

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Michigan State vs Mississippi State

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Spectrum Center

## Mississippi State Bulldogs

Chris Jans

Shakeel Moore

Tolu Smith III

Josh Hubbard

Dashawn Davis

Cameron Mathews

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to start with the student-athletes from Mississippi State.

**Q. Shakeel, how excited are you to play in your home state? How many people do you have coming to this game?**

SHAKEEL MOORE: I'm really excited. I have a bunch of family that's coming, especially on my dad's side. An opportunity for me and for them to see me, they don't get to see me that much. So I'm excited.

**Q. You guys lost three in a row at the end of the regular season, but you really bounced back in the SEC Tournament, defeating LSU and Tennessee. How do you plan to continue to move forward and just make a statement for yourselves in this tournament?**

TOLU SMITH III: I think those losses helped us, motivated us going into the SEC Tournament. I think we have all the confidence in the world right now going into the NCAA Tournament. So we've just got to bottle that up and use it for this game and the next games.

JOSH HUBBARD: Just following back on what Tolu said, just using that same momentum from the tournament and



the confidence and positive that we have through adversity, we know that we can compete with any team. So just following the game plan each game and taking one game at a time.

DASHAWN DAVIS: Beginning of the season we had a common goal that we shared with one another. So we just knew that any road blocks or any hardships that we had, we had to get through it. So those three losses didn't really hurt us mentally.

CAMERON MATTHEWS: Back like what they said, just staying resilient and not getting too high, not getting too low. Just staying the course no matter what.

SHAKEEL MOORE: To piggy-back off of what Josh said, just take it one game at a time, keeping your resilience and confidence at a high, never too low, and just handling what we've got to handle.

**Q. Cam, what has your relationship with D.J. meant to you, and how excited are you that you get to finish playing with him in the tournament?**

CAMERON MATTHEWS: It's meant a lot. Just looking back at it, just us being kids in high school and how long it's been, it's been a great journey with my brother, and I'm just excited I get to share a moment like March Madness with him.

**Q. I guess for any of you, what have you seen from Michigan State on the tape so far, and what's it going to take to beat them tomorrow?**

SHAKEEL MOORE: We know we've got to beat them on the backboards. That's our main thing is winning the backboard battle and just staying resilient on defense.

CAMERON MATTHEWS: Just doing what we do -- defense, rebounding, and maintain our offensive tempo and pace in transition and just try to slow them down, things like that.

DASHAWN DAVIS: They've got great players, a great system, a great coach. So we know we've got to execute



our game plan, play physical, play hard in all aspects.

JOSH HUBBARD: Just control the pace of the game, the tempo of the game. Defensive rebounding will be key to the game.

TOLU SMITH III: What everybody said. Staying within ourselves and doing exactly what these guys just said.

**Q. Just to reach this stage as a freshman, is it surreal to you? What's it like to see the court, and how excited are you to participate in the Big Dance?**

JOSH HUBBARD: I'm really excited. Definitely a surreal moment. As a little kid, you dream of moments like these. We all deserve this moment. We all put in a lot of work. Coach Jans deserves it too. He instilled a lot of the great things in us.

I'm not surprised we made it this far because it's what we deserve. We worked hard for it, and we have a lot of high expectations for it.

**Q. For Michigan State fans who have never seen Mississippi State play, what would you guys say is the identity of the program this year?**

SHAKEEL MOORE: Defense, rebounding, and toughness.

CAMERON MATTHEWS: Just being really physical, really getting after it, picking it up on defense. Just trying to make defense into offense.

DASHAWN DAVIS: It's just like they said. It's probably going to be the physical game they played all year.

JOSH HUBBARD: Just being physical and making the other team uncomfortable, putting them in bad situations.

TOLU SMITH III: Yeah, what they said. Playing defense, playing our game, executing and just being resilient.

THE MODERATOR: We have 15 minutes with Coach Jans.

**Q. On Sunday you mentioned you guys wouldn't be in this position without Gai and Jimmy and what they did when Tolu was out, guys that can throw Shawn Jones into that group when D.J. went out middle of the year, and that was a big part of your season. Just how important was his play during that stretch to get you out of the early SEC season funk and help you guys down the stretch at the end of the year?**

CHRIS JANS: I think every coach will tell you, when they

get in recruiting mode, certainly trying to find the best and the brightest and those that fit your system, and at the same time, guys that will end up choosing you and your program, and we're no different.

We were trying to build that as best we could because of the what-if scenarios that always seem to come up every season. Like I said Sunday with Jimmy, and especially Gai, he's a true freshman that the plan was to redshirt. We never had any intentions of playing him. We knew he needed development, but he played some meaningful minutes in some huge games and got us through some tough spots when Tolu wasn't available.

