

US OPEN

Saturday, September 9, 2023

New York, New York, USA

Coco Gauff

Press Conference

C. GAUFF/A. Sabalenka

2-6, 6-3, 6-2

THE MODERATOR: Champ, congratulations.

COCO GAUFF: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: You were hot coming into this tournament. You're obviously scalding right now. Talk about maturity and problem-solving over the past couple press conferences. Talk about being one set down and then taking down the No. 1 player in the world in the finals of a Grand Slam.

COCO GAUFF: I mean, it doesn't get more dramatic than that to be honest. Yeah, I went to the bathroom and I used the bathroom because I was nervous. I was washing my hands, I put some water on my face, and I was, like, Okay, I've got to just reset and redo it.

Today I went into this match like it was any other match. I honestly wasn't nervous going in. She was just playing great tennis, and I knew today was going to be one of those problem-solving tough matches because she's a tough opponent so I'm obviously happy with the result.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Coco, you said on court that after the French Open defeat you felt like the world was going to end for you and that you came into this feeling very differently. When was the moment, if you can pinpoint one, that that changed?

COCO GAUFF: Honestly, I feel like probably this French Open is honestly where it changed. Because I felt pressure to back up the final, and I obviously didn't. So I was, like, Okay, well, I've got to reset. Then Wimbledon happened, and that was a tough, tough loss, because I thought I was playing good tennis leading up to that.

Today wasn't really a change in the match mentality. I felt like I was playing as good as I could in the moment. She's



a tough power player, it keeps you, you're always playing on your back foot honestly against her. I was just trying my best.

But there was nothing, like, I think the momentum did shift a little bit in that when I passed her on the backhand crosscourt pass and I got the crowd involved, after that I just felt like I knew I was coming home with this (indicating trophy).

Q. When in this tournament did you start to think that this was really a realistic possibility, that this was going to be your year? I know you always go into things you're a competitor believing it, but I would imagine, maybe I'm completely wrong, that as the two weeks went on it started to feel, become more real, you started to have those visions.

COCO GAUFF: Honestly, I didn't have any of those visions till last night. You know, I thought about it, but I told myself to get it out of my head, because that's what I did at French. I was envisioning, you know, what would happen if I would win. I think I wanted it too much.

Last night, I started a little bit, but honestly, I just called my boyfriend, and I told him let's talk until it's time to go to sleep so we spoke until 1:00 a.m. and then I went to sleep.

I woke up this morning. Yeah, when I lost the first set I still felt I was into the match and I said, you know, I'm going to give it my all. You know, whatever happens happens.

Even on that match point, you know, 40-Love, like, technically the match was on my racquet. It didn't feel like I had won. It was crazy. I was just trying my best to just focus on the point ahead of me.

Q. Going further back, can you remember the first time when you were younger that you first imagined winning a Grand Slam title? How would you compare the feeling of having done it to what you imagined it might be like?

COCO GAUFF: Oh, I think the first was when I was eight and I would come, like, three times, three or four years in a row, to see Arthur Ashe Kids' Day and I was just watching, you know, players compete on this court.



When I was 13 I think or 14 when I played US Open juniors, I watched the men's final that year, so I had those envisions of myself then.

Honestly, you know, the French Open moment, I don't know if they caught it on camera but I watched Iga lift up that trophy, and I watched her the whole time. I said, I'm not going to take my eyes off her, because I want to feel what that felt like for her.

That felt like craziness today lifting this trophy. It hasn't sunken in and I think it probably will maybe in a week or so.

Q. In those emotions that kind of haven't sunken in yet, is relief one of them? People have been talking since you rose up in tennis, you have all the talent and celebrity but when is she going to win, does relief factor in at all?

COCO GAUFF: Oh, 100% a lot of relief. It's not the biggest emotion. I think it's honestly the smallest one, and I think that was what the difference was between French Open and now, I feel like the relief. If I would have maybe won that title -- obviously I didn't -- it would have been the biggest emotion, more than happiness, more than excitement.

Right now I'm just feeling happiness and a very, very small bit of relief. Because honestly at this point I was doing it for myself and not for other people.

Yeah, I have just been embracing every positive and negative thing that's said about me. I realize, you know, sometimes people have different personalities and some people need to shut off the comments and not look at them. But I'm an argumentative person. I'm very stubborn. My parents know. If they tell me one thing, I like to do the other (smiling).

So I really told myself, literally up until, like, 10 minutes before the match, I was just reading comments of people saying I wasn't going to win today. (Laughter.)

That just put the fire in me (smiling).

Q. Congratulations. So far President Barack Obama...

COCO GAUFF: I haven't even gone on my phone yet.

Q. They were all saying congratulations. I was going to say, obviously they were here last week, but what does it feel like -- and there were so many celebrities in the crowd today -- what does it feel like knowing all those people were rooting for you? And have you

talked to your brother yet? Did he call you back?

COCO GAUFF: Honestly, he did answer right before the ceremony started. I didn't know we were supposed to go up together so I was just going to wait until they started talking. Then Stacey was, like, You've got to go. I told him I had to leave.

