

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Mississippi State vs USC

Monday, March 24, 2025

Los Angeles, California, USA

Galen Center

Mississippi State Bulldogs Coach Sam Purcell

Jerkaila Jordan

Media Conference

USC - 96, Mississippi State - 59

SAM PURCELL: Let me make a couple of opening statements. Bear with me, obviously, still emotional from the loss.

But, first and foremost, my prayers and thoughts are with JuJu. Obviously we're competitors. You never want to see that, especially what she means for women's basketball and a competitor. I'm hoping the best for her because she's special. Obviously she's special for this team.

Second one is just congrats to USC. I thought the environment here was very special. That D.J. is unbelievable and I thought the energy was phenomenal. I think a shout-out to the crowd, when JuJu went down, how they rallied behind the players. And I thought they uplifted them and they played lights out.

When you play a No. 1 seed that just shoots it the way they do, they were the better team. Tonight we needed to play our best, and we just didn't do that.

Third and final here is a shout-out to my seniors. For us to get back to this NCAA Tournament, to have a winning culture and to have this young lady right here beside me for this journey from her first three years, I can't say enough thank yous to her.

Kayla and Eniya, we didn't want it to end because as much as the transfer portal happens, you put a team together, we were playing our best basketball at the right time, and just wasn't our night tonight.

Q. Jerkaila, athletes always want to go best against best and have that competition be top level. What did



you think when you saw JuJu go down?

JERKAILA JORDAN: Honestly, just very unfortunate. You look forward to playing people like JuJu. I said it yesterday, JuJu is a generational talent. She's changed the game in so many ways at such a young age.

I actually was looking forward to playing against her. She's one of the best of the best. Seeing her go down was really tough. I said my prayers for her. I hope she's okay.

It sucks. It was their last home game, very unfortunate. You hate to see a player go down, especially someone just as great as JuJu.

Q. What was it like for you and your teammates to hear that booing every time you guys touched the ball and they even got after your cheerleaders at halftime?

SAM PURCELL: Were they booing or cheering for us?

JERKAILA JORDAN: Like Coach Sam said, they're going to stand behind their home team. We're in their home. California is JuJu. They're going to go hard for JuJu. So I couldn't do nothing but just respect them because if we were in our home and it was flipped our fans would root for us.

Prayers for JuJu, I hope she's okay. Very unfortunate, but congratulations to USC.

Q. Just wanted to ask you about your tenure at Mississippi State. And we talked about it a few weeks ago, you chose to stay here through several different coaches. You already transferred here from somewhere else. How do you kind of sum it all up and what you were able to do here?

JERKAILA JORDAN: I'm honestly just grateful for the time I had at Mississippi State. Grateful for Coach Sam and everything we've been through. He's brought me to the tournament for my first time. This is my second time here with him. Just reflecting on everything. I'm just proud of the route that I've taken.



I wouldn't change it for anything. If I could do it again I would do it all over again. And everything comes to an end one day.

I'm just glad to go out with this coach, this team. Like I said, I'm just grateful for the opportunity, honestly, to even be here in this tournament.

Q. Similar to that question, but you being here now for a few seasons and playing your last game, what do you just think of the direction of the program and where this progress has been made these last couple of seasons?

JERKAILA JORDAN: Honestly, I remember first committing to Mississippi State, it was nothing like this. I've had a team of seven. We went out there played every night. Team of five, team of no coaches, interims. I've been through three different coaching staffs.

But honestly being someone that can watch the program evolve with your own eyes, being there when there were -- no one in the crowd, playing my first sold-out game in front of LSU, I feel if I had a checklist I checked off everything in the list of college career.

And I give everything to this man. I've played in sold-out crowds and played against the best of the best. I can just say thank you to this program as a whole. Thank you to the Starkville community. And, like I said, I'm very grateful, honestly.

Q. What improvements or (indiscernible) do you have this season? How did this season change you for the better?

JERKAILA JORDAN: That's a great question, honestly, I've changed a lot. Not only on the court but off the court as a person. I've learned a lot about myself.

You have to force me to be more talkative. I like to lead by example. So I have to step up my show a little bit. Especially with last year, I've been through ups and downs, highs and lows at Mississippi State where we didn't make the tournament last year.

