

# US OPEN

Tuesday, September 5, 2023

New York, New York, USA

## Coco Gauff

### Press Conference

C. GAUFF/J. Ostapenko

6-0, 6-2

**THE MODERATOR:** Straight sets, one hour and eight minutes, dominating first set. What were you telling yourself in the changeover, which was a little longer, after that first set?

**COCO GAUFF:** Just stay on her and that it's a new match. You know, playing Jelena you know that 6-0 set quite literally means nothing. Which that's tennis in general because there's two out of three. I feel like that means even more nothing against her. Honestly, I wouldn't lie, I am surprised by, not I guess the result but how the match went today. I'm happy with how I was able to stay in it.

**THE MODERATOR:** Questions.

**Q. You talked about how you were surprised a little bit maybe kind of how the result was going. I'm curious whether you noticed, and she kind of runs hot and cold anyway as a player, were you sensing her frustration either with the heat and conditions or just with her inability to hit the way she normally would?**

**COCO GAUFF:** Yeah, I mean, for sure. I mean, anytime you beat someone 6-0, especially her, I noticed her timing or something wasn't working. But I've also played her twice. This was the third time. It was a similar way in Australia where I went up a break in the first set and then lost that set. So today when I went up to the break, I was just trying to tell myself to stay on her.

You know, I don't know if the heat really played a factor or not, because the match was, you know, short. I do think if it was a longer match, I think it would have favored me even more.

But yeah, I definitely could tell that she was a little bit frustrated with her performance today.

**Q. Deepest run you've had at a Grand Slam since Paris last year, and obviously deepest run here. What**



**did you learn from that experience in Paris last year in terms of, you know, managing the situation, especially the attention and the emotions and your energy heading into these final few days? How will you put that to effect in this experience, do you think?**

**COCO GAUFF:** I learned that, you know, there's still a lot of tennis left to play, and it's a long match and a long tournament. You know, even though the semifinals, by theory, if you want to win there's two matches left. You can't think like that.

I'm still in the mindset that I'm in the beginning of the tournament. I think that's what I have learned, you know, in the past of being in quarterfinals, before I would think, you know, close to the end, but right now I have the mentality that I told myself I still have another two weeks to play. So that's where my mind is at.

Then obviously when it's over, it's over. But right now I'm just saying another two weeks. And also, I think what's helping is playing from D.C. to Montreal to Cincinnati, that was a long type of swing. So I think doing well in those tournaments built my mental endurance. Always had the physical endurance but it built my mental endurance.

Right now I feel emotionally fresh, which I think was the problem in the past in Grand Slams, I would emotionally be drained. Obviously I'm physically fresh and emotionally fresh, and I think that just came from experience.

I think this is one of the harder runs I've had to the quarterfinal stage. Obviously never got to semis, but I don't know, I just feel so fresh, to be honest. I don't know if it's because I've been tricking myself or maybe when this is over I'm going to hit a wall. But I'm really proud of how I'm able to get through these matches.

**Q. How would you describe the role your parents are playing now in this new team configuration? How much of an adjustment is it for you as a family when you bring new people in and maybe their roles have changed?**

**COCO GAUFF:** Yeah, I think for me my parents have continued to be my advocates. You know, when you're working with a team that you just met, well, now they know me well, but I guess in the beginning, yeah, my parents



would have to explain to them what works with me, what doesn't. You know, I have to explain, I'm still learning to speak up and say things that I don't like and do like. Just from being coached my whole life, being young, I've just been used to saying yes, yes, yes, even in situations where I wanted to say no.

The more I think that I'm having this new environment, the more I've been comfortable with communicating with my team.

Then my parents, I mean, they're just really my support system. They're helping me remember, you know, my clothes and everything, and my dad is still sending me scouting reports for every match. But my mom is more so, you know, just being mom. My dad just being dad other than the scouting report part.

**Q. You're the first American teenager to get to the semifinals here since Serena Williams in 2001. Just wondering when you hear your name in a sentence with hers and your accomplishments begin to add up, what does that mean to you?**

**COCO GAUFF:** Oh, it means a lot to me. I mean, being in any sentence with her is great. I mean, she's the greatest player of all time. You know, I'm nothing close to that yet. I'm just really honored to be in the same sentence as her.

It's something that I'm used to a lot. So, you know, I'm not going to sit here and be like, Oh, I'm shocked, but I feel like a lot of the stats have aligned with her, and people find new things to think about. I was the first teenager in the quarters and now semis, so I'm guessing if I win they're going to be, like, finals. It's just going to keep going.

Like I said, I never take it for granted. She's my idol. I think if you told me when I was younger that I would be in these same stat lines as her, I would freak out.

