

## 2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes Mississippi State vs. Alabama – January 13, 2024

### Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

***Q: The free throw shooting is going to be one of the bigger stories of this game. You guys haven't been a horrible free throw shooting team this year, what do you think happened down the stretch?***

**CJ:** "We missed free throws especially when it counted. You're in a one possession game down the stretch. You just rely on your reps, your routine and just staying focused. Unfortunately, we just didn't make them when they really, really counted."

***Q: You've seen Mark Sears for a couple years now. How difficult is he to keep in front of you and the way he's able to shoot the basketball?***

**CJ:** "Yeah, he's a great player. I think he's as good of a guard as there is in college basketball right now. He's just doesn't have any weaknesses in his game. He's got experience. He obviously shoots it at a high clip. He's 50 percent from three. I don't know what he is from the field [overall], but it's right around there as well. Mid 80's [percent] from the free throw line. He's a competitor."

"You can talk about keeping him away from his left, but we've all seen enough basketball where we complain that we're letting him go down that hand. There are certain players that can get there regardless. We certainly talked about trying to do that with guys, but he's one of those guys that's figured out a way to get where he wants to go. He certainly had a heck of a second half and kind of willed their team."

***Q: Kind of an out of characteristic night for Tolu [Smith] tonight. 5-15 from the floor. What do you need to see out of the rest of the guys when he can't get it going?***

**CJ:** "I mean he's probably more disappointed, or as much disappointed as anybody is. That was the plan, right? To play inside out and get him, and Jimmy [Bell Jr.] the ball. Try to impose his will on the other team and get his game going down there. For whatever reason the ball wouldn't go in the basket for him and the majority of his shots were around the charge circle other than the one jumper he took. I don't know. I mean, it's just one of those nights for him."

***Q: How confident are you in your guys' mentality and ability to wipe away a loss like this and continue to have the right mentality to attack the gauntlet of SEC play coming up?***

**CJ:** "I'm not worried about that. We've got a core group of guys that understand this league is unrelenting. It's unforgiving, every game, it's a lot riding on it. That's not my concern. I know we'll get back once we regroup and get through this feeling. That's just the way it works in every conference, but especially in a conference like this."

***Q: There aren't many teams in college basketball that are as high octane on offense as Alabama is. What do you think the guys learned about how precise and how crisp you have to be defensively against a team like that?***

**CJ:** "I'll talk to them when we watch the film, and we'll go through all of our breakdowns. The biggest issue we had was especially in the second half, even in the first half, was we were trying to play their ghost screens, if you will, where they slip out of the ball screens with a guard and a guard or a guard and big. We couldn't get it on the floor. We were guarding our own men. We had to on the ball. We got better at it later in the game, but a lot of their scorers were of that variety. That was frustrating, and we had to eventually try to change it."

“They’re a hard guard. We knew that going in. We certainly try to do our best to put players in position to give them the best chance. But, at the end of the day, the only message I had for the guys was that they played better.”

***Q: There was a sellout crowd announced tonight. What does it say about the fan investment that’s being made in this program now?***

**CJ:** “Yeah, we were excited. Obviously, we were hoping that was going to be the situation, and we’re not even back in school. Just disappointed that we didn’t deliver the result that our fanbase wanted. You could feel the energy even driving in to work and walking in. I had to do a couple things before the game [with the students], and you could just feel it. You could feel the big game atmosphere. The crowd was great. They were trying to help us in the right spots. Just disappointed, like I said, that we didn’t deliver the results that we all wanted.”

**Mississippi State Forwards Cameron Matthews and D.J. Jeffries**

***Q: What did you see in those last two minutes?***

**CM:** “We were getting the looks that we wanted, and we were getting fouled. We just have to focus on knocking the free throws down.”

***Q: Was there anything defensively that you guys weren’t doing too well at the end?***

**DJJ:** “They were doing a lot of ghost screens. We weren’t really communicating like we said all week that we were going to do, and a lot of us were not switching. So, they were getting a lot of open looks. You’ve got to give them props. They did their game plan, and they were hitting shots. I would just say us not switching was kind of the problem.”

***Q: How frustrating is it to have those opportunities there at the line and not connect?***

**CM:** “It’s very frustrating. All the work we put in every day before and after practice shooting free throws. We get our reps in. Just not seeing the ball go in is kind of frustrating. We just have to be better next time.”

***Q: How hard is it to guard a player like Mark Sears?***

**DJJ:** “Sears, he’s a great player. He made some clutch shots and made some big plays tonight. I felt like we did a good job guarding him. Like you said, a big-time player made some big-time shots. He just showed up in the clutch.”

***Q: Was this Alabama team different than any other teams you have seen this far?***

**CM:** “Offense, Alabama, they’re really great at what they do. They’re good in transition and top whatever in the country in pace. Three-point shooting, they just excelled at what they do, and we just didn’t do what we had to do to slow them down.”

***Q: After a tough loss like this, what do you say to your teammates in the locker room?***

**CM:** “Just focus in on the next one. In a league like the SEC, we have 19 or so straight high-level, high competition games. We can’t dwell on the ones that we just dropped. We’ve just to focus up and get back on the grind for the next one.”

