

2024-25 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes
Mississippi State vs. Utah – November 17, 2024

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: How big were KeShawn Murphy's contributions, especially late in the game?

CJ: "I've been praising KeShawn as much as I can and deservedly so. He's had a top two or top three mindset in his approach to work. He had an unbelievable offseason, and we've got to remember that he's not used to playing big minutes. He's done that in less than a handful of games since he's arrived. I thought tonight you could see him get rewarded for the work that he put in this offseason. I told him that the work doesn't always show up when you want it to, but eventually it will."

"Along the same lines of the work not always paying off when you want it to is Cameron Matthews. Who would've thought that I would ever run a play to get him the ball late in the game to shoot a free throw? He delivered, and his stroke looked really good early. He was confident. Again, people don't see the behind-the-scenes work that he's been putting in. Who knows what will happen in the next game or next week, but when we needed him this afternoon, he made them."

Q: How much does playing an intense game like this benefit the team later in the year?

CJ: "I think with portal additions and older guys that early-season basketball is a little better quality than it's been in the past. They've been there and done that. They have the experience, and we have so much access to them in the offseason now. So, we've got plenty of time to get everybody up to speed. With the way our schedule plays out, it's time to play someone who looks like us and is from a similar conference. We learned and grew in the previous three games, but we wanted this."

"It obviously didn't look very good at half time, but I'm really proud of our guys and their response. I've never been in these situations with this team. I wanted this to happen, but I didn't know if it would. So, that's something we'll lean on all year long, because we'll be in that situation again late in the season."

Q: Where is Cameron Matthews at in his game right now, and where do you expect him to end up?

CJ: "We know him well, and he knows us well. He knows the system inside and out. Nobody on our team understands our schemes, and our systems better than he does. He literally could play the one through five. People don't understand the value he brings because of his basketball IQ. He's got an unbelievable feel and an unbelievable understanding of basketball. With his experience here and what he's doing, he's at the top of the list of getting people organized."

"He talks to me coming off the court about what he sees, and sometimes we do what he tells me. I respect his mindset in that way. I expect him to get better, I mean, he's made the one three-pointer and shot well on free throws today."

"He's got to stay out of foul trouble, though. He always gets in foul trouble. He's got to be explosive and play athletically because that's who he is. If he doesn't do that people are going to say, 'What happened to Mook [Cameron Matthews], why isn't he disrupting?' So, there's a risk-reward involved."

Q: What did you see from Josh Hubbard tonight?

CJ: “He got off to a slow start, but I wasn’t phased by it. I’m sure he wasn’t either. He’s a big catalyst of why we won the game. He made some shots and certainly got the crowd into the game. It was pretty dead in here the first half and rightly so. I didn’t know what to expect in the second half, but Josh led the way. Guys know what he does and they’re going to get him the basketball when he’s on those runs.”

Q: How have you seen Josh Hubbard grow as a leader?

CJ: “I don’t need to urge him. He’s just a natural, especially now that he’s got a year under his belt. He is a great candidate for it because he’s just such a hard worker. He’s about us and the program. When he’s talking to the guys and they’re locked in, I love to see that. Equally important is, he was explosive and dynamic coming in, but he worked his tail off this summer. He’s more explosive and in better shape than he’s ever been in. He had the play right in front of our bench where he drove it right to the block and he showed his work. I told Dominic Walker, our strength coach, that all I could think about was that his work was paying off.”

Q: How important is it to play a game up here and reach your fans in this part of Mississippi?

CJ: “Since we arrived it’s been something that I’ve been all in for and invested in. We’ve played in Jackson and Tupelo. This year, we’re playing in those two places and in Southaven. It’s important for me to bring the game to our fans. We have fans that have to travel a distance. It’s just one game, but it means a lot to me. Hopefully, it means a lot to them.”

“There’s a lot of factors involved, but we haven’t been up here yet. I thought the crowd was awesome. They were a big part of our comeback and our big run. I want to apologize that it took us so long to play well enough to give them something to cheer about.”

Q: How important was it for you to schedule a competitive non-conference schedule?

CJ: “We’re in the midst of five in a row. You mentioned SMU in that true first road game [this upcoming Friday]. Then, we go to Phoenix and play UNLV out of the Mountain West, which ought to be a power conference with the bids they’ve been getting. Then, you play either Butler or Northwestern. We conclude it by playing Pitt at home. We’re in the middle of five games that we need. We need challenges and to have resume opportunities. Hopefully, this will give us some confidence moving forward.”

Guard Josh Hubbard and Forward Cameron Matthews

Q: What adjustments had to be made at halftime?

JH: “We knew what we had to do. We went through a little adversity. Shots weren’t falling down. We weren’t getting 50-50 balls and rebounding. So, we knew what we needed to do in order to make it a game. We just stayed positive and kept each other lifted.”

Q: What goes through your mind shooting free throws at the end of the game?

CM: “My team needed me and just being there for them. I was just remembering all the reps I’ve been getting in. I was just trying to mimic those motions and make the free throws.”

