

2023-24 Mississippi State Basketball Postgame Quotes
Mississippi State vs. LSU – March 14, 2024
2024 SEC Tournament 2nd Round

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: Walk us through the halftime adjustments.

CJ: “We were really struggling offensively. Obviously, that has a lot to do with LSU. Pretty obvious that Tolu [Smith III] was missing some things around the basket. We were trying to attack them inside-out early and just sort of trying to get the ball to go through the net. Then, Cam [Cameron] Matthews missed the four free throws. That just kind of takes your confidence away a little bit. I thought it hurt our defense because our defense the first five, eight minutes was as good as it's been in a while. When you stop making baskets and you miss free throws, it just gets you dialed down a little bit.”

“At halftime, we did make a pretty major adjustment to our ball screen D [defense]. We were pretty aggressive in the first half. Hunter Dean, especially, was getting behind us, and they were rolling behind us. We switched it to a little more passive coverage, trying to keep the ball in front. The obvious was that [Trae] Hannibal started really taking advantage of it and getting to the basket. I think it worked better for us in the second half.”

Q: Not specific to today, but how has the block-charge change affected college basketball, the style of the game, the way it looks, coaching it, all of it?

CJ: “It's made a huge impact. I don't know how anyone that follows the game, watches the game, or plays or coaches the game can't see that. It's going to change the way people recruit. A lot of teams rely on it. It's not so much even the charge, it's the thought of, ‘Hey, if I drive in there, I know they're going to be waiting in the weeds for me. For us, with the way we defend, it was a big adjustment. But we obviously had plenty of time other than recruiting, because we didn't know that then, to try to adjust.”

“Shak [Shakeel] Moore attempted to take a charge this afternoon. We tell our guys all the time from day one, don't even try. Avoid it, because 19 out of 20 times, it's going to be a block. That's the interpretation of the rule. We understood that. It's definitely changing the game.”

Q: You have one of the better defenses in the league. When you have this much offensive weaponry from team after team, can you talk about what the challenge has been on a nightly basis to stop these players?

CJ: “You were kind. I don't consider our defense in the upper echelon this year. It was last year, but that part has something to do with I'm not doing as good a job. It's a very frustrating situation when you watch last year's games to prepare for this year. You go, ‘We were just better defensively.’ We talked a lot about that heading into this game actually. The offense, like I'm a second-year guy, the league is a lot different than it was a year ago. There's just more high-octane offenses. Last year, I think was one of the worst shooting teams from the three in all of college basketball. I don't think we're at that point now. I think people went out and really loaded up offensively with different weapons, etcetera.”

“It's a huge challenge. It's hard to game plan for some of these teams because they have so many guys on the floor that can hurt you so many different ways – both inside and out. You just try to do your best.”

Q: You have another matchup with Tennessee. You were able to get them earlier in the season. Can you talk about that game?

CJ: "I haven't even thought about that. That's the second time I've been asked that. I'm not trying to be coy. We've been ready for LSU and preparing for LSU. You know the drill, our staff is way ahead. They'll give me all the information that I need. As soon as we're done with this media and see our family, it will be a long night preparing for them."

"Obviously, they won the league. I argue that they're the best team over an 18-game schedule, which to me means more than anything in my opinion. To do it like that, especially in a league like this, we have great respect for Coach [Rick] Barnes, their staff and players. It will be intense. They play a hard-nosed style. We're trying to play a similar style. I think it will be an intense basketball game, to say the least."

Q: You got one field goal in the first half from Tolu and Josh [Hubbard]. How disruptive was LSU's defense in the first half?

CJ: "Yeah, we were struggling. We had seven baskets and seven turnovers. That's not a good recipe to win games. Obviously, they gave Hubb [Josh Hubbard] a ton of attention. He's used to that now. It goes back to the missed free throws in the first half. We were 7-for-13. Tolu [Smith III] missed at least two that he probably should have made, and I think the game's a little bit different."

"They were revved up. Coach [Matt] McMahon is obviously a great coach. He's won everywhere he's been. We talked about how they're not happy we beat them at their place. It's a great motivation for them. They've been playing really well, and they won three of their last four. It's tournament basketball, and they certainly didn't disappoint when it came to that."

"I think, in the second half, our start helped settle us. We started getting into a rhythm. Obviously, we scored a bunch more points, 48 in the second half."

Q: All season long, the students have brought it, and the energy pushed you guys over the finish line. Can you talk about your student support, fan support, and what that means to your program?

