

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

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Spectrum Center

Mississippi State Bulldogs

Chris Jans

Josh Hubbard

Cameron Matthews

Media Conference

Michigan State - 69, Mississippi State - 51

Q. It just seemed like what they were doing defensively kind of knocked you off axis a little bit. What did you see from them, especially in the first half, to kind of get them going defensively and limit you all offensively?

CHRIS JANS: That was the story of the start of the game was us turning the ball over way too much. You can talk till you're blue in the face about that, but at the end of the day, you've got to give credit to Michigan State.

They didn't do anything different than we anticipated or that we prepared for, they just did what they do at a high level. They got in those gaps, and they've got guards that have really strong hands. They're very ball-hawkish when you try to drive it in there. I thought that really hurt us early.

Our half-court defense, our get back, getting from O to D, was good. We worked on it a ton out of respect for how fast they play. But we put ourselves in some tough spots with our turnovers.

We give them credit, but at the same time, we just didn't move the ball as well as we wanted to going into the game, and we got off to a really, really poor start.

Q. Both teams turned it over quite a bit, 16 and 15 respectively, but three-point shooting, Spartans 10-of-23, you guys 6-of-27. That appears to be the difference, would you agree?



CHRIS JANS: I mean, it didn't help. We've won plenty of games where we didn't shoot it very well.

They played really well. I thought Michigan State played really well. They were very well prepared. We had a hard time keeping their guards in front of us. They were getting downhill on us for themselves and creating for others.

We actually ended up playing quite a bit variations of different zones, especially in the second half, but it didn't slow them down that much.

Then we shot way more threes obviously in the second half trying to mount a comeback, more than anything.

Q. Josh, what did you see from them defensively that you felt like was so effective and kind of limiting you all offensively?

JOSH HUBBARD: Just following what Coach Jans said, they were heavy in the gaps, strong hands, scraping at the ball. We didn't really do that good of a job ourselves of moving the ball and moving off the ball as well. We could have done better. Yeah, great credit to them for how they played defense.

Q. Back to Josh, you made such an impact as a true freshman in a very difficult league. How do you kind of assess how you were able to adjust to this level in year one and have the kind of season you did?

JOSH HUBBARD: It all started in the summer. We were battling at each other in the summer, going at it each and every day, practicing hard. There were frustrating times for not just myself, but all of us, having high expectations and wanting to play.

So Coach instilled it in us, getting on us every day and holding us accountable. Once you go into that type of environment every day, it's kind of hard to not be successful for your teammates.

Q. For all of you, Tom Izzo has had a lot of success in this tournament, particularly in the first round, 20-5. I



just wondered, when you're going up against a team like that, what's it like going against him? I guess you have to be ultra prepared.

CHRIS JANS: For me personally, I talked about it prior to the game of the respect level that I had for him as a coach and how he's run his program from afar. I don't know him like that personally. I've never been to his practices or games.

When you're in this mode of preparing, it doesn't really matter who the coach is -- and I mean that with all due respect -- we're just trying to put our players in a position to be successful. We didn't talk about any of his records in terms of first round or tournament success. I think our players have the same type of respect for his program.

But at the same time, it wasn't like we were trying to go in the game and thinking about things of that nature.

Q. Cam, expectations, it seems like, have changed over the last few years. You guys are disappointed finishing in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. What's your thoughts on how far this program has come and the direction of things now moving forward?

CAMERON MATTHEWS: Just the direction that it's going in, very proud for our state and our coach, Coach Jans, and I just see the program in the future just continuing to excel even after all of us are gone. I just feel like it's going to go to another level.

THE MODERATOR: Cameron, Josh, you can head back to the locker room. Congratulations on a great year.

Q. Chris, I guess for you guys, last game with D.J. and Tolu, some of those veterans, what do they kind of mean to you, and what's it like to walk away on this note?

CHRIS JANS: These endings are tough. You don't prepare for walking in those locker rooms and how you're going to handle it because you think you're going to win the game. Certainly you're prepared for what you're going to say before the game. You try to have the message right leading up to these opportunities.

But we talked in the locker room about it. I thanked them for the guys that had been here since we arrived as a staff, just thanked them for believing in us and having blind faith in us when they didn't have to. There were people pulling them in all sorts of directions.

I'm sure part of it was they love the university, and they were there for a number of different reasons. We tried to

sell them a vision on what we thought we could do as a staff at Mississippi State, and I just really talked about that with them as a group. I'm going to appreciate them forever for sticking with us.

I also told them that they might not feel it right now, but I promise you they've had a lot of growth on the floor and probably more off the floor, that we feel good about equipping these guys when they're through with their eligibility and preparing for the next part of their career and the next part of their life for that matter.

Q. Just to follow up on that, as you guys continue to build this thing, how much do you feel like this group now leaving, you're going to be able to look back and say how much, I guess, they helped establish your culture and helped move things forward for this next group of guys?

CHRIS JANS: You can't go backwards, obviously, and play the what-if game, but that's kind of what I told them. I'm not sure -- I didn't say this to them, but I'm not sure where we'd be. We would have signed a lot more players than we did. We wouldn't have the same type of dudes in the locker room, maybe.

But we'll see. Who knows what the future holds? Obviously we went from an 11 seed to an 8 seed. We talked about that in that locker room as well. This group of men that have been here, they're going to be remembered. They've done a lot of things in the last two years that this program hasn't for quite some time with the quality of wins and the tournament appearances and certainly we're crossed yet we're not advancing.

That was the plan. We thought we could win multiple games with the group we had. That was our goal all year long when we got together in June and refocused in the fall. That was our ultimate goal. It doesn't feel great not to achieve it, but these kids will be remembered for sure.

Q. Speaking on those guys, you're losing some key pieces to this team. Still got some decisions to make on some guys too, bringing back Josh. What's kind of the biggest point of emphasis, you think, moving into next year to get back to this point?

CHRIS JANS: Man, I really haven't gone there yet. I've been super focused on this team, and certainly recruiting never ends. I've been super focused on trying to get our team into the best position possible to win these meaningful games.

I'm sure as we get through with our obligations and get back to the hotel, the staff will be raring to go with getting

me more on the phone than we have and trying to figure out where we go from here.

We're going to want quality people. We're going to want obviously good players. Like you said, we're going to try to be better, in a better position next year than we are right now.

Q. Speaking on those veterans, with D.J. specifically, we saw that 'Bama game he tried to play through an injury. Obviously wasn't 100 percent today and leading up to this game. What kind of impression does that give you of him, the way he tried to play through some of the difficulties this past month or so?

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, he got hurt in the Auburn game, and none of us knew it. He kept playing. He hasn't practiced fully since the SEC Tournament. He's been hobbled and just really rehabbing as much as he can.

He said he was available. The trainer said he was available. Anyone that watches us throughout the season knew that he wasn't himself. That was tough that way.

But it says a lot about him. He's grown so much. I love where he's at mentally. He's got a bright future. For him to do that on more than one occasion speaks volumes to who he is as a person and who he -- what kind of teammate he is and what he believes in.

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