I'm still trying not to think about it a lot, because I don't want to get my head big or add pressure, but it is a cool moment to have that stat alongside her.

**Q. You talked about feeling emotionally and physically fresh. How surprised are you that you have been able to do what you have since D.C. but also having as much fun as you have had? Because you've been a lot more kind of open with crowds and more seemingly accepting of the energy and what all this brings.**

**COCO GAUFF:** Yeah, honestly, you know, I wish I embraced the fun parts a little bit sooner.

I think, you know, just sometimes the way that the

structure, not even just the tour, just like sports in general you feel like you have to be, especially individual sports, you don't have the one teammate that always is making jokes or the one teammate that maybe messes up at the wrong moment where you can laugh at. So it's really just you. I feel like now I'm just being all those types of teammates for myself and I'm enjoying it.

I thought to play and win you have to be ultra serious and ultra focused, which that is true, but also you still have to enjoy it. I think that's what's been the change is that I'm having more fun.

Honestly, the first meeting that I had with Brad before he started coaching with me, one of the first things he said is you need to smile more, and it wasn't really anything with my game or anything.

I really took that, and when he said that I was a little bit surprised. I started to think and I was like, yeah, I do. That's something I'm trying to work on and continuing to do, and obviously I think it's helping my results.

**Q. What were your thoughts when you saw that Iga lost?**

**COCO GAUFF:** I was shocked, to be honest, because I saw, well, we don't -- I'm not going to get into it, but we can't watch ESPN in our hotel. (Laughter.)

I saw the scoreline, I didn't see the match, because I was getting treatment while it was going on and I saw she won the first set, and then I just went to call my friend, and then we were talking on the phone. Then around midnight was when I was going to sleep. Yeah, I saw that Ostapenko won. I was, you know, shocked. I mean, also not shocked because I know the level that Jelena can bring to the game, but also, she's No. 1 player in the world.

So in all my interviews, people were, like, you're going to play Iga. I was, like, they still have to play. I think almost in my head that just because of that I had it to myself I was going to play her. That's why, you know, you can never pay attention to what journalists says sometimes -- no offense to you guys -- but they were making the match up already.

I was shocked but I knew regardless I was going to have to go out there and play tennis regardless if I was playing her or Jelena today.

**Q. You talked about building mental endurance. What's that process? I wish you could bottle and sell it. What's the process of building mental endurance?**

**COCO GAUFF:** I think it's unique to every person. I think it comes with trial and error. I think, you know, what I learned about myself is that in these moments that I should not put so much pressure in these matches, because when you're playing these tournaments, the pressure is always on. They're so intense and you always want to win.

I think for me I just learned how to cope with that better the more I have reached this level. You have some people who kind of already had to do it already when they come on tour and some who need to learn.

I think that's just part of life and just part of learning. I think that's why sometimes, you know, someone has a great result, like when they come out the gates and then it's tough to back it up because you've just never been in this position before. I think the more I've gotten into this position, the more I've just been able to learn how to handle it.

**Q. If you wouldn't mind, can you give kind of the state of your game right now, and looking ahead to each potential opponent as an individual.**

**COCO GAUFF:** Yeah, today was the best match I've played, for sure. Even though it wasn't how I like to play, against her it's so hard to be the aggressor sometimes. So I think that, like, the way decision-making that I'm making is probably the best I've had, and I feel really confident in all my strokes.

Playing Karolina, I obviously played her in Cincinnati. I do think she said that she was physically struggling in that match, so I don't think that will be the case again if I were to play her just because there is a day in between. You know, I'm going to approach it differently, honestly.

And then playing Sorana, yeah, I've played her I think a couple years ago in Australia, but, I mean, that means nothing. That was so long ago. She's obviously having a great tournament. I've always said she's a great player. She doesn't surprise me when she wins matches against the higher-ranked players because she has a great game, she's a good baseliner, she can get a lot of balls back, and she can be really aggressive.

I haven't thought about the game plan for either one, to be honest, yet so I don't know that. I know that I'm just going to go out there and focus on my side of the court, as I've been doing the whole tournament.

**Q. Jelena was just in here saying that having played Sunday night and then having this quick turnover to a new match really messed her up and put her at a disadvantage. In your experience is that a valid gripe?**

**Does that put you at a disadvantage?**

**COCO GAUFF:** Yeah, I mean, it's definitely a valid thing. I remember in Montreal I had to play Marketa, and we finished around 11:00 and then played the next day at like 1:00 or 2:00. Luckily the match before us went long but I still am at the site and everything.

I do think with a day in between it does help a little bit. But also, I mean, I don't know, the Grand Slam tournaments are tough. She had to play the second night match. I don't know what time she practiced the next day, but it's definitely a different feeling.

