

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Mississippi State Bulldogs

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Chris Jans

Josh Hubbard

D.J. Jeffries

Postgame Press Conference

Auburn 73, Mississippi State 66

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue on with Mississippi State. We're going to go straight to questions.

Q. D.J., Josh, tough loss obviously, but what did you learn about this team and each other through this magical run you had?

JOSH HUBBARD: Yeah, we always knew that we can compete with anybody that we face as long as we stay together and stay positive, have that confidence, positive through adversity, we can face anything that comes at us.

D.J. JEFFRIES: Yeah, I'd say the same thing. We always knew we can compete with the top teams in the league. We just came up short today.

It hurt. But we got all the momentum we need to go in the tournament next week, try to make a run again. We just got to regroup again.

This loss hurt because we want to be in the championship. But you got to move on and regroup.

Q. Josh, coming in, being on the NCAA tournament bubble, you get two wins and a tight loss against a good Auburn team, how important was it for you to solidify yourselves, not have uncertainty going into tomorrow?

JOSH HUBBARD: It was definitely important. We had two good wins that helped us for the NCAA tournament. But we was focused on this tournament at the same time. We had an opportunity today, but just came up short.



Q. D.J., you mentioned yesterday how you hadn't made it to the semifinals during your time here. Playing that third game in three days, how difficult was that on your body? What was the feel of the team?

D.J. JEFFRIES: I mean, of course you're going to have fatigue. It's the third game in three days. The adrenaline kicks in. Going out there and competing, it just keeps you going.

I wouldn't use that as an excuse for the reason why we came up short.

Q. D.J., what do you think was the difference in the second half that allowed Auburn to secure this one?

D.J. JEFFRIES: I would say we lost our composure, especially myself. I allowed No. 10 to get in my head. A lot of us did. I feel like if we kept our composure, we would be fine. Probably would be a different result is what I would say.

Q. D.J., it's a little bit more rare to see a player stay at a school as long as you have. What will it mean to you to potentially get to play in the NCAA tournament, give it one more shot with Mississippi State?

D.J. JEFFRIES: It will mean everything in the world. It's my second time in a row. Especially my first couple years in college, I went to the NIT. It's special to end my college career the way I want to end it off. Hopefully we can make a deep run.

Q. Josh, similar to the last meeting with Auburn, they were able to limit you in the first half, then you got going down the stretch. What was Auburn doing? How were you able to find the openings and get good shots later in the game?

JOSH HUBBARD: Yeah, I wasn't as productive the first half. Got it going in the second half.

They just denied me a lot. We pretty much expected it, though. I feel like we did a good job to get transition points in the first half the way that we did, keep the game like we



wanted to keep it, so...

Q. I want to ask you about kind of the legacy, laying the groundwork for future Bulldogs. Talk about laying the groundwork for the future.

D.J. JEFFRIES: I would say we in good hands. Coach Jans, he know what he doing. Him and the coaching staff put in countless work and countless hours to get us a game plan, help us go out there and do what we need to do.

I'd say the future is bright. This is on the beginning for Bulldog basketball.

JOSH HUBBARD: Definitely laid a spark for the future. Expectations are just higher now for Mississippi State, as they should be. The program with Coach Jans, they can do a lot of important and special things.

Yeah, the bar is definitely risen for sure for the future.

Q. D.J., obviously tough result in this one, but what's the pulse on just how well you feel like the team is playing, the chemistry you have going into the tournament?

D.J. JEFFRIES: I mean, I feel like we making the right stride. We came together at the right time, especially coming off the four-game losing streak. We came together, rallied together and got two big wins.

Today hurt, but at least we got some momentum going into March.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse you fellas. We'll continue with questions for Coach Jans.

Q. Do you get the sense this team was able to regain some momentum in this week?

CHRIS JANS: Obviously we played better down here in Nashville than we did the majority of the latter part of our schedule.

Just disappointed with the result. Like I told the team, you just never know as a player, as a coach, how many opportunities you're going to have to play for championships, especially one of this magnitude.

Potential memories of a lifetime for every individual in our program. I felt really good about that opportunity. Even as the game unfolded, for the most part I felt we had a real chance to be playing tomorrow.

Unfortunately we just didn't get it done the last four or five minutes of the game.

Q. Where do you feel like this team is mentally right now versus even a week ago after that loss against South Carolina?

CHRIS JANS: Well, in real-time probably not very good. In my experience, kids are pretty resilient. They'll get with their families, rightfully so, here in the next few minutes. We'll obviously have time as a program to regroup. I'm sure back tomorrow we'll have a little bit more bounce in our step. Hopefully looking forward to the post-season, what awaits there.

