

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Ole Miss vs Michigan State

Friday, March 28, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

Ole Miss Rebels

Chris Beard

Jaemyn Brakefield

Matthew Murrell

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Michigan State - 73, Ole Miss - 70

THE MODERATOR: We're ready for Ole Miss. Coach Beard, if you could give us some opening thoughts, and then we'll open it up for questions.

CHRIS BEARD: Every season ends for every team except for one, with the feelings we have right now. It's a little bit different for me this year. You dread that walk back to the locker room to talk to your guys, but this year just felt different.

I'm just so thankful. I've never been this kind of emotion when a season ends, but I'm just thankful for these guys. To be in the Sweet 16 our second year at Ole Miss, it's the players, especially these two guys to my left that endured the coaching change and stuck with us and decided to come back their last year and play for us.

Just thankful, you know. From a coaching standpoint, you don't want to get beat your last game of the season, and I didn't think we did. I thought today we just ran out of time.

A lot of respect for Michigan State and Coach Izzo. I thought our guys went pound for pound, nose to nose. That was a really tough basketball game. I thought it would be the first one to 70 wins, and it turned out to be almost true.

But just really thankful and proud of our guys. And the best thing that they did and the thing I'm most thankful for -- not just myself, but for them -- I'm thankful that they did this for



themselves is they raised expectations. Nobody in the country thought we'd be in the Sweet 16 second year at Ole Miss when the season started, but these guys had their own expectations, and I'm really thankful for that.

We played some really good basketball in the last month, beat Tennessee at home and Arkansas in Nashville. We went head to head with Auburn. And to get through North Carolina and Iowa State -- again, today I thought we ran out of time. I didn't think we lost the game.

Just super appreciative of our players raising the expectations for themselves and our program. Now our fans feel it, our students feel it, our town feels it.

Ole Miss basketball isn't going anywhere, and we'll never forget these seniors that took us on a special ride this year.

Q. Jaemyn and Matt for you guys to stick it out and remain with this program for so many years, just to see it bear this kind of fruit, how does it feel, and what do you think it does for future years at Ole Miss, especially for Coach Beard?

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: It means a lot, obviously just sticking around and seeing the growth. Even off the court, in the community, just engagement in general.

Oxford is a beautiful place, and I'm glad that we were able to execute.

MATTHEW MURRELL: Just being able to be a part of the change, it's definitely been something special. Ole Miss wasn't really on the national map a couple years back, and we felt like we've been able to grow it throughout the years. Like Coach Beard said, Ole Miss will be here to stay.

Q. Matthew, take me through what you feel like was the difference in the game towards the end, and what did you see?

MATTHEW MURRELL: It just came down to which team made the fewest mistakes. It came down to just execution. They got the upper hand at the end.

Q. Coach Beard, obviously they were able to get to the rim a little more in the second half. What did they do



differently to adjust?

CHRIS BEARD: We don't give the players the questions first?

THE MODERATOR: No, we're fine.

Q. What did Michigan State do to get to the rim a little bit more? The points in the paint shifted in the second half.

CHRIS BEARD: Obviously the difference in the game was the free-throw differential period. We out-rebounded them. We took care of the basketball. It was a helluva basketball game.

Again, first one to 70 is probably going to win this thing. Baskets were hard to come by for both teams. I thought the free-throw differential in the game, maybe there will be another time and setting to talk about that. Yeah, I thought that was the difference in the game.

We didn't get to the bonus in the first half at all I think, and in the second half at the very end.

Give Michigan State credit. Obviously it was their offensive game plan. They weren't going inside as much to their post players. Their guards were just trying to attack. So I thought that was the difference in the game, the free-throw differential.

Q. Chris, a ton of effort across the board tonight, but Sean really down the stretch, whether it was that offensive rebound, driving the paint, he was dialed in. What's it like to get an effort from somebody like that who's only been here a year, but definitely could have been a Rebel for four years with how he was playing.

CHRIS BEARD: I think there's other times to talk about individual players. The thing about us, guys, is we were a team. We were a team that had five or six guys that averaged double figures. We were a team that had very little ego individually.

I'm so proud of these guys. I've kind of bit my tongue all year long because I didn't want to be the coach's speak. Matt Murrell played hurt most of the season. I said it a few times when I just couldn't take it. A lot of guys in college basketball wouldn't be playing this year with what Matt endured. Now we look forward to him getting healthy and going through the spring process to get his body right before he transitions to pro basketball.

Brakefield, you guys might have heard us tell this story, but he basically helped us put this team together. He was part

of every official visit, almost every initial phone call and zoom. He had his hands all over this team. I don't know what Brake's going to do later in life, but the minute he tells me he wants to coach, he has a job -- although I'll try to do everything I can to discourage him to do that.

But we were a team. Tonight is not about individual players or individual questions. Hope you respect that. Ole Miss, we had a bunch of guys check their ego at the doors, and we became a team. It took a while, but again, by the end of the year, we were playing some great basketball. Our last three or four weeks, we were deserving to be in the Sweet 16, and I really thought we could be a factor in San Antonio.

Q. Matthew, I'll come back to you. What do you take away from this season? I know it wasn't the ending you wanted, but I heard your teammate talk about how special this season was. How was it for you and getting to this point?

MATTHEW MURRELL: It was definitely a special season, a season I won't forget, not just for the run that we made, but just the camaraderie, the teammates that I had. It was a very tough season for me. Obviously Coach talked about it. I've been injured most of the season.

Just this team helped my confidence so much fighting through everything. So this group of guys will hold a special place in my heart.

Q. This one's just for Coach Beard. I'm just curious how much tougher is it to kind of win these games down the stretch when you've got a program that's kind of pioneering into the Sweet 16, first time maybe you all had been there?

CHRIS BEARD: Zero factor, and I'll repeat what I said. The thing I'm most thankful for, really why my emotions are different right now than at the end of any season, I'm just thankful. What these guys did -- what these guys did is they raised expectations, first for themselves and then the program.

When we were at the Selection Sunday show in March and the name came across, it wasn't about like we've made it, it was about let's get to work. Six games in three weekends. For that, I'll forever be thankful. I know they're going to do that for the rest of their lives. Whatever they want, they're going to go get.

I've been blessed to coach a lot of great teams, but these guys were different. Literally we walked around expecting to win the SEC, expecting to win every game, and expecting to make it to San Antonio, and it was beautiful to

be around.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

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