I mean, I had doubles yesterday, and I have doubles tomorrow. So I get the feeling in the way of playing back to back. Yeah, honestly, yesterday was a concern of mine when I found I was playing first, hoping that, you know, it was unfortunate Jess lost, but she lost fast, and then obviously they put us on Ashe so we didn't have to worry about the rain or anything.

Yeah, it definitely plays a factor, maybe more so mentally than physically, because I think physically you have the day in between but mentally these days go by so fast. I definitely can understand that point of view, for sure.

**Q. You were talking a little bit about your family before. One of the most interesting members of your family is your grandmother, I remember seeing her up in the stands cheering you on kind of with a spirit like no other. You have a great spirit. What did she teach you about life? What did you gain from her? Can you talk about her?**

**COCO GAUFF:** Yeah, I think she's probably "the" sole or one of the main reasons why I use my platform the way that I do and why I feel so comfortable speaking out.

You know, for those who don't know, she was the first Black person to go to, it was then called Seacrest High School, she was chosen to integrate that high school, and she had to deal with a lot of stuff. I think that happened like six months after Ruby Bridges did her integration. So, you know, she had to deal with a lot of things, like racial injustice. Her leading the way that she is and being so kind to everyone regardless of their background is something that I take inspiration from.

That's why I always say I like to know everybody's perspective. Whether I agree with it or not, I think it's important to know everybody's perspective because some people are raised in a certain environment and they don't know any other way. She always taught me to approach every situation with kindness and understanding.

For her to go through what she did during that time is something that I think what I do putting out a tweet or saying a speech is so easy compared to that, so that's why I have no problem doing the things that I do. She always reminds me that I'm a person first instead of an athlete.

**Q. We have been watching you for the most part now since you were 15. For someone who hasn't, what's it like to grow up in the public eye when everybody sort of hears everything you say, sees your mistakes, sees everything, even away from the court. What's that experience like?**

**COCO GAUFF:** I would say it's definitely weird. I mean, when I put my scale on to other people, I don't view it as big. I don't know, some of the celebrity kids who have, like, paparazzi everywhere. That's crazy.

You know, in my perspective, I think in the sports, it can be difficult sometimes because I think, you know, people do forget that you are a person, so they see you as an athlete and they're rooting for their favorite person, and when you lose, they say all types of things about you.

I think it's important that you really know yourself, because it's very easy to feed into what you should and what you shouldn't do when everyone is giving their opinions.

I think for the most part I've done well with it. I think it's because of my family. They have always kept me grounded and always, I guess, set the importance of my self-worth, because sometimes you can lose your sense of self in this environment, going from country to country, social media, all of that. I think they really help me embrace it instead of kind of shy away from it.

So it's something that's weird and different, and I always say, I don't know, like it's just strange that in that way, because I never -- when I was a kid, I just thought about winning tournaments. I don't know why I never imagined, the dreams never came with the people in the stands and autographs. That was never in the dreams. It was just, like, the trophy.

It's really weird, and I guess I never prepared myself for it. In hindsight, I think the amount of people that I've met doing this and the amount of people that come up to me just saying nice things and saying I helped them makes it all worth it. I will always continue to embrace the crowd and embrace the people, because the conversations that I have had really make me feel like I have done well in this life so far.

**Q. You have said that finding this new mentality and**

**finding joy on the court has helped you so much in this tournament and in this run this summer. Lots of players have tried to do that. How do you do that so fast? How do you take the pressure off of your shoulders and actually find that joy in practice?**

**COCO GAUFF:** I think it's just putting my life into perspective. I mean, at first I used to think negative things, like, why is there so much pressure, why is this so hard, blah, blah, blah. I realize in a way it's pressure but it's not. I mean, there are people struggling to feed their families, people who don't know where their next meal is going to come from, people who have to pay their bills.

That's real pressure, that's real hardship, that's real life. In a very privileged position, I'm getting paid to do what I love and getting support to do what I love. That's something that I don't take for granted.

So really I just put my life into perspective, and especially in New York, I just feel like you see that perspective a lot more especially compared to where I live. I'm just, like, I mean, I have a lucky life, and so I should enjoy it. I know there are millions of people who probably want to be in this position that I am now, so instead of saying why this, why that, I should just be, like, why not me? Why am I not enjoying this? I should.

Yeah, I just told myself, man, I should enjoy this. I'm having so much fun doing it. I should not think about the results and think about this. I'm living a lucky life and I'm so blessed. I don't want to take it for granted.

So that's the reason why, I think it's just putting my life in perspective and realizing how grateful and blessed I am.

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