Then Jimmy, the work that he put in and the numbers that he put up, I just don't believe that we wouldn't have more losses if we didn't have those two guys.

Then Shawn, like you mentioned, to me it wasn't as big a deal just because we expect him going into the season to have a better year, to play more minutes, and to give us productivity, and he's been able to do that.

**Q. Chris, I know you had spoken highly of Isaac when you guys were getting ready for Senior Day. He's the only one on this team now last time around when Mississippi State won a tournament game. What are kind of your impressions of kind of how he's been ingrained in Mississippi State and what he's been able to add off the court for this team?**

CHRIS JANS: I love having Isaac Stansbury on our team. What I love the most about him is, when he gets in that game, he plays the right way. He would never say anything to anybody else, but if he's out there and someone isn't playing the right way, it disappoints him. He practices at such a high level. He works at his craft outside of practice, even knowing he's not going to be in the guts of the game when the score is in balance.

I think it says a lot about who he is and what his makeup is. If he had any more eligibility, I would be begging him to come back and be a part of our program because he brings positivity to it.

**Q. You've been a part of this tournament at a bunch of different places, but there's a lot of discussion about changes to the tournament format, expansion, things like that. I guess where do you kind of fall and see the future of this tournament? Do you think it's something that should be looked at, discussed? Where do you kind of fall on that front?**

CHRIS JANS: I'll be honest, I don't spend a lot of time thinking about that just because at the end of the day no



one's going to care what I've got to say. No one really cares what Chris Jans' opinion about expansion of the NCAA Tournament. So why would I waste any of my brainpower, the little that I have, of trying to come up with an answer or a point of view?

**Q. This is a Michigan State team that was ranked top five in the preseason AP poll but fell short of that. Is it easy to overlook those shortcomings when you get ready to face them as this is a Tom Izzo coached team?**

CHRIS JANS: We're not going to overlook anything they do. They were ranked high in the preseason for a reason, and at the end of the day, it's how they're playing now. Tom Izzo is as respected of a basketball coach that there is in college basketball.

When I was growing up in the business, when I was young, younger, people would ask me, who's your idol? Who's your mentor? I said, you know, I really don't have one. I didn't grow up in an athletic family. None of my parents played high school or college sports. So I was oblivious really to the profession, and even college basketball for that matter. I just wanted to be a high school basketball coach and a PE teacher. I thought they had the best life you could ever imagine. Eventually I strived for a little bit more.

But people would ask me that all the time. To be honest with you, my answer was, if I had to emulate someone or some program -- and I'm talking about my early 20s, I go it would be Tom Izzo at Michigan State. I always respected the way he went about his business, the way his teams played. I wanted my teams to be looked at that way, and I know they're not.

From an early age in my formative years as a college coach, that was probably the person and the program that I looked up to the most. Then I chuckled when we got paired up with him because I'm sure he had to look down at his staff and say, hey, who is Chris Jans and who are we playing against? I'm sure he had to ask a couple people to get some information about me.

It's a privilege to be able to get a chance to share the floor with him and to compete against him.

**Q. Curious what attracted you initially to Dashawn? And can you describe what he has meant to this program since he got here?**

CHRIS JANS: He was one of our first guys we targeted. We got on him obviously in the portal. We knew him from his junior college days. Our staff had been familiar with

him when he was a junior college player. Obviously he didn't end up choosing us when we were at New Mexico State.

But he had a great year at Oregon State his first year. He led the Pac-12 in assists. His shooting numbers weren't as good as we thought they could be for us. We just obviously developed a relationship, like everybody does, in recruiting.

I think our familiarity with him, we had some relationships already in place. We had recruited him before, but we certainly were glad when he chose us.

**Q. (No microphone).**

CHRIS JANS: I'm on record saying this a number of times. We're at our best when he is revving the engine defensively for us. He's a disruptive defender. He's big, strong. He's got a competitive streak in him. When he gets out there and bothers the ball handler, gets them out of their comfort zone, it helps our team because they see it visually and that motivates them as well.

When he does that, he plays his best offense. When he's engaged and thinking aggressive and getting downhill and getting the ball in the paint for himself or others. So he's brought a ton of that to the table. The best thing about him for us is he's probably playing his best basketball here down the stretch.

**Q. Chris, when you guys are playing your best defensively, what are the things that stand out to you about maybe, whether it's connectedness, the intensity, the things you're looking for in those kind of moments from your group?**

CHRIS JANS: It starts trying to get five guys back in transition, which is obviously very difficult against a Michigan State team. If we can get five-on-five, we like our chances a lot more to have a productive possession.

But in the end, when we break down the video, it always goes back to guarding the basketball. If you can't guard the basketball by yourself at a point of attack situation or with a teammate in a ball screen situation, then you're probably going to struggle on those nights.