Q: What does it mean to be able to be back in Desoto County and play? How many people from Olive Branch got tickets for tonight?

CM: “A whole lot of people. I got a lot of phone calls and texts. It’s a good feeling being back close to home and seeing a lot of familiar faces. I’m just glad we got a dub here.”

Q: After changing your number, did anything change in your preparation from last year to this year that’s helped you elevate your game?

JH: “Not really to be honest. As far as changing, I just spent a lot of time in the film room maturing as a basketball player. Like I said especially in the offseason to a lot of reporters, getting my numbers more efficient and growing as a player.”

Q: How big was the performance from KeShawn Murphy today?

CM: “Yeah, he has definitely grown as a player. Every night out, he’s getting more and more experienced. I’m excited to see him out there, because he’s had a long journey. I’m just super proud of him.”

Q: How was the atmosphere for you guys as a team?

CM: “It was a great feeling. In the first half, they didn’t really have much to cheer about. But thanks to him [Josh Hubbard] and a few of the other guys on the team, the second half we were able to light it up a little bit.

JH: “It was electrifying for sure especially when we got it going and came back. There’s nothing like these fans getting into the game and helping us out.”

Q: Did that feel like a postseason game for y’all?

CM: “Definitely, it felt like more of a January or February game. It felt like a game we needed for our confidence.”

Q: How are you maturing from a scorer to a leader for this team?

JH: “I had a lot of tremendous guys help me last year and watching them be leaders for this team. I’m still learning as a player to have a voice. I’m not the best at it right now, but I’m still learning. I’m trying to be a leader for the team when they need me.”

Q: Have you seen Josh Hubbard step up as a leader?

CM: “For sure. I saw him last year as a young buck, being shy and being quiet. He’s definitely had more of a voice this year.

Utah Head Coach Craig Smith

Q: What were your thoughts on the game?

CS: “I thought it was a great college basketball game, a lot of ebbs and flows. You play these guys, and they’re super athletic. They push you out on a lot of stuff. Like we said for two weeks without some of those guys, you just got to kind of improvise and really simplify, but I thought we had a great second 10 minutes of the first half. Some guys played really, really well.”

“We knew there’s always an adjustment phase when you’re going against our scout team to them [Mississippi State], and we settled in. It’s kind of like a boxing match. You’ve got to feel each other out a little bit. The first five minutes of the second half, it’s a little cliché, but it’s a real thing.”

“They jumped us right away [in the second half]. The last thing we talked about when we left at halftime was that [Josh] Hubbard is a really good player. We held him to three points in the first half. I thought our coverages were very good. We were trapping ball screens, being really aggressive and trying to get the ball out of his hands. Early in the second half, we missed two of them. Two times when we’re supposed to be trapping him, he just flies out and sticks three’s. Now as a shooter or a scorer, you’re feeling good about yourself. You’re starting to get that mojo and confidence. To his credit, he gets 20 in the second half on us.

“At the end of the day, our front line was in foul trouble the entire night. They just really hurt us on the glass with 17 offensive boards, seven by [KeShawn] Murphy and five by [Michael] Nwoko.”

“I thought we did some good things too. I thought we really defended hard in the first half, the second half was the polar opposite. Not that we weren’t trying hard, but we were not nearly good enough when they score 50 points on 35 possessions. And, in the first half, they only score 28 points on 37 possessions.”

“We really started mixing it up the last eight minutes of the game. I thought it really helped and got them off attack. They weren’t as aggressive, but it is what it is. A couple plays here or there, and the score flips, and we’re super happy. This is a good team we played tonight, and it’s the type of team we’re going to see in the Big 12, no question about that.”

Q: This team was excellent tonight. Could you set the stage about what you were doing?

CS: “You come out and play a great first half. They [Mississippi State] had a really hard time getting stuff clean, except for offensive rebounds. In the second half, they start getting out on a tear. It’s our first road environment—make no mistake, it’s a neutral game, but it’s not a neutral game. The fans get in it, the refs get in it.”

“It’s easy when things aren’t going great that guys start hugging their man. What happens when you start hugging your man is that there are lanes to drive. Hubbard’s alone. We don’t have that. We were trying to take his right hand away, but we were just hugging guys. They’ve got some non-shooters out there. We needed to be sinking in and bait them into taking tough shots. We did that in the first half.”

“I just thought we got worn down, but we’ll learn from this. We got exposed for some things, and I also think it showed us some things that we’re really, really good at. I’m just excited for the trajectory of this season. We need to get some more bodies and get healthier. I think this game is going to help us a lot.”

Q: It wasn’t the result you wanted, but it’s a good result for the big picture, learning some things.

CS: “This will be a Quad 1 game at the end of the year. We had a golden opportunity, and we didn’t seize the moment. We have a lot of new guys, and we’ve got to keep growing together. This team is a smart,

intelligent team, and we're going to be a tough team. We've just got to learn and keep moving forward with this thing. I'm confident we will."