

**2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Quotes**  
**No. 25 Mississippi State vs. Nicholls – November 24, 2023**

**Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans**

***Q: Opening Statement***

**CJ:** "I want to acknowledge the folks who came to watch us play this afternoon. It was an odd start time. Obviously, we're trying to piggyback off the Egg Bowl and they [the fans] showed up. The upper level was unbelievable. I didn't realize it until the second half. We appreciate those folks coming out and watching us play."

"It's as big of a non-league crowd that I remember since I've been here. It makes a difference. These kids feed off of it. Hopefully, we've gained some new fans after today. Hopefully, some of them left before the last four minutes and didn't see the debacle that was the end of that basketball game. I really appreciate those folks for showing up and watching them [our players] play."

***Q: What are your thoughts on the balanced scoring you've had this season?***

**CJ:** "You never know how it'll unfold. I enjoy having balanced scoring. Certainly, we're not trying to hold anyone down. At the same time, it makes it so difficult to prepare against from a defensive scouting perspective. There are multiple guys that can have big nights. You're not relying on one thing to carry you offensively. Last year, we had some of that with Tolu [Smith] having to carry the [offensive] load around the basket. You're seeing some guys have big games, but they're different. You will still see that going forward. So, so far so good."

***Q: How big was it to have KeShawn Murphy back?***

**CJ:** "It was a special day for him. He was back much earlier than any of us expected. He was way ahead of schedule with his rehab. He was very diligent. A shout out to Andrew Kegley and his folks for all the extra time they spent with [Murphy] and with Tolu [Smith]. As for the number of minutes in my head, he didn't have a restriction. That was what we're hoping for. He had some good and some bad like most of our guys do when they get into the game. Hopefully, that'll give him some confidence with the injury having now played in a game. He'll be better going forward."

***Q: How important is it to have a defensive identity to fall back on when shots aren't falling?***

**CJ:** "That's what our non-negotiables are. That's just what we believe in. Certainly, we're trying to be better offensively, and people that have watched us both years know we definitely have a different style to us this year than the past, but it's still a work in progress."

"At the end of the day, 5-for-23 from three, and we're still able to win pretty easily at home. So, we're going to have nights where we struggle from the three. We want to rely on that. We want to have that in our back pocket. It's something we rally around every single day, and they all know that. They get it. They know how important it is, and the quicker they buy into it the better they are individually."

***Q: Talk about the energy the team brought today with the slam dunks.***

**CJ:** "Yeah, obviously, you can go back for decades and decades. Fans get excited when they [the players] make those kind of athletic plays. So, do their teammates. They're rhythm changers. They're momentum changers. You can say 'Just take the two', but no, no, tear it down.' Let's change the tenure of the game. Let's be aggressive, because I don't like it when they dunk in my goal. I don't necessarily love that feeling. So, we preach to get after it. Let's turn the game. Let's get the crowd into it. Take the crowd away for on the road. So, they like doing it. It's fun, and there's some importance to it."

***Q: What have you thought of the way Gai Chol has been able to learn from the veteran mentorship like Tolu Smith, Cameron Matthews and Jimmy Bell Jr.?***

**CJ:** “One day, he’s going to write a book. He’s going to remember the lessons he’s being taught every day, because he’s going against some veterans. Tolu Smith, Jimmy Bell and Cameron Matthews, even, because we play small ball. He’s had some rough days. He’s had his nose broke. He’s gotten hit a few times inadvertently, but he’s been roughed up a bit. I always tell him, “This is a part of the deal, man, just stick with it. You’re going to grow from these scars. You’re going to look back someday and be the player that you are.”

“He’s going to be a good player. He’s a good player right now, but I think he’s got a chance to be really, really good, because you’ve seen a little bit of it. He’s got a skillset. He knocks down free throws. He’s got beautiful touch. He can score it, and he can shoot it out to the midrange. I think eventually he’ll be confident enough to shoot the three. With a guy that big and spacing the floor, I’ve always said about him, he doesn’t fear anything. He doesn’t fear anybody, and that’s why he’s out there in the mix.”