People talk about, oh, the guy was late to the shooter or didn't get around the post, whatever the case may be. If you track it backwards, to me, it usually goes back to someone didn't guard the ball very well and they got an angle or the ball got to the paint or whatever the case may be.

So we spent a lot of time talking about that and trying to physically improve on that throughout the year. Certainly having your motors going and your engine revved and getting all that intensity in the game helps as well.

**Q. Curious, Josh, I think, is averaging 25 points a game in his last eight. You hear about freshman walls, he's obviously powering through that. What's allowed him to be so successful this year? Did you foresee him being able to make this level of impact as a freshman when you recruited him?**

CHRIS JANS: No. I didn't foresee him having that kind of impact as a true freshman. I'm glad I was wrong. I'm on record saying that I don't think anybody said that on record. If they're thinking it and saying it now, I would question if they're telling the truth or not.

Now, the people that did believe that he would were Josh Hubbard and his family. They know the work that he's put in, and now having gotten to know him even better after working with him this past year, I understand why. His confidence, his belief stems from his work. He's a dogged worker. He's a disciplined worker. He works at his craft. He loves the game. It means so much to him.

And he does it outside of the gym too. He's taken care of himself at a young age in terms of what he's putting in his body and his sleep and his approach. He hasn't had a bad day since he's been here.

He shot the ball good on some days, bad on others, but in terms of his mental approach walking in the door every day, he's steady Eddie. He's productive. He's coachable. That's the thing that sticks out the most to me. He's as coachable as anyone I've ever coached.

And he's got the it factor. If you talk to coaches what that means, it means a lot. He just gets it. I'm sure glad he's on our team.

**Q. Chris, Shak Moore grew up about an hour from here. He had a rough upbringing in some years and obviously a transfer from NC State. What have you learned about his time growing up here and sort of getting to this point with you guys and Mississippi State?**

CHRIS JANS: Every time we play over this way, there's always some Shak Moore family in the stands, and it's nice to see them supporting Shak and getting to interact with them following the game. That's one of the first things that I said once we were selected and then knew we were coming to Charlotte is that, hey, man, you're going home.

Certainly his smile lit up with a big, beautiful smile. I'm happy for him. I'm happy he gets another opportunity to play in March Madness and that he gets to do it in front of a bunch of his family and friends.

**Q. Chris, you were talking about the respect you had for Tom Izzo earlier. Why do you think he's been able to have the longevity that he's had and stay in his successful role even as the game has changed throughout the years?**

CHRIS JANS: I don't really know, to be honest with you, other than I would imagine, first and foremost, he's a helluva basketball coach. I think it starts with their -- you don't go to, what is it, 25, 26, 27 consecutive -- consecutive, mind you -- NCAA Tournaments in a row. I just can't imagine what that would feel like having to do that. That's a lot.

You talk about consistency. You talk about believing in your system, the recruiting aspect of it. To continue to do it at that level, I don't care what the front of your jersey says, that's a difficult task. I think all of college basketball admires him for being able to do that.

I'm sure what I just said, the words I just used probably had a lot to do with why he's been able to do that at Michigan State -- being a great coach, having a consistent approach, having a belief in their system, hiring really good coaches around him. But there's a lot to it. That's quite the accomplishment.

He's done it all. All the Final Fours, the National Championships, the Hall of Fame coach. Whenever he decides he's had enough, he'll be revered as good a coach as there ever was.

**Q. As you look at the tape with the Spartans, is there an area you see as the biggest matchup problem for you guys and then an area that you think you really can exploit?**

CHRIS JANS: First thing that jumps off the page to me is just how quickly they get the ball up the court. Certainly everybody runs on turnovers, and most people push it on misses, but when that ball goes through the net, I'm not so certain that they're not better that way than they even are in missed shots.

They get the ball out of the net, and they know where they're outletting the ball, and those guys run the wings and they rim run, and they give that passer options. And if you're not on your Ps and Qs and you celebrate at all on a made shot or you don't think get back or sprint back or whatever your assignment is defensively, it's over. They're

laying the ball in or they're hoisting up a wide open three.

That's what jumps out at me the most. I don't spend a lot of time watching other teams during the season, so I wasn't familiar with that. When I think of Michigan State, I think of the toughness, the rebounding, Tom Izzo. But that's what surprised me the most.

It's easy to say in terms of, yeah, let's just get back and guard them, but it's hard to do when they do it at such breakneck speed.

In terms of anything we can exploit, they're so well rounded. I'm sure the local people have been riding them, this and that, because they lost a game or two here and there, but look at their schedule. Their nonleague schedule was off the chart.

Who knows if he knew James Madison and Indiana State and folks like that were going to be as good as they were. When they made that schedule, maybe they thought that was going to be more of a relaxing game, but it's just scattered and littered with great programs up and down their schedule.

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