

## **2025-26 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes**

### **Mississippi State vs. Memphis – December 20, 2025**

#### **Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans**

***Q: How much confidence do you think it gives the team to be able to come up with the plays down the stretch over the last couple of games?***

**CJ:** "We've had a lot of them. I said that before the season, and obviously, been saying it since, that I'd anticipate us being in these situations a lot. We didn't do great on the first handful or two or three that we had. We came out in the wrong end. Then, we learned and grew with this group. We're making better decisions and understanding how valuable these possessions are as the clock dissipates before the final buzzer."

"So, it wasn't the most aesthetically pleasing game, but it's hard to play against that group with their length and their athleticism. This afternoon, they really switched up the presses, and we gave them confidence. We started turning it over too much. So, they went all in pressing us the majority of the game, and we had a mixed bag of results. We've got to get better at that."

***Q: How pleased were you to see Shawn Jones Jr. produce at the end of the game?***

**CJ:** "Yeah, we subbed him in there with four or five minutes left. Maybe, it was maybe 3 or 4 minutes. He was primarily the guy that was throwing the inbound passes. There's a lot of pressure on that guy, and we want to keep [Jayden] Epps and [Josh] Hubbard with the possibility of getting fouled there down the stretch."

"Shawn did a good job. That's not what he does all the time, but with the lineup we had in and where we were at in the game, we felt that we needed to have him be the trigger guy. He's been around and understands the value of all the possessions and the pass-and-catch part of the game when it gets down like that. Then, he just kept us organized. We switched defenses a couple times, and he was communicating with his teammates and making sure we were all on the same page."

***Q: How was your team able to come out on the other side as the stronger team with all the starting and stopping down the stretch? Jayden had a big block for you down the stretch.***

**CJ:** "I'm a little nervous that [Jayden] Epps is going to think he's a shot blocker now [laughter]. He had one in the first half or second half that they called a foul, which I didn't think it was. I'm sure the ref was surprised looking at him and going that I've had you before. That's not your game."

"I love how he's playing. I know that's not what you asked me about, but he's so bought in and locked into our program and being the best version of himself. His productivity for us for the last four or five games has been off the chart on both ends. He wasn't known as the defender, but he's really improved on that end of the floor. I'm happy for him, and I'm proud of him. He wants to win. Everybody wants to play, and everybody wants to get their minutes. Everybody wants to produce, but he's bought into what we're doing. He's bought into winning and doing whatever he needs to do."

"Then, at the end of the game, it felt more like last year when we had all the reviews. Certainly, that's not the case for most of the games this year, which is nice... They give us more time to talk to them. I mean, to be honest with you at that point, you run out of things to talk about other than my assistants getting in my ear and all having something else they want me to talk about with the team, but that's just the way it goes sometimes."

***Q: Do you think that was one of Achor Achor's best performances in the last month or so?***

**CJ:** "Yeah, I think so. Proud of the fact that he stuck with it. He's not playing at the level that he anticipated, nor that he wants to, and us either. But, he hasn't pouted. He hasn't hung his head, and he kept working. He's been in and out of the starting lineup all year long. Even though his stat line didn't jump out at you in the last game – on the video, he did some really good things from a defensive perspective. From tipping balls on the offensive glass, they don't show up on the stat sheet. Hopefully this is something that's going into the break that he can feel good about and then come back, and just be even better."

***Q: How well do you think Josh Hubbard handled the pressure from Memphis?***

**CJ:** "Yeah, they obviously had his name in red, circled, and he's used to that. He's done that for two plus years now. Someone asked me on the radio, was it the length of the athletes? He plays in the SEC. He's been through all that. He understands what it's like to play against that now."

"It reminded me of the Utah game a little bit, because he struggled offensively in that game. Then, he made two big baskets down the stretch, and it was very similar. We still went to him, he's our guy. He jumped up and made that three. A Josh Hubbard special there, right in front of the bench."

"Then, I don't know if he made them all down the stretch. He missed one, I know, but he made seven out of eight from the line. We stuck with him, and he stuck with it. In terms of any problems early, I mean, they just were throwing everything at him. They weren't letting him breathe. They were trapping him. They're long, and they're athletic. The court looks different than when you handle the ball, and you've got athletes that are trapping you like that."

***Q: What did you see from your post players?***

**CJ:** "Yeah, I mean, it's a fine line. We don't throw the ball in the post, obviously, as much as we've done in the past. When Quincy [Ballard] gets it with two feet in the paint, he's encouraged to get his balance if he doesn't have it, and turn and throw a right or left hook because he's got great touch. We have a difficult time sometimes of working out the timing of getting him the ball where we think he needs it to be as productive as he needs to be."

