

2024-25 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes
No. 14 Mississippi State at No. 6 Tennessee – January 21, 2024

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: How did Tennessee get off to such a strong start tonight?

CJ: “Well, they started out just like how we did at home on Saturday. This time, we were unfortunately on the wrong end of the punch. We learned our lesson from the last time we were here [at Tennessee two years ago]. So, I called a timeout a little quicker.”

“They [Tennessee] were just ready to go. Their physicality off the ball, they were just so physically strong. We knew going in that a Rick Barnes team in this league, the way it’s officiated, it’s going to be hard. Defensively, they just move you off your spots and make every catch difficult. We tried to replicate it as best as we could, but they’re hard to play against, especially here. They just threw us off-balance, especially on offense.”

“I thought we were okay defensively in the first half. We were assignment-correct for the most part. We had some breakdowns with [Chaz] Lanier, because players like that, when they make their first shot, it changes their mindset. He made his first one and got hot from there.”

Q: What adjustments did you make at halftime to help you score 40 in the second half, compared to 16 in the first?

CJ: “We didn’t change our attack other than imploring them to do what we do with our ball movement, our player movement and trying to get paint touches. We had 14 paint touches at halftime, which was our season-low. We just talked about that. We felt like we were standing around watching each other.”

“Around the basket, they were being very physical. Murph [KeShawn Murphy] got knocked off-balance and looked uncomfortable for the first time all year. All the other teams we’ve played, it hasn’t looked like that. Tonight, for whatever reason, he couldn’t get his legs beneath him. In the second half, we scored a little better. It’s easier when they take their foot off the gas defensively.”

Q: What makes Tennessee’s pin-downs so hard to guard on defense?

CJ: “We knew it was coming, that’s what they do. We got it to seven [at 38-31] when [Felix] Okpara, number 34, made a three. We got them down to quite a few clock shots. He made one, [Jahmai] Mashack made one, making it 7-to-13. If he doesn’t make that and we score, they probably call a timeout. Then, who knows?” Okpara hasn’t made a three all year long, but that happens. That’s not why we lost the game, but it certainly stops any comeback possibilities. Offensively, we definitely played better in the second half.

“In terms of the pin-downs, we started switching on them in the second half. They were picking on one of our guys and having success with it, which was disappointing. He and we are going to have to learn how to defend better.”

Q: What can you do differently to help stop offensive transitions that teams like Tennessee run?

CJ: “It’s a game within a game. Do you want to send more people back and give up some offensive rebounding opportunities? Going into the game, their numbers rebounding weren’t very good. They weren’t rebounding very well, but they did tonight. I kept saying that they weren’t going to keep doing that. We were pretty good on the offensive glass, which loosened them up. In terms of our get-back [defense], I just feel like it’s too much of a weapon for us to do that. We had some problems with not picking the ball up and not getting matched up early on the defensive possession.”

Q: Did it feel good to hold Tennessee to 11 offensive rebounds?

CJ: "I mean, it was 66 percent [rebounding percentage]. It was a lower-possession game. Our goal was to get to 72-to-73 percent. So, we weren't bad. I mean, they're third or fourth in the SEC on the backboards so far. You just can't get off to a start like that on the road. Can you overcome it? Sure, but it's hard to play through something like that."