Name: _____ Date: _____

Fifteen on Court One

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 763 words

Picture a tennis court with a crowd all around it. You are fifteen years old, and you are about to walk out and play at Wimbledon. Across the net stands Venus Williams, who has won Wimbledon five times. This was the day for Coco Gauff, the first of July in 2019. How does a fifteen-year-old get onto a court like that?

She did not just walk in. She had to earn a place. A wild card is an invitation, and the club that runs Wimbledon gave her one to enter qualifying. Qualifying is a set of matches played at a nearby site. Win them, and you get into the main tournament. Coco won through without losing a set.

Wimbledon is one of the four Grand Slam tournaments. In the main draw, Coco learned who she would play first. It was Venus Williams. So how does anyone win a match at a place like this? To follow the story, you need to know how the game is counted. Start with the court and the serve.

A tennis court for one player against one is seventy-eight feet long and twenty-seven feet wide. A net runs across the middle. It is three feet high at the center. Every point starts with a serve. The server stands behind the back line, tosses the ball up and hits it before it bounces.

The ball must go over the net and land in the box across at a slant. If the first serve misses, the server gets one more try. Miss twice in a row, and the other player wins the point. Then the next point starts with a new serve, and the count goes on.

Now the score. A player with no points has love, which means zero. The first point is called 15. The second is 30. The third is 40. The fourth point wins the game. But if both players reach three points, the score is deuce. Then someone must win two points in a row to take the game.

Games add up to a set. The first player to win six games wins the set, if she is two games ahead. At six games all, a short game called a tie-break decides it. A match is the best of three sets, so the first to win two sets wins. This match ended 6-4, 6-4. Coco's number came first. She won both.

In the first set, at 3-2, Coco broke Venus's serve. A break means you win a game that your opponent is serving, which is the hard way to win one. A report from the WTA, the group that runs women's pro tennis, said Court 1 seemed stunned into silence. Coco took the first set in just 35 minutes.

The second set had a hard moment at the end. A match point is a point that, if she wins it, wins the whole match. Coco had three match points, and she did not win any of them. Then

came a fourth. Venus hit a forehand into the net, and the match was over.

The whole match had lasted one hour and 19 minutes. Coco said after the win: "My dream was to win. That's what happened." A report from that day also called her the youngest qualifier ever to win a match at Wimbledon.

Wimbledon is a knockout. Each round, the player who loses goes home, so Coco had to keep winning. In round two, she beat Magdalena Rybarikova. In round three, she played Polona Hercog on Centre Court. In the second set, Coco came back from two match points down and went on to win.

That put the fifteen-year-old into the fourth round, which is called the round of 16. On Monday, the eighth of July, Coco met Simona Halep on Court Number 1. This time Coco lost, 6-3, 6-3. Two sets to none for Halep, and each set was six games to three. Her Wimbledon was over.

Her story went on. That October, she won her first WTA title, at Linz, in a final against Jelena Ostapenko. Years later, she won the US Open in 2023 and Roland Garros in 2025. Both are Grand Slams. Through November 2026, the WTA's player page lists those two Grand Slam singles titles.

Now go back to the first screen. A fifteen-year-old stands on Court 1, and a five-time champion waits across the net. You can read the score that came next: two sets to none, each by six games to four. The score of her first match at a Grand Slam main draw was 6-4, 6-4.

Questions

1. What did the wild card let Coco Gauff do?

A. Skip the main tournament
B. Enter qualifying
C. Pick her first opponent

2. What happens when both players have won three points in a game?

A. The score is deuce
B. The game is over
C. The server wins

3. Why did Coco have to keep winning at Wimbledon?

A. Each round is shorter
B. The loser of a match goes home
C. The crowd votes

4. In the story, what is an invitation?

A. A kind of score
B. A hard serve

C. A place that someone offers you

5. How did the first match end?

A. 6-3, 6-3 for Venus
B. 7-6, 7-6 for Coco
C. 6-4, 6-4 for Coco

Words to know

qualifying: matches to enter
serve: starting shot
deuce: tied at 40
tournament: set of matches
invitation: an offered place

Answer key: Fifteen on Court One

1. B. Enter qualifying
2. A. The score is deuce
3. B. The loser of a match goes home
4. C. A place that someone offers you
5. C. 6-4, 6-4 for Coco