

Australian Open

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Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Coco Gauff

Press Conference



C. GAUFF/C. Dolehide

7-6, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Coco, congrats on the win. Tough first set. How did it feel to get that over the line against Caroline today?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, it was a tough match. She's a tough opponent. She plays big, pretty much, on every shot.

Yeah, I think for the most part, I had the lead. I think I should have just kept serving and putting my foot on the gas pedal.

I think I transferred that into the second set. Not my best tennis, but, you know, a lot of improvement to look at for the next matches.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. In terms of, did you change tactics at all between the first set and second set in terms of how you wanted to play? Once you had the lead it seemed like going to the net, moving forward, seemed to be happening more in the second than maybe the first.

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I told myself I needed to be more aggressive, because she was just running me around the court, especially using her forehand.

You know, for the first couple games, she was making more errors, so I was just, you know, putting it in play. Then she started to make them and play smarter and go for bigger targets. It started to get difficult, so I knew I needed to be on the offensive end if I wanted to win the match. I tried, started to play, aiming deeper, I was okay with missing long, and also coming in, especially when I had her on the wrong foot.

Q. Speaking of playing big, playing Alycia next who has the ability to play pretty big. What's your familiarity with her in terms of, I know she's a couple years older than you, but how long have you known her? Did you play at all growing up? Have you played much in this phase of your life?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah. I have known her for a long time, since I was, like, maybe like 9 years old. Used to practice with her and her sister. We both lived in Delray Beach, or, like, in that area. Yeah, I know her very well. I always refer her -- obviously not for the next match.

She has a big game, big serve, big shots, very athletic. I think she's one of the most, if not "the" most at one of the athletic players on tour. Like me, her, Sloane, and Iga are probably up there and Sakkari. And there is more I'm probably missing. Those would be, like, my top 5. She's like up there.

Yeah, it's going to be a tough match. I don't expect it to be easy. I've never played her actually since that age other than the mixed doubles we had at US Open, but I've never played her in practice or anything. We're both going in, you know, not blind because we obviously watched each other but never hit or anything.

It's going to be a tough match. She's a great player, and I always knew she was going to do well on tour. It was just a matter of when it was all going to align. I think now it's starting to align.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the very last game of the match. There was so much back-and-forth, you had match points, breakpoints. I can imagine it was pretty, like, tough mentally. How did you do to pull yourself out of that and just take on the match?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I think the aggressive serving was the big thing that I needed to do to get out of that game. Also, you know, it's a pressure game, but I also knew that the pressure was more on her, because, you know, if I lose that game, I have a chance to break back or also serve again for it. Obviously I wanted to win it there, but I think just giving yourself a mindset of, like, this isn't life or death, makes it a little bit more relaxed to play.

Again, she started going big. You know, sometimes it works; sometimes it didn't that game. But I think the serving got me out of that.

Q. You mentioned before there is room for improvements. You haven't dropped a set yet, but if you had to say one element or one area where you would really like to make improvements going forward, what would that be?



COCO GAUFF: I think I can be more aggressive. You know, which is tough, because, you know, this match I played someone who plays pretty aggressive, heavy. She plays like a guy almost, using the slice.

But I feel like I was too much on the back foot in the first set. So I think I can play more aggressive and be more sure of my shots and hitting def. I think I put too many balls in the service box in the first set, and that's why she was able to dictate the points. Yeah, I definitely can play more aggressive.

Serving, I think I got broken, what, twice, yeah, twice the first set. So when I'm in the lead, I would like to continue to be aggressive serving, which is what got me the lead.

So, yeah, serving and just being more aggressive. That's just a mindset thing. I know I have the game to do it. I just have to believe in it.

Q. Is it especially challenging to make yourself more aggressive? Because you're particularly good, as you said, at running around the court and you're athletic, during the US Open, that refrain of, Make it physical, Coco. We all kept hearing that from the box. So does that become a challenge when you can do this thing quite well but you know you need to do that thing?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, it can be, depending on the opponent. Today she was making a lot of errors early on, so sometimes when you're playing an opponent like that, your first thought is to just make her keep playing because you know she's going to miss.

I think I kind of -- not forgot -- but leaned into just making balls, and really she was missing in the first couple games because I was being aggressive and hitting deep and not necessarily just because she's error-prone. Yeah, I feel like for me it's making that more of a plan B, defensive thing. Obviously there is going to be some opponents where they only can hit and not really, you know, feel the court out. Then there is going to be some where you need to be aggressive from the first ball whenever you have the chance.

Today I think that was one of the things I needed to do, which I did do in the second set.

