

**2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Quotes**  
**NCAA Tournament Practice Day Media Session - March 20, 2024**

**Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans**

***Q: How important was Shawn Jones Jr.'s play during the stretch with D.J. [Jeffries] out to get you out of the early SEC season funk and help you guys down the stretch at the end of the year?***

CJ: "I think every coach will tell you, when they get in recruiting mode, certainly trying to find the best and the brightest and those that fit your system, and at the same time, guys that will end up choosing you and your program, and we're no different. We were trying to build that as best we could because of the what-if scenarios that always seem to come up every season. Like I said Sunday with Jimmy [Bell Jr.], and especially Gai [Chol], he's a true freshman that the plan was to redshirt. We never had any intention of playing him. We knew he needed development, but he played some meaningful minutes in some huge games and got us through some tough spots when Tolu wasn't available."

"Then Jimmy, the work that he put in and the numbers that he put up, I just don't believe that we wouldn't have more losses if we didn't have those two guys. Then Shawn, like you mentioned, to me, it wasn't as big a deal just because we expect him going into the season to have a better year, to play more minutes, and to give us productivity, and he's been able to do that."

***Q: You had spoken highly of Isaac when you guys were getting ready for Senior Day. What are your impressions of how he's been able to add off the court for this team?***

CJ: "I love having Isaac Stansbury on our team. What I love the most about him is when he gets in that game, he plays the right way. He would never say anything to anybody else, but if he's out there and someone isn't playing the right way, it disappoints him. He practices at such a high level. He works at his craft outside of practice, even knowing he's not going to be in the guts of the game when the score is in balance. I think it says a lot about who he is and what his makeup is. If he had any more eligibility, I would be begging him to come back and be a part of our program because he brings positivity to it."

***Q: You've been a part of this tournament at a bunch of different places, but there's a lot of discussion about changes to the tournament format, expansion, things like that. Where do you see the future of this tournament? Do you think it's something that should be looked at and discussed?***

CJ: "I'll be honest, I don't spend a lot of time thinking about that just because at the end of the day no one's going to care what I've got to say. No one really cares what Chris Jans' opinion about expansion of the NCAA Tournament. So, why would I waste any of my brainpower, the little that I have, of trying to come up with an answer or a point of view?"

***Q: This is a Michigan State team that was ranked top five in the preseason AP Poll but fell short of that. Is it easy to overlook those shortcomings when you get ready to face them as this is a Tom Izzo coached team?***

CJ: "We're not going to overlook anything they do. They were ranked high in the preseason for a reason, and at the end of the day, it's how they're playing now. Tom Izzo is as respected of a basketball coach that there is in college basketball. When I was growing up in the business, when I was young, younger, people would ask me, who's your idol? Who's your mentor? I said, you know, I really don't have one. I didn't grow up in an athletic family. None of my parents played high school or college sports. So, I was oblivious really to the profession, and even college basketball for that matter. I just wanted to be a high school basketball coach and a PE teacher. I thought they had the best life you could ever imagine. Eventually, I strived for a little bit more. But people would ask me that all the time."

"To be honest with you, my answer was, if I had to emulate someone or some program -- and I'm talking about my early 20s, I go it would be Tom Izzo at Michigan State. I always respected the way he went about his business, the way his teams played. I wanted my teams to be looked at that way, and I know they're not. From an early age in my formative years as a college coach, that was probably the person and the program that I looked up to the most. Then, I chuckled when we got paired up with him because I'm sure he had to look down at his staff and say, hey, who is Chris Jans and who are we playing against? I'm sure he had to ask a couple people to get some information about me. It's a privilege to be able to get a chance to share the floor with him and to compete against him."

***Q: Josh [Hubbard], I think, is averaging 25 points a game in his last eight. What's allowed him to be so successful this year? Did you foresee him being able to make this level of impact as a freshman when you recruited him?***

CJ: "No. I didn't foresee him having that kind of impact as a true freshman. I'm glad I was wrong. I'm on record saying that I don't think anybody said that on record. If they're thinking it and saying it now, I would question if they're telling the truth or not. Now, the people that did believe that he would were Josh Hubbard and his family. They know the work that he's put in, and now, having gotten to know him even better after working with him this past year, I understand why. His confidence, his belief stems from his work. He's a dogged worker. He's a disciplined worker. He works at his craft. He loves the game. It means so much to him, and he does it outside of the gym, too."

"He's taken care of himself at a young age in terms of what he's putting in his body and his sleep and his approach. He hasn't had a bad day since he's been here. He shot the ball good on some days, bad on others, but in terms of his mental approach walking in the door every day, he's steady Eddie. He's productive. He's coachable. That's the thing that sticks out the most to me. He's as coachable as anyone I've ever coached. And he's got the "it" factor. If you talk to coaches about what that means, it means a lot. He just gets it. I'm sure glad he's on our team."

***Q: Shakeel Moore grew up about an hour from here. He had a rough upbringing in some years and obviously a transfer from NC State. What have you learned about his time growing up here and sort of getting to this point with you guys and Mississippi State?***

CJ: "Every time we play over this way, there's always some Shak Moore family in the stands, and it's nice to see them supporting Shak and getting to interact with them following the game. That's one of the first things that I said once we were selected and then knew we were coming to Charlotte is that, 'Hey, man, you're going home.' Certainly, [he] lit up with a big, beautiful smile. I'm happy for him. I'm happy he gets another opportunity to play in March Madness and that he gets to do it in front of a bunch of his family and friends."

