

Court Decorum

9-15-24



In case I never mentioned it, I'm a tennis player; I've loved the sport since high school. These days, watching ~~the~~ ^{the handful of} Grand Slam matches that still air on network T.V. is one of my few remaining pleasures. This year I saw something at the U.S. Open that kinda broke my heart, though... it was during the 5th game of the 2nd set of Coco Gauff's last match, when she was on the verge of losing, clearly unlikely to turn things around, and then a couple dozen kids came scrambling down the bleachers holding their balls (their souvenir tennis balls, of course — stop it with your dirty minds! "o"), hoping to collect an autograph or two before the players left. Honestly, I felt awful for Coco... she was trying to steady herself and accomplish the impossible, and here come all these kids, with that utterly innocent, unintentional cruelty at which children are such specialists, reminding her that her goal was, in fact, impossible. Or damn near, anyway. And the message clearly rattled her, too. It can't have felt good. My first instinct at the spectacle was... why aren't their parents telling them how rude this is? Telling them what their eager actions say to the person who is probably about to lose one of the most important matches of his or her life, and in front of the whole world at that? Talk about a truly "teachable moment". That's where my head originally went, but then I heard one of the commentators chime in, Nick Kyrgios I think, calling ~~the~~ ^{the autograph-seeking} kids "vultures", saying they "sense the end" and "swarm". Suddenly I had a new reaction, which was: "Why doesn't someone tell HIM how rude THAT comment is??" He's certainly not wrong to ~~criticize~~ ^{criticize} the practice of thronging the sidelines when one player is still fighting for her life, but there's an obvious and far kinder, more charitable interpretation of these kids, too: can't we just say they're making a pragmatic choice, insensitive only due to their inexperience, to be nearby IF the game ends soon, which it clearly might? There's no need to demonize them with... hmm, what's the opposite word for "anthropomorphizing"? Well, anyway, with language that equates them to non-human scavengers. That seems unnecessarily harsh. And again, the practice really reflects more on the parents than on their kids, since who should we suppose is encouraging them to run down there and be first in line for post-game perks while the match is still being played.

Yes, my heart went out to Coco Gauff as she frustratedly bounced the ball, waiting for the juvenile ~~hoopla~~ ^{hoopla} nearby to ~~calm~~ ^{calm} down, and I cringed a bit to see it. But to all the ~~child~~ ^{child}-bashers who want to ~~tsk-tsk~~ ^{"tsk-tsk"} them over the display of seemingly ill manners I can only ~~say~~ ^{say}, Hey, Tsk-ers, leave them kids alone! ☺ (But at the same time, sure, let's do try to nudge young folks toward a bit more compassion and empathy, yeah?)