

# Mubadala Citi DC Open

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Washington D.C.

## Coco Gauff

Press Conference



C. GAUFF/L. Samsonova

6-3, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Coco, congratulations. You're through to the final. How are you feeling? Can you also share some thoughts on the match today.

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I'm super happy with how I played today. Playing defending champion is never easy. She's a player that goes really hard on every ball.

I had to, like, accept that a lot of points are going to be off unforced errors. Sometimes as a player it doesn't make you feel great when you're winning off unforced errors, but also when you're playing someone who is so aggressive and dictative as her, you have to accept that.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Coco, aside from Roland Garros I guess this is your first non-250-level final. Can you speak of the significance of reaching, I guess, this high level of a final?**

COCO GAUFF: Yeah. It's something that honestly I didn't really think about it, to be honest. Like, a win is a win, but also, in the same point, yeah, it's cool. I did say at the beginning of this year that I wanted to do better in these 500- and 1000-level tournaments. I didn't have the best -- I know I made the semis in Dubai and semis in Berlin, so I'm happy to finally get through to the final.

**Q. Aside from that fun conversation with Pere in the on-court interview with Rennae and also Brad, what did Brad tell you in terms of how you performed today, not only how you served well but your depth of shot against Liudmila's was so powerful?**

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I guess both of them really instilled a belief in my game. Bringing someone in and, you know, sometimes they feel like they need to change everything, but I think with both of them it's not, like, big changes.

I think they are really confident in my game. So I think it makes me even more confident, especially when it comes to the serving. A couple of times I was down breakpoints or Love-30. They don't tell me to, like, get the serve in. They tell me to go for it.

I think that's why I'm able to come up with those aces. In the past I don't think I had that mentality. I was just trying to get a decent serve in. Now I feel like I'm really going for them.

Also, I think I have much respect in my second serve a lot more. I haven't changed my second serve really at all. I think I'm respecting it more that the girls aren't able to step in and attack. They may do one or two, but the majority I'm getting a lot of unforced errors on it. I think that allows me to go bigger on the first.

**Q. I know we asked you about Brad on Media Day, but are you working with him or kind of just for this week?**

COCO GAUFF: I mean, we were just trying it this week, but obviously, I think, with the way it's been going, we are going to continue.

You know, with anyone, you don't want to say, Let's plan for a long time. I really only had one conversation with him in person, and that was at Wimbledon. So this was, like, our first, that practice I had, my first practice here was my first time ever on the court with him.

Originally we just, you know, said, Let's see how this week goes, you know, how everything goes.

I'm thinking that it's pretty obvious the differences that he and Pere have made in the short amount of time, and I like the way the team dynamic, everyone is getting along, so that's the most important part.

I think, you know, that they are implementing differences in the way I do things daily. I think that they are good differences.

**Q. You mentioned how Liudmila just goes for every shot. How do you feel about playing two really**

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**aggressive players in a row now? And her and Belinda helped you find what you were talking about yesterday, not putting yourself in defensive situations? Has playing those two types of players back to back helped with that?**

COCO GAUFF: Yeah. I do think that today Liudmila hits a bit bigger than Bencic, but Belinda takes the ball a lot earlier and is a lot flatter. I think she doesn't take as much time. But I think the ball today was bigger.

Playing the two opponents, like, they have similar but yet very different game styles. But it did help a lot. I think for me the biggest thing was just trying to be aggressive when I could. There were moments even when she was serving, I was, like, Oh, I got the return too short. But also, like, I don't know, sometimes I'm hard on myself. Then my box would be, like, She hit a good serve. It's okay to hit the return short sometimes. You just have to get it in.

I think those are moments that really make me reset and think back on it. Also I'm, like, okay, me and her are probably the same same-caliber servers, and she didn't break me. So I think she was going really big on the returns.

I think my focus was mainly trying to get them in more so than put her on defense, because it's tough to do it. I think her focus was really trying to put me on defense on the first ball.

But, you know, it's tough when I'm serving good and she was missing, so I'm trying to do that.

**Q. You have played Maria quite a few times in the past. Apologies for bringing up the fact that her record is better than yours in those matches. When you do face somebody maybe you have had trouble with in the past, are you someone who prefers to try to think of something yourself that maybe you either want to do differently or attacking your opponent's game, or are you more likely to want to hear input from somebody else?**

COCO GAUFF: I think that's a little bit of a combination of both. I mean, I do think since the last time I have played her I'm at a much more confident level. I think that the game, for me, is, the way I'm viewing the game is a lot different.

