

United Cup

Friday, 2 January 2026

Perth, Western Australia, Australia

Team USA

Captain Michael Russell

Taylor Fritz

Mackenzie McDonald

Christian Harrison

Coco Gauff

Varvara Lepchenko

Nicole Melichar-Martinez

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Can you give us your thoughts on coming back here and defending the title?

TAYLOR FRITZ: It's exciting to be back. Obviously we've had a lot of success here in the past, so I think it feels really familiar for me and Coco as well being back in Perth to start the event.

So I think we're just going to try to take things how we did last year.

THE MODERATOR: Coco.

COCO GAUFF: My first year was last year, and obviously it was a successful year. I would love to repeat that. Yeah, like Taylor said, it feels familiar being back here in Perth, and looking forward to starting the year off strong.

THE MODERATOR: We will open it up to questions.

Q. Taylor, your third set win against Hubie last year in United Cup final, was that one of your favorite matches of 2025?

TAYLOR FRITZ: Yeah, it might be. It was a really cool moment to clinch that and kind of just, I guess, the occasion as well, like a third-set tiebreaker.

And for the United Cup, I felt like it was really cool. I think winning in the team events is always more fun, because you have the whole team to kind of celebrate with afterwards.

Q. It may not have got lots of attention, but you led the tour for aces last year. Do you feel like your



serve is still getting better? Can it get better?

TAYLOR FRITZ: I don't know if it's still getting better, but I do think last year was probably my best serving year, for sure. I felt like my serve has kept improving. I don't know if it will keep improving. But yeah, last year was definitely the best year I've had serving.

Q. Mackenzie, last year you've got some great memories obviously from Australia, especially in Melbourne. What do you want to get out of this week, and in general, how much do you enjoy starting the season here in Australia?

MACKENZIE McDONALD: Yeah, I mean, I've always loved coming to Australia. It's pretty fun to be on a team. That's something I always enjoy. So I'm super happy to be representing and helping out how I can.

Yeah, I mean, I've come down here so many times now in my career. I definitely like the conditions. So it's good to start here, for sure. I think it's just going to be a fun week.

Q. Coco, last year obviously in singles you had a lot of success. I think you were perfect 5-0. I guess talking about the team format of this competition kind of, how does it help you to transition to the rest of the year where you are essentially probably playing kind of individual tournaments?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I think for me coming off preseason and being able to start the year in a team environment, it's like the perfect mix of pressure and having fun.

Obviously last year I remember being super nervous, because I didn't want to let anyone down, but I was able to come out of that and do pretty well.

Yeah, I'm hoping to be able to do the same.

Q. Talking about your offseason preparations, how was it as a whole? What were you focusing on specifically heading into this new year?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I think just overall becoming better and more comfortable with my game. Yeah, I spent all my preseason in Florida. Yeah, well-rested and looking forward to this year.

Q. In your singles matches, you have two new



opponents in Solana and Jessica. Talking about them as opponents, what are you looking forward to playing potentially someone new to start the year?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I think it's always tricky playing someone you never played before. So I guess I'll just take it match by match. I haven't really looked forward to Jessica's match next, because it's next.

But for Solana, I know she can serve well. I haven't played her. Feisty player, so I know I have to compete for each point.

Q. Nicole and Varvara, what are you hoping to get out of the week in Perth, and will we see you in doubles here?

NICOLE MELICHAR-MARTINEZ: Yeah, I mean, we're here to be on the team, to play, and to support and do what we can. It's a team environment. We just want to have fun. Obviously, like they said, we're here to do our best and try and win if we can.

VARVARA LEPCHENKO: It's just fun to be on the Team USA and support, again, like the best way we can, and hopefully we're going to win the whole thing.

Q. Coco, a little bit off topic for a second. Would just love to get your thoughts on Venus getting the wild card for the Oz Open?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, she's a legend of the sport, so it will be cool to see her back in action. It's incredible for the longevity of her career that she has. Yeah, she's a legend, one of the people I looked up to, so looking forward to seeing her back on court.

Q. You've got the win over her a couple of times now, but is it still pretty daunting coming up against her if that were to happen?

