

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

## Mississippi State Bulldogs

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

## Coach Chris Jans Cameron Matthews D.J. Jeffries

Postgame Press Conference

Mississippi State 73, Tennessee 56

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with Mississippi State. We'll go straight to questions with the two student-athletes.

**Q. D.J., obviously you guys had a tough task defensively today, but came out and had a good showing in the first half. How well do you feel you executed for 40 minutes?**

D.J. JEFFRIES: I felt like we did a great job for 40 minutes. We stayed together from the start. We just dictated. We didn't allow them to get into they stuff. They was just fighting from behind the whole time. We did a good job for 40 minutes.

**Q. Cam, you guys talked on Wednesday about not just wanting to win the game against LSU, but to secure a tournament spot, playing beyond that. What was the message last night going into today about wanting to beat Tennessee and keep this run going?**

CAMERON MATTHEWS: Just going out playing like that could be our last game. Having a good lay out of the bracket. Most of the teams on our side we already played good or already beat. Just knowing we got the confidence to go out there and compete with all the teams.

**Q. Cam, what do you think for someone who is more of a casual college basketball fan, what do you think you and your guys showed everyone with Mississippi State basketball today?**

CAMERON MATTHEWS: That we get after it. Please, please, keep counting us out. Please keep giving us a chip



on our shoulder. Gives fuel to the fire. Just keep doing that.

**Q. Cam and D.J., talk about what it meant to you to hear the Mississippi State fans at the end hooting and hollering and silencing "Rocky Top" in Nashville.**

CAMERON MATTHEWS: Yeah, it just means a lot having a good crowd like that 'cause I don't know if -- the people that couldn't see, it was mostly orange out there. It just felt good silencing all that noise, having our fans root for us.

D.J. JEFFRIES: Just piggyback what he said. Felt good because it was mostly orange, like this is their home, I guess. It was a home game for them.

Just go out there get a win, see our home fans be happy. We're doing it for them. Trying to go get a championship.

**Q. D.J., for the veterans on this team, you got bounced in the next round after beating Florida. What does it mean to get to play another day? What was the mood in the locker room?**

D.J. JEFFRIES: It's a big relief. For two years since I've been here, we always get put out in this round, two, three -- I don't know how long it's been. Just relief to get to the final four. Never been in the SEC final four. It's a big relief.

This is my last go-around. I'm going to go out there and give it my all, whatever it takes.

**Q. D.J., you've been teammates with Cam for a long time. How often have you thought about this could be the end?**

D.J. JEFFRIES: I mean, I try not to think about it too much. But some days I think about it. I've been with him for a long time. This is my guy. He's like my best friend. I don't know what he going to do without me next year (smiling). I'll call and check up on him.

**Q. Cam, that dunk you had in the first half went viral quickly. The camera panned to your mom. She was celebrating. What has it been like having her sit right**

**ASAP** . . . when all is said, we're done.®  
sports

## behind the bench?

CAMERON MATTHEWS: Same old, same old. She's very supportive even since I was a baby playing football, tee-ball. She's been the same person my whole life. Feel like it would be kind of weird if she weren't right there yelling and screaming.

Really appreciate it, love her. But don't show her this stuff, so... (Smiling).

**Q. Talk about the performance out there for both y'all. You unlocked the beast out there.**

D.J. JEFFRIES: You said talk about the performance?

**Q. Yes. Personal performance.**

D.J. JEFFRIES: I just did my job. I just went out there and played defense, played hard, do what I need to do. Whatever they need me to do, I'm going to do it. I'm going to give my all each and every night.

CAMERON MATTHEWS: Just trying to piggyback. Played better than I played yesterday. I kind of beat myself up yesterday. I didn't have my best performance. My teammates and my coaches just told me to stay with it: We trust you, we got belief in you that you're a good player. Just go out there and do what you do.

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

**Q. You have had a ton of very impressive wins this year. To beat the No. 1 seed in the SEC the way that you did, was this the most impressive win of the year for your guys?**

CHRIS JANS: I'm not in the mood or portion of the season where we're reminiscing that much. Certainly it was a big win for us, considering the platform, considering it's the end of the year, considering what we're trying to play for.

We've got so much respect for Coach Barnes, his staff and their players. I mean, to win the SEC regular-season title is big-time. To go through the gauntlet of this type of league, be able to come out on top says so much about their program. They do it the right way.

Really felt our only chance was to hit them in the mouth. We had to come out and attack 'em, just get our toughness in the game and see if we could rattle them a little bit.

Our plan was super aggressive in everything we were doing defensively and even offensively for that matter.

You've been doing this long enough that sometimes when you got a game on that court, you've got a run, you've got a win, you feel really good, they haven't played in a while, sometimes you get a little rust on your game that way as well. I thought that had something to do with the way the game unfolded, at least from the start.

