

2025-26 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Quotes Mississippi State at South Carolina – February 21, 2026

State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: How much of a factor was South Carolina's interior offense today?

CJ: “Yeah, they had some great individual performances. I thought 31, Elijah Strong, at least from the film study that I did, probably had his best game that I watched. I certainly haven't watched them all, but he had established himself down there and kind of got going early. Then, he ended up making, I think he was 3 for-3 at one point [from three-point territory] and missed his last one there late in the game.”

“Quincy [Ballard] had his had his moments. I thought he had a really good stat line. He was 6-for-8 [from the field] and was 3-of-6 at the line, [had] 10 rebounds in 23 minutes, but I thought going into the game that we could get some rolls in our ball screens. I thought we'd get behind him. I thought we could get some refusals off ball screens. You've got to give them credit. I thought they defended well. I thought they had a good plan. They obviously were very heightened and aware of Josh [Hubbard] and just did a good job of trying to limit his touches. Then, being conscious of directions when he had the ball and just never let their guard down with him. So, he had a hard time really getting into the flow of the game offensively.”

“We certainly, and you'd expect after the game he just had that, not that he doesn't get all the attention every game, but probably a little more heightened, like I said after the game he just had. Unfortunately, we didn't do enough of a job of generating better open looks for him and other players as well.”

Q: Jaden Epps carried the scoring load for you for a period during the first half. To lose him with an injury before halftime, how much did that impact things offensively?

CJ: “Well, and you look at the stat sheet at halftime, he had 13 points, not anyone was really close to him if I'm not mistaken at halftime. He had got it going a little bit there had some open looks and buried them. We all know he can get it going as well.”

“When we got the news at halftime that he was at the minimum out for today, it was next man up. We had other guys that had to play more minutes. It paved the way for King Grace to play a little more. Then, we were just trying to make sure we keep Josh [Hubbard] as fresh as we could with the media timeouts and how the game was unfolding, but it wasn't much of an up-and-down game. So, I felt it wasn't as taxing that way.”

Q: What was South Carolina doing on offense that resulted in them getting open looks from beyond the three-point line today?

CJ: “Yeah, I mean we had a plan going into the game based on watching them and the numbers and the analytics. They had some guys, like you mentioned, that made shots and credit to them. We talked about [Elijah] Strong already shooting 26 or 27 percent. He hadn't been making them and knocked them down.”

“Meechie Johnson, we were very aware of him, and he played excellent especially in the second half. He had some foul issues in the first half, which slowed him down, but then he just had some one-offs. Number 0, [Jordan] Butler, hadn't been playing at all, He played 10 minutes and played really well. He made a three. Number 6, E.J. Walker, the freshman knocked down a three. He hasn't been shooting many three's at all.”

"I'm not saying that they don't deserve to make those shots. Right? And, like you said in film, it wasn't like they looked awful. They just had lost some confidence maybe in their shot. It's like what I always say, three-point shooting and free throw shooting can be contagious in a good way, like it was for South Carolina this afternoon."

"Sometimes in a bad way for teams where it's not going through the hole, it just takes the life out of the bench, but I thought that's kind of what happened today. They made some shots and especially when 31 [Strong] made some shots, I felt like their team grew in their confidence level. When we started the game, I couldn't ask for a better start. Certainly, that's what you want. But, at the same time on the road when they turn the tide, the crowd's going to get back into it. It was almost too easy how the game unfolded. It was almost too easy, and they didn't have a ton of fight to them in the beginning. Then, they made a shot or two and got back in the game that way. Then, their confidence really, really rose."

Q: What did you see from South Carolina guard Meechie Johnson?

CJ: "He is obviously a really good player. One of the biggest things we talked about was trying to keep him down with no open three's when we did the deep dive on him. When he scored big, it was when he got to the line which he did today. He was 9-for-10. Then, when he made three's, you can't take everything away from him. You can try, but our big thing was no open three's and keep them off the line. He was 2-for-5 from three, but the free throws are what, in my opinion, those points when the clock's not moving. He controlled the game. He had the ball on his hands. He's very quick and very explosive. He had nine assists against turned two turnovers, and he played an excellent game."