I haven't gotten a chance to speak to him yet long. I just heard him on the phone, both of them. He was like, Let's go. It was so loud, it was hurting my ears so I hung up.

The support I have gotten is incredible. Obviously from President Obama and former First Lady Michelle is crazy that they were here my first-round match and now I'm a different person now.

I saw pretty much every celebrity they showed on that screen. I've been looking at it the whole night -- or all week, two weeks, I've been looking at it from the first round till now. Some of those people I've actually met before. I saw Madelyn Cline was here. I did a little shoot with her. I was like, Oh, that's cool.

I've been embracing everyone. It doesn't make me more nervous. Honestly, it helps me keep my mind off the match. Okay, I have got to win in front of these people.

Q. For several years you have been in the public eye. You've handled it so well. Are you ready for what's coming now?

COCO GAUFF: I mean, I feel like this is a big achievement, but honestly, I feel like I've been so used to this since I was basically 15 years old in high school, doing online school, just used to it. I mean, I'm sure it might be a much bigger scale now because of this achievement, but I'm ready. I mean, I embrace it. I know how to keep my peace but also embrace all of this around me.

Yeah, I think the pressure has been a little bit taken off a little bit, and I still am hungry for more. But yeah, I'm just going to enjoy this and try not to look into the future (smiling).

Q. Can you talk a little bit about the advantage of growing up in South Florida to become a pro and a Grand Slam champion.

COCO GAUFF: Oh, yeah, the endurance is there. I can last as long as anybody in the women's side of the tournament. Probably even maybe some of the men (smiling).

Yeah, the heat means nothing to me. I was a little bit, like,



the roof was closed because I knew it was raining. I kind of wanted it to be hot. You can't have everything.

Yeah, it definitely helped me I think against my Caroline Wozniacki match, against Andreeva and against Ostapenko. That was crucial. Especially against the quarters I think. I don't even remember what round that was. I think that was the quarters. Especially in that match it helped a lot because it was smoking hot that day.

So South Florida has helped me a lot prepare for these moments.

Q. Wondering if you can, I guess, analyze and articulate what was going through your mind, you have talked about embracing, when you're hugging your family, what was going through your mind at that moment?

COCO GAUFF: Nothing. Honestly, I was just, like, Whoa. When I hugged my dad, I didn't see him, because he went immediately for the embrace, but I heard him crying, and he doesn't like when I say that, but I have never seen that man cry in my life with everything that's happened. Yeah, I've never seen him cry.

My mom, I knew she was going to cry regardless if I won or lost. I wasn't really surprised with that. But, I mean, honestly nothing, like, the whole time I was saying to myself, Oh, my goodness, how is this real?

I think a little bit when I sat down after hugging them back before the ceremony, it felt real in that moment, but when I was going to hug them it didn't. I almost forgot to shake the ref's hand. It was a crazy moment.

Q. How difficult has it been in all honesty to deal with the expectations that people have had of you since what happened at Wimbledon as a 15-year-old?

COCO GAUFF: It's been difficult. I mean, it's been a long journey to this point. I wasn't a fully developed player, and I still think I have a lot of development to go at that moment. I think people were putting a lot of pressure on me to win. I felt that at 15 I had to win a slam at 15. I think that was, you know, not the mistake, because everything led to this moment so there was no mistakes.

But that was, like, a little bit of the pressure that I was feeling. Now I just realize that I just need to go out there and try my best. I mean, it was to the point where I remember I lost when I was 17 and there was a stat, they were like, Oh, she's not going to win a slam before Serena's age. It was stuff like that that I felt like I had a time limit on when I should win one, and if I won one after a

certain age it wouldn't be an achievement.

Yeah, it's just crazy the amount of things that I have heard or seen about myself, but I'm really happy of how I've been able to manage it all.

Q. There has been a video of you here as a young girl watching.

COCO GAUFF: Yes.

Q. I'm curious if you could go back and speak to her, what would you tell her now?

COCO GAUFF: Man, I don't even know if, like, that little girl, like she had the dream, but I don't know if she fully believed it. As a kid, you have so many dreams. You know, as you get older sometimes it can fiddle away. I would tell her don't lose that dream.

Honestly, I felt like I lost a little bit of the dream as this journey has gone. I would tell her don't lose the dream. Keep having fun. As you can see in the video, I loved being on Ashe, whether it was in the crowd or on the court.

So I would just tell her just keep working hard and keep believing in that dream and don't let the doubters diminish that.

Q. You grew up idolizing Venus and Serena. What's it like to look at that trophy there and see your name on there with them?

COCO GAUFF: Yes, it's crazy. I mean, they're the reason why I have this trophy today, to be honest. They have allowed me to believe in this dream, you know, growing up. You know, there wasn't too many just Black tennis players dominating the sport. It was literally, at that time when I was younger, it was just them that I can remember.

Obviously more came because of their legacy. So it made the dream more believable. But all the things that they had to go through, they made it easier for someone like me to do this.

