

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 9, 2023

## Mississippi State Bulldogs

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

## Coach Chris Jans

## Tolu Smith

## Dashawn Davis

### Postgame Press Conference

Mississippi State 69, Florida 68 OT

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with Mississippi State. We'll ask Coach Jans for some general comments on the game, then take questions for the student-athletes, then finish up with Coach.

CHRIS JANS: Loved the way we started the ballgame. Got off to a great start on both ends of the floor. We were in a great rhythm offensively, and then we weren't. We didn't end the half great. Had a pretty sizable lead, then they came out in the second half. They started better than we did.

The whole second half was a struggle for us, especially on the offensive end. We scored 21 points. Scored 12 in five minutes in the overtime and 21 in the 20. That wasn't ideal.

At the end of the day, when you're in these situations, it's find a way, survive and advance. That's what we did.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Tolu, congratulations on the win. Obviously pretty happy. Talk about getting the ball at the close of the second.**

TOLU SMITH: Honestly, man, I thought Dashawn was going to lay it up. At the last minute, he passed it to me. I thought it was a great play on his part. I thought it was just a great play.

**Q. You're going to play No. 1 seed Alabama tomorrow. What kind of gives you confidence going into the matchup tomorrow?**



TOLU SMITH: Yeah, I just feel like we gave them a good run both times. We made a couple mistakes in both games. I feel like we worked on and got better at.

I think we're going to give them a good run tomorrow and get the win.

DASHAWN DAVIS: Like he say, I feel like we played them good both times. We made crucial mistakes last time, a couple bad calls. But we definitely ready to play them again.

**Q. Dashawn, how did you draw up the final play? Was the intent to give it to Tolu?**

DASHAWN DAVIS: No, it wasn't drew up. It was me playing instinct. The guy stepped up. I seen Tolu was open so I just gave it to him.

**Q. Can you talk about the impact the Mississippi State faithful had out there.**

DASHAWN DAVIS: The fans always give us great support, home and away. We definitely needed that.

TOLU SMITH: Oh, yeah, the State fans did a great job. I heard them from the start of the tip to the end of the game. We love they come all the way out here to support us.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes and continue with Coach Jans.

**Q. Your thoughts on tomorrow's round three with Alabama?**

CHRIS JANS: I'd like to enjoy this for a little bit. But that's not the way it works. It's tournament play.

I just look at it as a wonderful opportunity. I don't know where they're ranked, in the top 25, top 5, a No. 1 seed. They got great players, great coaches. We haven't been able to beat them. We had two cracks at it.

What an opportunity and obviously a big challenge for us.



**Q. Where do you think your team has changed or grown the most since the last time you played 'Bama in January?**

CHRIS JANS: We'll find out tomorrow, I guess.

I would have liked to have said offensively, but coming off that performance, especially in the second half, it wouldn't feel right coming out of my mouth.

We just struggled. A lot of that had to do with Florida. They just stuck with it, spread us out on the other end. We just struggled. We got out of rhythm. We didn't make a three in the second half. We struggled from the free-throw line. In the end we just had to gut one out.

I think this group has earned some toughness. They've come from behind. They've staved off other teams that way. I just think their makeup right now is probably a little bit better than it was then.

**Q. When I saw you in the spring, you weren't sure what you had. How did the process come together of having a good and possibly NCAA tournament team?**

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, we just talked about that. That's what I talked in the locker room about our team, about what a hodgepodge group of people we put together.

We've had some ups and downs, which is normal for a new coach, new staff, especially in the landscape of college basketball. It's obviously becoming more normal. But when you're new, there's a lot of things to sort out.

We got off to that great start in the non-league, had some confidence. Then some adversity hit when we got into SEC play. Locally, in all my press conferences, I talked about the fact that I don't remember being as proud of a group sticking together, weathers the storm, continuing to practice at a high level, and not giving up, not throw the towel in.

That's the reason I think we've had success is because of that time when we were struggling in the win column, we are so close. They kept grinding, kept with it, kept believing. They didn't start questioning each other or us. That's probably what I'm proud of most.

**Q. Tolu, impact player of the season. Talk about his impact on your team, how you're following him basically into March now.**

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, it's a luxury to have him. In the fall I said, I think at the SEC pre-season event in Birmingham,

that we wanted to have a year that we all want to have. He had to be an SEC First Team All player, and he was, he delivered.

Every night he knows he's going to get double-teams, people are going to come at him. He's obviously not a great free throw shooter. Why not foul him a little bit more and make the referees call it or not.

But he plays through it. He plays through it. His free throws have been up and down all year long. I think everybody in the gym knows when we walk out, we're going to play inside-out through Tolu. He's handled it wonderfully all year long.

**Q. During the midweek you talked about finding a way to win. Things got ugly tonight, but you found your way. What happened in OT especially?**

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, I'll get a ton of texts this afternoon. We'll take it any way we can get it. That was ugly but we'll take it.

I chuckle a little bit internally because that's how college basketball is for the most part. Most games aren't that aesthetically pleasing. What they show on the highlights for the fans, everybody getting a snippet of what goes on, that's not reality most of the time, especially in a conference tournament situation when you try to survive and advance.

We've won a lot of ugly games different places we've been. Won those in that nature this year. Doesn't bother this crew at all.

**Q. Alabama has been dealing with a lot this season. Do you have a gun policy on your team?**

CHRIS JANS: That's a good question. Not sure I know the correct answer to that right now.

**Q. Obviously tomorrow is going to be pretty physical. What do you plan at throwing at Alabama to get the win tomorrow?**

CHRIS JANS: Not even close to being able to answer that question. I've been all in on Florida. I haven't watched a minute of Alabama. Certainly my staff is ahead of the game.

I'm excited to catch up. That's what I said to the SEC folks, that I can't wait to open the laptop and get back into that grind of trying to prepare a team, 24-hour turnaround. We obviously got veterans on our staff. They get it.

Like everybody in this tournament, they get how to turn it around and prepare. I know we're going to have to play really, really well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

CHRIS JANS: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

