



ALUMNI PROFILE

WHO IS WILLIE deWIT?

Boxing

+81kg (Heavyweight) Division - Gold Medal
Brisbane 1982 Commonwealth Games

Willie deWit of Grande Prairie, Alberta, is best known for his outstanding accomplishments as a heavyweight boxer. His career in both amateur and professional boxing made him a Canadian icon in the 1980's. However, deWit's accomplishments outside the ring have been just as impressive.

Willie deWit took up boxing relatively late at the age of 17. Prior to that he had been a standout high school quarterback. Although he was offered a football scholarship to the University of Alberta, he turned it down to pursue boxing instead.

DeWit was first spotted while working out at a Grande Prairie fitness club. Although not a boxing gym, it had heavy bags that were used for conditioning. The man who ran the club, Jim Murrie, saw the potential in deWit and contacted Dr. Harry Snatic, a youth boxing coach originally from the United States. Willie began training regularly with Snatic.

In March 1979, deWit entered and won his first boxing tournament – the Alberta Provincial Boxing Championships. He was placed in the Novice division along with six other inexperienced fighters aged between 17 and 20. He won his first bout so quickly and easily that all the other fighters in the division immediately withdrew from the competition.

DeWit went on to win a North American title and in 1982 moved to Calgary to work with Mansoor Esmail a Ugandan boxing and fitness coach. Esmail had also worked with other Commonwealth Games stars such as Henry Rono and Kip Keino. Later that year, deWit was selected to the Canadian team competing at the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane, Australia. Also on that team were two other outstanding boxers who would become household names in Canada – Shawn O'Sullivan and Dale Walters.

Competing in the +81kg (Heavyweight) division, deWit easily defeated William Isangura of Tanzania in the Semi-final, with the referee stopping the contest in the first round. In the Gold Medal match held on October 8th, deWit defeated Harold Hylton of England. Once again, the fight did not go beyond the first round. DeWit won by a knock-out to collect the Gold Medal for Canada.

Two years later, deWit competed for Canada at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. At the time, he was the World Amateur Heavyweight Champion and was one of the favorites to win gold. To his disappointment, deWit earned a Silver Medal after a controversial decision in the Gold Medal bout went in favour of his opponent, Henry Tillman of the United States.

Following the 1984 Olympics, deWit turned professional. His first pro fight took place at the

Northlands Coliseum in Edmonton on December 1st, 1984 (a TKO win over Walter Morris, USA). His pro career lasted until March 1988. Perhaps fittingly, his last fight was a unanimous decision win over his former Olympic opponent, Henry Tillman. Over that four-year span he compiled an impressive record of 21 wins, one draw, and one loss.

Early in his boxing career, deWit became friends with a Calgary lawyer named Milt Harradence. It was Harradence who first suggested that deWit return to school after his retirement from boxing and pursue a career in Law. DeWit followed that advice and obtained a Law degree from the University of Alberta in 1994. He went on to become a successful criminal defence lawyer and a former president of the Canadian Bar Association, Criminal Law subsection. He was appointed to the Queen's Counsel in 2013 and became a Judge in 2017. DeWit still serves as a Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta sitting in Calgary.

Willie deWit was inducted into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame in 1995 and the Canadian Boxing Hall of Fame in 2019.