Q. I think you have the two fastest serves on the women's side so far in the tournament. I think Alycia is right behind you. We obviously talked a lot about it in your other press conferences, the serve. If you take the mental side of the serve out of it, how natural is that motion for you throughout your career, like, when you first started serving when you were younger? Like, how much tinkering has it gone under or was it just toss it up and hit it? Can you

give a little insight into that.

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I would say not that much tinkering. Like, there is small things that I change, which not really, like, I didn't ever have to do big changes in the serve. Like, I've always had a sound motion. It's more so, you know, keeping the left arm up, things that I can change in a second, which doesn't feel off. I have never had to go through, like, a big motion change or anything like that. So it has been pretty natural.

And the speed, I've always been able to get up there. Again, it's just a serving mentality. I think a small adjustment I made with Andy helped me be more consistent with the serve. That got me out of that last game, hitting those big aces or big body serves or even the slider Y. When I'm playing like that, it's tough as an opponent because they don't know where the serve is going to go. You know, sometimes I can serve it slower and sometimes it can come really fast.

I think just continuing to be variety and not so much get into one zone is when I'm serving my best.

Q. Do you remember when the first time was when you cracked a serve, whether when you were a kid, juniors, or whatever, you're like, Wow, that's fast?

COCO GAUFF: I think when I got on tour, actually, because when I got on tour, I noticed when I was really serving, like, I was serving faster than a lot of the girls on tour, which, like, I was 15, so I wasn't expecting that. So, yeah, I would say when I got on tour.

When you're in juniors they don't have the serve clock, but definitely I would say the first year on tour I was getting high 110s or low 120s even at that age, and then sometimes on the changeovers they show like the serve speed leaders. I would always be on the list.

I think when I got on tour is when I really realized how fast I can get it. Now I don't need to get it much faster. I mean, I would love to get maybe 130 just to try to get that, but, you know, 128, 130, I don't think it would make much of a difference. As long as I can keep hitting my spots.

Q. You're playing two big servers back to back. Your return, how has that shot developed over the years? How much time do you spend on it? Last year I was talking to a lot of male players, and Frances even said they barely practice it.

COCO GAUFF: Wow. I actually practice a lot on it. One of the reasons why is because when I used to see Serena practice, she would spend like hours or a whole practice almost on her returns, which is why she's such an incredible returner.

Yeah, playing today with the big server and then obviously the next round I'm going to play a big server, I think just putting the return in makes such a big difference, whether it's a great return or not. Obviously you want to rip them, but today I knew going into the match I wasn't probably going to be that many rips at it, just because her first and second serve is really good and it bounces really high. I started the match serving bad. I'm probably going to have to do that the next match.

I do spend a lot of time on it. Serve and returns I think are one of the most important shots in tennis, because it starts the point and it, you know, sets you up. For me, I try to spend, like, equal amount on serve and returning. I think my returns are something that's improved over the years, and hopefully I can keep improving them.

Q. Has anything changed since you first came on the tour and started facing big serves? Have you, like, moved back or tried to shorten your swing or anything like that?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, both. I think I realized, from juniors you're playing most of the time girls who don't serve that big so I was used to standing inside the baseline and ripping and doing a lot of that. Then you start playing, you know, grown women who can actually serve and serve really hard and consistently hard, and you can't stand inside and rip. Sometimes it's not as pretty of a shot when you get it, like, return it middle or deep or whatever, not as pretty as like a clean winner but it's necessary.

Yeah, I think just playing with a serve position is what I like to do. Sometimes I'm back; sometimes I'm up. Today I was mostly back, and there is matches sometimes I'm mostly up. It just depends on the server.

Yeah, definitely shortening the swing. I've watched a lot of Novak because I want to return like him. He's probably the best returner. Yeah, he definitely is. I want to return like him. If you look at his swings on the returns, it's not like full cuts. It's a lot shorter and abbreviated to when he actually hits.

I realize when you're serving, someone is serving hard, you can just use their pace against them. I think that's the model. Sometimes it's not always easy, but that's something I feel like is what I work on and practice on a lot.

But Frances should practice his returns (smiling). He's a pretty good returner, but, you know, you can always get better (smiling).

Q. Can you compare not playing at a home slam? Is it a completely different experience here? I imagine it's a little more chill for you.

COCO GAUFF: Oh, yeah, definitely more chill. You can even see in the press room, there's only a couple of you guys here, whereas US Open it was full. Definitely more chill.

I mean, look, I love talking to you guys. I see you pretty much every slam, which is great. You guys always ask good questions.

It's definitely more chill. I like it. The crowd support is different, for sure. The last matches obviously I have been more the favorite in the crowd but it's not like the New York crowd. But I like Australian Open, and I like the chill vibes here. I feel less stress here.

Just walking around in Melbourne, I don't really get recognized that much, which is nice. Just walking to dinner, you know, maybe one or two people notice, and yeah, it's something that I appreciate a lot.

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