***Q: How do you see last year’s experience being in the rankings compared to this year’s?***

**CJ:** “There was a lot of the talking before the injuries. There was a lot of talk in all of the too-early polls. This and that and the other, but we’ve had more people coming into our gym and evaluating our team than the year before. From different analysts, different networks, and the things they do their homework on. Then, it kind of went away for a while. We tried to use that to our advantage, and we knew going into this game we had a lot of ammunition if you will with last year’s scare. They beat LSU [earlier this year]. So, we had plenty to talk about to get our guys ready to go.”

“But in terms of the rankings and all that stuff, we haven’t talked about it one time. At least, I haven’t talked about it with our team or even our coaching staff since that came out. Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad we’re being acknowledged. It’s great for our program in a lot of different areas. But at the end of the day, we’ve got a lot of basketball left to be played.”

***Q: What did you see with Cameron Matthews’ game today?***

**CJ:** “He had a couple turnovers that we didn’t like. He’s such a good passer and has a great feel for the game. He has a high basketball IQ, is locked into scouting reports and he sometimes questions how we’re guarding something. I love it. That tells me that he’s in. When those kids start asking me questions like ‘What about this’. We encourage that. He’s [Matthews] leading the pack when it comes to that. Sometimes, he wants to thread that needle and make the highlight pass instead of sticking to the play. He gets us in trouble sometimes with his careless turnovers. It’s never a lack of effort or energy with him. He’s a big part of what’s going on right now.”

**Forwards Gai Chol and Cameron Matthews**

***Q: You guys had a 12-point lead there early, and they cut it to five in the later part of the first half. What started to click for you guys to build that halftime lead and pull away during the second half?***

**CM:** “Just doing what we do best, being tough. It starts with defense. When we get our defense into the game, we can just get out and run to get our offense into the game.”

***Q: Obviously, you guys added offensive pieces this offseason. Why do you guys still embrace this defensive backbone that Coach Jans created?***

**CM:** "I'm guessing it's just more of, you guys saw it last year, we had lapses on offense, but we're still competitive. We hang our hats on defense. So, I guess just keeping that type of mindset."

***Q: Gai, when you signed, Coach Jans said the plan was probably to redshirt you. Obviously, your role has quickly changed with injuries. How did your mindset change with that?***

**GC:** "Obviously, when they told me, I had to change my mind set to help by doing whatever I have to do to help the team. That's what I'm doing right now, whether it's playing hard or cheering for people when I'm on the bench."

***Q: Last year, the team got off to an 11-0 start. I don't want to say it was unexpected, but nobody knew what to expect from you guys with a new coach. This year, it's almost like the quick start was kind of expected. Would you agree with that?***

**CM:** "Yeah, just having the same core back we're just trying to piggyback off the success we had last year. So, I'm guessing that's where that came from."

***Q: Cam, you guys get KeShawn Murphy back today. What was it like hearing the ovation he got, and what was it like seeing him get going a bit in the second half?***

**CM:** "I'm really happy for my guy because he's been through a lot of ups and downs. So, it just makes me smile internally seeing him out there having fun again."

***Q: How much has it help you to have guys like Cameron [Matthews], Tolu [Smith] and some of the veterans in the program to help you get adjusted?***

**GC:** "It has obviously helped me a lot by the way I'm playing. They're always motivating me and always telling me what to do. [Telling me to] Speak louder and play hard which has made me better."

***Q: It seems that you and your teammates were having a lot of fun out there. There were several slam dunks today. Did it seem to be nice and easy like it looked out there?***

**CM:** "Yeah, I wouldn't say nice and easy because Nicholls is a good team. It's just getting our athleticism, our size and our defense into the game. That's what makes all of the highlight plays easy when we're getting on the fastbreak, just running and having fun."

***Q: Where do you feel this team is at six games in, and where do you feel there's still room to grow on the offensive side of the ball.***

**CM:** "Just working on our pace and our sets. Just making our offense flow more smoothly. Outside of that, I think we're going to be okay this year."