

Deontay Wilder on Drug Testing: “I Believe in Three Strikes, You’re Out”

By Caryn A. Tate on December 25, 2017



“You have to stand up for what is right.” (Amanda Wescott/Showtime Sports)

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“I’m the heavyweight champion of the world. But I’m still a human at the end of the day. I’m still gonna feel a certain type of way...”

WBC heavyweight champion of the world Deontay “The Bronze Bomber” Wilder (39–0, 38 KOs) is well-known for several positive things. A few of them include sporting a highly impressive 97% knockout ratio, winning a bronze medal at the 2008 Olympics for Team USA, and insisting on drug testing with VADA (Voluntary Anti-Doping Association) for himself and his opponents.

VADA is the most stringent testing organization out there, and while several boxers use it, few are as vocal about it as Wilder. “I think it’s very important to test these fighters,” Deontay said. “To have a fair playing ground, you know. I strongly believe in it, and I’m not gonna put myself in a situation where I’m gonna be taking punishment and a guy being on drugs to be able to do it.”

Wilder understands that, as heavyweight champion of the world, he has a particular standing in the sport, and he believes in using it in a positive way. “In the position I’m in, I can influence a lot of people—seeing certain things or dealing with certain issues that they wouldn’t normally see or deal with. Being in this game and expressing my opinion about it, it brings awareness to

my division. You got people in their divisions that must speak out. I'm doing my part in mine to keep my division clean. Because it's all over the [sport], it's not just the heavyweights. And I try to be that person to speak up, to bring awareness that this is a real situation that not only are these guys harming [others], but themselves. They harm themselves as well, putting these chemicals in their bodies."

During a 16-month period from spring 2016 to November 2017, three separate Wilder opponents tested positive for banned substances, which resulted in their bouts with the champion being canceled or postponed. In spring 2016, Alexander Povetkin tested positive for meldonium; in January 2017, Andrzej Wawrzyk's test revealed the anabolic steroid stanozolol; and in September, Luis Ortiz tested positive for two banned diuretics, chlorothiazide and hydrochlorothiazide.

No one was more frustrated or upset by these positive tests than Deontay, who along with his team put tremendous amounts of energy, time, and money into the preparation for these fights that didn't end up happening. Of course, if a fight doesn't happen, that means the boxer doesn't get paid. Not only that, a replacement foe must be found—often at the last minute—which means preparation may not be quite as thorough as a fighter would like.

When Wilder posted emotionally-charged videos on social media of himself talking about the situation following the third and most recent occurrence with Ortiz's positive test, some criticized the 32-year-old for showing too much emotion or for complaining. Deontay explained his perspective as he was forced to deal with yet another bout cancellation and opponent change.

"I'm the heavyweight champion of the world," he said. "I do a lot of great things inside the boxing ring with my ability as an athlete. But I'm still a human at the end of the day. I'm still gonna feel a certain type of way. I'm still gonna have emotions about certain things. Especially when I'm trying to prove to the world that I am the best. When the rest don't even want to prove to the world that they are the best. In fact, they want to cheat."

As a sport, boxing is inconsistent in its approach to fighters who have tested positive for banned substances. This is an aspect of clean sport that Wilder feels needs to be sorted out. "The thing I find funny is we can talk about the issue, we can talk about certain situations, but why is it that these guys always come back? We understand it's the politics and the money of boxing. It's always been around and it always will be. That's just what it is. The only thing that we're doing now is alerting people that these guys are cheaters. I guess they're paying with the humiliation, or they're serving time out of the sport for the humiliation, and then it's, 'all right, you can come back.' It's a tough situation, and it's gonna have to be thought out and sat down with the organizations that believe that if you get caught, this is the punishment. And they really have to stay strongly by that. Because if you accuse somebody of doing it and you find them guilty of it, that should be the consequence. No matter what the state of the division is."

Deontay has his own ideas for what the consequences should be for fighters who test positive, particularly for repeat offenders. In fact, his approach is a fair and measured one, but with a meaningful punishment.

"Give them a chance. I'm not saying—especially not on the first offense—they need to be banned for life. I would think that would be a little harsh. The second time should be a little more strict, give them enough time to think about what they did, to give them a great fine. Then they pay that off and come back. Because at the end of the day, they have a family too, and they fight to provide for their families. So I don't want to take that away from them.

"But on that third offense? It's just like anything else—like if you get a DUI. There are consequences and penalties. Most times with that third one, that's it. I do believe in three

consequences and penalties most times than that time one, that's how we believe in three strikes, you're out."

In an era when many celebrities and athletes often become popular based on their brashness, negative behavior, or for having legal troubles, Wilder believes in using his platform for good, and for trying to better the sport.

"There comes a time when you have to take a stand and stand up for what is right," said Deontay. "So we're gonna continue to strive for greatness, and continue to keep boxing a clean sport."

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