

US OPEN

Wednesday, August 30, 2023

New York, New York, USA

Coco Gauff

Press Conference

C. GAUFF/M. Andreeva

6-3, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Straight sets. A very efficient hour and 16 minutes. Give us your assessment of your performance this afternoon.

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I'm really happy with how I played. Last time I played her, we had a longer match. Split sets. So today I was really trying to take advantage of when I was in the lead and continuing to be aggressive.

I'm happy I was able to get it in straight sets. Not a long match like the three hours last match. Saved myself some time today.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. What is your aggression level? Is that one of the things I guess you learned from that three-set match that you had to attack and put her on the back foot?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I learned a lot from that match. Also, it's two completely different opponents. The way Laura played made it very hard to be aggressive. She's hitting slices that are bouncing really low.

On TV it looks like when the slice comes it looks slow but when you're actually playing the ball's really low so it's not as easy to be as aggressive as you want. She was also coming in a lot which I obviously didn't plan for that. I didn't find my game plan until the last two sets and that showed I was playing better.

Then today, I mean, honestly it was tough to be aggressive too on Mirra because she can rip some backhands down the line and everything. But I think I was just trying my best to get her to the corners and not letting her control the court.

Q. Novak Djokovic is playing now, and you put on a Djokovic-like performance today against a really top player and how you had to deal with her at Roland



Garros and she played at a real high level. Yet you still routined her. Can you talk about how comfortable you've gotten sliding on this surface? When did you start feeling that you were comfortable being able to slide, particularly on the backhand side?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, it's not something I think about, to be honest. Maybe something that, I don't know if I've done it my whole life. It's not something that I've tried to work on or learn. So it came naturally. I'm assuming it's something I just learned as a kid.

I do know when I was learning how to play on red clay when I was super young in Europe at Mouratoglou Academy they were teaching me how to slide on clay but not necessarily on hard.

I think it's something as a last resort on hard court you can use. I don't think sliding is the best thing all the time but it definitely helps you a lot when you're getting to those balls where you probably don't have enough time to do that extra step.

Somebody who I look up to a lot movement-wise is definitely Novak and definitely Carlos. I think they're both people that are seating their fill when it comes to -- well, obviously the tennis, but obviously physically and footwork-wise. It's something I'm trying to work on.

I do think I have the athleticism as them -- not like the same as them -- but compared to my field. So I'm hoping I can continue to learn by watching them. I was watching Alcaraz last night.

Q. You hit the Milly Rock dance when you won in D.C. This is home of Milly Rock, at least in Brooklyn. Is that your favorite dance to do of the mini dances right now?

COCO GAUFF: I don't know why I did that. I just was like walking back, and I was like, I don't know, I want to do something funny so I decided to do that.

Then when I won in Cincinnati I was trying to think of another dance to do, but all the other ones just seem so outdated. I wasn't going to pull out a Whip/Nae Nae, like, no. So the Milly came again. Hopefully if I win here I'll definitely pull it out again.



Q. You talked in D.C. about the old playbook against you. I'm wondering, during this stretch, have you found opponents not doing that and adjusting the way they face you? In general have you seen that, I guess? Today though did it feel like she was going to the old playbook?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, she probably watched the match back that we played in French Open, or her team did at least. Yeah, in that match I definitely -- and it was also different surface so I was using the high heavy a little bit more so than I was today.

Yeah, I mean, things have improved. That's for sure. I think that the way opponents are playing me, some play me different, some don't. And so honestly it just depends on the day.

I still have to improve a lot on both wings, to be honest. Yeah, but I definitely think that, you know, I've noticed that sometimes people do get frustrated with their team when, like, that happens. You'll see sometimes back and forth, I don't know if they pick it up on camera.

Yeah, it's definitely something I've improved on. I think that's just part of learning. I recognize it was a weakness and I try my best to improve it, and I still need to improve it. Yeah.

Q. If I could follow up on the back and forth. You mean as you're having success with your forehand in a match?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah.