CJ: "Yeah, it's been fun to watch it grow from when we arrived. Every coach talks about how your style is going to resonate with the fan base. We're going to build relationships. We really try to match our words, if you will. It's grown. We had three sellouts in the SEC last year. We sold out seven of nine this year."

"A great testament to the folks at Mississippi State. A great testament to our guys too for doing a good job of being good people, understanding how important that is and that they build relationships with the student body. They've been the best, not that the other folks haven't. Our student body has been there since day one. We've had great support. We've tried to build the relationship with those folks around spring break like a lot of schools are. To look over there and see the band, the students behind them, you could hear them. It's a great feeling."

Mississippi State Guard Josh Hubbard and Forward Tolu Smith

Q: Tolu, obviously disappointing offensively today, but you did a lot defensively. Talk about that, overcoming that adversity to help the team.

TS III: "Yeah, I got a great coaching staff and Coach Jans believes in me. He just tells me to keep going. If the offense isn't going, it gets like that for a lot of good players. I know we've got to keep going defensively. I got another chance tomorrow. We won."

Q: How aware were you going into today that you kind of need to avoid a loss to feel better about your standing come Sunday?

JH: "We knew it was a good opportunity for us. Big game, one of our biggest games of the year. So, we just came with a mentality of preparation and confidence. We knew that we have to earn it, and that it wouldn't be easy or given to us."

TS III: "Yeah, to piggyback off what Hubb said, it was a battle game for us. We needed this win. We're coming off a couple bad losses that we should've won. We executed and did what we had to do."

Q: Now that you have this win, where do you feel about where you currently stand within your March Madness resumé?

TS III: "I mean, we're in the SEC Tournament now, not the NCAA Tournament. We're focused on the SEC Tournament. We're going to try to keep advancing. We're not ready to go home. I think that's our main focus and our main concern. We'll get there when the rubber meets the road."

Q: Josh, you always look so calm out there. First game of the postseason. How do you keep the nerves under control? Were you nervous at all?

JH: "It was just another game. All of our guys put confidence in each other. We're all positive. We were prepared for the game. Just a lot of repetition on the scout and stuff like that. Yeah, I was pretty calm and confident in what to do with my assignment."

Q: With both of you being Mississippi guys, what does it mean to you to represent Mississippi State? What was said at halftime amongst yourselves to get that win today?

TS III: "Yeah, I think being from Mississippi means everything. We're trying to build a legacy here. I think when Coach Jans came in, he had a blueprint for us. We try to follow the blueprint to the best of our ability. He's a Mississippi guy now, too. We open our arms to him. We're so thankful to be from Mississippi and get an opportunity to represent our state."

JH: "Yeah, at halftime, we were down seven. We knew that it could be different, and we could be playing way better. We just stayed positive and kept rooting for each other. We didn't stick our heads down. We lifted each other up. We just knew we had 20 minutes to change things. So, that's what we did."

Q: Tolu, you have a reputation as being a big, physical, strong player. Can you assess physicality within the conference itself now that you've played?

TS: "The SEC is the best conference, one of the strongest conferences out there. There aren't a lot of foul calls, which is good for both ways. I just think we got the best athletes, all-around guys. Every night it's not a pushover. It's a good game every night. You have to be on your Ps and Qs every night."

LSU Head Coach Matt McMahon

Q: Opening Statement

MM: "Honored to be joined here by Hunter Dean and Trae Hannibal. Really enjoyed the privilege it's been to coach them this year. They've given us every single ounce of everything they have. Really made a tremendous impact on this LSU program. With that said, congratulations to Mississippi State. I thought we put ourselves in a good position in the first half. I absolutely loved our team's defensive effort, our energy and our defensive rebounding. Unfortunately, some of the turnovers there prevented us from extending the lead during that stretch."

"Mississippi State, obviously an NCAA tournament team, a team that I think could play into the second weekend. They showed why there in the second half, made some great plays on their offensive end and earned the victory."

Q: The first half you probably did everything you could do other than 12 turnovers. Did you feel pretty good at that point? You knew they were going to make a run the second half.

MM: "I think especially on the defensive side of the ball, I loved our effort there. I thought we played with great physicality. That's the strength of Mississippi State. Obviously, was a huge concern for us coming in. I thought we did a good job – other than the eight times we sent Hubbard to the free throw line when we fouled him on jump shots. Would love to have those back, clearly."

"I believe they only had seven field goals in the first half. I don't think we took advantage in that stretch on the offensive side. We had 12 turnovers. We were two for our first seven at the free throw line. We finished 13-of-14 from there. We weren't able to extend the lead during that time, credit to them. We knew they'd come out ready to go to start the second half. For whatever reason, we weren't locked in to play at the level that was required for this game when that second half started."

