

Iga Swiatek, Coco Gauff fall on a rough day for top women at Wimbledon

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WIMBLEDON, England — The streak lived for 132 days or, in tennis time, an eon. It breathed in six countries on three continents. It went through Qatar, California, Florida, Germany, Italy, France and the United Kingdom. It had an unforeseen ball in an indomitable era. It wowed tennis scholars because a 37-match winning streak dazzles in a world that has filled with women who can maul the hell out of you on a court.

Then it died as they all do.

On a Saturday when this Wimbledon lost both its [French Open women's finalists](#) in the third round, No. 1 Iga Swiatek and No. 11 Coco Gauff, Swiatek's towering streak died as streaks do now and then: in a hasty fizzle. It ended when she lost 16 of the last 19 points and said, "I was pretty confused about my tactics." It ended when the 21-year-old Polish marvel bowed, 6-4, 6-2, to a crafty sort, [32-year-old Alizé Cornet of France](#), a marvel herself in her record-tying 62nd consecutive Grand Slam main draw.

"I mean, what she's done this year is out of this world," Cornet said, "and I can't believe I'm the one that actually broke the streak."

So after Golubic, Kasatkina, Sabalenka, Sakkari, Kontaveit, Kalinina, Tauson, Kerber, Keys, Halep, Sakkari again, Golubic again, Brengle, Gauff, Kvitova, Pegula, Osaka, Prisacariu, Buzarnescu, Lys, Raducanu, Samsonova, Sabalenka again, Ruse, Azarenka, Andreescu, Sabalenka again, Jabeur, Tsurenko, Riske-Amritraj, Kovinic, Zheng, Pegula again, Kasatkina again, Gauff again, Fett and Pattinama Kerkhove, the answer finally came up Cornet.

Actually, she's the same Cornet who [beat No. 1 Serena Williams](#) 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the third round of Wimbledon 2014, on the same court, except now she's rather the Helena Sukova of the 21st century, Sukova having ended Martina Navratilova's record 74-match winning streak in late 1984.

"As a solid player, she used [the confusion] pretty well," Swiatek said.

Anyone following and listening could have learned all manner of curious sports realities. For one, Cornet has had her best big-tournament year just as she had reckoned she would exit her sport, some sort of case of victory through appreciation. She reached her first major quarterfinal (at the 2022 Australian Open) in her 63rd major try. She reached the third round at the French. She's not sure, but she thinks it might be this: "I think that's why I'm playing so good. It's because I know it's almost the end."

She walked to Court No. 1, the secondary of the stadium courts, remembering to smile because she might not walk to it again.

She won, then did not want to know the identity of her fourth-round opponent. "No, really, please," she said. "I just beat the world number one. I want to enjoy for a few hours, not knowing what's next, not envisioning and be like, I'm going to play her, blah, blah, blah. I don't want to know. Until tomorrow I'm not going to try to be on the social media because for sure I will find out."

(It's Ajla Tomljanovic of Australia, No. 44 to Cornet's No. 37.)

Then there's the reminder that grass-court tennis has left many a player lost between the blades, even a maestro such as Swiatek. Suddenly, she's not contesting the points so much, and she's got a sitter overhead at 2-4 and 15-all of the second set that she whales into the bottom of the wall behind the baseline.

Cornet has to dodge it.

Swiatek actually laughs at herself, always a good sign.

"Well, basically the thing that I changed this year is I started being more and more aggressive," she said. "It was really comfortable for me to have the initiative and be proactive. But here I couldn't control the ball. So I needed to slow down a little bit. I was kind of pushing the ball, which sometimes was actually okay ... But there in the second set, yeah, I kind of made a few attempts to speed up again and didn't work out. I didn't come back to being solid. Also, you know, when you play aggressively and you suddenly change the way you play, it's not easy to keep that. Yeah, so I got a little bit confused."

She said at one point, "I didn't tank it, but I just didn't know what to do," as the grass retains the power to flummox even somebody who just won 37 straight and a French Open tucked amid.

It doesn't flummox Gauff as much — she reached the fourth round here in 2019 at age 15 — but the French finalist faced grass and wind and, most importantly, New Jersey-born Floridian Amanda Anisimova, whose 6-7 (7-4), 6-2, 6-1 win dismissed Gauff but did not disillusion her.

"I think I've grown a lot in my mentality over this trip," the 18-year-old said.

To describe: "Well, I mean, the start of the clay season there were matches, there was my first match of the clay season, I was up 4-0 and lost the set, kind of lost the match really because of mentality. Today I was up 3-0 and went down a break. I was able to somehow find a way to win that set (from 4-1 down in the tiebreaker). For me, that just shows improvement in that aspect."

She moved on to mixed doubles with Jack Sock, an opening win full of smiles from both Americans, and then she made the walk from Court No. 3 to the locker room, surrounded by a throng of admirers. She posed for umpteen selfies and signed umpteen autographs, a bustling signal of her budded stature, and she said: "For me, it's crazy that people get nervous to meet me 'cause I'm not — well I guess the way I watch myself on the court, I do look intimidating. Off the court I'm not intimidating, so I try to tell them: 'Just chill out. Let's have a conversation.'"

As she walked through with the gathering blob of life around her, her opponent had fallen — onto the grass in wonder. Anisimova, 20, who beat Gauff in the 2017 U.S. Open girls singles final, had made a torrid run to the 2019 French Open semifinals but had suffered the sudden death of her father at 52 before that U.S. Open.

By 2021, she had lost enough — only one match win in any of the majors — that she couldn't believe her standing in the fourth round here. The slowing of the wind after the first set had helped her unforced errors dip from 26 in that set to 10 and four in the two others. She was powerful and masterful as she tried to “soak in every moment that I had” on her first Centre Court trip, including the ending, of which she said, “Especially after last year, I wouldn't have pictured myself in this position.”

Her year has been strong, and her winning streak has just reached a hard-won three.