Q. And you'll see them talk to their...

COCO GAUFF: I don't know if that's the discussion that's going on. But, you know, it is frustrating sometimes. Like I was doing it with my team against, like, Laura. She didn't play the way that they had prepared me for. Yeah, so it's frustrating (smiling).

But that's when you have to, you know, play your B plan. That's why me, I had a feeling she was going to play the way that she played me but she didn't play that way in quallies. So, yeah, it just goes about how you adapt in the matches.

Obviously you can have a scouting report, but like I said, the player can show up and play completely different than how they played other players. That's what happened in my previous round. Today I would say not so much.

Q. A moment ago you spoke of looking up to Novak and Carlos. How much have you seen them play this year? What are your thoughts on their level of play and their rivalry?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah. I saw the French Open match and I saw the Wimbledon final. I did not see the whole Cincinnati final because I was flying home the same time as the final. So I missed the match live. I saw bits and pieces from it but I didn't see the whole thing.

Yeah, I can't remember when they played again, but I saw most of their matchups. Obviously I watch them a lot when they're playing other people.

The thing I've learned the most is how they're able to handle the situations when they're not playing their best tennis. For instance, Carlos in Cincinnati, he was losing a set every match pretty much and he wasn't playing his best, that was clear. I don't know. The way that he was still smiling, for me, against Hubi Hurkacz and he was down a set and a break or something like that, I don't know, he was down crazy or down match points. He was still smiling.

I was, like, if he can smile, he's No. 1 in the world and he has all this pressure, he's supposed to beat Hubi on paper, then I can do it in situations maybe where, most of the time now I'm not the underdog, but against, for example, like Iga or Sabalenka, those where I'm considered the underdog on paper, I can smile too.

I think I learned the most about their joy in matches and how I can transfer that. Because I have a lot of joy in me but I just seem to bottle it up when I play. Now I'm really just having fun and laughing and smiling, and I think it's making tennis more enjoyable.

Q. What's the experience to watch it when they play against each other?

COCO GAUFF: Oh, it's incredible. The limits of the game, to be honest. They're breaking the limits of tennis.

You know, as you watch the generations of tennis, everybody in their generation, you know, thinks, for me watching, I'm like, man, 30 years from now, you know how you watch tapes from 40 years ago, they're not playing bad but the level is definitely different, and I'm watching the matches and I'm like, I don't know how, like, 40 years from now how the level can be really so exceed this.

I think it's peak tennis, to be honest. Not just their matchups. I've watched Novak play against Roger, Rafa, those two, it's just peak tennis. I don't know. It's crazy, it's

a one-in-a-generation type of thing, and Novak is a one-in-a-generation type of player, and so is Carlos, and they're playing each other on two different spectrums. I don't know. I can talk about this all day. It's really cool.

Q. You mentioned before about sort of talking to the team when you're frustrated, the tactics aren't working either against you or what's happening to you. How much do you say, Okay, I actually expect an answer if I'm yelling up to the coach or I'm just really mad and I'm saying something? When it's happening on the other side of the court, what do you think when you're watching other players do it? Are you thinking, I hope I'm not acting like that or do I look like that too or is it just natural?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I think for me sometimes it's just letting out frustration. Yesterday or the -- my days are confused -- two days ago, I was like, man, what am I doing? They finally told me maybe I should lob her a little bit more because she was coming in. Honestly, the lob is not something, I don't know, it's not something I practice. It came out.

Like I always call my lob the shot that it works in the matches but I never make it in practice, but most of the times in the matches I make it. So that's like my shot. I don't know. Maybe it comes from doubles.

When those frustrations happen, it's just like built-up tension. Sometimes it's not even directed at my team. My team knows that some of the things I say isn't directed at them. I don't say anything terrible, don't get me wrong. I'm like, The plan is not working, I'll say that.

But also I'm a player and I have to figure it out for myself. Coaching wasn't allowed for a long time so I shouldn't rely completely on them. I think I trust my ability and able to adapt. That's what I did.

Q. Jimmy Butler came to watch you today.

COCO GAUFF: Oh, he was here? Oh, shout-out to him.