Q: Every other coach that's been up there talks about how strong the league is. You've had a couple years now. Can you assess where the league is in your mind and what makes it so good now.

MM: "Well, I think you look at last year, I believe Arkansas went to the Sweet 16. They were the number 10 seed in this tournament last year. So, I think that speaks to the depth of the league. It's the number one offensive rebounding league in the country. It's the number one league in the country when it comes to blocking shots. I think that speaks to the athleticism and physicality around the basket."

"I think the league this year, just is so much better offensively. Teams shoot it much better from behind the three-point line. You have offenses that are putting up a hundred on a regular basis. It's just an elite league top to bottom."

Q: After the game in Baton Rouge when Josh Hubbard got 32, what was the plan today? Just to throw as many guys at him and disrupt him?

MM: "Well, we did a good job in the first half. I think he was 1-for-6 from the floor. Unfortunately, had those fouls on jump shots that got him some free throws there. We wanted to try to mix some coverages. We guarded him multiple ways on ball screens. We guarded handoffs multiple ways. I thought Coach Jans made a good adjustment, used him as a screener some. That hurt us because of the attention we were paying to him trying to take his shots away."

"I thought they did a good job there, but he's just a really good player. On an offensive rebound, he got a kick-out dagger three there. When they really needed a shot, he came flying off a screen and hit a huge three there in front of their bench."

Q: On the strength of the league, you obviously knew what you were getting into when you signed up. Was there anything at all that surprised you that you did not expect?

MM: "I don't know if it was a surprise. When you're looking at this league, most NBA Draft picks by far in the country over the last four years and twice as many lottery picks as any other league. You know the talent is off the charts. You go down the roster of coaches, you have multiple Hall-of-Fame coaches. Guys who are already in the Hall of Fame and still coaching. Then, guys that will be in the Hall of Fame one day."

"I think the rim protection is just incredible. You've got to be able to finish some plays at the rim. You go in there with soft layups, it's not going to work out very well for you in this league. I don't know that that was a surprise, but it certainly stands out. We saw it again tonight.

Q: At halftime, did they make defensive adjustments to take you out of your game early in the second half?

MM: "They went to it late in the half. The 2-2-1 slowed us down a little bit. We had a couple kind of uncharacteristic turnovers against us. Just looked like we weren't quite ready to receive passes for some reason there. But, they make it really difficult on you. Their defense is terrific. Coach Jans has long been known as an excellent defensive coach. They really pressure you. They deny a lot of passes. They'll switch some things to take you out of what you want to do and put you in a position where you really need to space the floor and attack off the bounce. Then, they make the right read when they come with their aggressive help from the weak side."

"I thought at times we did a good job there. We had some really good possessions in the first half when we didn't turn it over. There, in the second half, we just weren't able to execute and finish plays at the level winning would have required today."

Q: Closing Statement

MM: "I'll close by saying I've got a great admiration and respect for the effort of our players today. I thought they came in locked in, ready to go. They competed at the highest of levels on the defensive side and on the glass. Unfortunately, we just weren't able to score enough there in that run in the second half or slow them down once Hubbard got going. Really proud of our players for their response when adversity hit multiple times this season. Hopefully, we'll have the opportunity to continue to play. Thanks so much."

LSU Guard Trae Hannibal and Forward Hunter Dean

Q: Your team defense did such a great job on Josh Hubbard and Tolu Smith [III] in the first half. What were you guys trying to do especially to Hubbard after he got you for 32 a couple weeks ago?

TH: "Kudos to him, he's a tough freshman. A guy like that, once he gets rid of the ball, you can't let him get it back. Taking him away, forcing other people to play was the game plan. After a while, [he] starts to wind down. He got a couple open shots; I think that's what got him hot."

HD: "Yeah, I mean going into the game, we knew those two were the two who fueled their offense. We knew from the start we had to show them that they're going to have to rely on somebody else to get their offense going."

Q: Trae, you guys had a seven-point halftime lead. You knew they were going to make a run. Where did it go wrong in the second half?

TH: "I feel like coming out of the half, we started off slow. That's been a thing for us this year. We get a big lead, get too complacent and too relaxed. Came out and got punched us in the mouth. I think that's where it started off."

Q: Hunter, you had a 10-rebound advantage in the first half. Second half, they evened that out. What did they start doing? Did Tolu start going more to the basket?

HD: "Yeah, just seemed like their intensity going to the glass the second half just raised to another level. Just didn't seem like we got the job done when they raised their level."