

2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Quotes

Mississippi State at No. 11 Auburn – March 2, 2024

Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: For your team to start slow offensively, what were they doing defensively to make it tough for you guys? How important is that on the road getting a better offensive start?

CJ: “Yeah, I thought we started slow both offensively and defensively as a matter of fact. They were very aggressive early in the game, and for the majority of the game, but especially early. We were catching the ball further out than the plays designed to do so which kind of put us on our heels a little bit.”

“Then, offensively, I thought they were really on it as well. I really felt like it was unfortunately, a classic case of playing uphill, all night long. [We were down] 8-2, 24-10 and down 17 [39-22] at the half. We cut it to eight [48-40] which was the closest we ever got, and it wasn't there very long. They stretched it out again to get it back into double figures. We were just playing uphill all night long, and that's how it felt. They did an excellent job.”

Q: Two tough losses this week against some of the top teams in the conference. What do you feel like the guys learned in this week of play competing against these types of programs?

CJ: “Well, the first game was. when you've got a chance to beat a team of that caliber [on your home court], you've got to get it done, and we didn't. We certainly had some chances. We had some opportunities in the Tuesday game against Kentucky that didn't happen for us.”

“This game, the lesson will be playing against a good team and a great crowd and environment on the road, you've got to try to take away the crowd as best as you can. They got into the game because the home team played well, and we didn't do our job of doing anything to quiet them down too much. So, just being ready to play all the time, and every possession matters.”

Q: You were able to shoot better than 50 percent in the second half. Were there some adjustments you guys made that might carry over to the next two games coming up?

CJ: “Gosh, I don't know. We just ran better offense. We tried to get into some two-man games in the side with a guard and Tolu [Smith III]. They were switching some and thought we could maybe get the switch, throw it inside and play through that. That worked for a little bit. We had to increase our tempo in the second half because of obvious reasons. We were down too far to really stick to our game plan of trying to make it more of a possession game. That certainly didn't work in the first half. But, we played better [in the second half].”

“More importantly, the lesson was that – what I told them after the game was that they took the fight to us to start the game. They were more physical than us. Kudos to Coach [Bruce] Pearl, the staff and his players. I haven't said that very often all year long with our team, but I told them the truth. We always tell them the truth, and it was the truth that they took the fight to us. That can't be the case the way that our team is put together and the way our roster is constructed.”

“I've got to take some of the blame. We've been playing a certain ball screen coverage the last two or three games prior to this one. We actually switched it back to how we played against Auburn when we beat them at home, and it wasn't as aggressive. They took advantage of it. In the second half, we switched to what we've been doing recently to be more aggressive, and that helped us on defense as well.”

Q: We saw your guys respond to that 3-6 start in SEC play with a winning streak. How much do you feel like that experience gives you the trust in your players to flush this week?

CJ: "We'll find out shortly. It doesn't matter what I think will happen. We've got two more games before we head to Nashville. Obviously, we talked to them back home about the 40-minute game being the season like we're in the last five minutes of our game, if you use the analogy of our season. The opportunities go away quickly. We've got to win some games, that's the bottom line. Obviously, the last four games of our SEC schedule, is like the first four. It's tough, they're great opportunities. But if you don't take advantage of them, they're just lost opportunities."

Q: How important is it to gain momentum in this last week before postseason play starts?

CJ: "Yeah, I'm not too concerned about momentum heading into postseason play. I'm just more concerned of winning basketball games. That's kind of where we're at. Each game is very, very important. It's crucial to where we're at, what we're trying to do and what our goals are for the season. Our whole focus will just be on trying to get ready for Wednesday."

Q: It's no secret that Josh [Hubbard] is at the top of a lot of teams' scouting reports at this point in the season. How have you felt that he's handled different defenses especially as he sees some of these opponents for a second time?

CJ: "They're obviously were giving him a ton of attention. He was 1-for-6 at halftime with a couple turnovers. I thought they sped him up a little bit which doesn't happen very often. Obviously, Josh is a big-time player. But, with all players, I don't care if you're a 10-year vet, you've got things to learn. You've got to use experiences that you've been through to help make you better."

"I think Josh obviously understands the game and understands that he's got to get better. He's got to learn how different people defend him. Because of his stats here, etcetera, he's got to be careful sometimes when they speed him up, and he tries to get all the way to the rim when there's a bunch of size waiting for him. He's just got to make sure he takes care of the basketball. But, we've talked about him all year long, and he'd still find a way to help us have a chance to get back into the game in the second half. It just wasn't quite enough for our team."

Guard Josh Hubbard

Q: You guys had a stretch early in the game where you missed 12 straight shots. What were they doing defensively early on to make things difficult for you and your teammates?

JH: "They were aggressive on and off the ball, denied everybody. They got us into us, and they were strong in their gap defense where it was hard to get to the rim. We had to work for catches and stuff like that, little things like that. They played aggressive defense, and that kind of stopped us. It shouldn't have, but that's just the way it is sometimes."

Q: You had two games this week that were against some of the top teams in the conference that could go deep into March. What do you think as a team you guys learned about what it takes to compete with those type of teams on a nightly basis?

JH: "We just have to get our mental state better. Being grateful and being honored to have those opportunities against those top teams, not taking it for granted either. It was a good opportunity tonight, and earlier this week [against Kentucky]. We've got two more opportunities next week. So, hopefully, we'll learn from this mistake and just move on to the next one."

Q: Do you feel like you made some good adjustments there in the second half to be able to get some open looks for you and the other guys?

JH: "Yeah, defensively, we made a few adjustments. Our ball screen defense was huge. I wish we had started like that from the jump, but it is what it was. It was a great adjustment, like you said. We could've made a comeback. We cut it down to like 48-40 at one time I saw. That was another good opportunity to make a run."

Q: You guys have had back-to-back losses after having a five-game winning streak before that. What have you guys learned from these experiences this season to be able to flush this one and go into Texas A&M?

JH: "Yeah, when you're in the moment, you realize from past experiences. Like, next week, if we go down eight or something like that with 10 minutes left in the first half, we can look back on this game. We can take it as a positive moment and positive motivation. It's the little things like that."

Q: How important do you feel like next week's two games are with trying to build momentum before the SEC Tournament and possibly heading into the NCAA Tournament?

JH: "Yeah, it'll be huge for us. Just have to leave this week in the past and move towards the future. Two good teams next week with opportunities for us. We're at A&M next week, and it'll be a good one."

Q: Early on, you guys had the offensive struggles here. Playing on the road, how big is it to get a better start offensively?

JH: "Yeah, it's huge. On the road, it's not easy to win. It's not [like] at home. So, it's a different environment. You just have to play together, not let the outside [noise and crowd] affect you. Bring that energy and have that first punch."