We had maybe three, four returners. We didn't have a team, didn't have a starting five.

It was just four of us. I stuck beside him. I trusted the process, learned to take in the freshmen and newcomers and tell them something you don't want to go through again. I've seen the worst, the best, but I wouldn't trade it for nothing in the world.

Me, overall, I feel like I improved very mentally. Just growing as a person. Now just taking everything I learned from the team and just going into the real world and using it every day.

Q. Obviously the injury seemed like it was a noncontact injury, but --

SAM PURCELL: Talking about JuJu?

Q. Yes, with JuJu, but seems like there's some people that thought that one of your players did something. And it seems like it's kind of getting on social media. Have you talked to your players about just, hey, like, you're okay; you did nothing wrong?

SAM PURCELL: This is the first time I've heard that. Again, that's what I said in my opening statements. We're a program of class. And my prayers and thoughts as the leader of this program immediately in that opening statement are with JuJu.

We don't play to hurt; we play to compete. That's just an unfortunate situation. There was no harm. And I hope us as a society, because social media can be ugly, that you understand the other lady on my team that was involved is a woman of class. She comes from a family, too, of loving parents. And I'm sure she is remorseful and obviously didn't want to have that happen situation.

So I pray as a society that we understand it's a thoughtful apology that we don't take this further than it needs to. On behalf of the Bulldogs, again, we're praying for her recovery for this next game because she's the ultimate competitor. We want to see her back out on that court.

Q. Obviously you took this roster over. You had to completely rehaul it outside of three or four players right back in the NCAA Tournament. We talked about this. This was a disappointing ending, but how do you kind of sum up how you were able to get this team back to where you wanted to be and in position to where you're playing a team that can compete for a national championship and you're in position to go to the Sweet 16?

SAM PURCELL: If you're a competitor, first and foremost, you sacrifice. I talked about my team, it's chances and choices. We made the choice to come here. We made the choice to wear this Mississippi State jersey and wear it with pride.

That's what I'm proud of, we put together another 20-win season and competed in the toughest league in the country. We've just got to be real. Tonight was not our

night. USC deserves all the flowers. They were unbelievable and the better team.

We can't let one night like tonight derail, to your point, what a great year we had to get this program back. And now it's maintaining that energy and only building off of it.

And obviously in women's basketball, our goal is to get to this point where we win enough games now, take this to the next level where you're hosting in the first and second round and try to avoid a situation like this because, again, I can't say enough great things about USC and the energy of the fan base and that D.J. and the energy that was in this building. I just thought they played at another level tonight.

Q. Talked a lot about the turnovers this season and (indiscernible) stats, 20 field goals and 20 turnovers. How much do you think that just played a part in how things unraveled?

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, it was unfortunate. We've seen this year. We talked about getting off to a great start. I thought we had great prep. You saw a great Cal game where we fought like no other.

And when you play a team like this, you don't want to get punched in the face. I thought obviously first call of the game on Madina was hard and next thing you know I'm burning a timeout and it's 11-0 to start the game or 9-0.

They were making shots. That's not what you want. You want to have them tight because they're obviously trying to defend their home.

But when you have a major league like that with one of the top teams in the country, I just thought they continued to start cooking and start playing, and they just like they did in this media room, turned the lights out -- on us.

Q. You mentioned this in your first statement, but could you talk to me about Jerkaila Jordan and what she meant to the program? Just all the years she's been here, what does she mean to you and the program?

SAM PURCELL: I'm going to try not to get emotional again. 20 years, right? I've been in this business, there's certain kids that are special. I love all the seniors, but that one, like you heard her story. We've been through some stuff.

Given this job three years ago, there's a lot of pride to understand what I've taken over. We were at the highest of highs, and I embraced it. I'm a dog. I want to get it back. But in order to get it back you have to have some

dogs with you.

For Jerkaila to stay in the program and give a first-year head coach an opportunity, it's unheard of. She's, like, what in the world is happening in my career? Who did we hire? The guy's never been a head coach.

I sat down with her and talked to her. She said, okay, I'll give him a chance.

