

2020-21 Mississippi State Men's Basketball

Mississippi State vs. Mississippi Valley State – December 21, 2020

Head Coach Ben Howland

Q: What did you like from your team defensively tonight?

BH: “I thought we did a good job defensively, for the most part. Give them credit, they showed a lot of patience offensively, more so than they had in previous games. I thought it really helped them. They’re harder to defend when they make you play for longer periods of time. This game, the final score did not feel like we won by 40, to be honest with you. I’m glad that we got everybody a chance to play tonight. We got everybody on our team a chance to get out there and get a minute or two at least.”

“I thought Tolu [Smith] did a really good job tonight, another double-double. Iverson [Molinar] and D.J. [Stewart Jr.] are fast forming one of the best backcourts in the SEC, in my opinion. Abdul [Ado] does so many things that don’t show up on the stat sheet. He had two great screens when they were trying to ice the pick-and-roll and the side ball screen. He got Iverson right in the lane for easy opportunities to attack.”

“When you look at our shooting from three, it was good. If you look at the foul shots, it’s still really disappointing, especially out of D.J. I can’t believe he missed his foul shots. He was only 2-6 tonight, so that’s something I know that he’ll work on during the break. He’s a way better shooter from the foul line than that. He had some really nice three’s tonight, and he shot the ball extremely well. We were very unselfish. To have 19 assists on our 33 baskets is something that I really appreciate, and I’m happy for that.”

Q: How much has Iverson Molinar improved his overall game in the last year?

BH: “His overall understanding of the game has improved in every aspect. He’s a way better rebounder. He’s a better defender, both on and off the ball. He’s a very good decision maker, in terms of passing. Between him [Molinar] having five assists, and Deivon [Smith] with four assists, we had nine assists out of our point guard position, which is really nice and it’s a big thing for us.”

Q: How much better is Tolu Smith getting at “going quick” and how is that helping his numbers go up offensively?

BH: “I think it helps him a lot. He has had the habit of always dribbling when he gets the ball in the post. Even his offensive foul tonight in the second half, his third foul was off a dribble. Our rule is when he catches it in the paint, he shoots. That’s a general rule, but it’s the right rule for bigs.”

Q: Do you feel like the team is in a good spot as SEC play starts or is there anything that concerns you?

BH: “I feel good about our team. I feel good about the improvements we’ve made. I think we’re playing pretty good defense, and I think we’re getting better offensively. I would [have] loved to start out the season the way it was planned with four games leading up to that tournament, with Iverson [Molinar] and everybody healthy but things happen. It is what it is.”

“Right now, the bottom line is the SEC is a whole new season. Everything starts over, in terms of SEC play. Once it starts, it never stops. 19 games [with Iowa State in the SEC/Big 12 Challenge], and they’re coming at you. Starting at Georgia is tough. It’s a grind. It’s going to be a real challenge. Our league is so good. Arkansas, with how well they’ve played. Tennessee, who hasn’t had a game within 20 or 30 [points], I don’t think. We have some teams that are really playing well in our conference right now. We’re just on to the next game, which is Georgia. He’s a very good coach, Tom Crean, and that’s going to be a big challenge. Then, we come home and play Kentucky, Missouri and then we’re at Vanderbilt. I don’t know what’s after that. I just know those first four games in my head.”

Forward Quinten Post

Q: How cool is it when you can get in there and throw the ball down a couple of times like you did tonight?

QP: “It felt great for sure. It is kind of unexpected from me too, but I just went up as high as possible. The first one was pretty easy. The second one I just went up as high as possible, and I was able to knock it down.”

Q: Eight games in with non-conference, where do you feel like this time is at right now heading into conference play?

QP: “I think we are actually a really good team. I think we had a tough time starting out the season, missing Iverson [Molinar]. We had a lot of guys, like freshmen, having to step in. I think we really got into our groove as a team. I think we are going to be a really good team. I think we are a really underrated team. I think if we keep playing together like we have been doing the last few games, we have a real good chance.”

Q: How much more comfortable would you say that you are compared to game one, and do you feel that you are acclimating pretty well?

QP: “I think I have got a lot more use to it. I kind of know what Coach [Howland] expects from me. My mindset is just to get out there and play as hard as possible on defense and try to really pressure the ball in ball screens. If I am open, I shoot the ball. I try to get as many rebounds as possible. That is kind of what I try to do. So yes, I know my role now. I just try to go as hard as possible.”

Forward Tolu Smith

Q: How much have you worked on getting that dribble out of the paint?

TS: “In the beginning of the season, Coach Howland emphasized me not dribbling the ball. If you watch the tournament of our first few games, it was a constant for me to dribble. I am not sure why, but he just emphasized me not dribbling in the next few games. It has been working out really well for me.”

Q: Did you always feel like you could be a double-double kind of guy night-in and night-out?

TS: “Yes sir, with the size of my body, shape, and my frame I should be able to bring a double-double in every night. It is pretty much a necessity for our team to win.”

Q: What is it like building chemistry with the guys out there, and do you feel like everyone is on the same page?

TS: “Like I said previously, we are becoming better with the chemistry amongst our team. You are starting to see it. Communication wise, I feel like early on we were just real quiet on the court. Now, it is just constant talking and constant chatter. You could say we are communicating and meshing pretty well.”

Q: Heading into SEC play, where do you feel like this team is at?

TS: “I feel like we are in a great spot. Obviously, they have us lower than where we want to be, but I like being the underdog. I personally feel we put a lot of work in, and the results are going to show.”