"Then, Jamar [Jamarion Davis-Fleming], right now, we haven't thrown the ball much to him back to the basket. Both those guys, their worth and what they bring to the table has nothing to do with how many baskets they're scoring with Jamar being able to have multiple different ball screen defenses. And Quincy, being a rim protector when it's really, really rolling, and his motors going. They're both doing exactly what we asked them to do."

**Guards Jayden Epps & Guard Shawn Jones Jr.**

***Q: How much confidence do you have in this team's poise in late game situations thanks to how you've closed the last three games?***

**JE:** "It give us a lot because we've struggled at it at times. I feel like we're definitely making strides to get better at that, like we showed today. We got through and won the game. We've been showing strides of being better with our turnovers, being better with taking care of the ball, especially down the stretch. Coach has been emphasizing that a lot. So, I feel like we've been getting better at that."

***Q: How did it feel to get some of those late shots to fall and to make that dunk?***

**SJJ:** "That felt good, it's basketball. Some days, you don't make it. Some days, you don't miss them. As long as you show up with the right time that's given to you, that's all that matters."

***Q: Shawn, you guys held a high scoring Memphis team to just 66 points. What did you feel like you guys did to have success on the defensive end?***

**SJJ:** "We just preached all week to be in the gaps and being on the defensive assignment correct. Taking away different things from them that they're very good at, and we executed at a high level. It won us the game."

***Q: Shawn, I want to get your take on what they asked Jayden about close games at the end and making plays. What do you see there?***

**SJJ:** "That's the bare minimum around here making plays and making game winning plays. That's what we preach. For four years, it's been instilled in me. We're finally picking up on it where they know that the big plays aren't making big shots or crossovers. The big plays are the little things like getting rebounds, boxing out your man and things that don't show up on the stat sheet. I feel like it's something we're picking up on as a team collectively, and it's making us a very good team on that side of the ball."

***Q: How comfortable are you with the three-guard lineup?***

**JE:** "I feel like it was good for us because they were pressing us a lot. So, putting three guards in there helped us to be able to break the press. We have really good guards coming off the bench in the game. King was ready to step up when he got in the game, and I feel like that's good for us that we got depth like that."

***Q: Jayden, how big were moments like that late block in tonight's game?***

**JE:** "I just feel like we had a lot of plays like my block in this game. Like Shawn saving the ball, jumping into the crowd. Coach just always preached to us plays like that. Make a play that's going to win us the game. Make a play, like Shawn said, that doesn't show up on the stat sheet. So, we just tried to stay in the game and just tried to make big plays. We just try to do whatever we can to help us win."

***Q: It was a very back and forth game, Shawn, as a leader on this team, what did you say to the guys during huddles or on the floor to keep them together?***

**SJJ:** "Stick with it. Basketball is a game of runs. Since we've been kids, we've been taught that basketball is a game of runs. So, every team is going to have their runs. It's about who can step up and stop the other team's runs. Lately, that's what we've been doing."

## **Memphis Coach Penny Hardaway**

### ***Opening Statement***

**PH:** "Just too many hard lessons right now with this team. Not being able to finish games, about four of them now maybe five, where we had opportunities to seize the moment. We just didn't take advantage of it, and other teams are doing it to us. Their players are stepping up and knocking down big shots and making a big stop or whatever. We just hope that all of these experiences of the non-conference will take us into the conference, and we do what we are supposed to do in conference."

***Q: What do you see as the common thread when you guys have struggled late game?***

**PH:** "Attention to detail, physicality and chemistry. Today was our first game out of the 11 where we have had a full healthy roster. So, today was the first day, but those have been the things that have hampered us. We haven't been able to make winning plays at the proper time, a bad turnover, a bad foul, putting teams in the penalty or not rebounding. We're one of the worst teams in the country in defensive rebounding. It's a lot of self-inflicted things along with other teams. This

schedule wasn't easy, but I felt like no matter who we had we would be up to the challenge to compete. I think the things that have hurt us are those things I just mentioned."

***Q: What do you think it stems from? Is it late-game pressure, is it selfishness, is it cohesiveness?***

**PH:** "It's definitely not selfishness, because the guys really aren't selfish. I think it's just cohesion. Maybe sacrifice and trust are the two things because two guys are on the ball way too much when it's just communication, just at the wrong time. There's never a right time to miscommunicate, but just transition defense not knowing who's who and transitioning, no one has a man."

