

2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Quotes
Mississippi State vs. No. 12 Auburn – March 16, 2024
SEC Tournament Semifinals

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: Do you get the sense this team was able to regain some momentum in this week?

CJ: Obviously, we played better down here in Nashville than we did for the majority of the latter part of our schedule, just disappointed with the result. Like I told the team, you just never know as a player or as a coach, how many opportunities you're going to have to play for championships especially one of this magnitude. Potential memories of a lifetime for every individual in our program. I felt really good about that opportunity. Even as the game unfolded, for the most part, I felt we had a real chance to be playing tomorrow. Unfortunately, we just didn't get it done the last four or five minutes of the game."

Q: Where do you feel like this team is mentally right now versus even a week ago after that loss against South Carolina?

CJ: "Well, in real-time probably and in my experience, kids are pretty resilient. They'll get with their families, rightfully so, here in the next few minutes. We'll obviously have time as a program to regroup. I'm sure tomorrow we'll have a little bit more bounce in our step. Hopefully, looking forward to the postseason and what awaits there. We had our chances, we had our chances. We had some good wins down here."

"We knew today was going to be hard. Coach [Bruce] Pearl and their program is a championship-level program. What he's done at Auburn since he arrived is special. I mean, he's taken that program to heights that they haven't seen. It's very impressive all the way around how people view his program. He's the architect of it."

"I knew it would take a good effort for us today to figure out a way to win that third game in three days, but we didn't even talk about that. I didn't see it, I didn't see it during the game. It felt like fatigue was a factor, but I'm not those guys out there playing. I mean, it's not going to come to Fruition, but certainly tomorrow may have been more of a factor."

Q: I asked you about trusting the guys, veteran leadership. What have you learned about your team over the last two or three days that you can take forward?

CJ: "I don't know if I learned anything new. Obviously, we've been together since June for this particular team. Then, a bunch of the guys have been here for two seasons now. We've got a pretty good pulse of who we are as individuals and who we are as a program. But, what I come out of this tournament feeling and knowing is that they've got a competitive personality to them that's high level. They competed. I told them in the locker room we didn't lose this game because of your lack of want to or effort."

"We talked repeatedly about leaving everything on the floor, and we did that. We just had some things throughout the game and didn't make our free throws. You're trying to win a championship, more than likely, you're playing against high-level teams. That [missing free throws] will come back to haunt you. They made theirs. We just didn't take advantage of all the second-chance opportunities that we had. We had a bunch of them. Credit goes to them that they're so big and physical around the basket. They make it hard on you to stick putbacks in there. It sounds easy enough for me and most of you. But, when you're out there with that size and athleticism, sometimes it's hard to do that."

"Like I said, I'm proud of our guys. Probably not many people predicted us to have a chance to play for a championship and to be in the semifinals. Like I said earlier, when you get these opportunities, you've got to take advantage of them."

Q: What does it mean to you have veteran players, Josh and D.J., are buying into what you and the staff are trying to do?

CJ: "What are they going to say? I'm standing right next to them. They still got games to play (smiling). What I learn is kids will do whatever they got to do to get in the game. So, hopefully, it was the truth. Yeah, we got great kids. Excited to be their coach."

Q: As a coach you're going to have that 'one game at a time' mentality. What did the guys show after the losing streak that gives you confidence that this team is built to make a run over the next couple weeks?

CJ: "People talk about our defense. I cringe a little bit this season because from where I sit. I didn't think it was quite the level that we wanted, even to last year. Certainly, we talked about the last time I was in here, some of the rule changes have made it more difficult, etcetera. But, our offense has improved a lot this year compared to last year. I don't know if this is correct or not, but there's a part of me that thinks because of that we scored the ball a little bit easier. We had some great halves and great games. We kind of thought maybe we could win games that way."

"We've got the opportunity after the regular season to kind of regroup and actually have four days between games, with three of them being practices. That was our sole focus was to kind of get back to the basic tenets of what we're trying to do as a program. I thought we as a group took advantage of it just our core defense, and our principles were better these three games than the majority of the games leading up to the SEC Tournament. Hopefully, that's something that this team has learned. If we're hopefully given another opportunity to play in postseason, we'll get that on the floor, as well."

Q: As you await the NCAA tournament fate for tomorrow, what are the next 24-ish hours looking like for you and the program?

CJ: That's a good question. Hopefully, the guys are seeing their families like I mentioned earlier. I got a bunch of folks here, as well, having seen my siblings, my parents for 5-to-10 minutes. They're in our hotel, they get it. That's just the way it goes. I'm trying to make some plans personally to see those folks that spent the time and money to come down here and support us."