Q. You didn't see him?

COCO GAUFF: No. Well, I'm on the court.

Q. He was courtside.

COCO GAUFF: No, man, I was looking at the ball (smiling).

Q. He said on television he's a big fan of yours and obviously playing in Miami.

COCO GAUFF: Uh-huh.

Q. Makes that connection. Has he given you any advice throughout your career? What's that connection been like?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I mean, he's given me, like, the generic, like keep working hard, everything. Him and my mom spoke for a long time three or four days ago when he was here for the practices. Yeah, I asked her what he said obviously because I want to know. He was like, yeah, he can really see the joy in me again in playing and enjoying the competition, and that I should continue to do that.

And then watching him, you know, I learned a lot watching him, you know, everybody counting him out. I don't think anybody when he was playing college would have thought he would have been the player he is today leading a franchise to the NBA Finals, and happy he's leading. It's my franchise that I support.

He has that mentality really of, you know, no matter what the odds are against him, he's gonna give it his all. He pretty much helped the Heat. Without him we wouldn't have been in the Finals, and he did that during the COVID year and again.

I think he's just one of those athletes the mentality makes his game even better. You have people that are talented and don't have the mentality. I think he has the talent and the mentality. It's just taking him even further. That's something I learned from.

And honestly, that's part of the reason I would say that switch I had in the last couple weeks. I mean, people think some incredible thing happened. But realistically between two weeks or between Wimbledon and the next tournament I played nothing could have really changed that much. It was really just the mental thing. I think that's what I learned from watching Jimmy compete over the years.

Q. There are some players who only think about themselves when they are on the court and they think that if they play their best they can beat anyone. Whereas you talk a lot about your tactics and how they change based on opponents and stuff. I'm curious how your problem-solving abilities, how they have developed over your career and how you feel about the aspect of your game now.

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, I think I have always done a good job of adapting to players and having a plan. I do think having the team that I have, the plan is a little bit clearer.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

But I have done, you know, over the years a good job with that.

Obviously maturity plays a part into it. The more matches you have, the more experience you have. I think that was honestly, like, today, I think, you know, Mirra, she's going to be a great player, I think with the more matches she has, the more experience she has. I really see myself in her.

These matches are tough. So I told her, like, she's playing good at the net. Keep doing up. I think for me that adjustment just happened a lot with age and also with, you know, the new team and just hearing new things.

So I don't know. I think today that just reminded me, I don't know, playing a younger person just reminded me how far I have come and I should be proud of myself. That process is necessary and those losses are necessary for growth.

Q. This year marks the third time that the US Open is having its HBCU Live celebration. What are your thoughts on this new tradition?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, it was really cool. I saw today, I didn't know they were having it today on my court. It was really cool.

I mean, my family pretty much grew up, like, in HBCUs. My cousins go to Bethune Cookman. I have gone to the Classic for -- I mean, I haven't been able to go now because of my tennis, but when I was younger I would go to FMU and Bethune Classic. Every single year it was a family trip that we made.

If I were to go to college, and I still want to, you know, at least online, in-person is not possible at this point, but I always said it had to be an HBCU. I always said, you know, if tennis didn't take the route that it took I would have 100% would have wanted to go to an HBCU.

The HBCUs are important, and having spaces where Black people can feel free to be creative and live their life is important. Having these spaces are important. If you look at the way that HBCUs started and the historical context behind it it's pretty incredible how far we have come and becoming one of the top institutions in the country.

I'm so happy that US Open is celebrating this, and there are a lot of tennis players going to HBCUs and are playing tennis. A lot of my friends are playing for HBCUs, and I think it's really incredible US Open is highlighting that.

They also do a couple other events. I know they have Pride Day coming up too. Not all the tournaments do it, but I think for it being in New York City, it's really important,

because the crowd here, when I look into the crowd, it's like no other tournament.

It's very diverse. You see people of all shades watching tennis. I think if we highlight that, you know, maybe one person can see themselves in that and hopefully be on this stage many years in the future. So I hope that they continue to have this celebration, and I'm really proud that I was able to play on it today.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

