

2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes Mississippi State vs. No. 8 Auburn – January 27, 2024

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: This is the kind of the defensive performances we see when you have these types of wins. What did you see from your team to flush the Florida loss and some of the defensive performances you weren't as pleased with to get that result today?

CJ: "Yeah, we certainly like every game win or lose, we try to learn from the video. We didn't hardly practice on Thursday. We just felt like we're going to try and ease up a little bit. Even Friday wasn't quite as long, it didn't have as many physicality aspects to it. We're just trying to sell them on being fresher for the game and not having anything in their mind that they were tired, etcetera."

"I don't know if that helped or not, but I thought they played the way that we feel like, for the most part, is how we need to play to win games. I know it isn't always aesthetically pleasing for everybody, but you get into conference games against good teams. You've got to slow it down a little bit. It becomes somewhat of a rock fight, and that was a classic rock fight this afternoon."

Q: You stressed over the past couple of weeks about rebounding. Was it just a matter of effort and right positioning, or what did you see from there without seeing the film?

CJ: "I just think we were more motored up. What we talked about going into the game – Thursday, Friday and even at shootaround in our meetings before the game, was that we just focused on two areas. We talked about how we've got to play harder. I know it's an old school concept, everybody says it, but we really leaned into focusing on just competing each and every possession. The 70-plus possessions around there, give or take, it had to be every possession. We've got to compete head on every single time."

"Then, our goal was to get 20 offensive rebounds. We only got 14. We had 11 at half, and I thought we're on our way. We missed 11 shots, I think, in the second half. So, there weren't as many to get. But we felt like the one thing we did well at Florida was rebound the ball. We had 22 offensive rebounds, and we wanted to sell our guys that that's the way we need to play. If we continue to do that, we could be successful. That was one of two things."

"Certainly, we talked about scout and game planning and all of the things that we normally do, but we just really focused on those two areas. I basically promised them that if you did that, we'd win the game. Fortunately, we did."

Q: What does it mean for a guy like Cameron Matthews who does so many things for you guys so well to have a game where he gets a little bit more in the spotlight and scores some points?

CJ: "He's so valuable to us. Obviously, Auburn did a terrific job of pressuring us, and we've had some issues with that in the past. We continue to tell our guys that if we don't clean it up and are sharper in that category, then everybody will do it. That's what they do anyway with the type of pressure that they showed us. They were a little more aggressive with trapping, but we started to design inbound plays where Cameron was just going to be the one who caught the ball. He's willing to do that, and those don't even show up on the stat sheet. How many catches did he have in our press offense to alleviate some stress for our basketball team? They don't show up."

"So, he's invaluable for us. He's our engine, he's our personality and what comes with that is some responsibility. He's got to do it all the time. One of the radio guys was telling me in warmups that he looked different. So, hopefully, we can try to capture that. Whatever he did, whatever he ate or

whatever – I don't know what he listened to before the game, but I'm certainly going to ask him and try to replicate that going forward."

Q: *You mentioned not being aesthetically pleasing for fans, but is there any satisfaction for you guys to win a game like this doing it your way and with your identity?*

CJ: "Yeah, I've got no idea what the outside is saying. I don't really care, to be honest with you. I just want to win. Whatever style of play we've got to play to win the game is all I care about. I don't care if the game is in the 90's or the 60's. You just got to figure out a way to win games."

Q: *Nobody led by more than six in this game, and it was a one point game when Josh [Hubbard] hit that three to make it a two-possession game. What do you think of the way he's stepped up in those moments against top ten teams he's had some of his best performances?*

CJ: "What I remember most is that he [Hubbard] hit a big shot, I don't know if it's exactly the one you're talking about, but it was in the last couple minutes of the game. Man, he looked at me like he scored on me. I'm like, 'Man, I'm with you. What do we have going here, man?'"

"It was pretty stone cold. It was pretty stone cold, and it made me feel pretty good inside like he's not afraid of the big moment. He's obviously not afraid to take the big shots. He's been doing it his entire career, and it's nice to have someone out there like that."

Q: *With road trips to Oxford and Tuscaloosa next week and a tough early portion of the schedule, did you feel in your mind with this being a home game that it was in the must-win category?*

CJ: "When we're done, I'll show you a text message that I sent to my son. I told him that this was a must-win [game]. I didn't tell my team that. I didn't really tell anybody else that, but it was a must-win in my mind because of the obvious."

"We need more quad one wins, let's just be honest. This is a really good quad one win because of how high they ranked in the NET. I'm sure they're going to stick around in that vicinity all year long. It's like the Tennessee win. They're quad one wins, but they're like super quad one wins because of how solid their numbers are and how they're playing all year long."

