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Drivers voice support for tougher drug testing policy

Concerns raised after Fike admits to use on race days

By [David Caraviello](#), NASCAR.COMApril 10, 2008
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AVONDALE, Ariz. -- In more than a decade of racing in NASCAR's national divisions, [Kevin Harvick](#) has never been subjected to a random drug test. But if an official with the sanctioning body were to ask him to submit to one, the Sprint Cup driver would willingly oblige.

"Every driver in this garage should take one, in any garage," Harvick said Thursday at [Phoenix International Raceway](#), site of Saturday night's Subway Fresh Fit 500. "This has always been perceived as a clean sport. Let's not let it be perceived as something that's not clean now. Because it is, for the most part. Let's prove it."

He's not alone. Several other top drivers on NASCAR's premier circuit also voiced support for a change in NASCAR's drug testing policy, which currently is administered only if series officials have a reasonable doubt as to whether a competitor is using. But many drivers seem clearly shaken by the recent admission of former Craftsman Truck driver [Aaron Fike](#), who was suspended from NASCAR after being arrested for heroin possession charges ([read more](#)), and told a national magazine that he used drugs on race days.

"I guarantee you, he's not the first guy, and he's not going to be the last guy," said Daytona 500 winner [Ryan Newman](#).

"I cannot believe it. That is absurd," added reigning Cup champion [Jimmie Johnson](#). "I don't know what this means, where things go from here. But I'm so happy they figured out what was going on and got him off the track. That is absolutely unacceptable."

Fike and his girlfriend were arrested this past July while shooting up heroin in the parking lot of an Ohio amusement park. NASCAR suspended the driver indefinitely. Fike told a writer from *ESPN the Magazine* that he did drugs on race days, specifically before a Truck event at Memphis Motorsports Park on June 30 of last year. That admission was enough for some Sprint Cup drivers to start banging the drum for a drug policy with more teeth.

"I'm all for it," two-time series champ [Tony Stewart](#) said of a proposed random testing policy. "I would love it. I've never been asked to take one yet. I think it should be mandatory that we have random drug testing all the time, I think non-stop through the year. Obviously with this happening, we as an organization aren't doing a good job of seeing it before it happens. Aaron coming out and saying that is an indication that we need to do a better job than we're currently doing. But I'm all for random drug testing, from the time we go to Daytona to the time we finish the season at Homestead. I think it's a great idea."

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Most major pro sports have drug policies that allow for random screenings. The NBA's even allows for testing of coaches and trainers. The PGA Tour will implement a drug screening program next year. In NASCAR, drivers must agree in writing to a substance abuse policy before they are allowed to compete. The sanctioning body can test drivers anywhere at any time, but typically does so only if there's suspicion about a particular competitor.

At times, the policy works. A number of drivers have been suspended from NASCAR for failing series-ordered drug tests, including [Shane Hmiel](#), a former Nationwide driver banned for life after his third failed test. Former Craftsman Truck drivers [Brian Rose](#) and [Tyler Walker](#) were suspended for failing random drug tests administered by NASCAR, and former Nationwide driver [Kevin Grubb](#) was suspended for refusing a test. NASCAR even submitted Cup driver [Tim Richmond](#) to drug testing in the 1980s.

"The responsibility here rests across the board -- with the drivers and competitors, owners and teams and NASCAR," NASCAR spokesman Kerry Sharp said. "We test an individual when we have reasonable suspicion, and a positive test results in severe consequences and is a career-changing moment for that person. NASCAR's policy is also supported by the various policies that the teams have in place that are required under the driver/owner agreements. No system is flawless; but we believe our zero tolerant policy that is in place has served the sport well."

But Fike was suspended only after his arrest, and the image of a driver shooting heroin stunned a sport that prides itself of being clean-cut. "That's one thing that's been good about NASCAR," Newman said, "we haven't had to worry about those things as other sports have."

Harvick fielded a Nationwide car for Fike in three races near the end of the 2006 season, and said he had no

reason to doubt that his driver was clean. But on the track, he sometimes had doubts about others.

"There's another driver that is suspended that I can almost guarantee you was in a racecar while he was under the influence, and that [ticks] me off. That is not fair to the 95 percent of this garage. The bad part about it is 95 percent of this garage I can guarantee you is clean, but there's a 5 percent chance -- it's just like the safety thing back in 2001, the reason that we reacted to it. We weren't proactive until that situation happened," he said, referring to **Dale Earnhardt's** fatal crash.

"There's no reason not to be proactive in the drug situation, and that to me is irresponsible more than it is anything. I'm sure I'll be blasted from somebody for saying what I feel, but I don't want to be on the racetrack with people like that."

Harvick made similar comments last year after Fike was arrested, and said he brought up the topic of a tougher drug policy in a meeting with NASCAR officials. "It almost seems like it went on deaf ears," he said.

"We haven't made any headway whatsoever on the drug testing policy. In the 10 years that I've raced, I've never been drug tested. So to me, that is not a proper professional sports drug policy and I went up and talked to them about it. They were more mad that I had a reaction to the situation than they were as far as trying to move forward. To me, it was just kind of one of those meetings where they were content to listen to what I had to say and that was about it. My name is not **Jeff Gordon**."

NASCAR's response: "No issue or conversation that we have with a driver, owner or team member ever falls on deaf ears," Sharp said. "Now, they might not always come out of the meeting with the answer they're looking for, but we listen."

In other major sports, athletes resist additional drug testing, often at the behest of players' unions. In NASCAR there is no union. Want to drug test? Schedule the drivers' meeting one hour early one week, **Greg Biffle** suggests, and hand every competitor a cup on the way out. "Just say, 'Make up your line over here, guys.' There you go," Biffle said. "I absolutely think they should. All this privacy B.S., can't do this, can't do that. You want to race in this sport? Get tested. I'll get tested anytime, I don't care. I think a lot of people are like that."

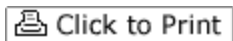
Including many of his fellow competitors.

"I'd be open to that," **Kasey Kahne** said. "As far as I'm concerned, where we are in NASCAR, where we are in racing, wherever you get the opportunities that we did, there should be no question that you're clean, or [not] doing drugs, or anything at all. I really don't think there are a lot of questions, because I don't feel like I race with people who do drugs. But I don't see anything wrong with having a random test every now and then."

Neither does Johnson. "I'm confident that every driver in this garage area is willing and open to whatever NASCAR decides to do, or whatever policies are put in place," he said. "I see no issues with that from any driver."

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http://www.nascar.com/2008/news/headlines/cup/04/10/kharvick.afike.drug.testing/story_single.html#page2



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