COCO GAUFF: I mean, she's a legend, so you are never going to underestimate her. It will be funny if I drew her the first round again, because that would be, like, three times. Yeah, I mean, we'll save that if it happens.

Q. Another strong year on tour for you. As you enter 2026, what's the next step in your evolution looking like?

COCO GAUFF: I think just consistency. I would like to go deep in all the slams this year. Yeah, obviously I would like to touch No. 1 ranking. That would be pretty cool. But yeah, I think just being consistent throughout the year.

Q. Taylor, your fourth straight year finishing in the top 10. When you kind of reflect on the last four

years and the road ahead, what do you feel like is the next stage for you? Do you feel like you can narrow the gap between yourself and Jannik and Carlos?

TAYLOR FRITZ: You know, I think over the last four years I feel like I've continued to improve a lot as a player and just a much better tennis player. I think the one thing that I've been noticing now is the body just has to be able to keep up with it.

It's a lot of demand kind of playing so many matches that you do when you are, I guess, a higher-ranked player. There's no question to me that I'm going to keep improving as a player.

But I think the biggest thing ahead of me is I have to stay healthy, and my body has to feel strong like it did my first year in the top 10 in order for me to keep pushing it to the demands of the level of tennis that needs to, I guess, be played to keep up with the very top guys.

Q. Taylor, that was amazing about the aces last year. Is there a trick? Is there a secret sauce as to why you're serving so well?

TAYLOR FRITZ: I think I was returning a lot worse last year, so I had to make up for it with better serving.

Q. And you're a United Cup veteran. USA as a team are so dominant at this tournament. What is it about the United Cup that USA rises for, and how does it set you up for the rest of the year, Taylor?

TAYLOR FRITZ: I think it plays to the strengths of our country. I think we have such amazing women's players. Coco's first year was just last year, and obviously we won it beforehand, as well.

The first year we had it with the top two men and top two women, I think that favors our country even more in that kind of format.

You know, it's great to just feel like we have such a strong team all throughout. For me personally, I've always felt like I play a lot better in the team competitions.

Q. Then Coco, coming to Australia, coming to Perth, and then going over to Sydney and then Melbourne, do you feel like there's a good crowd contingent, a lot of U.S. compatriots or U.S. people coming out to support you?

COCO GAUFF: I'll be honest, no. I feel like we're definitely, in the tennis department, the worst when it comes to that. So I've always said I wish our country in other places would show up throughout the world as we see maybe smaller countries support.

But I also think it's just because of our country is good in so many sports, so it's just hard.

Yeah, I definitely think there are Americans that come out more in Melbourne than necessarily here, but I would like to see some more Americans, if we make it to Sydney, in Sydney than there were last year.

Q. If there's less U.S. support, do you feel like you're, despite being a top-seeded team, almost underdogs when it comes to playing?

COCO GAUFF: No, because we're the No. 1 seed, so there's no underdog in that standpoint. Yeah, we played Poland last year, and the stadium was still pretty rowdy. I think maybe necessarily if they're not Americans, I do think we get a lot of support from people who are just fans of us that may not be from U.S.

But, yeah, I would like to see a little bit more red, white, and blue in the stands in these team competitions.

Q. When it comes to your preparation before games, before tournaments like the Oz Open or even the United Cup, how far in advance do you look at your opponents, or do you live in the moment and just that next match? Or have you got an eye to maybe even watching Sabalenka or those top tennis players as you're heading in towards a big tournament?

COCO GAUFF: For me personally, I just look the next match. I always say, you know, you got to win the match before you get there, and then you worry about that later.

Tennis is one of those sports that one week can change your season. So a player can be playing like this one week and the next play unbelievable. Yeah, I think for me I just like to look one match in advance.

I always watch tennis. I love watching tennis. I'm watching it on a fan standpoint. Not necessarily always scouting.

Q. Who is your favorite tennis player to watch at the moment?

COCO GAUFF: I mean, Jannik and Carlos are pretty fun to watch. I like watching Daniil just because you never know what he'll do on the court.

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