The first year we make the NCAA Tournament and just like today's society, the portal is crazy. She didn't leave me. Everybody wanted her. She was a top SEC player. She was, like, I believe in you and the vision.

Her second year, to be one of the first four teams out, again, kids can make excuses. They can leave. She didn't. She loves Mississippi State and she loves this program. And she was one of my lead recruiters in helping put this team together.

For us to get back is a testimony to her because coaches get too much credit for wins and losses. And a player like her, when we look at the history of our program, you look at a kid that, like I said, played every single night like it was her last game.

And you just love that as a coach. You want that out of every player but every player ain't wired like that. Jerk's wired like that. And I can go back from game to game where it was hard. And she rises to the occasion.

That's why I hate this one ended like it did. Because this she wanted this. It just wasn't our night.

I'm emotional because I love that kid. And there's no doubt she's going to be a pro and I wish nothing but the best for her. And thankful for the years she gave me.

Q. Seems like when you've got a team that's making a bunch of really tough stops, including some highly contested ones, how do you not let that affect your play on the offensive end? It seemed like obviously they were pressing and setting you guys up a little bit, but how can you not get hurried when a team is smoking hot the way they were?

SAM PURCELL: Again, I can't say enough things. We've got to keep it real. We got our butt kicked by a really good team. I thought they played inspired when JuJu went down and this place went to another whole level.

And they have other really good players. When a good player goes down other players step up. I thought that's what you saw tonight.



Obviously Kiki is one of the best players in the country. She was electric. We had our center on her, our guard on her, we doubled her, we went 2-3, we went man-to-man, we trapped her. We never stopped her.

We threw the whole kitchen sink and the house, but she was just electric. That's what great players do. They make plays and they carry a swagger. And I thought she did that.

Then our goal was to get it to 10 by half. And I could just see that shot at the end of the half. It's one of those nights when you just know, oh crap, there's still time on the clock and they shoot it and it banks in. You know you're in for a long night and it's their night.

So we tried everything, like I said, but there's no excuses. They were the better team. We had to bring our A game. It's simple just unfortunately in the second round we didn't. And you have to give USC their credit.

Q. I assume coming into the game you had developed a game plan to stop JuJu or to contain JuJu, when she goes out like that, how difficult is it to switch the game plan and try to stop Kiki and the other actions that they had away from that?

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, that's a good question. You all know that JuJu is the focal point. We wanted to double her on ball screens. Blitz her when she went on one-on-one isolations because JuJu is the lead as she should be.

But we also knew that when JuJu was out and the minutes that she played, they would go to Avery Howell or Kiki. Those are the next two that get their numbers called.

So we tried, but again when elite players know that they need to rise to the occasion, that's where I want to give Kiki and Howell their flowers along with Samuels.

I don't think Samuels gets enough love. I keep saying that. That kid, every time I watched the tape, changes the game. She changes it. I told my team, you know you've got a special team when, no offense to her, she's the third point guard on the team.

She comes in and I'm talking about the third point guard as much as I am the first. I tell them, we have to be mentally dialed in and don't turn it over when we inbound it because she's picking you up and changing course.

It happened right away. Just a shout-out to the other players being ready for their moment. And again this team at USC still has a special team. And, like I said, I hope

JuJu can come back because they've done a lot of great things this year and you don't want to see something derailed this late in the year.

Q. Sam, just kind of looking ahead now, I mean, obviously replacing a special player in Jerkaila, I know you're hoping to bring back a lot of this roster. A lot of players that have the opportunity to come back. What's your outlook on building this next team?

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, first and foremost, like I said to the returners, it's obviously -- again this is the beauty of March, but tomorrow is the portal. Retaining all the players, bringing this team back. We have a winning culture that just went to the NCAA Tournament, just signed a top 10 signing class in the country with some great young women that our fan base is going to absolutely love.

That's my energy right there, is talking with them, making sure nothing changes here tomorrow. And then let's build off this. Let's have some chemistry where we understand what it takes and not have to spend so much time like we did this year to build that nucleus because I think those group that can come back is a special group. We would love to have them here, and they did a lot of great things this year.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports