

## Deontay Wilder & The Recent History of Other Heavyweight KO Sensations

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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From the waist up he's built as if he were the first man into the great gene pool, he's got long and fast twitch muscle on top of muscle. From the waist down he's extremely thin and has very spindly like legs. He's 6'7" and has an 84 inch reach and being only 28, so there's a good chance he'll add even more muscle onto his athletic frame. At least that's been the case with most of the new era heavyweights who stood over 6'4" and eventually fought for a version of the heavyweight title.

His name is Deontay Wilder and he is America's latest hope to reclaim the heavyweight title, something that was almost a staple of heavyweight boxing until about 15 years ago. Wilder is undefeated in 31 pro bouts and hasn't yet had to go the distance in any of them. He started boxing in 2005 and won a Bronze medal at the Beijing Summer Olympics in 2008. He's a boxer-puncher and has many observers hoping he turns out to be a heavyweight version of former five division champ Thomas Hearn, who unquestionably had dynamite in both hands and scored some of the most picturesque knockouts in boxing history. Nothing excites boxing fans like watching a legitimate heavyweight knockout artist demolishing top contenders on his way to the title. Since the Mike Tyson era or roughly the last 25 years, there's been a handful of fighters who were promoted as once in a generation type punchers, Lennox Lewis, Tommy Morrison, David Tua, Wladimir Klitschko and Samuel Peter. I'm sure I've left a few out but the ones mentioned are the fighters who immediately stick out in my mind. Of the five, Lewis and Klitschko were the only big hitters who you could say were close to being a complete fighter/boxer, that being they could win by knockout or by out-boxing their opponent.

Tua was the biggest single shot puncher of the group but was out-boxed or out-worked in his biggest fights. Morrison had questionable stamina and was betrayed by his chin, like Lewis and Klitschko, a few times in big fights. Peter was a heavy handed crude fighter and that basically sums him up.

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Of the five mentioned only Lewis and Klitschko went on to make a significant mark in the division and are hall of fame worthy fighters. Which pretty much suggests that to succeed and really make a mark in boxing, even as a heavyweight, a fighter driven by his punch and power alone, isn't usually enough. And to this point Wilder isn't blowing anybody away with his skills or refinement as a fighter. His power and punch have been enough to overcome the level of opposition he's faced, and that has most observers trying to deduce whether or not that'll be enough to carry him when he faces upper-tier opposition at the championship level.

As of this writing most of the questions asked about Wilder as a fighter center around his chin and what kind of a punch he takes? However, I think there's more to question about Wilder than just his chin. For starters, I'm not totally sure about his power. Sure, he can hit and his right hand looks very legitimate, but I'm not sure it's on the level of the fighters mentioned. By the time they were into their sixth year as a pro, based on their opposition, I didn't have a morsel of a doubt that Lewis was a killer with his right hand and the same applied to Klitschko. After watching Tua and Morrison ice opponents with a single left-hook, was there the slightest doubt that they were once in a generation type bangers? No. Even Peter's destruction of Jeremy Williams was more frightening and memorable than any knockout that Wilder has scored in 31 fights. And even though Morrison, Tua and Peter turned out to be the real deal in the power dept, they never really had much of a say regarding the heavyweight title. Morrison won the vacant WBO title versus an out of shape 44 year old George Foreman and lost it in his first defense versus Michael Bentt. Tua lost to Lewis in his only title shot and Peter won the WBC title against Oleg Maskaev, who hadn't fought in nearly a year and a half and lost it to Vitali Klitschko who hadn't fought in nearly four years in his first defense.

In addition to not being sold that Wilder is a genuine once in a generation puncher, the questions about his chin must be asked and eventually answered. And of course his stamina and durability have yet to be addressed. His jab looks formidable and despite scoring knockouts with his left hook versus low level opposition, we can't say one way or the other just how much of a weapon it really is. He has good hand speed and isn't afraid to let his hands go, but his offense, at least that I've seen is pretty vanilla and basic and lacks imagination.

Back in 1970 heavyweight contender Mac Foster compiled a record of 24-0 (24). At that time there were many followers and insiders who had the same questions about Foster, who built up his record feasting on journeymen and washed up contenders and former title holders the way Wilder has. In his first real test Foster fought Jerry Quarry with the understanding that if he could get by Jerry, he'd be heavyweight champ Joe Frazier's next opponent. Quarry was a year removed from coming out on the wrong end of a seven round war with the undefeated Frazier. For three rounds Foster got the better of it against Quarry, then he got hit on the chin by some

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beautiful short hooks and right hands from Jerry in the fourth round. Foster made it to the sixth round and was counted out thus resurrecting Quarry's career and earning him a shot at Muhammad Ali in his comeback bout four months later. Foster continued on after Quarry but never fought for the title.

History, at least going back to the seventies, is replete with heavyweights who built up a big undefeated record littered with impressive knockouts. Starting with George Foreman and up through Wladimir Klitschko, we've seen these type of fighters come along and the same questions, usually regarding their heart, chin and toughness were asked. There's definitely a buzz going around about Deontay Wilder. But for some reason there's an underlying feeling that something's not quite legit about him. Usually, you get American fans frothing at the mouth over an undefeated American heavyweight with big power. But, with Wilder, you're getting people asking a lot of questions, more so than there's been about past fighters who were perceived as catch 'n' kill destroyers. Why is that? Foreman and Tyson fought a lot of the lower tier opposition that Wilder has faced on the way up, but for some reason they both looked like a safe bet to win the title and be around for a while, something I'm not comfortable saying about Wilder. And that was during an era when the division was much deeper. In Foreman's case it was easy to see why he had a lot of support - because he won a Gold Medal at the 1968 Olympics and knocked out every opponent he faced but one. But Tyson, who was listed at 5'11" but was really only 5'10," didn't even make the 1984 Olympic team. Wilder made the US Olympic team and won a bronze medal, and he's a giant with a pair of lats in his back that look like wings. Yet for some reason there's more questions about him at nearly the same stage of his career than there were regarding Foreman, Tyson, Lewis, Morrison and Tua.

Those questions won't be answered until Wilder finally fights a top-10 contender, just as it was the case with the previous American heavyweight knockout sensation Seth Mitchell when he stepped up and fought a legitimate contender in Chris Arreola. Mitchell didn't make it out of the first round versus Arreola, hopefully Wilder will fare better when his moment of truth finally arrives. So we'll just have to wait a little longer about what to make of Deontay Wilder the heavyweight destroyer. But rest assured we'll soon get the answer because he will most likely face a real contender or title-holder in his next fight and nobody knocks everybody out, nobody.

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