

**2024-25 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes
No. 15 Mississippi State vs. No. 21 Ole Miss– January 18, 2024**

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: What was going through your mind when the buzzer sounded after that close game?

CJ: “What went through my mind? That’s a whole lot of stuff. I was just happy we won. I was happy for our guys, happy for our program and the fans that were here and elsewhere. We talked with our guys about what this game meant for people in Starkville and everywhere, really, not just here. It was for the Bulldogs in our community and in our state.”

“I’m sure for the fans, it was a heck of a college basketball game. A lot of big plays, big shots, big turnovers. With turnovers, I’ve got to give them credit for what they do. I thought we’d do better with it. Some of it was silly plays and passes, which had a lot to do with it as well.”

Q: It seems like the fans have started to notice Riley Kugel’s importance to this team. Did his performance today show how important he is to this group?

CJ: “Possibly, he’s just had to get healthy. He had two injuries in the same game against Kentucky. You know when he’s cooking a little bit and was in that game, that hurt us. We tried to get him ready for Auburn, but he couldn’t go. Then, we felt good coming into today. I’m happy that our fans get it, and they’re cheering for our guys, making them feel good. For him, it’s always been about consistency. If he can string some games together, hopefully that’ll be the case.”

Q: KeShawn Murphy and Riley Kugel came off the bench big time for you tonight. What do you think about how they helped finish down the stretch?

CJ: “I think everybody made some big contributions. With [KeShawn] Murphy, we expect all of that. We rely on it. He went 8-of-12, had a double-double and also had three assists. That’s just who he is for us.”

“We talk about establishing yourself. If you’re a good offensive rebounder, you need to be doing it all the time. Whatever the facet is in the game, you need to be accountable for it. In the first three SEC games, he had one offensive rebound. We had to get on him for that because he’d been pretty steady in the rebounding department before league play. It’s good to see him have 11 against this quality team.”

Q: What can you say about the hustle and intensity shown by your team down the stretch?

CJ: “I thought that his [RJ Melendez] block was the biggest play of the game. If that doesn’t happen and they lay it in, then, who knows? There are always pivotal plays. You’re not always sure when they’re going to happen, but that was a big one.”

“Matthew Murrell played awfully well in the second half and the end of regulation. They went and put the ball in his hands, and it was a little too early to foul. The players now understand that everybody is trying to foul, and you kind of get caught with your hand in the cookie jar. You can have a foul on a three or even a made three. That shot was a big one. It took some wind out of our sails. When you go into overtime, you never know what your composure is going to be. I was glad that our guys stuck together and won the game.”

Q: It seems like every time your backs are against the wall, you manage to find a way to pull it out. What does that say about your program and how you've built this team?

CJ: "I'll let you guys figure that out. I didn't tell the team that this was a must-win game, but it was for me, internally, for a lot of factors. I don't know if we've had a bigger must-win game going into a game. We're trying to make steps for where this program is going. We lost two in a row and have to go on the road for two more. This was a rivalry game. So, everything added up to this being a big turning point."

"I thought our guys came out of the gates very loose and comfortable. The crowd was unbelievable, especially the first 15 minutes of the game. I was glad our guys had that kind of mentality coming out of the gate."

Q: RJ Melendez makes that block. Then, Josh Hubbard lobs it up to Cameron Matthews to find Riley Kugel in the corner for the three. There was a moment when Cam realizes in mid-air, 'I'm not going to get to the rim, I need to pass this.' Are you going to take credit for coaching there, or are you going to give that to Cam?

CJ: "You know the answer to that [laughter]. There are a lot of things they do, and there's not a lot of credit to be given to us and our staff. He is just so instinctual. That's why we love him. We ran our offense through him a lot in the second half with the backdown game. We thought they'd muster, and he did a beautiful job reading if they were or weren't."

"That [RJ] Melendez play was unbelievable because, offensively, he didn't have a great night. He hit a big shot, had a big block and he was 2-for-8 from three. He's such a good shooter. Anytime, he shoots it, I think it is going in. It was a heck of a play, and a heck of an exchange. You can argue it probably won the game."

Q: It was a pretty hectic last 20 seconds of regulation. What did you tell your team in the huddle going into overtime to calm them down and get them ready?

CJ: "I told the radio guys this that I saw some droopy faces when it was time for me to sit down. Certainly, as a coach, that's not what you're looking for. We tried to reset it as best as we could. We tried to get them energized again, ready to go and ready to play. We had a lot of game left, and we couldn't let how it ended prick our balloon. We couldn't let that emotion take over and not compete. I thought they came out of there and did a pretty good job of resetting themselves, understanding that it was going to take more time. There's going to be more ball, and they had to lock in."

Guard Riley Kugel and Forward KeShawn Murphy

Q: How did you feel coming back with the ankle, and take us through the last couple of minutes in overtime?

RK: "I was just anxious to get back out there. I missed the last game from injury and was just happy to be back out there with the guys. It was just fun to play. And, in overtime, everyone just had to connect, talk a lot more than we were and we were going to come out with the 'W'."

Q: That sequence where RJ [Melendez] gets the block in transition and then Cam [Cameron Matthews] dishes to you, what did you see on that play? How big do you feel like that was to be in control of the ball game and ultimately win it.

RK: "Yeah, I saw a three-on-two transition so I knew we had to get a bucket, but Cam could also score. He had that much trust in me, and he kicked it out to me. I stepped up and knocked the shot down."

Q: KeShawn, you made some grabs on the board especially early on in the game. What matchups were you sort of noticing against their players and pretty much getting what you wanted to.