**Q. I think y'all are the only team in the league that haven't lost to Tennessee this season. Was there something about that matchup you felt good about going into this, or is that your guys having two good days?**

CHRIS JANS: It doesn't happen very often, but we actually felt going into the first game, even this afternoon with a similar mindset, that we wanted to really attack inside-out and try to go at Aidoo and their other bigs as much as we could. He's an unbelievable player, especially on the offensive end. He's a good shot-blocker, as well.

We felt like we had a little bit at times a weight advantage. Try to get our back-down game, get Jimmy and Tolu doing, get to the free-throw line while you're trying to pound the ball inside.

On the perimeter, obviously it starts with Knecht and Zeigler out there. With Knecht, you do the best you can, make him a volume scorer, make it hard. With Zeigler, you got to do your best. They're obviously both really good players.

We felt good about the matchup, and that's helped us. We beat them. We got confidence going into this game. Our kids felt good about the matchup all day long.

**Q. Cam mentioned having a chip on his shoulder, feeling the fire. Why do you feel you've embraced that underdog mindset, use it to win many of these top 10 games?**

CHRIS JANS: I don't know. A lot of different reasons probably. These kids are tough-minded guys. We feel like we work pretty hard on a daily basis. They bought into that, bring it every day, lunch pail mentality.

For the most part, some of them weren't recruited at the highest levels, a bunch the stars by their names. We have a couple of them did, but a majority of our guys didn't grow up in basketball that way. We mixed this group together. Fortunately they got to know each other and like each other. You can tell by the way they play for each other.

At times we talk about that chip, trying to use it to our advantage in certain situations.

**Q. Cam's mom, Tolu's family back there, Josh's family. What is the dynamic like with the families behind the bench? What are your thoughts on their involvement?**

CHRIS JANS: It's been really fun to be here for the last two years and getting to know these guys. When you walk in, you're talking about a bunch of guys that have been with us for two years, certainly some additions. They didn't know me, I didn't know them. There was some blind faith on their part to stay with us. They had choices not to. Even after the first year, they had choices not to.

Getting to know their families and how supportive they are, that's what impressed me the most after our first year, during our first year, is the quality of young people that I inherited. Certainly what we added to the group. It makes it more fun every day knowing you're going to work, to practice, they're going to have a good mindset for the most part individually and collectively.

In terms of the dynamic during those games, it's different. I don't have rabbit ears fortunately. My wife will ask me a lot throughout our career of, Did you hear what they said?

I'm like, No.

She goes, I don't know how you don't.

I go, I don't know either, but I'm glad that I don't.

So I'm sure there was stuff said that I didn't hear, but don't get me wrong, I can't lie to you that I don't hear them once in a while. As long as we keep winning, them being behind there is no issue.

**Q. Another night where Cam and D.J. have the really impressive plus-minus numbers. For them, when you have games like this, yesterday against LSU, how key are the two of them?**

CHRIS JANS: I mean, great basketball bodies. I've talked about this with the local folks obviously. They know how to play. That's the one thing that in my opinion is the hardest thing to teach, is just instincts. They every have it or they don't. You can get a little bit better at it. Just an understanding of what's going on out there all the time.

Those two are at the top of the list for our team. We got a bunch of other guys, too. They just get it. That's nice as a coach to have guys on the floor that do get it. It makes a big difference.

They're about winning more than anything else. In this day and age, in college basketball, unfortunately that isn't always what's going on. Our guys in that locker room,

especially these two, have put aside some interest of their own to sacrifice to be part of something bigger than themselves. It's fun to be a part of it.

**Q. On a couple occasions in the second half, then with five minutes left, Tennessee made a run. You were able to stem the tide. What were the keys? What were you saying to the guys to keep that comfortable lead?**

CHRIS JANS: Well, I'm not surprised obviously with the quality of program and the players that they weren't going to go away. We talked about it at halftime. Certainly talked about it in some of our huddles of trying to get out of this huddle and have the mentality that we were down 10, play with that urgency. They're not going anywhere. They're going to punch back.

They did that, definitely had some similarities to the first matchup where they slapped the press on us and we struggled a little bit.

We played well enough in the first half that the deficit was a little bit bigger than it was in Starkville. That certainly brought our comfort level to us when they were trying to make their comebacks.

**Q. I want to ask you about trusting your guys. You got some senior leadership, guys who have been with you for two years. Talk about your trust in those guys down the stretch.**

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, it's been fun to coach a team the last couple years that have voices. Some of them have grown recently, some have been there from the jump, to empower those guys to take ownership of the program.

Like I said earlier, we have a lot of high-IQ guys that get it. You don't have the to worry about them saying the wrong thing that could get you off the path a little bit. It's a big plus.

We obviously went through a stretch there where we weren't playing our best, weren't having the outcomes. Like I kept telling them, we're a good basketball team that is playing other good basketball teams. It's hard to win especially on the road but sometimes at home depending on the quality of the opponent.

They continued to scratch, fight and claw. Now we're being rewarded for it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®