"We plan on getting out of here at some point here in the next few hours and getting home. Then, being able to let this sink in and sleep on it. Hopefully, like I said, get up, go to church and figure out what we're going to do on Sunday. Hopefully, we'll get some good news. Until I see that, you're not going to hear me say much about the postseason other than saying the postseason. If you paid attention, I haven't said anything but the 'postseason'. That's the words that I've used. We'll see what happens and make a game plan."

Q: You mentioned free-throw shooting earlier. Seems to be a plague across college basketball. Why is that?

CJ: "Do I look like I'm smart enough to figure that out? I'm not. I wish I knew the answer. I would help my team first, then maybe some of my buddies. I'm not sure, I'm not sure. I know that whoever's in charge of our defensive free-throw percentage should be fired because we're either 13th or 14th in the SEC of other teams making free throws ... I don't know whose fault that is, but it sucks to lead that category. You don't have much control over it. I'm not trying to be coy or funny."

Mississippi State Guard Josh Hubbard and Forward D.J. Jeffries

Q: D.J., Josh, tough loss obviously. What did you learn about this team and each other through this magical run you had?

JH: "Yeah, we always knew that we could compete with anybody that we face as long as we stay together and stay positive. Have that confidence and be positive through adversity. We can face anything that comes at us."

DJJ: "Yeah, I'd say the same thing. We always knew that we can compete with the top teams in the league. We just came up short today. It hurt, but we got all the momentum we need to go into the [NCAA] Tournament next week to try to make a run again. We just got to regroup again. This loss hurt because we want to be in the championship, but you got to move on and regroup."

Q: Josh, coming in, being on the NCAA Tournament bubble. You get two wins and a tight loss against a good Auburn team. How important was it for you to solidify yourselves, not have uncertainty going into tomorrow?

JH: "It was definitely important. We had two good wins that helped us for the NCAA Tournament. But, we were focused on this tournament at the same time. We had an opportunity today but just came up short."

Q: D.J., you mentioned yesterday how you hadn't made it to the semifinals during your time here. Playing that third game in three days, how difficult was that on your body? What was the feel of the team?

DJJ: "I mean, of course you're going to have fatigue. It's the third game in three days. The adrenaline kicks in. Going out there and competing, it just keeps you going. I wouldn't use that as an excuse for the reason why we came up short."

Q: D.J., what do you think was the difference in the second half that allowed Auburn to secure this one?

DJJ: "I would say we lost our composure, especially myself. I allowed No. 10 [Chad Baker-Mazara] to get in my head, a lot of us did. I feel like if we kept our composure, we would be fine. Probably would be a different result is what I would say."

Q: D.J., it's a little bit more rare to see a player stay at a school as long as you have. What will it mean to you to potentially get to play in the NCAA Tournament, give it one more shot with Mississippi State?

DJJ: "It will mean everything in the world. It's my second time in a row [potentially in the NCAAs]. My first couple years in college, I went to the NIT. It's special to end my college career the way I want to end it off. Hopefully, we can make a deep run."

Q: Josh, similar to the last meeting with Auburn, they were able to limit you in the first half. Then, you got going down the stretch. What was Auburn doing? How were you able to find the openings and get good shots later in the game?

JH: "Yeah, I wasn't as productive the first half. Got it going in the second half. They just denied me a lot. We pretty much expected it, though. I feel like we did a good job to get transition points in the first half the way that we did, keep the game like we wanted to keep it."

Q: I want to ask you about kind of the legacy, laying the groundwork for future Bulldogs. Talk about laying the groundwork for the future.

DJ: "I would say we're in good hands. Coach [Chris] Jans, he knows what he's doing. Him and the coaching staff put in countless work and countless hours to get us a game plan. [They] Help us go out there and do what we need to do. I'd say the future is bright. This is only the beginning for Bulldog basketball."

JH: "Definitely laid a spark for the future. Expectations are just higher now for Mississippi State, as they should be. The program with Coach Jans, they can do a lot of important and special things. Yeah, the bar is definitely risen for sure for the future."

Q: D.J., obviously tough result in this one, but what's the pulse on just how well you feel like the team is playing and the chemistry you have going into the tournament?

DJ: "I mean, I feel like we're making the right stride. We came together, at the right time, especially coming off the four-game losing streak. We came together, rallied together and got two big wins. Today hurt, but at least we got some momentum going into March."

Auburn Head Coach Bruce Pearl

Opening Statement

BP: "I'll start off by congratulating Mississippi State on a great regular season and a great postseason run. To just imagine that that team has as many quad one wins as they already have. They've beaten the best teams in our conference, were close to Kentucky. They beat Tennessee twice. They beat us. They've beaten Florida. Chris Jans is a great professional. His teams play so hard, so physical and so tough. He's a good dude. I know he looked down there a couple times, he knew we were just doing what we had to do. We've got great respect for one another because both our teams play hard. I like his team. I like the way he coaches. It was a rock fight because both teams were playing really, really physical. That's Mississippi State's MO. Our MO is playing hard all the time, not always quite as physical. They beat us on the boards, but we hung in there. We hung in there. I thought that was really important."

