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Deontay Wilder Exclusive: Behind the Hype

By [Caryn A. Tate](#) on April 11, 2018



"I'm fine. I'm picking my weight back up, and just living right now." (Ryan Hafey/PBC)

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I've spoken with several world champion fighters, and they've all told me about that switch that goes off as they prepare to enter the ring...

Recently, heavyweight Deontay Wilder (40-0, 39 KOs) received a lot of angry responses when he provided a peek into the psyche of a world champion boxer. He spoke about his mentality in the ring and how "The Bronze Bomber" is an alter ego of the regular person he is as Deontay Wilder. He was quoted as saying, "I want a body on my record...Somebody's gotta go. I want that on my record, because when I'm in that state of mind, like, I ain't myself."

I've spoken with several world champion fighters, and they've all told me about that switch that goes off as they prepare to enter the ring. Prior to a fight, it's common for boxers to pray for themselves and their opponents, that everyone goes home safely to their families.

But after that, a transition takes place. The one that says, "I want to hurt/destroy/stop/brutalize"—and, yes, for some—"kill my opponent."

It's part of the fabled "killer instinct" boxing fans love to romanticize, and it's part of what enables one human being to walk into a ring with nothing but a pair of leather gloves on his/her hands to face another person whose only intention is to hurt/destroy/stop/brutalize you in hand-to-hand combat.

Many of the same people who criticized Wilder for saying what he did are the same who claim that boxing is just a sport. Yet when a boxer gets badly beaten or retires on his stool, these same people ridicule said fighters and use names like "quitter"—as if these boxers were in a fight to the death.

Could Wilder have phrased his thoughts differently? Well, if the goal is to be all things to all people and never risk offending anyone, sure. But clearly that's not Wilder's goal, nor is it most people's.

It's important to remember that sometimes fighters get caught up in the moment and reveal more than some observers feel comfortable learning about the mindset it takes to get in the ring and fight. These fighters shouldn't be punished for their honesty.

We should be paying less attention to the hype and more attention to the human beings behind it.

Just prior to the above quote going viral, I had a conversation by phone with the champion that may surprise some. I got a glimpse beyond the hype and a look at the real person who exists behind the fighter we see in the ring.

It was revealed on Showtime just prior to Wilder's last bout, a thrilling clash with Luis Ortiz on March 3, that Deontay had come down with an illness (and, because of this, he weighed 214.75, the lightest he's been since 2009). Wilder revealed a little more about how he'd gotten sick just before one of the biggest fights of his career.

"Before I was set to fight, I did an event for kids back home [at the YMCA] and I ended up getting sick from the kids. I got my young daughter sick too. It was hard—she had to go to the hospital. That's how bad it was. She was in the hospital for several days but she's okay now."

As far as his own health, Wilder said, "I'm definitely fine. I'm picking my weight back up, and just living right now."

Aside from the recent illness, after his bout versus Chris Arreola in 2016, it was revealed that Wilder had broken his right hand. After surgery and seven months' recuperation, Deontay discussed how his hand is doing now—and

revealed that it wasn't a new injury that popped up during that fight. "It's never fun when you break it, but my hand is doing well. It's definitely healed completely and I'm happy for that. I'm able to punch with full throttle. It's an amazing feeling to be able to do it because it used to tingle and hurt when I used to use it. It used to have a tingle feel when I would punch. But it's good now."

Wilder [spoke more in-depth about the event](#) at the YMCA and what it meant to him. "I wanted to let them know that, being that young, they're able to achieve anything that they want to achieve. They can do whatever they want to do if they put their minds to it. I had them chanting out that 'I am somebody' and it meant so much to me. To hear those kids on the same accord, screaming, 'I am somebody! I am somebody!' The kids need to know they are somebody, that they special. Right now they're just a child but when they grow up, they can become anything they want. And I want them to be able to focus on that right now, at a young age, so when they do become older and more mature they understand that and they'll know, they'll have a little guidance in their life and know what they want to do, you know?"

"I love kids," Wilder continued. "I fed them, I clothed them, I gave them a motivated speech and it was a blessing because some of those kids wasn't gonna eat no more that day. And I know this because I grew up in the same environment that they did, so I could relate, totally."

Deontay hasn't spoken a lot about his childhood in the past, but when asked about it, he was happy to discuss it. "I had a great childhood," he said. "I had both mother and father in my family, and my father taught me and my brother to be able to take care of your responsibilities and be a hard worker. He was definitely strict on being a hard worker, doing everything right the first time. He used to have a saying: 'You do it wrong, you do it long. You do it right, you do it light.'

"He had another saying. We used to get things wrong and we'd be like, 'I thought—well, I thought—' And he'd be like, 'Well, you should'a stopped thought and started thinkin'!' Different little sayings that me and my brother always listened to, hearing him over the years. I didn't understand a lot of things till I became an adult.

"I can't complain. My childhood taught me to be a very independent person. It taught me to be strong. It taught me to be a hard worker, and I appreciate it because this is exactly what I am today. I feel like I'm unstoppable—the baddest man on the planet."

Though Wilder's mother and father were both present in his life as a child, his biggest influence was his maternal grandmother, whom he talks about with palpable affection. "My grandmother, man, that was my baby. I wasn't a daddy's boy or a mama's boy—I was a grandmama's boy. Her teaching was different. She didn't discipline you that much—she was more of a teacher. She'd teach you and talk to you. It was always about God. She was very religious.

"Grandma showed us—not only did she teach, but she practiced whatever she taught as well. We saw her do things we didn't understand. She would allow people to come to her house, to just have a meal to eat. Whatever she had in there, she would cook for people. I remember her making me give my bacon sandwich I'd just prepared, so delicious-looking, to a stranger we didn't even know. They came and knocked on the door and I had to give it up. And that was [our] last piece of bread.

"As a child, you want to get mad, but she made you give it up. I didn't understand it then, but I understand now. We were fortunate to go to the store and re-buy it, fresh. But this man right here, he might never eat no more again. This might be his last meal.

"My grandmother, she definitely was a selfless person. Someone who just thought about other people. I learned a lot from her."

In addition to volunteering his time and energy with kids at the local YMCA, [Wilder recently posted a video](#) on social media expressing his support for the teenagers and others marching in support of more stringent gun

control in America. Deontay explained why this issue is near and dear to his heart.

“I support them because when I look at the kids and I see what they’re going through—you gotta keep in mind, I have children as well. When I made that video I was actually at my oldest 13-year-old daughter’s pool party. And just seeing all the kids there, I just started reminiscing on what those kids have to go through at school with the shootings and stuff. I was like, damn, that could be my child. School is a place where you want your kids to feel safe. You never thought about sending your child to school and there could be a shooting. We didn’t think about those things back in the day, coming up. The world is changing like crazy. School was the last place you wanted to bring anything. Now it’s just different times. That’s what really made me make the post. We need more protection at the schools, and kids, if you see something, hear something, report it. Be aware of it.

“We need our kids. They are our future. We gotta keep on with them.”

Check out more of Caryn’s work at <http://www.CarynATate.com> and follow her on [Twitter@carynatate](https://twitter.com/carynatate)

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1.

[Ollie Downtown Brown](#) 01:51pm, 04/14/2018

Someone is self projecting AGAIN.

2.

[Rob](#) 02:35am, 04/14/2018