

## A WHOLE NEW BALLGAME

**By signing on as a principal with Dallas-based Direct Development, former NFL quarterback Troy Aikman tackles a new type of sport: shopping center development.**

Lindsey Walker

Troy Aikman has worn many hats over the years. From playing a quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys to owning a NASCAR racing team to being a television sportscaster for the Fox network, Aikman is no stranger to taking on new challenges. His latest venture — serving as a principal in the Dallas-based commercial real estate development company Direct Development — is one that he hopes will turn a life-long interest into a long-term investment.

"I've always had an interest in real estate, primarily from a business standpoint with the things that I've done," Aikman says. "As far as developing shopping centers, there's always been a part of me that's been intrigued about being involved with something like that."

It all began a little more than a year ago when Aikman met David Watson, a managing principal with Direct Development, at a local golf tournament.

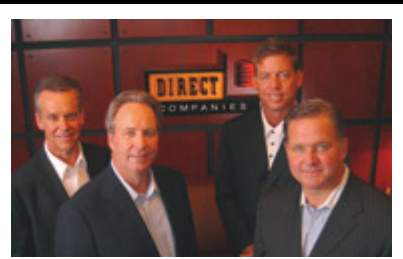
"David and Troy Aikman were flighted together, and so during the course of the tournament they played a match together," says Syd Hurley, also a managing principal with Direct Development. "During the match, they had the typical talk of 'What do you do?' and through that conversation they got to talking about the shopping center business. Troy said he had some friends in the industry and would like to learn more about it."

After the match, a dialogue commenced between the two and last May it culminated with Aikman joining the company as a principal. He is a partner in all of Direct Development's ventures going forward.

"Aikman has a great reputation that he's worked hard for, not only as a great quarterback but also as a businessman in our community," Watson says. "We work hard to try to maintain that same reputation, and his aptitudes are such that made him of interest to us at a partner level — even if he'd never played quarterback. His people skills and ability to build relationships go without his success on the field."

Though not necessarily in-volved with the day-to-day operations, Aikman's role in the company is a significant one — to help Direct Development build and maintain its relationships in the marketplace.

"The real estate business is relationship based and my job is to continue to help develop those relationships," Aikman says.



Direct Development's principals from left to right: Mike McCoy, Syd Hurley, Troy Aikman and David Watson.



The first project that Aikman will be involved with is Robertson's Creek, a 450,000-square-foot retail development located in Flower Mound, Texas. Aikman will be an investor in the Flower Mound project, along with another Cowboys' alumnus, Mike McCoy. McCoy was a former part-owner of the team and is also a new principal in Direct Development. The more than \$50 million center, which is the company's third retail center to go in near the intersection of FM 407 and FM 2499, is scheduled to open next summer.

The new principals' first project is Robertson's Creek, a 450,000-square-foot retail development in Flower Mound, Texas. The more than \$50 million shopping center is scheduled to open next summer.

"The interesting thing to us is that this is the biggest of all the shopping centers here at 150,000 square feet," Hurley says. "Anybody would've guessed that for the last one at this intersection, Robertson's Creek would have the C-grade tenant mix that maybe shouldn't have been built. I'm going to argue that this will be the best of the centers in terms of its line-up." The center will feature big names such as JC Penney, Belk and Dick's Sporting Goods, among other smaller tenants.

Since Hurley and Watson consider their employees their biggest asset, it is no surprise they'd welcome a people-person such as Aikman to join their team. The two started their company partially because they wanted to be able to make those important decisions — who they work with, where they work and what to do with their success.

"We started the company in November 1997 primarily to satisfy an entrepreneurial urge that burned brightly in both of us," Hurley says. "Another important part behind it was the ability to control your own environment.

With the addition of Aikman, Hurley and Watson feel they are on the right track to meet their company's initial objectives.

"We feel we are 98 percent whole, in terms of building our organization," Watson says. "We feel very proud of the team we've assembled. The environment you create has most to do with the people you bring in around you. We have now raised our organization in terms of size and have stayed consistent with that original goal. I think that sets us up well to continue to experience a favorable market."

As for Aikman, this venture is something he also plans to carry him into the future.

"I view this as something long-term that ultimately could take up the bulk of my time outside of broadcasting," he says. "I have always had an interest in real estate and am extremely confident in the principals of Direct Development. We share a similar philosophy of integrity — I intend to learn a lot and have some fun in the process."