"Our balance really, really paid off. I thought Jaylin [Williams] did a tremendous job on [Cameron] Matthews in this game because he's a real factor. I thought our five men [Johni Broome and Dylan Cardwell], to only give Tolu three baskets, really significant we were able to kind of defend Mississippi State on the inside. It was a big factor."

Q: Going back to the discussion about matchups. You're getting killed on the offensive boards early. Made some adjustments. What did you tell your team, what did you see?

BP: "What we talked about originally was the bigs are going to have to keep their bodies on their bigs and the guards are going to have to rebound down. When you play against Mississippi State, it's not just that. It's going to take multiple efforts. The bigs have to hit and then chase down loose balls because there's not going to be a clean one."

"I just thought early we were slow to do both. You're going to get in a ball screen. You got to hit [Josh] Hubbard and not let him turn the corner. Then, get back to Tolu [Smith III]. It just takes multiple efforts. I thought early on we weren't giving that kind of effort on the rebounding."

Q: How big was depth in this game? Was that true in the second half?

BP: "Yep, we're a program that's committed to playing 10 guys double-digit minutes. We're a program committed to playing our stars sometimes under 30 [minutes] so that we can be fresh in March and be fresh in the end of the season, at the end of games or the end of halves to be able to make runs."

"It's like to have guys like Chaney Johnson, Chris Moore, K.D. Johnson and Dylan Cardwell coming off the bench, just having confidence in those guys, not dropping off, being different. How many effort energy plays did Chris Moore make?"

"Then, Dylan Cardwell, yeah. It's hard to have Johni Broome out of the game late, but Dylan was such a factor defensively. I wanted to give Johni a quick blow to kind of end it. He comes out there and switches on Hubbard, blocks a shot, gets the dunk. I just don't think a lot of backup centers are going to be in there at that time. We believe in the sum of our parts."

Q: First single-digit win of the year, what did you learn? Maybe not a bad thing they had to go through something like that in the postseason?

BP: "It was really good. I got to tell you, I thought Chad Prewett and Corey Williams did a really good job with the scout, the preparation. It's a limited play call list because most of what we do won't work because of the way they guard. I mean, 73 points was hard (smiling). It was good to be in a close game. I thought down the stretch, obviously, we didn't turn the ball over late. We made our free throws. We got the ball to Jaylin Williams, Chad Baker-Mazara, and they did a great job closing it out."

Q: Second-chance points huge. They had 10 in the first half. They had zero until the last few seconds on the dunk. That had to be big for your team.

BP: "Yep, it was. I think the guys talked about it a lot at halftime. Tendency to succumb to fatigue, the physicality. It was a tough game to work from the standpoint of keeping the game under control. Both teams playing really hard, really physically."

Q: How have you seen Chris Moore sort of develop in his years with you? What does it mean to have a player that's kind of willing to take on different roles, change positionally?

BP: "Yeah, man, Chris Moore started for us most of the year because he was one of our best teammates. He's a hard-working, great guy. Let me bring Chad Baker-Mazara off the bench and gave us firepower off the bench."

"Dylan Cardwell, a four-year guy with a chance to be back for a fifth-year. Jaylin Williams, a fifth-year guy, the winningest player in history of Auburn basketball. Chris Moore, a four-year guy. You don't see that anymore in college. That's your culture. That's your chemistry."

"We've got to continue to find ways to recruit guys that want to be part of a family, grow, develop and have their roles change. It requires some unselfishness. We can do it at Auburn because our kids love Auburn. They're not just out there. They care about the name on the back of the jersey and the front of the jersey when you go to Auburn. It's just true."

"They've got a loud voice in that locker room, even some of those guys coming off the bench. Chris brings physicality, brings toughness. He brings respect, he made some big shots tonight. He lets a guy like Chad, who is clearly a more talented player, not have to play 32 or 33 minutes, withstand four fouls."

Q: You mentioned after the Georgia game that the first game in the SEC tournament will be the hardest, that it gets easier. You're one game away from the title. Have you taken a look at Texas A&M and Florida?

BP: "I'm laughing because I was obviously wrong. The toughest game wasn't the first game (laughter). That doesn't have to do with our opponent. We played really well against South Carolina. We lost at Florida, we beat Texas A&M at home. We only played each team one time. I thought that the four teams remaining were the teams that played as hard and physically in this tournament as anybody."

