

Western & Southern Open

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Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

Coco Gauff

Press Conference



C. GAUFF/K. Muchova

6-3, 6-4

THE MODERATOR: Coco, your biggest title to date. Talk us through the emotions you're feeling right now.

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I'm really happy with how I was able to manage this week. I got a huge win yesterday, a big one today.

Karolina, she's not an easy player. It's really good to see her back at the top. I think she's one of the most talented players on tour. I'm sure that she's going to keep making strides on this level.

THE MODERATOR: Who would like the first question?

Q. What was the mentality for you, especially that 5-2 game? You had a couple match points or a few of them. After that slipped through your fingers, what were you telling yourself? How happy were you to cross the finish line?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I think in those match points I was like, Just get the ball in. I think that was the wrong mentality. In the service game I just told myself, Close how you know how to close, which is hitting your spots and going for your shots. That's what I did.

So, yeah, I think it was two different mentalities. Obviously one was more successful than the other. I think I'll have to keep that one going forward when I have many more matches like this where I need to close in these tight moments.

Q. You said on court that there's been times where at night you were crying, trying to figure out how to improve. What has that been like, how to improve, but also understanding you're still on the right path? What has it been like?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, for me, it was just like difficult because I knew what I needed to improve. I was going in practice and I was working on it. It just wasn't translating

into the matches. It still can get a lot better, the things I want to improve.

For me the biggest thing was my serve, forehand and return. Today I really won it off of breaking serve, to be honest. I wasn't really serving as good as I did against Iga. I don't know if it was nerves. I wasn't that nervous, to be honest. Also a combination of the long match yesterday. I wasn't serving as well.

I think that's what makes a champion, is how you're doing on the days you aren't feeling so great. I'm glad I was able to push through.

Q. Your journey is such an inspiration to many of us in the black community. How do you feel about being an inspiration, especially a teen inspiration?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, it's something that I don't take lightly. I think sometimes I guess it increases the pressure because I know that this community of people, the community of people of color, black people, look up to me a lot. Especially with Serena retiring, people consider me the next leader or something of tennis.

I don't put myself in that box because Serena is the G.O.A.T. for a reason. It's 'greatest of all time'. That's what the word means. I'm part of all time, so I don't know if I'll be able to go as far as she did. That's the dream. But also there's a G.O.A.T. for the reason.

I think for me, it's just trying my best to be the best version of myself and being the best Coco on and off the court. I think I try to pay attention to how I present myself and the causes that I support off the court.

Obviously on the court, my game, I work hard, I can't control the results all the time, but I can control how I present myself. I think that's what I try to do to help girls and boys that look like me know that they can be something in a field that there's not many of us in.

Q. If a 10 is Coco's very best, what would you rate today and this week?



COCO GAUFF: Today? Probably like a 6 (smiling). To be honest, I was not serving that well, yeah. But mentally, a 10. I mean, my biggest weapon was not working, and I was still able to manage.

Overall this week, I would say probably about an 8 or 9. Probably a 9, yeah. I think, honestly, today level-wise was our worst match. I think Karolina might say the same. I was looking at her matches. I don't know if she came before you guys, but I was looking at her matches this week. It was tough.

I think physically we were both feeling the impact of yesterday. I think for me, I was just able to persevere a little bit more in that final push.

Q. What makes winning, now that you've done it, a 1000 difficult? You've obviously had chances. What is it about this level of tournament that's hard to win?

COCO GAUFF: Well, I think everybody's trying hard in this level. I mean, the Grand Slams are obviously where the people try the hardest. But obviously in this level is the next.

Like the schedule, playing back-to-back tough matches is tougher sometimes than in a Grand Slam in many moments because you don't have that day between. Karolina kind of said it in her thing. She woke up and she was like 'ouch'. I'm a little younger. I was feeling the impact yesterday. Yeah, I think maybe because I'm younger, it was a little bit less.

But, yeah, that was the toughest thing mentally is coming from that high, beating Iga yesterday, and getting ready for another match.

This week, draw-wise, I did play a lot of players ranked lower than me. I think that was a bit of pressure because you know you have to win these matches, or you should be on paper. Obviously it's not that simple when you're going into the match. I feel like when you are ranked higher, they try harder against you because everybody wants that big win. I don't blame. I did the same, too.

Yeah, I think for me, it's just the back-to-back matches that are the toughest on this level. Especially I'm glad I was from Florida so the heat today wasn't nearly like I experience in Florida. It was hot, but not as much as in south Florida.