***Q: You were talking about the respect you had for Tom Izzo earlier. Why do you think he's been able to have the longevity that he's had and stay in his successful role even as the game has changed throughout the years?***

CJ: "I don't really know, to be honest with you, other than I would imagine, first and foremost, he's a hell of a basketball coach. I think it starts with that -- you don't go to, what is it, 25, 26, 27 consecutive -- consecutive, mind you -- NCAA Tournaments in a row. I just can't imagine what that would feel like having to do that. That's a lot. You talk about consistency. You talk about believing in your system, the recruiting aspect of it. To continue to do it at that level, I don't care what the front of your jersey says, that's a difficult task. I think all of college basketball admires him for being able to do that. I'm sure what I just said, the words I just used, probably had a lot to do with why he's been able to do that at Michigan State -- being a great coach, having a consistent approach, having a belief in their system, hiring really

good coaches around him. But there's a lot to it. That's quite an accomplishment. He's done it all. All the Final Fours, the National Championships, the Hall of Fame coach. Whenever he decides he's had enough, he'll be revered as good a coach as there ever was."

***Q: As you look at the tape with the Spartans, is there an area you see as the biggest matchup problem for you guys, and then an area that you think you really can exploit?***

CJ: "First thing that jumps off the page to me is just how quickly they get the ball up the court. Certainly, everybody runs on turnovers, and most people push it on misses, but when that ball goes through the net, I'm not so certain that they're not better that way than they even are in missed shots. They get the ball out of the net, and they know where they're out letting the ball. Those guys run the wings, and they rim run, and they give that passer options. And if you're not on your Ps and Qs and you celebrate at all on a made shot, or you don't think get back or sprint back or whatever your assignment is defensively, it's over. They're laying the ball in or they're hoisting up a wide open three. That's what jumps out at me the most. I don't spend a lot of time watching other teams during the season, so I wasn't familiar with that."

"When I think of Michigan State, I think of the toughness, the rebounding, Tom Izzo. But that's what surprised me the most. It's easy to say in terms of, 'Yeah, let's just get back and guard them,' but it's hard to do when they do it at such breakneck speed. In terms of anything we can exploit, they're so well-rounded. I'm sure the local people have been riding them, this and that because they lost a game or two here and there, but look at their schedule. Their nonleague schedule was off the chart. Who knows if he knew James Madison and Indiana State and folks like that were going to be as good as they were. When they made that schedule, maybe they thought that was going to be more of a relaxing game, but it's just scattered and littered with great programs up and down their schedule."

**Mississippi State Guards Shakeel Moore, Josh Hubbard and Dashawn Davis, and Forwards Tolu Smith III and Cameron Matthews**

***Q: Shakeel, how excited are you to play in your home state? How many people do you have coming to this game?***

SM: "I'm really excited. I have a bunch of family that's coming, especially on my dad's side. An opportunity for me and for them to see me, they don't get to see me that much. So, I'm excited."

***Q: You guys lost three in a row at the end of the regular season, but you really bounced back in the SEC Tournament, defeating LSU and Tennessee. How do you plan to continue to move forward and just make a statement for yourselves in this tournament?***

TS: "I think those losses helped us, motivated us going into the SEC Tournament. I think we have all the confidence in the world right now going into the NCAA Tournament. So, we've just got to bottle that up and use it for this game and the next games."

JH: "Just following back on what Tolu said, just using that same momentum from the tournament and the confidence and positive that we have through adversity, we know that we can compete with any team. So, just following the game plan each game and taking one game at a time."

DD: "Beginning of the season we had a common goal that we shared with one another. So, we just knew that any road blocks or any hardships that we had, we had to get through it. So, those three losses didn't really hurt us mentally."

CM: "Back like what they said, just staying resilient and not getting too high, not getting too low. Just staying the course no matter what."

SM: "To piggy-back off of what Josh said, just take it one game at a time, keeping your resilience and confidence at a high, never too low, and just handling what we've got to handle."

***Q: Cam, what has your relationship with D.J. [Jeffries] meant to you, and how excited are you that you get to finish playing with him in the tournament?***

CM: "It's meant a lot. Just looking back at it, just us being kids in high school and how long it's been, it's been a great journey with my brother. I'm just excited I get to share a moment like March Madness with him."

***Q: For any of you, what have you seen from Michigan State on the tape so far, and what's it going to take to beat them tomorrow?***

SM: "We know we've got to beat them on the backboards. That's our main thing is winning the backboard battle and just staying resilient on defense."

CM: "Just doing what we do -- defense, rebounding, and maintain our offensive tempo and pace in transition and just try to slow them down, things like that."

DD: "They've got great players, a great system, a great coach. So, we know we've got to execute our game plan, play physical, play hard in all aspects."

JH: "Just control the pace of the game, the tempo of the game. Defensive rebounding will be key to the game."

TS: "What everybody said. Staying within ourselves and doing exactly what these guys just said."

***Q: Just to reach this stage as a freshman, is it surreal to you? What's it like to see the court, and how excited are you to participate in the Big Dance?***

JH: "I'm really excited. Definitely a surreal moment. As a little kid, you dream of moments like these. We all deserve this moment. We all put in a lot of work. Coach Jans deserves it too. He instilled a lot of the great things in us. I'm not surprised we made it this far because it's what we deserve. We worked hard for it, and we have a lot of high expectations for it."

***Q: For Michigan State fans who have never seen Mississippi State play, what would you guys say is the identity of the program this year?***

SM: "Defense, rebounding, and toughness."

CM: "Just being really physical, really getting after it, picking it up on defense. Just trying to make defense into offense."

DD: "It's just like they said. It's probably going to be the physical game they played all year."

JH: "Just being physical and making the other team uncomfortable, putting them in bad situations."

TS: "Yeah, what they said. Playing defense, playing our game, executing and just being resilient."