

2020-21 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes
Mississippi State vs. Richmond – Thursday, March 25, 2021
NIT Quarterfinals

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Q: What do you think about D.J. Stewart Jr.'s shot at the end and your success at the foul line being the deciding factors in this game?

BH: “At one point, they had taken a lot more free throws than we did. We ended up making our foul shots. D.J. [Stewart Jr.] was great producing offense from the foul line. They [Richmond] are a really good team. You can see that they came out, pressured us early and forced a bunch of turnovers. Again, our Achilles Heel was 18 turnovers to their seven, but I’m so proud of our guys for hanging in there.”

“We got some help from God because that miss at the front end of the one-and-one down there with eight seconds to go. That was a huge miss. The whole time when D.J. had the ball, I was yelling at him to ‘Shoot the three! Shoot the three!’. I was yelling at the top of my lungs hoping that he would hear me. We don’t need the tie; we need the win. God, did he come through.”

“It reminds me of being in Texas three years ago when Q [Quinnndary] Weatherspoon hit a similar type play; a jump shot against Baylor at the buzzer to win the game on the road. This is a great win for us. Iverson [Molinar] and D.J. were really good scoring the ball again. I thought that Javian Davis gave us good minutes today. Deivon [Smith] comes in, and he’s always a stabilizing force. He had four assists, two turnovers – a two-to-one ratio. Everybody contributed. I’m really pleased for our guys. This gives us a day off now to rest and then also prepare for whoever wins that 9 p.m. game tonight between Western Kentucky and Louisiana Tech, which should be a great game.”

Q: Do you see D.J. Stewart Jr. as a guy who has the “clutch gene”?

BH: “Yeah, he was taking the game over at the end for us. He had 10 foul shots there, and he didn’t have any in the first half. He was stepping through, making plays and getting to the line. You could see it. We were trying to get him the ball. Richmond was really good defensively. Their hard hedging bothered us a little bit. We weren’t hitting the slips early enough.”

“D.J. [Stewart Jr.] made a great pass to Abdul [Ado] late in the game to cut it to two on that dunk shot. Give them [Richmond] credit. [Jacob] Gilyard is an unbelievable player. He had four steals tonight. The guy is top 5 in the history of college basketball [in steals]. He’s an incredible player. I thought their big guy inside, [Matt] Grace did a really good job. Abdul [Ado], for the most part, was matching up against [Nathan] Cayo, who was the second leading scorer in their conference games at 14.2 per game. He had one basket on ten attempts tonight. That was a huge difference to our advantage. I thought we did a pretty good job on [Tyler] Burton today. He had been their leading scorer the last two games ... Today, he was 1-for-7. We did a good job on two of their key guys defensively. Our field goal percentage defense was very good again. Our foul shooting and shooting from the field [were good], we just have to somehow figure out how to take care of the basketball.”

Q: Does your recent success offensively point to experience and guys knowing what they need to do?

BH: “I just think that our percentages are so high because our misses are getting thrown to the other team before we even get a shot. It’s ridiculous. I hate to keep harping on it, but we have to get better. I have to tell you, I’m so happy for our team. The adversity of not having Tolu Smith today, the leading rebounder in the SEC. Right after the game, I went and I called him from the locker room. I put the whole team on, and we held a big hurray for him. We love him very much, and we feel for him so badly that he can’t be here with us right now.”

Q: What was your message to the team before the game knowing Tolu Smith was out?

BH: “I talked about it yesterday, everybody has to pick up their level. We’re losing our leading rebounder, and our best inside scorer. We did a great job on the glass today. I can’t complain about that. We won by 16 [rebounds] on the glass. That’s outstanding. I was just proud of the guys and their effort.”

“Again, we beat a really good team. A team that had never been to the NIT semi. They had beaten the two other SEC teams they played this year – at Kentucky and at Vanderbilt. They were excited to play against us and try for the trifecta. We got their very best effort today. There’s no question that Richmond really played well today, and I imagine their coach would suggest that. They’re very hard to guard because of how they space you out and spread the floor. That Princeton offense can be problematic.”

Q: How happy are you for Abdul Ado that you still got the win after he missed the two free throws and fouled out?

BH: “I’m happy for him, and I’m happy for JD [Javian Davis] because a technical foul is inexcusable. We can’t get technical fouls talking to the officials. We had a number of guys that got redemption. My message to the team after was that you never quit, you never give up and you never hang your head. If you make a mistake or things go bad, you keep fighting. You keep battling and good things happen. We had some help today from the almighty with that front-end miss [on the 1-and-1]. Things happen, and I’m so thankful.”

Q: What is it like to possibly be playing Western Kentucky with how important Rick Stansbury is to Mississippi State?

BH: “I spent an hour with Rick [Stansbury] last night in our film room. We sat there for an hour and visited together. I have great respect and admiration for Rick as a coach for what he accomplished at Mississippi State as the head coach, and what he did as an assistant coach to help Richard Williams have such great success before him.”

“Rick is one of the best coaches in the country. He is the winningest coach and the most successful coach in the history of Mississippi State basketball. He and his wife are special people. We are so proud to have Isaac [Stansbury] on our team to keep the family within the Mississippi State family. It’s really special. Of course, when we lace them up, we want to win. We have great admiration and love for the Stansbury family, as all Mississippi State basketball fans do.”

“You think about all the great years, all the NCAA Tournaments and the phenomenal crowds. Rick was a driving force behind the construction of the Mize Pavilion and raising the money. He is a beloved figure here at Mississippi State. If we end up playing them, it’ll be a special game.”

Guard D.J. Stewart Jr.

Q: *What was the play at the end when you got freed up for the game-winning three?*

DJS: “I was trying to find the ball whenever I looked back and saw the ball was in the air from QP [Quinten Post]. I was either going to lay the ball up or just go for the win. I chose to go for the win, and it went in.”

Q: *What kicks in during the final 20 minutes of the game that allows you to make things happen offensively?*

DJS: “It’s just me willing to do whatever the team needs. That was on the offensive end tonight, and I was able to perform for my teammates.”

Q: *How important was it for you and Iverson Molinar to step up at both ends of the floor without Tolu Smith?*

DJS: “I think everybody stepped up together. Everybody knew that they had a bigger role tonight with Tolu [Smith] being out. Much respect to the guys that stepped up tonight.”

Q: *How does it feel to finally be able seal the victory by making free throws?*

DJS: “Coach hounds us on free throws. We practice them so much that it’s almost second [nature] now. That was a big part of the second half. I was able to step up and knock them down.”

Q: *What was going through your mind when you made the game-winner?*

DJS: “I was trying to see how much time was on the clock. I was celebrating. Then, I had to snap back into it to see how much time was on the clock to try to get a stop and win the game.”

Q: *How have you been able to finish games down the stretch after struggling to early in the year?*

DJS: “By learning from the games that we couldn’t close [earlier in the season] and knowing what to do in the moment of the game from the film that we watch.”