We had our chances. We had our chances. We had some good wins down here. We knew today was going to be hard. Coach Pearl and their program is a championship-level program. What he's done at Auburn since he arrived is special. I mean, he's taken that program to heights that they haven't seen. It's very impressive all the way around how people view his program. He's the architect of it.

I knew it would take a good effort for us today to figure out a way to win that third game in three days. But we didn't even talk about that. I didn't see it. I didn't see it during the game. It felt like fatigue was a factor, but I'm not those guys out there playing. I mean, it's not going to come to fruition, but certainly tomorrow may have been more of a factor.

Q. I asked you about trusting the guys, veteran leadership. What have you learned about your Mississippi State Bulldogs over the last two or three days that you can take forward?

CHRIS JANS: I don't know if I learned anything new. Obviously we've been together since June for this particular team, then a bunch of the guys have been here for two seasons now. We have a pretty good pulse of who we are as individuals and who we are as a program.

But what I come out of this tournament feeling and knowing is that they have a competitive personality to them that's high level. They competed. I told them in the locker room we didn't lose this game because of your lack of want to or effort.

We talked repeatedly about leaving everything on the floor, and we did that. We just had some things throughout the game, didn't make our free throws. You're trying to win a championship, more than likely you're playing against high-level teams, that will come back to haunt you. They did. They made theirs.

We just didn't take advantage of all the second-chance opportunities that we had. We had a bunch of 'em. Credit goes to them that they're so big and physical around the basket. They make it hard on you to stick put-backs in there. It sounds easy enough for me and most of you, but when you're out there with that size and athleticism, sometimes it's hard to do that.

Like I said, I'm proud of our guys. Probably not many people predicted us to have a chance to play for a championship, to be in the semifinals. Like I said earlier, when you get these opportunities, you got to take advantage of 'em.

Q. What does it mean to you have veteran players, Josh and D.J., are buying into what you and the staff are trying to do?

CHRIS JANS: What are they going to say? I'm standing right next to them. They still got games to play (smiling).

What I learn is kids do whatever they got to do to get in the game, so... Hopefully it was the truth. Yeah, we got great kids. Excited to be their coach.

Q. As a coach you're going to have that "one game at a time" mentality. What did the guys show after the losing streak that gives you confidence that this team is built to make a run over the next couple weeks?

CHRIS JANS: People talk about our defense. I cringe a little bit this season because from where I sit, I didn't think it was quite the level that we wanted. Even last year. Certainly we talked about the last time I was in here, some of the rule changes have made it more difficult, et cetera.

But our offense has improved a lot this year compared to last year. I don't know if this is correct or not, but there's a part of me that thinks because of that we scored the ball a little bit easier. We had some great halves, great games. We kind of thought maybe we could win games that way.

We had the opportunity after the regular season to kind of regroup and actually have four days between games, with three of them being practices. That was our sole focus, was to kind of get back to the basic tenets of what we're trying to do as a program.

I thought we as a group took advantage of it, just our core defense, our principles, were better these three games than the majority of the games leading up to the SEC tournament.

Hopefully that's something that this team has learned. If

we're hopefully given another opportunity to play in post-season, we'll get that on the floor, as well.

Q. As you await the NCAA tournament fate for tomorrow, what are the next 24-ish hours looking like for you and the program?

CHRIS JANS: That's a good question. Hopefully the guys are seeing their families, like I mentioned earlier. I got a bunch of folks here, as well, having seen my siblings, my parents for five to ten minutes. They're in our hotel. They get it. That's just the way it goes.

I'm trying to make some plans personally to see those folks that spent the time and money to come down here and support us.

We plan on getting out of here at some point here in the next few hours and getting home, then being able to let this sink in and sleep on it. Hopefully, like I said, get up, go to church, figure out what we're going to do on Sunday, hopefully get some good news.

Until I see that, you're not going to hear me say much about the post-season other than saying the post-season. If you paid attention, I haven't said anything but the 'post-season'. That's the words that I've used. We'll see what happens and make a game plan.

Q. You mentioned free-throw shooting earlier. Seems to be a plague across college basketball. Why is that?

CHRIS JANS: Do I like look I'm smart enough to figure that out? I'm not. I wish I knew the answer. I would help my team first, then maybe some of my buddies.

I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I know that whoever's in charge of our defensive free-throw percentage should be fired because we're either 13th or 14th in the SEC of other teams making free throws, and percentage-wise, which I don't know whose fault that is, but it sucks to lead that category. You don't have much control over it. I'm not trying to be coy or funny.

I really don't know. I really don't know.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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