

Internazionali BNL d'Italia

Tuesday, 7 May 2024

Roma, Italia

Coco Gauff

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Coco, welcome back to Rome. How are you feeling ahead of the tournament here?

COCO GAUFF: I'm really happy to be back here in Rome. It's a great city. Just happy to be back at this tournament and hopefully have a good one.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. What has been the primary thing that you've been focusing on in the prep ahead of Rome on the practice court?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, definitely improving the serve. In the short time I feel like it has improved. Other than that, just kind of continuing to build on how I was playing in Madrid.

I felt like off the ground I was playing pretty well. I think just continuing to build on that and make the right decisions.

Q. You mentioned Madrid. I was wondering what your take on the final there was?

COCO GAUFF: I actually only saw the tiebreaker of the final in Madrid. I actually only saw the tiebreaker. The level was, like, really good from the tiebreaker.

But, yeah, I didn't see the whole match, so I can't speak much on it.

Q. Iga, she's obviously one of the favorites here. What is it like playing against her when she gets that momentum, winning sets 6-Love, 6-1? How does that feel being on the other side of the net?

COCO GAUFF: I mean, when you're playing her, you shouldn't worry about the results in the previous matches because every day is a new match and a new opportunity. I think if you play her thinking about her results, then you probably lost the match.

I think for me, I just approach every match as a clean slate. I think it's even more important when you're playing



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against somebody who has done well in the past just because you don't want that to affect how you play.

Q. How hard is that to do, put that all out of your mind?

COCO GAUFF: For me personally, not that hard just because I feel like in the past with the way my career has went, I played a lot of big names early. I think I just got used to separating the name from, I guess, the match. So for me personally, it's not that difficult for that.

Obviously playing Iga herself is difficult. But I guess that aspect doesn't affect me when I'm playing her.

Q. Looking ahead a bit, what importance do you place on the Olympics? How do you place that in terms of the Grand Slams? How difficult was it missing Tokyo?

COCO GAUFF: I didn't understand the first part of the question.

Q. What importance do you place on the Olympics? Where do you place that in terms of the Grand Slams this season?

COCO GAUFF: I mean, for me, the Olympics is a top priority. I would say equal to the Grand Slams. I wouldn't put it above or below just because I've never played before. This is my first time. Obviously, I always want to do well, try to get a medal. Yeah, I mean, but the prep is going to be interesting because I've never done the grass-to-clay transition before.

Yeah, I'm not putting too much pressure on it because I really want to fully indulge in the experience. Hopefully I can have the experience multiple times in my lifetime. I'll treat it as a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Q. How difficult was it missing Tokyo?

COCO GAUFF: It was for the first day or so because it was out of my control. The players made me feel better because they said with the COVID it wasn't the same. I did feel better. I don't know if they were trying to make me feel better about missing it or they were being truthful (smiling).

Q. Question about Challenges, which I know you have

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seen. What did feel the most plausible and implausible bits of the film was?

COCO GAUFF: I thought it was a great movie. I enjoyed the romance and the thruffle situation, the very unique characters. I thought the tennis was done pretty well. Was it 100% perfect? No. But that's every sporting movie.

I thought the actors themselves did a good job. I was expecting it to be not as well done just because of looking at their interviews, they were pretty much downplaying it a lot. I thought overall they did a great job.

I think for me the MVP definitely goes to the people who designed the set. I feel like that was the most accurate when it came to the signage and the logos and all of that. Obviously the acting was incredible and the story was also pretty good.

I think the more you deep dive into the movie, the more enjoyable the movie becomes.

Q. Have you met characters like them in tennis?

COCO GAUFF: I don't know any thruffles going on on tour (laughter). There probably are some, but I'm not in it. I'm not Tashi Duncan [sic]. I don't know any Tashi Duncans [sic].

I did relate to her mentality on the court, not everything going on off the court. I did relate to that of just, like, that. Also there's a part of the movie, I told my boyfriend, Thank God you don't play tennis, because she's right, I would not want to date a scrub on tour (laughter). That's the only relatable part I have about Tashi, otherwise she's not a nice character to how she treated her husband.

Q. I'm writing a piece about rankings. I'm curious, players say they're focused more on trying to develop as players and not looking at the their rankings. When you first came on the tour, how difficult or easy was that to do? Is it, like, easy to attach how you feel you're developing to what the number is next to your name?

COCO GAUFF: For me personally, ranking has never been like a thing for me. I just never look. Even if I did look, I wouldn't care.

I will say maybe like towards the end of the year you're looking at the live ranking to see if you make the WTA Finals.

For me it's more about titles. For sure if you played bad a couple weeks in a row, it does make you feel bad about

yourself. I've never been a player to attach to the ranking. I think it's just I want to do well in tournaments. The ranking comes with that.

I know it is difficult for some people, especially when their ranking moves a lot. Especially when you're on the cusp of getting into main and quallies, I think that's more of a difficult situation than maybe when you're like top 20 and you know you're going to get into everything.

Q. In terms of this week and getting your game shored up for Roland Garros and everything, what will make you happy leaving Rome?

COCO GAUFF: I think for me it's just serving better than I did last week, honestly. I feel like the other parts of my game are very improving in the right direction. I feel like that's the part that if I can work that through, I think it will set me up for a very good Roland Garros.

Other than that, yeah, I feel like I'm returning well, hitting off the ground well. For me, if I can get that part well, I can do well.

I think last week, even though I lost 6-4 in the third, like 14 double-faults. This is like four or five games. I feel if I'm still close in these matches against Maddie, who is like a top player, I think I just fix that detail, it will save me and maybe those matches would turn into winning in straight sets instead of losing in three sets.

Q. A quick question about Rafael Nadal. Coming up to the end of his career. Specifically his last time at the French Open. How do you assess his legacy, especially at that tournament?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, honestly it's very weird for me as a fan to come to terms with just because the majority of my life he's been the Roland Garros winner. Yeah, I mean, I guess it's now hitting.

I think I was in Madrid. It didn't really hit that he was retiring yet. Now when I saw them do the little ceremony after, I was like this is real life, this is for real.

I feel a little bit sad about it because he's definitely one of my favorite players to watch. His mentality and intensity is something I admire. Honestly, he's probably the only player that when I practice on the court next to him, I would literally zone out of my practice to watch him.

I've practiced against - not against - but next to some incredible players on tour. He's the only one that my eye wonders to. No disrespect to other players, but it's something about him and his aura and the intensity in

which he does everything. It's just something to me as a young player to look up to.

Also just the grace he shows. He's a very nice person. I remember last year at Roland Garros, he touched me on the back and said, Hi, good job. I didn't respond like till 20 tiles already down the stairs because I couldn't believe he spoke to me.

I think it's little things like that that I'll miss seeing on tour. The way he carries himself is just great. His legacy is going to be something that is almost, like, unmatched when it comes to just the intensity in which he approaches everything. I think that's something that the players will miss and the fans will miss.

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