"It was huge. We had to have it. I didn't really say those words with the team, but I think they knew what was at stake. We talked about the quad one opportunity, and how important it was being at home. The biggest thing we talked about in the locker room is that this is our court, and it was our day and our time. We had to figure out a way to get it done."

Q: *What gave you the confidence to give Josh the start today?*

CJ: "Starting Josh wasn't something that he didn't deserve earlier, okay? I know a lot of people are into that, I'm more into who's in at the end of the game. That's more important to me than who starts the game. Who's out there when the game is hard and in balance is more important than anything else in my opinion."

"We just decided to make a change a couple of days ago. We wanted to tweak our rotations a little bit, and maybe try to help get some other guys going. When we have had enough firepower, I've always preferred to have a scorer, doesn't have to be a leading scorer, coming off the bench. There's nothing like when you're struggling early and you get a guy or two in there, and that's what they do best. That can really lift your team when you get off to poor starts. That's why we decided to make the change."

Q: *What about the team today did you see that they all felt like it was a must win game today?*

CJ: "I've got a ton of respect for Auburn and for Coach Pearl on how they've built that program. They're obviously really good, but that's what we kept talking about. I don't care what level you're coaching at, you've got to play harder."

"We really drilled down with it, and we showed them clips where we thought that we were a little grimmer last year. We score the ball a bit better at times this year, and our possessions are bigger this year, in terms of number per game. We showed them clips of last year against Auburn, even though we lost over there. We thought that we were a little tougher and nastier last year, and we needed that today to get back to our true identity. I think they adopted that a little bit this afternoon."

Q: *How big of a piece was Josh putting in extra work to get him playing at a level like this?*

CJ: "Josh is just different. He's different. I've coached some kids like him, and I've had the opportunity to coach some really great players, but he's the whole package. He's got the right work ethic, the right mindset and the right approach."

"Obviously, he's proven that there's no moment that's too big for him even though he's very young in his career. He does it all with a great demeanor about him and a fun personality. He's endeared himself to his teammates. All the guys like him and respect him. That's why he's able to transition the way he has and be accepted by his teammates. I'm certainly glad he's with us."

Mississippi State Guards Josh Hubbard and Shakeel Moore; Forward D.J. Jeffries

Q: *How good was it to get this close win and come through in the final seconds for another win over a top 10 opponent?*

SM: "It felt good, it felt good. Coach [Jans] talked about certain teams having our number for the last couple of years. Auburn has got us a lot over the last few years. We had to get this one at home, and it was a quad one win for us."

Q: *How important is it to be a grinder-like team when the offense isn't clicking?*

DJJ: "Our identity is defense and toughness. That's one thing that we can always rely on. We're going to rely on defense and toughness. That helped us win the game. Of course, we hit streaks where we'll miss shots. So, we can rely more on our defense and our toughness to carry us through each and every night."

Q: *Was there any difference in mentality between coming off the bench and being in the starting lineup?*

JH: "Not really. Coach Jans always tells us that starting lineups are just getting started for the game. We have great depth. So, we know a lot of people on our team are going to play. The only difference is that I'm getting my name called first. We still have that same mentality. Nothing was different and changed in terms of our mindset or anything like that."

Q: *What does Cameron Matthews mean to this team?*

JH: "He means a lot on both ends. He brings that energy and brings that fire to the team. He's one of our captains and our of leaders. So, we follow him. He knows the game and has a very high IQ. So, he's a great addition to this team for sure."

Q: *What do you think you guys need to do on the road to get these type of wins away from home?*

SM: “Just being more hungry than others, being more grimy than others. Coach [Jans] showed us some clips from last year’s games, and we were just a bit more grimier on defense. We’ve got to out rebound teams and out play them.”

Q: *Are you guys surprised to see what Josh Hubbard is doing since he is only a freshman and how he’s grown throughout the season?*

DJJ: “No, it doesn’t surprise me nothing like that at all. He’s been doing this his entire life. So, I expect him to do that. I like the confidence he has each and every night, and he gives us a spark. I couldn’t be more proud of him.”

Q: *The team out rebounded them by a wide margin, especially on the offensive glass. What goes into accomplishing that?*

SM: “Just making winning plays on the defensive end, checking out. Coach [Jans] always says that our first shot defense is excellent. We hold teams under certain percentages, and it just starts when the other team shooting the ball. Who is going to check out, and who’s going to go grab the board?”

