

An Interview With:

TROY AIKMAN

TROY AIKMAN (Opening Comments): I very much look forward to the weekend in Canton coming up. We found out five months ago and it's hard to believe that so much time has passed and here we are and it's going to be here in just a few short weeks and I'm excited about it and looking forward to the weekend.

I've heard a lot about it from some previous Hall of Fame inductees in recent years and I'm excited about the class I'm going to be going in with. Obviously it's a great group that's accomplished a lot. And I think it's a great group of guys as far as how they represented the game.

Q. How different has this off-season been knowing you'll be inducted into the Hall of Fame?

TROY AIKMAN: It's not that different as far as what my time commitments are and things that I'm doing outside of broadcasting. But there's no question that as far as putting together an invite list and all of those things that are required, getting ready for Canton is pretty time-consuming. My wife's been extremely involved in that process and has really done the lion's share of the work.

And for me it's about trying to get my speech prepared and mention the people that I feel need to be mentioned. And we've been told we're given 10 minutes for each inductee. I think in some ways if we had been given 30 minutes it would be an easier speech, but to try to get it all in in 10 minutes, it's a challenge. That's what I've been working on.

Q. If you could give me a Cliff's Notes version of your career, could you tell me about three of your greatest moments?

TROY AIKMAN: Well, first on that list would be winning our first Super Bowl following the '92 season. That was extremely meaningful to me based on what happened in my rookie year. Going to the Cowboys was a highlight as well. I know some people don't get to go where they want to go. For me, Dallas was the city I wanted to come to, where I wanted to live and the team I wanted to play for. That was certainly a highlight for me.

And I'd say probably the last thing for me has been just the guys that I got a chance to get to know. The teammates, the coaches, the relationships that were established over a 12-year period. That's really what I'm most proud of, aside from the football part of it. We were talented back then. There's no question that had a big part in why we were successful. But we had a great group of guys.

And I think that oftentimes is overlooked. And I was just with Michael Irvin and Emmitt Smith. I just left them 10 minutes ago. We were doing a photo shoot in Dallas. We hadn't seen each other in a few months and it brought back a lot of great memories. And those guys are doing well in business, in their post-career, post-football career. And I think that's just another illustration of the type of people we have on our team. They're able to transfer to other things and be good at it.

Q. Troy, talk about what it meant to be part of the Triplets and how much fun you guys had in the early '90s?

TROY AIKMAN: I'm glad you asked about that. And, you know, I said it when I retired, that that moniker for us, it was something I was always extremely proud of. And I was proud to be a part of that group and with those guys, and our relationship is very strong. It was when we played. It still is to this day.

The thing that's special for -- I think the reason it's so special for all three of us is that, first of all, we were all just one year apart. Michael came in '88. I came in '89 and Emmitt came in '90. And we really did not enjoy any success without the other guys.

So we enjoyed our successes at the same time with each other, and after Michael left, I played one more year. Emmitt played a couple more years with the Cowboys after I left, but our careers, no question, are very much linked together.

Q. Troy, can you talk about why you picked Norv Turner to be your presenter?

TROY AIKMAN: It's interesting, Norv was my coach for three years. You know, in all

the years I played football and for the 12 years I played for the Cowboys, Norv was a part of that for three years. And yet I don't think there's any question that I wouldn't have become the player I was able to become. I certainly would not be getting inducted into the Hall of Fame if it weren't for his impact.

He came in at a time when I was a young quarterback going into my third season, had struggled my first few years and needed some guidance, needed somebody to kind of show me how to do it, and put together an offense and put me in a system that allowed me to do the things that I could do and allow Michael do his thing and Emmitt as well.

And he did that. He put it together for us. We went from last in the league in offense my second season to Norv's first season of being ninth in the league. The next few years we won Super Bowls.

And not only myself, but I know when Michael and Emmitt and I went into the Ring of Honor in Dallas a few years ago, it was a press conference to announce that. Both Michael and Emmitt credit Norv Turner for getting their careers in the right direction as well. So his impact on our football team was very profound.

Q. Troy, when you guys were 1-15, was that more difficult physically or mentally, physically because you're getting pounded or mentally just to hang in there?

TROY AIKMAN: It was mental. I was still -- I was still a young guy at that time. I was 22 years old. So I could absorb some of the hits. But the mental anguish was the most trying, because you know to put in the kind of time you do during the week to get prepared for the game and to go through the physical punishment in the course of a game, only to walk off the field, all 11 times that I played, without having experienced what it was like to win was extremely, extremely frustrating.

I didn't think so at the time, but I will tell you that even as I moved into the middle of my career when we had much success, that experience in '89 was a very positive thing for me, because I never lost sight of how difficult it was to win in the National Football League. And I really think it served me well, although while I was going through it, it was arguably the most difficult year I'd ever experienced in my life.

Q. (Indiscernible) -- with the Cowboys right now. I would like you to explain how did you manage along with

Emmitt and Michael the egos, not in (indiscernible) but how did you manage those egos together?

TROY AIKMAN: A lot of the perception publicly was not accurate, as far as the players that we have, whether that's Michael or Emmitt or any of the other, you know, superstar players that we had come through Dallas. Those guys, I've always said -- and Michael was probably the most unselfish player that I ever played with. And one of the best teammates I ever played with as well. I think he's a very misunderstood individual as far as what his contributions were to our team or what type of teammate he would have been.

They see the charisma, they see the personality he has, they immediately translate to, well, then, he's selfish. Michael was a tremendous competitor. Of course he wanted the football as much as anybody, but he understood when he was not getting the ball thrown to him why that wasn't happening. And as long as we were winning, he was very content with that.

Emmitt, in a lot of ways, was the same way. He was such a big focus of what we did offensively, that when they were shutting him down and we had to throw the ball and that's what we did, we had success doing it, then he was content with that as well.

And so that's why to go back to what I kind of said a little bit earlier, we had great players, but we had better people. And that's why we won. And I think when you look at teams that are winning, whether it was before us or have won recently, the teams that win in this league, yes, they have talent, but they've got to have a lot more than that. If it was just talent, then there's a lot of teams who have tried buying great players, they would have won world championships more than what they've been able to do.

So I played with great guys who really sacrificed for the team and Michael and Emmitt were those kind of guys.

Q. Troy, what player would you say is a future great in the league and why?

TROY AIKMAN: Well, there are a lot of great ones there now. The first one to come to mind is obviously Peyton Manning. I don't know that I have to explain why he's a great player. If you ask me to pick someone people don't know about right now, I can't do that. But I know that there are players that come through the league

when you talk about guys like Dan Marino and John Elway and Steve Young and Jim Kelly and going back, Joe Montana and Dan Fouts, and all those quarterbacks, and obviously a lot of other great players as well, and when they leave the game, I think there's always a part of all of us that wonders, 'Wow, the game is not going to be the same now that so-and-so is no longer a part of it.'

But what we realize is that the game goes on. And there are other superstars that step up, they play great and they make their marks. And then they leave their legacies to the next generation of players that are coming through.

So this league is littered with great players that are going to go on and -- and if they haven't already, have Hall of Fame careers. And no one individual or no group of players is ever bigger than the game itself.

Q. Do you have any regret regarding your NFL career?

TROY AIKMAN: I have no regrets. The only athletic regret that I can think of is that at UCLA I failed to take our team -- I played there for two years -- I failed to get our team to the Rose Bowl. And that's really the only thing I look back on and think, 'Wow, I wish I had been able to do that.' But the rest of it, professionally speaking, I'm very happy with my career.

Somebody asked me the other day if I would give up what I currently have in my professional life to go back if I was guaranteed that I could win a fourth Super Bowl. And my response to that is no, I love my life. I love my career that I had. And giving up what I currently have to go back and win a fourth Super Bowl is not important to me.

