

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Mississippi State Bulldogs Coach Chris Jans

Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome to the stage from Mississippi State University, head coach Chris Jans.

CHRIS JANS: Thank you. As always, excited to be here. Fourth year standing up on the podium. I was talking to Garth Glissman waiting to be introduced. I remember when I first got here, my wife and kids, anyone else real close to me was glued in to the SEC Network to watch this presentation or this talk, if you will.

Now I guarantee they're not watching today. They're doing their things. It's old hat for them now. We're grizzled veterans of this league, if you will. Other than my mother. She's been texting me all morning asking me what time I was going on, Central Time, Eastern Time, et cetera.

In terms of our team, like all the other coaches are talking about, we got 15 players. It's the smallest roster I've ever had as a head coach at any level. It's new territory for me that way. I've been accustomed to having a lot of bodies in practice. It's caused us to change how we organize our practices and certainly run our practices.

We have four guys that were in uniform last year. One starter, two in the rotation. That means we have 11 new players. Of those 11, four of 'em are high school players and six of 'em were transfers, then we have an international player, as well.

Still trying to find our identity, to be honest with you. I remember a few weeks ago struggling internally about who our team is going to be, how we're practicing, et cetera.

I got to believe now looking back, talking to other coaches, that it's a similar feeling that's going on across the country. You're just not quite there yet. Your personality hasn't quite formed yet as a basketball team because you just haven't had the necessary time and reps and adversity that you're comfortable with having so many other players

back from years past.

We're excited about the season. We'll certainly take any questions.

Q. I know a lot of times with the coaches that have ju-co backgrounds like yourself are a little more used to frenetic roster building. Do you have thoughts on now when the portal starts? Seems like there could be some issues, some coaches might have complaints that the portal opens before the season is over, and that's your window.

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, I adhere to why you complain, nobody pays attention to it anyway. But it's certainly been a hot topic for years now since the portal has become a part of our landscape.

For me personally, I've been championing the weekend after the Sweet 16. I think that's the perfect time for it to open, where there's only four teams that are left playing. Boo-hoo to those four, they're playing in a Final Four. They've got to be able to get in the portal a little bit, still prepare for their team.

I'm sure they would all take the inconvenience.

I believe when it started two years ago, before the NCAA tournament, that was a travesty, in my opinion. I get there's a lot of talking points that comes with it. I can't imagine a better sweet spot than the Monday after the Sweet 16 weekend.

Even for the coaches and the staffs and their families, when you lose the last game of the year, which all but one of us do that are in the NCAA tournament, you don't get to take a breath at all. You don't even get to internalize what happened. It's very emotional. You don't have a choice. You better jump in the portal both feet, both hands, every part of your body, to be able to do what you got to do, because it's very time sensitive.

I think it gives the players time to decide if they want to go in or not. It gives the coaches time to re-recruit, if you will, some of the players that are on the fence.

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I know there will be people that will say, Well, we need to know, right? It's going to give time for coaches to get behind the scenes and do what they do.

Let's be honest, that's going on anyway (smiling). I tell our coaches all the time that everybody is in the portal. That has to be your mentality regardless if they're officially paperwork-wise in the portal.

Again, that's my opinion on that.

Q. There was a lot of uncertainty with Josh coming back at the end of the season. He's finally back. What are you looking out of him to take that next step personally and helps you guys get over the hump?

CHRIS JANS: There may be some uncertainty at a national level. I didn't have any uncertainty with it just because I'm with him daily. I've got to know his family very well, what kind of people they are, what they stand for.

I understand the narrative. Anyone that good, that young, there's going to be talk about it. Again, what I said earlier: I look at returnees as everybody's in the portal. I think it speaks volumes to who he is, what kind of person he is, how strongly he believes in our program and our community and our university.

I never get tired of talking about Josh. I had someone come into practice the other day that has been around a little bit yearly. He asked me, Is he really as good a kid as he seems to be, as he comes off to be?

I go, He's better.

A lot of coaches talking about kids being better people than they are players. It's a cliché, but that's Josh. That's his identity. That's who he is. That's a heck of a statement because he's a hell of a player. To say that he's a better person just speaks kudos to the quality human being that he is.

Q. In this day of college sports, continuity on rosters especially in basketball seems rare. To have somebody like Josh, how important has he been in this off-season in integrating the new players?

CHRIS JANS: He's been crucial. He took a leadership role last year as a sophomore, along with Cameron Matthews. He was definitely the little brother of the duo. He did it more silently than Cam did it.

He's got all the qualities you would want if you're looking at it from a coach's perspective in terms of his ability. He's

got respect that way. He's as hard a worker as we have in the program, which gives him a little more confidence in allowing him to say things to his teammates.

I really don't like the kids who start kind of taking over leadership role and they're not doing the right thing every day. That's counterintuitive. I get frustrated when I see that happening. With Josh, no worries at all.

He's stepped up a level in terms of his using his voice. That was the thing I said last year. Josh needs to find his voice in our program internally. He's done that and more. He doesn't just lead by example now. He uses his voice. He's working harder than he ever has. He's practicing more consistently, especially on the defensive end, than he ever has.

I think once we start playing these games, people watch him play, you'll see he's gotten even better. He's continuing to strive to be a two-way player, improve his game all around. We're seeing it develop in front of us every day.

Q. You added a lot of size and length past off-season. What have you seen from those guys in your front court so far in practice?

CHRIS JANS: Well, people talked about "The Dentist" that I didn't coin myself. Had nothing to do with that name. We were known for being a tough-nosed team, blue-collar.

Last year I wouldn't have described our team like that. Our analytics flipped a little bit. We had a very good offensive year historically for Mississippi State and for my teams. We were ranked in the top 25 efficiency-wise, we scored the second-most points in the history of Mississippi State. Had a lot of other highs for our program.

Defensively we took a couple steps back. I knew we would. I just didn't want to take two steps back. We took more than we wanted. We had that in mind when we jumped in the portal this year, tried to get, like you said, some length and more defensive-minded guys.

We'll see how the plays out. But that's definitely something we're going to try to get back to.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Jans, thank you for your time this morning.

CHRIS JANS: Appreciate it.

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