Q: *What’s it like to play in these sold out environments and getting to play at State?*

JH: “It’s definitely a dream come true. A lot of kids dream about moments like that – sold out crowds and playing in those type of environments. It’s definitely fun, and it’s motivating. It’s definitely a blessing for sure.”

Q: *Did you feel like this was a must-win coming into today because of the two games ahead next week?*

SM: “Yes, most definitely. The way we prepared and the way we practiced, it was a must-win for us for sure. But, looking down for these next two games on the road, we just have to out there and play and out board people.”

Q: *Was playing great defense a priority after what happened at Florida?*

DJJ: “Of course. All this week, he [Coach Jans] was about getting back to being grimy like Shak [Shakeel Moore] said. That’s what we tried to do today. We come in and wanted to be the more grimier team. We wanted to go out tough them, play defense and do the tough things. That’s what we did.”

Auburn Head Coach Bruce Pearl

Opening Statement

BP: “Mississippi State played great defense all game. We played pretty good defense in the first half. In the second half, while we were better offensively, we let them get so many second-chance points. When Johnie Broome is 5-for-7 [shooting] and the rest of the team shoots the percentage that they shoot, a better coach would have gotten him [Broome] the ball more. We should have gotten him more touches and into better positions.”

“I thought that our team, particularly Johni Broome, did an outstanding job defending Tolu Smith [III]. If you had told me that we would come here, and we would hold Tolu to just [seven] shots and turn him over four times – Boy, I would tell you that we would’ve had a fighting chance, which we did. I just want to give those guys credit. We continue to struggle to shoot it on the road. We continue to unfortunately take some of those same shots that we’re going to have to make or some of those guys are just going to have to put it away. It’s hurting our offensive productivity when we’re launching and missing, like we are on the road.”

Q: Do you want your guards to be more selective with their shots going forward?

BP: "Yes, more selective for some and put it away for others."

Q: Did you feel it was a fatigue and focus thing after giving up a lot of offensive rebounds in the first half but being able to hold them without an offensive rebound for most of the second half?

BP: "This is very interesting, who did you have out there at the end? I'm looking for who are my best defensive players. Some of those guys can be solid, they won't make plays. Some of them can make plays but won't be solid."

"At the end of both games [at Alabama and at Mississippi State], we didn't get stops, and we didn't get rebounds. That's what cost us at Alabama, and that's partly what cost us at Mississippi State. The free throw checkout, we didn't get. I think, in some ways, we lost both games in the same manner."

Q: How do you feel about your group's toughness going forward after playing in two tough road atmospheres this week?

BP: "I think they're competitive, and I think they want to win. Obviously we didn't play as well [as the other team]. We didn't make as many shots. We didn't have as good of an assist-to-turnover ratio. We didn't get easy baskets in transition. We didn't execute, a lot of it had to do with Mississippi State."

"Certainly, the environments have been tough. You've got to step up to beat the best teams on your schedule. Johni stepped up this week, and he stepped up in both games. Really nobody else can say that, including the coaching staff."

Q: Do you have any comment on the starting lineup change for your team?

BP: "It was just a violation of team rules. So, I made the adjustment."

Q: Jaylin [Williams] has been on a roll recently but there's been a couple of tough one for him

BP: "It's going to be interesting to see. I will talk to Jay Will about it. He's a great teammate, and he's such a hard worker. I'm sure that he feels terrible that he didn't play better and make more shots. He's been an absolute monster and a huge part of our success and why we're in the position we're in. There's a lot of responsibility there now too."

"Again, how about Chaney Johnson's run there in the first half? What makes us a good team is the fact that we do pick each other up, we pick each other up. I thought there was a lot of that out there but just not enough step up."

"I think Jaylin will be fine. He didn't shoot it as well, and that sort of set things up. He missed some things in and around the basket. A couple things that were really close that he has been making. My advice to him is to concentrate on finishing around the bucket first. Then, the other stuff will come."

Q: How tough did it make it when Dylan Cardwell got into foul trouble so early?

BP: "It's tough. Look to Johni's credit, he didn't rest on the defense end. He kept playing, and he led us with seven defensive rebounds. Dylan got in foul trouble. I don't know, I thought the officials did well in a tough environment. He may have got a couple that were either obvious, or there was a lot of physicality. Overall, I thought they did a pretty good job."

Q: Was there anything you think that Alabama and Mississippi State did defensively that caused a struggle?

BP: "I mean, some of it I think would be our execution. Our point guards have got to do a better job of playmaking. Chad [Baker-Mazara] has been a real reliable playmaker. So, I think our playmakers have got to do a better job, and our shooters have got to make a few more shots. I think that will help."