You know, it could come with the coaching team, new coaching team, or it could just come from maturity. I do think tomorrow will be a different match regardless if I win or not. I am approaching it different.

Yeah, like, it's crazy, because I have so many long records against a lot of players, but I'm still, like, young, so the biggest thing I guess that's keeping me positive is how I'm going to look at this in the long term. Like, 10 years from now, how different are these records? Like, a lot of these losses that I'm having I played -- I think I first played Maria when I was 16.

I'm a different player from 16 to 19, and hopefully 19 to 23 I will be an even more different player. I don't really take too much dwelling on those losses. Now looking back I guess in the moment, yeah, it really sucks.

Yeah, I don't really mind when people bring it up, because it happened. I'm not, like, in denial of the past. The only thing is to try and learn from it and improve. You don't have to apologize for bringing it up.

Yeah, I'm going to have to watch those matches and see what I did wrong. Honestly, sometimes even, like, when I played Belinda, I didn't even watch the match before. When I played Liudmila, I didn't watch the match I did before, because I do feel like I'm just viewing it different. So there's no point in looking at what I did then because I'm not in that same mentality.

**Q. One little follow-up, you sort of have two relatively new voices here helping you this week. Which one of them or is it both does more in terms of strategy going into a match?**

COCO GAUFF: I would say, like -- that's actually a good question. I think I get more of the game plan from Pere, but I do think that most of the strategy comes from Brad. I mean, he's probably one of the greatest minds out there.

But I do, like, I would say today's strategy definitely came from him, and same with last match, and I think that's something that Pere is learning from him around that.

You bring up any player, he can tell you a lot of things about them without watching. Obviously he watched their matches, but, you know, honestly his mind is like that. I don't think he needs to.

Yeah, definitely when it comes to strategy, I think Brad is the better of, but also, like, I mean, he's been commentating for forever. He's been watching, this guy loves tennis more than anybody I know. Honestly, Pere loves tennis, too. They're, like, equal. Obviously he's younger. He's a newer coach.

But I do think their plans are pretty the same. I'm sure they really discuss before they bring it to me, because they make sure that we all talk together, so the plans are the

same.

Yeah, I'm, like, I have the feeling it comes more from Brad, but also, Pere knows tennis. Some things are just obvious when it comes to certain people.

**Q. You have been using the crowd a lot this week, getting them riled up. It reminded you at the last US Open getting the crowd pumped up and involved. Is that something you felt more comfortable doing recently?**

COCO GAUFF: Honestly, like, after Wimbledon, I talked to a lot of people, and the main thing was they were, like, You need to have more fun on the court and allow yourself to have more fun. Because I think when I speak to different people in person, they realize that I actually have a personality more so what I look like on the court.

Even with Pere, he told me, Man, when I didn't know you, I just thought you were just closed off and everything, but you're really fun and you like to joke.

Even with Brad, he's, like, I want you to smile at the box sometimes and talk to us. This was even before I even decided to work with him. But he was, like, You can be a little bit happier if that's what you want, because off-court that's how I am. I think sometimes I have gotten too much in the match where I felt like I wasn't allowing myself to have fun on the court.

So I have these feelings even before in the past that I wanted to do that, but I felt like, Oh, I need professional, blah, blah, blah. You know how tennis is. But I realize that's not my personality.

Yeah, I want to do that and have fun. I think watching Frances and people like him, I don't think I will ever be able to be on the scale as him, but there's moments, because I do it in practice. I'm, like, Well, if I'm having fun in practice, I should in the match and allow myself to experience the good and bad emotions.

Yeah, something I have been trying to do more recently. Even, like, the other day, Bencic, she hit a return, and it was a really good return and, like, I thought it was going to go in but it was barely out because it hit the net cord.

I, like, went to my box and said, If that went in, I was going to break my racquet. Just little comments like that I'm sure the people sitting next to them hear. Before, I used to tell myself, Don't say anything. Be stiff.

Then I realize these emotions are building up and I'm not having fun. So now I'm just, like, I'm going to let it happen,

play into the crowd. Because when I'm watching as a fan, I love it. As a player, I want to do it. But before I would just shut myself down. Now I'm just, like, I really want to have fun playing tennis, and I think I lost that for a little bit, but I'm really finding it.

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