KM: "Jans [Coach Chris Jans] told us that this was going to be a tough matchup, because Dia [Malik Dia] was good at getting offensive rebounds. So, going into this game, we knew and I knew, that I was going to have to step up and get offensive rebounds and check on both sides. So, we emphasized that a lot and got it done."

Q: Riley, you weren't on the bench at the start of overtime. Was there any thought you wouldn't be able to come back in the game?

RK: "I just knew I had to get back out there. I had twisted the same foot, but I was going to do whatever I could to get back out there. Really it was just a mental thing, but I had to get out on the court though."

Q: Keshawn, you're one of the veterans on this team, so you understand the importance of this game to the fans and everybody. How does it make you feel to have such a good performance in a game that means so much?

KM: "First, shoutout to Coach Jans with the 200 wins, we got it done for him. I'm just proud of Hail State and repping my jersey and my number. It's bigger than just me. So, I knew how much it meant for us just being here, and we got it done."

Q: How did it feel to take control of this game early, and how did you stay resilient throughout?

KM: "We really just stayed focused. We had to stay focused one game at a time, and we had two losses that we had to learn from, which we did. We got better as a team and as a group. We stepped up tonight and got a big win."

Q: It's hard to call this a must-win game in January, but this game felt like one. What can you say about how this team stays resilient when your back is against the wall?

KM: "It's Jans' trust in us, and our trust in him. We work out there as a collective, and we trust each other. We go out there and play for one another. It carries over."

Q: Riley, you've spent three years in the SEC, what is it like going through the rigors of preparing for tough stretches like this?

RK: "We know every game in this league is going to be a dogfight. So, we attack it every day like we usually do. It starts with practice every day. When you're working hard at practice, it's going to transition to the game. Regardless, we're going to work hard no matter who our opponent is."

Q: Riley, you've played in big rivalry games at Florida, how did this game compare to the games you played in there?

RK: "It felt amazing. It was loud as hell. It was fun, and I'm glad I was out there with the guys."

Ole Miss Head Coach Chris Beard

Opening Statement

CB: "It was a good college basketball game. Congratulations to Jans and those guys, protecting their home court. To me three things: Start of the game for us was just unacceptable. You can't dig a hole like that in the first eight minutes of the game, the first two four-minute periods in a 40-minute game. I'll give them credit, I think they fed off the crowd. They were the more physical, more aggressive team the first eight minutes of the game so now we are playing behind. I'll give them the credit. We understood what we were walking into today, just didn't get it done early."

"Then, in the basketball game, it was a difference in free throws and rebounds. They make more free throws than we shoot, but I have no major complaints on the officiating. It was a hard game to officiate. I thought they were the more aggressive team, and they did a good job drawing those fouls. The free throw differential was big, to overcome that you have to do something special in the game."

"Finally, third, most important is just the rebounding. We had one offensive rebound at halftime. We were outrebounded 15 or 20 at half. So, from our point of view, it's the rebounding, the free throw differential, and the start of the game."

"Other than that, there is some positives. We fought back to get this game into overtime. I think that speaks a lot of our team and what we could be when you get down to late in the game, winning time. It's going to be the team that makes the fewest mistakes. We missed a couple of block outs. Then, our shot selection wasn't where it needed to be late, but give Mississippi State the credit. They were the more aggressive team, and they played great today at home. It was a good college basketball game."

Q: What was the most difficult part about the matchup with Cameron Matthews and KeShawn Murphy down low?

CB: "Yeah, two physical guys who really put their bodies on the line. Jans does a good job of getting them to their spots. Obviously, as the game went on, they were posting us with our sizes mismatched, but you know you're looking at time and score there. You make a commitment to really try to stop the three, and we just made some critical mistakes. What we all should have saw was a couple of post moves in that moment, but they were still getting to their game plan of inside out three's even after we tried to adjust. I think they were disciplined today. I wasn't in their huddle, but it was pretty obvious to me that they were doing what they were trying to get done, and we just had too many critical mistakes in big moments."

Q: Coach, obviously a hard fought game wire-to-wire after the second half. Coaches always talk about these types of games as when they find out more about their team. They learn from these games so that they can win more games. What would you say you learned about your team tonight?

CB: "It's just a reminder for our team that this is round five in the SEC. This wasn't the first time we have had some adversity or played against a really good team. I hope what the reminder is for our players, and what we'll certainly emphasize our next practice is we have got to do what we say we are going to do ... also known as discipline. You're not going to make every shot in a game, you're not going to get every call, but you have to do at some point what you say you are going to do. On a couple of our post defensive mistakes, we didn't do what we set up to do. It's been a strength of our team with our veteran players to be able to help the guys make adjustments or whatever you want to call it but tonight we just made some mistakes that we just couldn't overcome."

Q: Matthew Murrell obviously not 100 percent, playing in and out of the game with a heating pad on the bench but then also stepping up in the biggest moment of the game, knocking out a three over state's arguably biggest and best defender. What do you see about the toughness of him today?

CB: "I thought Matt played with a lot of courage today. This game was important to him. Matt has been in Mississippi for five years now. He understands this game as much as anybody. I thought he played the game with a lot of courage today. A big play in the game was the breakaway layup, and the Matt Murrell I know goes and dunks that ball. Did that decision have something to do with his health? I don't know. I don't want to speak for Matt, but that was a big play in the game."

"Matt played really hard today. He played with some courage. He has overcome a little bit of adversity as are most players in college basketball right now. You know it is January there's not a lot of guys feeling 100% right now."