**Alabama Head Coach Nate Oats**

***Opening Statement***

**NO:** “It’s a tough place to get a win. Coach Jans is one of the best coaches in the country. He coaches defense and toughness. They’re one of the tougher teams. You saw what they did to Tennessee here last game. I think Tennessee is one of the tougher teams, and they [Mississippi State] out-toughed them for most of the game.”

“For us to come in here and get a big win, I thought we had some guys really step up defensively. I thought Latrell [Wrightsell Jr.] was one of them. I thought Grant Nelson’s defense on Tolu [Smith III] was huge for us. Rylan [Griffen] is really starting to guard and play well. Obviously, it wasn’t one of our better offensive games. It’s good to win on the road when you don’t play great on offense. We made free throws too. Our four guards went 16-for-16 at the free throw line between Latrell, Rylan Mark [Sears], and Aaron [Estrada]. They didn’t miss a free throw.”

“A lot of positives, we had them outrebounded for most of the game. We ended up losing [the rebounding battle] by one. With a team that rebounds as well as they do, I thought we did a pretty good job most of the game.”

***Q: How did you see toughness in the team tonight?***

**NO:** “We had more offensive rebounds than they did in the first half. I think we had six, and they had three ... Grant Nelson’s defense on Tolu Smith was good. He [Nelson] ended up with three blocks and three steals. He made some tough plays inside. Rylan Griffen played really well. He got downhill and finished at the rim well. Aaron Estrada had some strips inside and big steals in different ways.”

“When we needed stops, we were able to get them. We had some tough rebounds. We saw it in different ways. We chirp a blue collar, and we call them ‘blue collar’ points on effort stuff. We had 16 more than they did. This is a team that’s as hard playing as anybody in the country. I told them if we can beat them in the ‘blue collar stuff’, then, we can beat them in the game. That’s what we hung our hat on. They [Mississippi State] have some skill players too. We didn’t do a great job all the time with all of them. I thought we played harder than a hard-playing team. Our guys answered the bell when I challenged them to do that.”

***Q: How did you think Grant Nelson did against Tolu Smith?***

**NO:** “He was great. He was lengthy, stood him up and was able to do it without fouling him much. We benefited from Tolu missing some free throws tonight. I thought Grant’s defense was as good on him as anybody’s. Grant showed that he can be that spacing five for us. We need him because he can cause problems on the offensive end with his skill set.”

***Q: What is the confidence level of the team after winning five in a row?***

**NO:** “It’s coming. I want it to come on the defensive end with toughness. Offensively, we haven’t been great. Too many turnovers and only nine assists. We’re getting into league play where teams know you better. They know how you want to play. Your defense is going to have to carry you. I have been telling these guys that. As good of an offense as we have, if your defense doesn’t get significantly better, you’re not going to win any tough games. Our defense was definitely better tonight than it has been.”

***Q: What is it like having a fourth-year senior guard like Latrell Wrightsell Jr.?***

**NO:** “We’ve got one of the deepest and best backcourts in the country, if not the best. Latrell is capable of scoring 20 off the bench. He’s a great defender. We go with those four guards a lot. We play around with him at the four. He has some length and shows his toughness.”

“Rylan [Griffen] is an unbelievable teammate. Rylan knows he is a little bit small at the four. If we need to get rebounds, he comes over and asks who we should get in for him. I told him, I love it. He’s super unselfish and not trying to hog up minutes. He’s trying to win. It would be nice if he became a better rebounder so we could keep him in there. He’s smart and is a winner. These guys have turned into being all about winning. It makes it a little easier to coach these guys.”

**Alabama Guard Latrell Wrightsell Jr.**

**Q: *How did you weather going down by nine early in the game?***

**LWJ:** "We've been battle tested before. We understand how to get through adversity. That's our biggest thing. Adversity is something we get through every day. We knew if we stayed the course and played the game, it was going to even out."

**Q: *How were you able to knock down a lot of critical shots?***

**LWJ:** "Our coaches believe in us. They tell us to shoot the shots they believe we can make. We work on it. We spend a lot of time in the gym. I know you guys don't get to see it, but we spend a lot of time there [in the gym]. We've got some of the hardest working people in the country. It shows on the court when the game happens. We're able to hit those shots when it comes to game time."

**Q: *How does it benefit the team having an experienced guard like you come off the bench?***

**LWJ:** "I'm experienced, and we've got a lot of experienced guys in the starting lineup. When I come in and help those guys out, it gives an extra boost to us. We all just play along with each other. We have really good guards which makes it easy for me."

**Q: *What value does Mouhamed Dioubate bring to the team?***

**LWJ:** "We call him 'Mo Diba'. It's about celebrating each other's success. He's done that this whole time. Now, it's starting to pay off for him."

**Q: *How has Aaron Estrada improved?***

**LWJ:** "He's an all-around player, and he does everything for our team. He takes charges, he gets steals, he has fast hands and he does stuff that we need to win without scoring."