

Australian Open

Tuesday, 23 January 2024

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Coco Gauff

Press Conference



C. GAUFF/M. Kostyuk

7-6, 6-7, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Coco, just give us your reflections on the match and getting through to the semifinals here in Melbourne.

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, it was a fight. I think today was definitely a C game, so didn't play my best tennis but really proud that I was able to get through today's match. Hopefully got the bad match out of the way and I can play even better.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Thank you for sharing that routine that you have before the game. What other routines you got and is there a particular one in Melbourne you'd like to share with us?

COCO GAUFF: I mean, the only thing I've been doing consistently is playing card games every night with my parents. Done that every day.

Prematch, just eat and listen to music. Yeah, that's about the only -- I'm not a superstitious person. I don't have a complete ritual. I just go with the flow and go with the feeling.

Q. You mentioned the other day that on your shoes is the coordinates of the public courts where you started playing in Florida. You also went to France as a young kid. Curious, with all the academies and stuff in Florida, what made you want to go to France and train with people from Europe?

COCO GAUFF: Patrick Mouratoglou. I mean, he was coaching Serena Williams at the time, and she was my idol. It wasn't really a decision -- like, I got invited over there when I was 10. It wasn't like I made the decision. It was just, you know, my parents, they got presented this great opportunity to go for a week and all expenses paid for. I had never left the country.

Yeah, then went to Paris for a week and we did this process called Champ'seed. It didn't feel, it was not an auditioning but I guess in a way, and he just picked the

best of the best to kind of help fund our careers essentially. There's a couple other players that came out of that. Off the top of my head, Holger Rune was one of them and the Fruhvirtova sisters and others.

That program kind of just exposed me to different ways to play. Probably would have never had red clay experience if it wasn't going there.

Then with Florida, I only was at an academy, it was not even a big one, but it was called Sly Black Tennis Academy, and he actually lives in Thailand now but he was my childhood coach. Then I went to Gerard Loglo Tennis Academy, another small academy. So I never did like the big academies outside of going to Mouratoglou maybe six to eight weeks out of the year.

I didn't want to commit -- or my parents didn't want me to commit me to spending full time there because I still had a family at home and friends at home so they didn't want to disrupt my life, which I think was the best decision.

Q. When you were 5-1 down in the first set, what went through your mind? At what point did you feel like you were able to take control of the match?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I was playing not great. I was just missing everything on both wings and not serving well. I was just trying to win one extra game (smiling).

Yeah, that was really the one thing. I was just, like, let me make it competitive. Obviously sometimes when you're down 5-1 you're not expecting to win the set. I believe every point, every game matters, and eventually the score started to get closer.

Yeah, then I was back on serve. Yeah, I was just fighting as much as possible. I know going in, playing her, it's a tough match. She's pretty athletic, and we kind of play similar. I think today she was just more offensive, which I wish I was taking the offense from the beginning.

Q. I know you have said before with regards to the WTA in Saudi Arabia you wouldn't want to say anything because rumors are not set in stone.

COCO GAUFF: Yep.

Q. Do you hope and think that you the players will



have the opportunity to privately maybe have input on that decision before it is set in stone? It feels like once a decision is made, then to an extent what's said publicly doesn't necessarily make a difference.

COCO GAUFF: I think the WTA, I've noticed probably Cancun, they're trying to take more steps of communicating with the players about certain decisions. And part of the reason why they didn't go to Saudi last year for the Finals was they didn't have time to -- they wanted to make sure the messaging was correct.

I feel like if we go there, I feel like we have the opportunity to make change. Hopefully, you know, I know the situation there isn't great. Definitely don't support the situation there, but I hope that if we do decide to go there, I hope that we're able to make change there and improve the quality there and engage in the local communities and make a difference.

Yeah, and there hasn't been a decision made about Saudi, and so I can't really speak much of that. But I will say that they are trying to at least communicate with the players more. I don't know if we have, like, you know, a final say or decision-making but at least we're getting in the conversations. I do appreciate the effort to change and include us more so we do know more what's going on. At the end of the day, the WTA was founded by players. So, yeah.

Q. During your US Open run last year you praised your problem-solving ability during matches when you had to fight your way back in. How important was that today in the first set?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, it was really important. Today was frustrating because I knew how I needed to play. I just couldn't execute. Eventually I was able to find it, which is what I'm proud of.

But, yeah, problem-solving is tennis. You know, you could play someone today and maybe a week later they'll play you completely different. It's a part of it. At the end of the day you're given a scouting report but you have to go with feeling and try your best to win.

That's what I did today.

Q. You mentioned C game. Did you have a sense of it when you were warming up that something was off or was it once the match started it was hard to find what you wanted to do, weren't being able to execute, I guess?

