

NASCAR Stars Call for Drug Testing

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Thursday, April 10, 2008

(04-10) 22:49 PDT AVONDALE, Ariz. (AP) --

NASCAR's stars are serious about fighting drug use in the sport — even if it means regular, random testing.

In the wake of revelations this week by former Nationwide and Craftsman Truck Series driver Aaron Fike that he was addicted to painkillers and sometimes used heroin at the track on the same day he raced, the drivers quizzed about the situation Thursday at Phoenix International Raceway were dismayed.

"I cannot believe it," two-time reigning Sprint Cup champion Jimmie Johnson said. "It's absurd. I don't know what this means, where things go from here. (But) I'm so happy they figured out or found out what was going on and got him off the track. That is absolutely unacceptable."

NASCAR's substance abuse policy, based on "reasonable suspicion," allows the sanctioning organization to broadly administer tests anytime, anywhere. The sanctioning organization would not reveal how often those tests have been administered, but only a handful of drivers have been suspended from its various racing divisions for abusing its substance policy over the years.

Cup drivers are not represented by a union, like many other professional athletes, but most say they would like to see a program of random drug testing installed to alleviate any chance that people like Fike, arrested while shooting up heroin last July 7 in the parking lot of a Cincinnati, Ohio, amusement park, will be racing against them in the future.

Fike, eighth in the truck standings and racing for rookie of the year at the time, got a two-year probation and avoided jail by going to schools and tracks to deliver an anti-drug message. Since his arrest, he has raced in several sprint car races sanctioned by the U.S. Auto Club, which tests him before each race.

Fike revealed in the April 21 edition of ESPN The Magazine that he used heroin on the day he finished a career-best fifth in a truck race in Memphis, a week before his arrest.

"I've never been asked to take (a drug test), yet, and I think it should be mandatory that we have random drug testing all the time, I think nonstop through the year," two-time Cup champion Tony Stewart said. "Obviously, with this happening, (NASCAR) as an organization we aren't doing a good job of seeing it before it happens."

"Aaron coming out and saying that obviously is an indication we need to do a better job than what we are currently doing."

Kasey Kahne, who raced against Fike in Nationwide — then called the Busch Series — said he did have his



suspicious.

"I don't feel like I race with guys on drugs but, at the same time, there are certain people you wonder about at some times," Kahne said. "I definitely wondered about Aaron Fike the last year he was in Nationwide, or whatever he was racing.

"As far as I'm concerned, where we are at in NASCAR — in racing — whenever you get the opportunities you get, there should be no question that you're clean or doing drugs. I think there should be no question at all."

Would he be OK with random drug testing?

"I think there is more that goes into it than just saying, 'We're going to test you guys.' I don't understand it totally because I've never been testing," Kahne said. "I would be up for (drug testing) at any time, just so that I knew — and everybody else knows — what's going on.

"As much money that's in this sport, and as lucky as we are to get to do what we do, we should be clean and everybody out there should be."

Johnson, who said he has never been tested, added that he is confident that every Sprint Cup driver would be "open to whatever NASCAR decides or whatever policies are in place."

He added, "If anyone really knew, especially other drivers, you'd go straight to NASCAR and try to come out with the information and help them understand what you heard, what you know, what you saw, to get that person off the track. There's no exceptions for that on track, period."

Kevin Harvick said he spoke with NASCAR officials at the end of last season about the drug policy and the lack of regular testing and that "it went on deaf ears."

He added, "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, as 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."

NASCAR spokesman Kerry Tharp answered Harvick's criticism, saying, "First of all, let me assure you that no issue or conversation that we have with a driver, owner or team member ever falls on deaf ears. Now, they might not always come out of the meeting with the answer they're looking for, but we listen."

Talking about NASCAR's substance abuse policy, Tharp added, "The responsibility here rests across the board — with the drivers and competitors, owners and teams and NASCAR.

"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 tolerance policy that is in place has served the sport well."

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2008/04/10/sports/s150639D22.DTL>

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