"It's all the little stuff that new teams go through that we just haven't had the opportunity to play. This really isn't an easy schedule to get ready, because we didn't have any warm up games we just kind of got thrown in the fire. That's what I've always done here, I've always scheduled this way which is what I'm always going to do. It's just this year's team wasn't up to the task of getting it done as a group. There's just been so many different variables going into why we haven't."

***Q: Where do you think the lack of cohesion with this team comes from?***

**PH:** "I think there's the guys that the relationships, I'm trying to find the right words, because you have to really care about the city. You have to care about the team, and you really have to engulf yourself into everything. I don't think everyone is sacrificing in that fashion. I think in this transactional world of transfer portal, we're getting to know guys on the fly. Guys haven't really put all their chips on the table, and just aren't all in yet. You have to get everyone to be all in and it's a little overwhelming to guys because this schedule a lot of these guys have never played, especially non-conference. So, with that and not knowing one another, and the first game not being healthy, it's been tough."

***Q: The way the guys run the offense coming down taking a lot of three-point attempts, are you comfortable with how you guys play like that?***

**PH:** "I think that's just the world we're in. As long as they are good shots. We call it bronze, silver and gold level shots. As long as those three's are within the full of the offense, and we get to our movement without the ball then guys just have to make it. You can't drive every ball to the basket, right? You've got to be able to knock down shots. I think it's more of a challenge to guys to knock down the open ones. Get in the gym, put a lot of work in on knocking down open shots. Then, you open up that defense. Some of those three's at the beginning of the game were bad, we took some poor shots, and those led to fast breaks for good teams. But, some of those three's were really good shots. We charted those, and we didn't make enough of those good shots."

***Q: Do you think you guys have taken a few steps back in the past few games?***

**PH:** "Well again, not having a full roster, that's not really fair of me to say because we've not really had everybody together. Without having Julius and without having Curtis at times, it's kind of hard to judge, because that's two of our pieces that we're going of play. Now, I think we can start seeing whether we go up, down or level with the group we have now."

"Hopefully, I pray no more injuries, and then we can go from here, but understanding what you're asking, we didn't go upward at all. The Louisville game was a wash, but then you come back home, it wasn't bad. I'm not a moral victory guy, but playing a number 13 team in the country in overtime and having an opportunity to win the game, just couldn't finish. So, I wouldn't say that's negative. Then, coming to Mississippi State, it isn't easy to do. They've got really good players, and it's not easy just coming here and taking a win."

**Guard Curtis Givens III**

***Q: What do you think this team needs to do to turn things around?***

**CG III:** "I mean, like coach said, down the stretch they made big plays, They made tough shots, and we didn't really capitalize off of any mistakes on defense. I know myself, I made a few errors. They were also in the penalty, and we fouled them a lot. They shot a lot of free throws. Credit to Josh Hubbard, he made a couple of tough shots. I feel like we've just got to better down the stretch and be more disciplined."

***Q: You were the leading scorer tonight. How did it feel to not only just be back on the court playing well but also what do you feel you offer to this team when they need it right now?***

**CG III:** "It felt great to just be back out there coming off of the injury. I just feel like this team needs me to be more of a playmaker and get more guys involved. Just make the whole team morale better overall."

***Q: Curtis, we've heard Penny say multiple times, with the new team the guys are still trying to find their roles and see where they fit. When you're out for five games and you're coming back int, how tough is that to re-integrate into a mix that hasn't kind of leveled yet?***

**CG III:** "I don't really think it's tough. I think just coming in, Coach has told me to just be myself. I was doing anything and everything I could to just fit in with the team. We just came off a loss or whatever. I came into this game thinking I'm going to do anything and whatever I can to help this team."

***Q: I know you played more of a facilitation role at LSU like a true point guard. Do you feel like in order to have this team be at it's best, you need to have nights like tonight?***

**CG III:** "I feel like we've got a lot of guys that can really do that, it doesn't just have to be me. I can have 18, or I can have two points. It doesn't matter. We have a lot of guys on the team that are really capable of doing this. I trust my teammates a lot to have big scoring nights. I don't really put a lot of pressure on myself to score the ball because I know we have a lot of other guys who can do the same thing as well."

***Q: As you've sat and watched what is your analysis of what the breakdowns are?***

**CG III:** "I think down the stretch we're fouling way too much. We're putting teams in the bonus, and that's really hurting us. We're turning the ball over a little too much, and we've got to clean that up."