

2024-25 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes
No. 17 Mississippi State vs. Bethune-Cookman – December 30, 2024

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: What are your thoughts about the team going into SEC play? Where do you see them stacking up?

CJ: "That's a good and fair question. I don't spend a lot of time thinking about that, but it makes sense that the non-conference portion of our season is complete. Now, we've got 19 guaranteed SEC games moving forward without any other teams. Then, who knows what waits for us at the end of the season, depending on how we play the rest of the year."

"I would say so far so good. We had high expectations for this team, like we've had for all of our teams since we've been here. Like most years, there are a couple of games we won that I wish we would have played better than we did. Certainly, the loss to Butler, they beat us fair and square. I just didn't like how we competed that particular night in Arizona. But, 30,000-foot view, I would say B-plus range. Some could say A-minus with the record, the numbers, the metrics and all that. But there's a long way to go, and we're just at the beginning of it."

Q: How did Claudell Harris [Jr.'s] three's in the second half help your team?

CJ: "He's really rounding into form for us in terms of how we want him to play. His competitive level is really good. He's bought into not just being a scorer. It's kind of what he's been the majority of his career before he was here. He and Mook [Cameron Matthews] are probably the best talkers we have on defense. For him to go an entire half and not take a shot, I can't imagine he's done that very often knowing his history in his college career. To me, it's just a great sign that he didn't force it and was rewarded with five great looks. He knocked three of them down. Like you already mentioned, they were big shots."

"I kind of put him in a bad spot [at the beginning of the game]. He played too long in his first run to start the game after the holiday break. He was out there for the first eight or nine minutes. I knew I needed to get him out of the game. Because of other reasons, I missed it. He was a little spent that way, but I love where he's at. He's in a really good spot, and he's going to be a big part of what we do the rest of the season."

Q: Riley [Kugel] had another big offensive game, what did you see from him tonight?

CJ: "Obviously, he was scoring the ball at an elite level. He was confident, just like he was against Memphis. Anyone who's watched us enough knows what I'm talking about. It looked like every time he shot it, he knew it was going in. It almost did."

"Into other facets of the game, watching it live, he was just okay. He had four turnovers and would try to make too fancy of a pass at times, but he's very unselfish in that way. In my opinion, he gets as much joy setting his teammates up as he does actually shooting and scoring the ball."

"Defensively, we were just okay, and he was just okay as well. We had multiple breakdowns on that end. However, he scored the ball at a really high level, and we needed that tonight."

Q: How big of a difference is KeShawn Murphy's mentality in crashing the boards compared to last year?

CJ: "He had eight points, nine rebounds and went 4-of-6 from the field. It's pretty good. He had two assists and one turnover. He didn't have an 'Oh My God' type line, but he had a pretty good line. He wasn't a star of the game and didn't have a take-over moment, but he was consistent."

"For the most part, it's been his focus. But, it's like I said earlier, it's been about his approach. Since he got here in June, he rarely hasn't had a good day in practice. He has a high motor and good work ethic. Everyone in the program knows it. He has a high competition level, and he continues to get rewarded because of it."

Q: What is it with the chemistry of this team where the guys know where to get the ball so quickly?

CJ: "I think I may have mentioned this one other time, but we thought as a staff that once we got into more team activities in July. They were very unselfish, even early. That made us giddy to think that, 'Hey, this team likes each other already. Coaches love it when you have an unselfish team. That was something we saw early on, and it's carried over into how we play.'"

"It's a luxury, you're not fighting that. We've even got guys that overpass it at times. Staff members talked about that in the fall, and I'm like, 'Hey, I'd rather have that problem than the other one.' We'll work it out if it gets to be a problem. I don't feel like it is most of the time in our games, but it's been something that these kids have done since they arrived."

Guard Riley Kugel and Forward RJ Melendez

Q: Riley, what has been working for you lately?

RK: "Just playing my game and attacking the lane like I should be every day. My teammates are trusting me, and I'm having fun."

Q: For both of you, talk about your confidence shooting from the perimeter.

RJM: "We work on it every day. We have guys in before and after practice getting their shots up. During practice, we get a lot of shots up during drills. We get in the gym and work on our game every single day. It gives us that confidence to come out and be ourselves on the court."

RK: "Like he said, we're all in the gym every day. This is a reward for it, and we just work hard for it every day."

Q: What is the importance of hustle plays and not giving up on your shots, especially when you followed up a missed three with a layup?

RK: "I think it's just a basketball play. It felt like it wasn't coming off right. So, I obviously went for the rebound. I think it was just a basketball play. I was just trying to bring the energy."

Q: Is this about where you thought this team would be going into SEC play?

RJM: "We've just got to stay together, it's a long season. So, there's going to be a lot of ups and downs. A lot of people are saying that the SEC is the best conference, and I agree. We just have to come in every game, bring our A game and make sure we follow and scout every single day."

Q: What defensive adjustments were made at halftime?

RJM: "We just had to play harder. We weren't caught up in guarding the ball in the first half, and they were just getting whatever shot they wanted at some point. So, we just had to come out and tie it up on our defense."

Q: What's the chemistry level on the team that you can seemingly know where each other are on the court?

RK: "I think it starts off the court, everybody has trust in each other. When you have a working team like this, there's a lot of options that can score the ball. Everybody just has a lot of trust in each other."

Q: For both of you because you've been through SEC play before, what's the anticipation this week getting ready for games?

RK: "I just can't wait for it. I feel like it's the best time of the year, that and the postseason. I look forward to playing in high-level games. That's just always been me, and I can't wait. It's going to be a gauntlet, we're ready for it."

RJM: "It's just a great conference. Just going to be a dog fight every single night. You just have to come ready every single game."