"I think those four teams, Texas A&M and Florida, same thing, in the matchups leading up to this. They're different. They're both really different. We've got groups of coaches that have had the different scouts. So, I've got two groups of coaches that are going to be on Florida, going to be on Texas A&M. I'll work on us for about an hour or two till the game is over. Then, shift gears and meet with the team tonight at 8 p.m. to give them a bit of a preliminary scouting report, let them get off their feet. Then, 8 a.m. tomorrow, morning breakfast and another scout."

"We'll probably have two hours between now and the game time with our team. That's just about going out there and playing. There's a lot on the line tomorrow. Opportunity for anybody here to make really, really some kind of special history. We're still in position to make history."

Q: You mentioned scratching and clawing for 73 points. 86 yesterday. Two good offensive performances against two different types of defenses. What about your unit is it that they're adaptable?

BP: "Good question. Texas A&M tomorrow, with all their switching, all their changing of defenses, they're hard to play call against."

"Florida, with all their size and length. What a matchup this is going to be now of great guards. You got four of the best guards in the league in Florida, Texas A&M going at each other. Either way, it's going to be a really hard game. Tomorrow is going to be another hard game to score. We'll have to figure some things out. While we're trying to figure it out, we better get stops."

Auburn Forwards Chad Baker-Mazara and Jaylin Williams

Q. Jaylin, second half rebounding, a lot better. What changed? Did you make an adjustment?

JW: "Man, we knew they were dominating us on the offensive glass. I was like, let me just jump up, use my athleticism and go grab the rebounds. That was really key. At halftime, we talked about that. They had more offensive rebounds than we did rebounds total. We had to put our pants on, go out there and show them Auburn basketball."

Q: Jaylin and Chad, Mississippi State came out and threw the first purge early on. What did it take for you to adjust to their style of play?

JW: "I knew, like, they played before us. So, they done played a couple games before us. I knew coming out they were going to try to be more physical than us. First half, they had to stick around as long as they could and compete at the highest level as possible. They knew they were tired, probably didn't have as much rest because they had to prepare for us the whole night. This morning, we had to play at noon. We knew they was going to come out the gate, be physical, Mississippi State, which is one of the most physical teams in our league, we had to adjust and respect them. But, we had to play our game at the end of the day."

CBM: “Basically, we knew it was going to be a dogfight. We played them twice. We already seen what they're capable of. So, we just had to come out there and basically execute. Coach [Pearl] told us what it was going to be about. SEC Tournament, not many foul calls. We knew it was going to be really a war down there. So, we basically came out and listened to Coach, stuck to his game plan and just executed.”

Q: You had a nine-point lead, they cut it to one. Dylan Cardwell gets a dunk off a great feed for you, blocks the athlete, gets another dunk. It changed the whole momentum. Talk about that minute of the game.

CBM: “To be honest, that was really a game changer. I feel like that gave us a spark, to everybody. Helped us, like, get the crowd involved, too. It was a really big play. He came in, basically came in clutch, turned the whole momentum around. At that point, they came from a nine-point lead. I feel like that really helped us a lot.”

Q: This is your first win by single digits all season. What do you think you can learn from that down the stretch?

JW: “Make free throws and rebound really, especially when it's that close. We're up like that, they're going to foul us. Then, we've got to get stops, communicate and stick together. Like, we can't shut down as a team, that's what we did.”

CBM: “When it comes to games like that, basically it comes to who wants it more. A little 50/50 plays, going to make the extra hustle, the one more pass, who's more disciplined at the end. I feel like we, how he said, stick together. We know we're going to have to take it out from there, we're not just going to walk in there and get a dub. I feel like we stayed together at the end and stayed composed and came out with the dub.”

Q. Jaylin, your team had 15 assists on 25 made baskets. What is the secret to be able to distribute the ball like that?

JW: “I had a couple bad turnovers because I didn't realize how long they were on the perimeter from the get-go. Everybody on our team can score the basketball. We all trust each other in any position: perimeter, inside. Especially like Johni [Broome] and Dylan and me inside, and you got Chad and Aden [Holloway] shoot the ball well outside. Very hard to pick who to guard. Move the ball around, somebody is going to get the best option eventually.”

Q. I want to ask you about the budding rivalry between Mississippi State and Auburn.

CBM: “We know that they have really great players, especially in the backcourt. We know that our guys are better. We never underestimate them. Every time they come, they give us a good game and a good fight. We just really come out there and just play harder than them and try to out-execute them basically.”

JW: “Mississippi State, again, they play harder than most teams in our league. They gave us a lot of things to look at on film, what we need to get better at as a team. Playing against those guys the last five years, they've been playing really hard, really good games against them. Sad that it's over because I learned a lot from playing against those guys because they play really hard.”