Q. All week I've been asking players about the future of this tournament. You said out on court you would like to see it stay in Cincinnati. Can you describe what it is about this city that makes this tournament so

special?

COCO GAUFF: I think really the people. The people here are really nice. Obviously the first person I met from Ohio is Caty McNally. She's a native. She's the one who taught me about the Skyline Chili, all of the things. Her brother went to Ohio State. I'm like learning things. She was showing me around. I asked her for some nail places here. I got my nails done.

I just really feel like this is the week before a Grand Slam where you don't want to be somewhere crazy. I got to chill. I think the people just make it outstanding. The locker room staff, they've been so helpful and nice. The food. The cooks here...

Every day the guy was giving me, I don't know if it was a pesto or basil leaf. It was my good luck charm. I would never eat it, but he still gave it to me (laughter). I don't think you're supposed to eat it. Today, yeah, he even came out of his way to give it to me.

It's just like little interactions like that make it worth it as a player. I truly think people see you as a person more here. I think people see me on TV, they just see me on court. Here, they never ask for photos or anything. They really just care. I think that's what it means for me staying in Cincinnati.

Q. You're now 5-1 in finals. Some players get to the final and then struggle to perform with the title on the line. When a title is on the line, what does it do to you?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I don't know. I just think about it as another match. I'm like, Well, worst thing that can happen is I lose. I try not to put too much on it.

Obviously you get nervous, but at the end of the day I try to just think about making the moment as small as possible. Today I was making it as small as possible. Literally before that 5-4 service game, I was just like, You held serve many times, it doesn't matter if it's 1-0 or 5-4, it's pretty much just as important to hold. That's what I was thinking about.

Obviously in the moment, you would rather hold serve at this moment maybe than 1-0 in the first game of the match. That's how you have to trick your mind into making you relax.

Q. You've dealt with a lot of hype, the spotlight for four years plus. Now that you have a 1000 title, there will be a lot of that heaped back on you at the US Open. What have you learned in the last few years



about taking other people's expectations?

COCO GAUFF: Just embracing it but also just focusing on your linear path. I think the biggest thing that I've learned is that everybody's path for you is not what's true, it's not what's going to happen. Even the path that you want for yourself may not happen.

I believe in just, I don't know, you give it your all. That's all you can do. I'm going to give it my all in US Open. If things go great, that's exciting. If not, I go back and work hard and get ready for the next one. That's kind of the mentality you have to have.

I can't control how I play. Today I couldn't control my serve. But that's the thing, for me, I try to tell myself literally the first point, I knew it was going to be a tough match, I was just, Just accept the good with the bad.

I probably double-faulted the most I did in a while. That's accepting the good with the bad, just keep persevering. So that's what I'm going to do in US Open.

I think this match really taught me a lot really just for maybe my whole career.

Q. You've spoken in the past about being from a family of educators. What do you think that has meant to you in terms of your mentality as a tennis player? We saw it after Wimbledon, your hunger to improve. Sometimes that requires a little bit of humility to acknowledge you need to improve. Being surrounded by that energy, does that influence you?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, definitely. I think my parents always, they still want me to, like, do college classes. I've been pushing it off, so I don't know what that's going to entail (laughter). Hopefully they don't see this. Next year, next year. It's been a year (smiling).

No, I think for me, they always express the importance of knowledge. I think in this world today, you can learn so much even not pursuing a higher education. I still 100% support people going to higher education. I still want to do it for myself. I'm just not in the mentality to take that on yet.

Yeah, I think for me as a kid, I always want to improve and get better. Even when I would write essays and get good grades, I was a teacher's pet, to be honest. I always strived to be better. I think that's kind of a social awareness.

Sometimes you think you write a good essay, then you get critiqued on. I think that just teaches me about tennis in general. You think you play a good match, and maybe

your coaches say, You could have did this better, this better. You can't be hard-headed. You can't be stubborn. You have to say, You know what, you're right.

I haven't spoken to my coaches about the match, but I know they're going to say a lot of things. I'm going to accept the things that they say. But my family always stressed the importance of looking for yourself in almost like a 3-D type of view, looking at yourself from the outside, because that's really when you can learn yourself. If you only stay within you, you won't be able to learn. I think that's the biggest thing.

Yeah, my dad told me that college taught him a lot of discipline and stuff, all that. He's instilled that into me. I think I learned that more in tennis, to be honest. But school taught me that I have interests outside of tennis. I think that was the biggest thing that my parents wanted me to continue in school, was because it made me realize I'm much more than a tennis player. That was the biggest learning experience, that I have the potential to be successful in other things outside of tennis.

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