I mean, you look back at the history with Indian Wells, with Serena, all she had to go through, Venus fighting for equal pay. Yeah, it's just, like, it's crazy and it's an honor to be in that kind of lineup as them. And I'm looking at it, and she's won this a lot of times. (Laughter.)

Q. I just wanted to pick up on what you said a couple of answers ago about there being moments where the dream died a bit or faded. When were those moments?

COCO GAUFF: I would say for sure a little bit after the Wimbledon loss, honestly. You know, people, I don't know, I just felt like people were, like, oh, she's hit her peak and she's done. It was all hype. I see the comments. People don't think I see it but I see it. I'm very aware of tennis Twitter. I know y'all's usernames, so I know who's talking trash and I can't wait to look on Twitter right now. (Laughter.)

Yeah, a little bit after that. And yeah, honestly after that, I was, like, okay, I have a lot of work to do. I think it restarted again after D.C., because I felt like I had the belief, but it wasn't fully there because a 500 to a Grand Slam is a way different level.

Yeah, I think after that loss. Slightly in the 2020 year with the COVID thing, I felt that was a rough year too.

So I think this means a lot to me. I wish I could give this trophy to my past self so she can be, like, all those tears are for this moment.

Q. A Grand Slam champion at age 19. Following the tradition set by Althea Gibson to Serena, Venus, and now with Sloane and Naomi to be the latest Black woman to win this title, and that feeling and reminding yourself that you're a teenager in the hardest era ever for a teenager to not only win a slam but compete. Can you just describe that mental focus and reminding yourself of that message. And whether you wanted them to play O.T. Genesis "I'm in Love With the Coco."

COCO GAUFF: No, I did not want them to play that because it does not mean my name. It means something else. (Laughter.)

But sometimes people in the crowd do say that, and I'm, like, yeah, that's cute, but please no.

I mean, it's an honor to be in that stat with Althea Gibson, Serena, Venus, Naomi, Sloane. They paved the way for me to be here. I remember Sloane winning this trophy in 2017. I lost in the juniors US Open. It was an inspiring moment for me to see her win because I grew up watching her and I have known Sloane since I was 10 years old.

Obviously Serena and Venus, words can't describe what they meant to me. I hope that I'm a continued of a legacy. I hope another girl can see this and believe they can do it and hopefully their name can be on this trophy too.

Q. About the match today, I'm sure you went in trying to get depth. How were you able to actually do that in the second set technically, and is that something you

might have not been able to do before this run started and the confidence you came through?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah, it was hard. The first set I was hitting balls so short and I was, like, why are they going so short? My team was telling me to get depth, and I was, like, I'm trying. It was hard to redirect the ball where I wanted to go because she's always on the front foot, always hitting so fast.

I told myself, A, just aim for the baseline, because before I was aiming for slightly inside the baseline, which is what I normally do, because you don't want to aim for the baseline, but I was, like, clearly that wasn't enough. So I was telling myself to aim for the baseline because I'll probably miss short more so than long. Honestly, I think I didn't have too many errors long. I was more so her hitting winners or forced errors.

I was just trying to stay in the match. I knew she was going to go out there swinging, and I knew that I wasn't going to be able to win this match the way I like to play. I don't like to play the way that I played today. Running around the court, it's fun, but, you know, it's not as fun as hitting winners.

I knew going into the match that was going to have to be the way I was going to have to play today against her.

Q. You have talked a lot about how your parents have helped you stay grounded and keep perspective. Are there any specific mantras that they have said to you over the years that you repeat to yourself during difficult moments that help you stay confident?

COCO GAUFF: Yeah. My grandparents, the biggest one my grandfather says is "Never say die." Yeah, I was telling myself that I wasn't going to give up after that first set. I have come too far to do that.

My parents and my dad dream big, and he was wearing a shirt today that said "Imagine." I don't know if he was wearing it during the match, but he showed me after the match. He showed me that imaginations can come true. It's not always just the image in your head. You can make it a reality.

My mom, she just always reminds me that I'm a person and I'm human and that, you know, with this tennis thing is just what I do but it's not who I am.

I think that helped me today, because I realize regardless if I came home with this trophy or not I'm still a human person and I still do a lot of good in this world outside of the court, so I think that reminded me.

I think in the past I would label myself as a tennis player, and I felt like if I didn't do well in tennis it meant I wasn't a good person. It took a lot of growth to realize the opposite.

Honestly, it's been a struggle. I used to put my tennis and compare it to, like, my self-worth. When I would lose, I would think I was not worth it as a person. So having my parents always remind me that they loved me regardless of how I do helped me today.

Q. Congratulations. This has been just such an incredible run for you. You're so good with words. I want to ask you, if you would put this in one word or two or one phrase, what has this experience meant to you or what's at the core of this experience and why?

COCO GAUFF: I don't know. I think the three words I would put it in is "Dreams come true," and that this is crazy. I still have no words. I don't think it can be put into words.

But, you know, there is a song lyric that I want to use for my Instagram caption. It goes, "Concrete jungle, where dreams are made of."

Thank you. Yeah, that lyric is true. New York City is the city where dreams are made of.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports