

## Sports

# Fury knocks out Wilder to retain WBC crown in heavyweight classic

## 'Gypsy King' emerges victorious in third bout of bitter rivalry

**LAS VEGAS:** Tyson Fury retained his WBC heavyweight crown on Saturday with a spectacular 11th-round knockout of Deontay Wilder as their trilogy fight delivered a boxing classic. In an epic battle in front of 15,820 fans at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, both fighters were knocked down on multiple occasions in an enthralling contest full of improbable twists and turns.

Fury looked to have gained the upper hand after flooring Wilder in the third round, only for the 35-year-old from Alabama to respond with two knockdowns that had the English champion clinging on desperately in the fourth. But it was the bigger, heavier Fury — landing the cleaner and more damaging blows — who finished the stronger, and the champion had Wilder down once again in the 10th with a right hook. Wilder responded bravely to that knockdown by wobbling Fury in return. But the brutal energy-sapping nature of the fight, and Fury's relentless physicality, finally took its toll on Wilder in the 11th.

With the American exhausted and on the ropes, Fury landed the decisive combination. A right uppercut scrambled Wilder's senses before Fury crashed a right hook into his opponent's temple that sent the challenger tumbling to the canvas, barely conscious.

"Shots like that end careers," Fury said. "I just hope that he's OK. Because he took a lot of punishment tonight. Don't ever doubt me," Fury added. "When the chips are down I will always deliver. I give him the glory for the victory. He's a tough man — he took some big shots tonight. It was a great fight tonight as well as any trilogy in history."

### Multiple knockdowns

Saturday's bout was the third instalment of an acrimonious rivalry between Fury, the trash-talking self-styled "Gypsy King" and Wilder, the heavy-handed knockout specialist regarded as one of the most destructive punchers in the sport.

Fury had scored a seventh-round knockout of

Wilder in their second fight 20 months ago, after the two men shared a controversial draw in their first meeting in Los Angeles in 2018. Both fighters entered the ring on Saturday at their heaviest ever fighting weights, with Fury tipping the scales at 277lbs (125.6 kg) and Wilder at 238lbs.

Wilder's camp said the extra bulk was designed to give their fighter a quick early rounds knockout. But although Wilder started aggressively, working Fury's midsection in the opening two rounds, he was unable to find the precision to hurt the elusive Fury, who by contrast repeatedly scored with his right.

The fight appeared to have swung decisively in Fury's favor in the third, when he landed a left hook and a pair of right uppercuts to put Wilder down. The

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American finished the round dazed and on the ropes with Fury poised to go in for the kill.

But incredibly Wilder rallied in the fourth round to put Fury on the canvas twice, once with his feared straight right and again with a right hook. This time it was Fury who seemed to be in peril, but the champion was able to clear his head and survive.

Fury then recovered to dominate the middle rounds, repeatedly stunning Wilder who showed remarkable resilience in the face of a sustained onslaught. Yet just when it looked as if the denouement could come at any moment, Wilder summoned another rally in the ninth round, rocking Fury once



LAS VEGAS: Deontay Wilder (right) is knocked out by Tyson Fury in the 11th round during their WBC heavyweight title fight at T-Mobile Arena on Saturday in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

again with an enormous right hand.

But momentum shifted back to Fury in the 10th as he opened up with a devastating exchange to put Wilder down. Again the American found reserves of strength to fight back, wobbling Fury near the end of the round as the fans roared their appreciation. Wilder's resistance was broken once and for all in the 11th round though as Fury's devastating final combination settled a gripping battle.

### Two warriors

Fury, who improved to 31-0-1 with 22 knockouts, revealed afterwards he had sought to pay his respects to Wilder after the fight, but had been rebuffed. "We fought like two warriors in there," Fury said. "And I

went over to shake his hand and say well done and he was like 'No, I don't respect you'. I was like 'How can you say I've cheated when you know in your heart, you've been beaten fair and square?' Is he a sore loser or what? But I've acted like a gentleman throughout my career and that's all I can do."

Wilder, who was taken to a Las Vegas hospital following the fight as a precaution, did not speak to the press following the bout. However in brief remarks he acknowledged he had struggled to deal with Fury's size. "I did my best, but it wasn't good enough," said Wilder. "I'm not sure what happened. I know that in training he did certain things, and I also knew that he didn't come in at 277 to be a ballet dancer. He came to lean on me, try to rough me up and he succeeded." — AFP

## Dodgers overpower Giants 9-2 to level MLB playoff series

**LOS ANGELES:** The Los Angeles Dodgers offense bounced back Saturday in a 9-2 victory over the San Francisco Giants that saw the reigning World Series champions level their Major League Baseball series.

One day after they were shut out by the Giants in game one of the best-of-five National League division series, the Dodgers responded to give themselves a chance to close out the series in two games in Los Angeles.

Dodgers starting pitcher Julio Urias shut down the Giants — and helped his own cause with a run-batted-in single. Cody Bellinger and AJ Pollock produced two-run doubles as the Dodgers blew open a close game in the sixth inning.

It was a statement in San Francisco for the Dodgers, who notched 106 regular-season games but still had to play a wild card game to earn the right to face the Giants — who won the National League West division with 107 regular-season wins.

"It was a lot," Dodgers outfielder Mookie Betts said of having to beat the St Louis Cardinals in the wild card game then immediately face their NL West rivals. "Emotions ran high through the wild card game, that was a crazy game in itself. Usually you need a little time to reset — we only had a day. But each game, you've got to take it one game at a time," Betts added. "And we were able to pull one out today."

Urias struck out five and walked one over five innings, giving up one run on three hits. He also singled in a run in the second inning to give the Dodgers the lead before Betts drove in another run. San Francisco responded in the bottom half of the inning,



SAN FRANCISCO: The Los Angeles Dodgers celebrate after beating the San Francisco Giants 9-2 in Game 2 of the National League Division Series at Oracle Park on Saturday in San Francisco, California. — AFP

when Urias issued a leadoff walk to Wilmer Flores who would score on a sacrifice fly from Donovan Solano. It remained 2-1 heading into the sixth inning, when Trea Turner doubled to lead off the inning for the Dodgers, and after Justin Turner struck out, Will Smith walked to chase Giants starting pitcher Kevin Gausman after 5 1/3 innings.

The bases were loaded when Bellinger, who struck out in his first two at bats, stepped to the plate and belted a pitch from reliever Dominic Leone into the left center field gap for a two-run double. Pollock followed with another two-run double and the Dodgers were off — out-scoring San Francisco 7-1 over the final four innings. "It's great to win one on the road," Betts said.

### 'Keep them off balance'

The Atlanta Braves did the same in Milwaukee, where Max Fried pitched six strong innings and

Austin Riley homered in a 3-0 victory over the Brewers that leveled their NL division series at one game apiece. The Brewers brought the tying run to the plate in each of the last three innings, but the Braves bullpen held on to send the best-of-five National League division series back to Atlanta tied at one game apiece.

Fried gave up three hits and struck out nine without surrendering a walk. Willy Adames hit a two-out double off Fried in the sixth, but Fried struck out Eduardo Escobar to end the danger. "It's a really good team over there, so you just want to try to stay on top and keep them off balance," Fried said.

Atlanta took a 2-0 lead in the third inning off The Braves pitcher Brandon Woodruff. Jorge Soler hit a one-out double and scored on Freddie Freeman's single to right. Ozzie Albies drove in Freeman with a double and the Braves made it 3-0 in the sixth when Riley belted a solo homer. — AFP

## 'Best of era' Fury hailed after Wilder classic

**LAS VEGAS:** Tyson Fury believes he is the greatest heavyweight of his era after producing a scintillating display to beat Deontay Wilder in a boxing classic on Saturday. The 33-year-old undefeated Englishman recovered from two knockdowns against the hard-hitting Wilder before knocking out the American in the 11th round to retain his WBC crown.

"I know I'm the greatest heavyweight of my era, without doubt. Number one," Fury said following an epic battle at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas. "I've fought the most



LAS VEGAS: Tyson Fury celebrates his 11th round knockout win against Deontay Wilder after their WBC heavyweight title fight at T-Mobile Arena on Saturday in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

devastating puncher in the history of our sport, not once, not twice, but three times."

At a towering 6ft 9in tall and weighing in at 277lbs, Fury is unarguably one of the biggest heavyweight champions of all time. Icons of the heavyweight division like Muhammad Ali or Joe Frazier would be giving away massive advantages in height and weight in any theoretical match-up with the reigning champion.

Fury was initially reluctant on Saturday to rank his chances against past greats. "I don't like competing with fighters from the past because it's fantasy, not reality," he said. "I can only beat the best of my day. And I've done that. I'm the best fighter in my era."

However, he later could not resist comparing himself favorably to the greatest heavyweights to have graced the division. "There's been so many of them, so many great champions," he said. "Without sounding too clever, I place myself at the top of the pile. I believe I can beat any man in history, any man."

Saturday's thriller meanwhile left many at ringside struggling to think of a better heavyweight contest in boxing history. "Listen, I've been in this business 57 years promoting fights and I truly have to say I have never seen a heavyweight fight as magnificent as this," said Fury's US promoter Bob Arum, who promoted 27 of Muhammad Ali's fights including the 1975 classic "Thrilla in Manila" against Joe Frazier. Frank Warren, Fury's veteran English promoter, said Saturday's bout was "boxing history." "It's the best live heavyweight fight I've seen," Warren said. — AFP

## Cuban baseball hit with record number of defections

**HAVANA:** One player took off from the airport, while another jumped out the window of his hotel room. In all, of the 24 members of Cuba's national baseball team who arrived in Mexico for the under-23 World Cup, only about half came home. This year, a record number of players have defected from the communist-run island nation, where baseball is the national pastime but which is enduring its worst economic crisis in 30 years.

The mass defection is "unprecedented in the history of baseball," Francys Romero, a sports journalist who has written a book on the phenomenon, told AFP. The player who jumped from his hotel room window? He told Romero that he shimmied down a palm tree to get to a waiting getaway car.

Cuban baseball players leaving their homeland is not new — when professional sports were upended in the wake of the revolution led by Fidel Castro, many sought better opportunities abroad. After a smattering of defections during the Cold War, the exodus picked up pace after the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Since Rene Arocha left the national

team at the airport in Miami in 1991 for a career in the United States, about two or three players a year have deserted their country. Nine jumped ship in 1996. Those players are consistently treated as disloyal traitors.

Some have left legally — an option that became possible with immigration reform in 2013, but which was starkly curtailed when flights were reduced due to the coronavirus pandemic. A who's who of players who became Major League stars have made the leap, including Orlando and Livan Hernandez, Jose Abreu, Aroldis Chapman, Yasiel Puig and current Tampa Bay Rays standout Randy Arozarena.

### 'War'

Not only has the number of players seeking a career abroad exploded, but their profiles are different: they are younger and not always destined for Major League stardom, according to Romero. So why are they risking it? "To change their lives. Sports comes after that," he says.

Those who have left have faced criticism on social media, but many Cubans have simply wished them well



HAVANA: Baseball players play with friends at a field in Havana, on October 7, 2021. — AFP

— they are all too aware of how difficult life is in Cuba at the moment, with major shortages of food and medicine.

Earlier this year, when Cuba's national team came to the United States to play Olympic qualifying games, top talent Cesar Prieto, two other players and the team psychologist defected. Cuba, a three-time Olympic champion and 25-time Baseball World Cup winner, failed for the first time ever to qualify for the Summer Games in Tokyo.

For Luis Daniel del Risco, currently the highest-ranking official in the Cuban baseball federation, there is "a

war" under way to "destroy Cuban baseball." He slammed what he called "a harassment campaign" by foreign recruiters, who attend most games that Cuba plays abroad.

"These people have access to the hotels (where the players stay), and many of them come just to contact these young people" with proposals to play elsewhere, he said. Recruiters also call the players and send them messages via WhatsApp, either directly or through their relatives, Del Risco claimed, saying such overtures prevented players from concentrating on the competition at hand. — AFP