COCO GAUFF: No, I mean, when I warmed up in the prematch earlier this morning I was hitting good. I was, like, serving good. I actually felt really good.

Then when I went on court and then I had two

breakpoints in the first game, so I still, you know, felt good. Then I don't know where it all, like, happened, to be honest. So, yeah, it wasn't something that I felt this morning or even in the warmup or even in, like, the five-minute warmup before. It kind of just happened. I felt like I was going for shots that I normally make and was missing and missing by, like, a lot, not even close.

So I think that was, like, frustrating. But I'm, like, again, just glad I was able to get through today.

Q. Coco, your mum caught the ball at one stage. Wondered if you saw it and if she's still celebrating.

COCO GAUFF: I did not see it. I heard somebody in the crowd say mom caught it or something. I got the gist of what happened.

Then I saw the video of her celebrating. I was, like, it wasn't that hard of a ball to catch. You know, celebrate your little wins (smiling).

Yeah, she was really happy with that. I mean, I'm sure you guys have seen from US Open videos she likes to celebrate in crazy ways. If it's just catching a ball, whatever makes her happy. Her son is a catcher, she should make that.

Q. Since the US Open win, you've gone from being the hunter to the hunted. Have you noticed any change in that regard? Have you sort of approached matches differently or just been the same old?

COCO GAUFF: No, I don't really approach matches differently. But yeah, there is definitely a change in just the energy. I mean, you do feel like you're the one to beat and I feel like people step on court and they play more free and want to play -- not want to play, everybody wants to play best games every day -- but play their best games because there's no pressure.

Yeah, I definitely feel a little change. But also, at the same time, like, not really, because when I was young, nobody wanted to lose to, like, a 15-year-old, so I felt people played really hard too.

Yeah, definitely, I remember being in that position, too, when I was underdog and you just play free. Yeah, it's always, I think there's a quote, it's not easy to get to the top, but easier to get to the top but harder to stay there.

The goal is to stay here as long as possible and keep going upwards. I mean, I'm not at the top but I'm up there.

Q. There has been talk in the last year or so about merging the WTA and the ATP. Wondering where you stand on that. Do you think it would maybe be a good way of boosting prize money in the women's

tour for non-Grand Slam tournaments?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I definitely think it would help women, especially the women's side of the game. I find that when I'm at combined events I just feel like the energy amongst the crowd is better. For most of the events it's equal prize money when they're combined. Yeah, definitely will help our side of the game.

Yeah, and I just feel like I generally enjoy when both men and women are at the same tournaments just because I have also friends on the guys' side. Not even money-wise, it would just be more fun for me as a player around the grounds.

Yeah, I definitely think it would help us a lot. Hopefully one day it could be a possibility.

Q. Wondering if you have read "Winning Ugly." And if you could talk about Barbora or Aryna.

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I bought a copy but I didn't read it. Maybe I should add it to my reading list. Yeah, I did buy one, and I didn't -- when, like, my mom actually got it for me when we were in the talks of just possibly working with Brad and she was like, You need to read this. She read it and I didn't read it. But, you know, I feel like I got the real version so I don't need a book. But maybe it could help. I'll probably do it just to surprise him.

Yeah, for Barbora, I haven't played her in a long time, I believe. I can't remember the last time but it's been a while. She's obviously been in this position before, and I think she's a really smart player. We always see her, like, watching matches live and paying attention. I think she's probably one of the smartest players on tour, and when she's on, she's a tough player to beat.

Obviously Aryna, always a tough match with her. I think she's playing well this tournament. Yeah, obviously that US Open final was tough.

Yeah, I think either way it's going to be a tough match. I think these are the later stages of a Grand Slam, and for both of them, I think they're in good form.

Q. You're three for three from Grand Slam semifinals. Does that give you confidence heading into these big matches?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I think definitely being in the semis a couple of times before definitely doesn't make it -- obviously it's a big achievement and a big deal, but I think just when you have the experience, you don't feel like it's your last time ever reaching this. You want to play like it's your last time, I guess, because you don't want to take advantage of the moment, but also just feel like you can do it again.

Yeah, I think, I mean, I didn't even know that was the record, so hopefully I can make it four for four. If not, I guess I'll have to go back to the drawing board.

It does give me confidence knowing that at least in that stage of a Grand Slam that my nerves are usually settled. Hopefully I can go out there and be settled.

Q. A simple question. In your words, what are, in your opinion, your super strengths as a player?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I think for me definitely my movement. When my serve is on, I think my serve is a big weapon for me. Same with returns. I didn't return that well today, but usually I do well with that.

I think just my mental strength. I think that's gotten me through a lot of matches, and I feel like mentally I'm one of the strongest out there, and I try my best to reset after each point.

Yeah, I think those are my strengths that I can think of right off the top of my head.

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