And so I have no regrets as far as what happened while I was with the Dallas Cowboys.

Q. Troy, if I recall, you didn't even much like football when you very first started playing. At what point did you realize you probably would make a pretty good quarterback?

TROY AIKMAN: I guess I probably came to that realization when I was a freshman at Oklahoma. I played football and I enjoyed it. But I enjoyed baseball and basketball more as a child growing up playing. And almost gave up football when I was going into the eighth grade. Then at the last minute decided to go ahead and play. And in Oklahoma there was more of an emphasis on football than there was on

baseball. Baseball was my first love. I'm convinced that had my family stayed in California and not moved to Oklahoma that I would have gone on and had an opportunity, anyway, to play college baseball and potentially professional baseball.

When we moved to Oklahoma, football was where the emphasis was. When I was making a decision on which college to attend, I had initially said I was going to go to Oklahoma State and play for Jimmy Johnson, the head coach there at the time. At the last minute I decided to attend Oklahoma University, and I did that because I just said I want to go somewhere where we have a chance to win national championships and you have that opportunity at OU. And I don't know that I can compete at quarterback at this level. And I know if I can't do it at quarterback at least I could do it at another position, whether that was playing safety or tight end or whatever it may be.

But I was only on campus there for a short time and I realized that I could play quarterback at the collegiate level. And that's when I really got excited about the possibilities of a collegiate career at quarterback as well as going on and playing professionally.

Q. Troy, you have been in Mexico a couple of times. What's your opinion about having more regular season games in our country?

TROY AIKMAN: I think it would be great. We didn't have a regular season game there, but we did play in Mexico three times when I was with the Cowboys. And we always had great response. At one time we had the largest crowd that had ever assembled for a professional football game, well over 100,000 fans. Of course, the Cowboys are very popular in Mexico, and that lent itself very well for us going down and spending time and playing and exposing that part of the country to American football.

I think it would be great. I know the league concurs with this. They would love to expose as many people around the world to American football as they can. Sometimes travel prohibits that. But I would be very much in favor of it. And I'm sure a lot of other people would be as well.

Q. Troy, when you were with the Cowboys, what was the most satisfying team that you beat -- was it a Buddy Ryan team?

TROY AIKMAN: (Laughter.) Well, we had some really great rivalries, I know that. Those teams in the NFC East, whether it was Philadelphia, Washington or New York, you know, of course Arizona was in our conference or in our division at that time. But those three teams that I mentioned, they -- you know, they always got pretty geared up to play us. And it was always -- we always felt that if we could play within the NFC to be successful we could be successful anywhere. And it proved itself true.

In '90 I think the Giants won the Super Bowl, in '91 the Redskins did and in '92 we did. And it was awfully competitive. So anytime we were able to pull out a win in our division, it was saying something. And we had some great games against San Francisco as well -- the NFC Championship Games, there was a stretch there where those games were about as big as they got. And then we had a few of those matchups with the Packers as well.

But that's really -- when I look back on my career and I think of the things that I do miss, it's really those big games, because I think those games are really what kind of defined my career and I miss playing in them.

Q. Do you think you might have played longer if you played in another division?

TROY AIKMAN: (Laughter.) Well, you know what, it's funny, because now as an analyst, we get ready -- we've done, as you can imagine, a lot of Philadelphia games, because they've been so good since I got out of football. And it didn't matter who was coaching that team from the time I came into the league, their whole MO was to hit the quarterback and hit him often and try to get him out of the game. And that's been their style for almost 20 years.

And whether it was Buddy Ryan or Bud Carson or Ray Rhodes or now with Jim Johnson, that style, any time you got ready to play those guys, you knew you were going to take a pretty good beating.

I know other quarterbacks, we'd get together in the off season. And I'd see Warren (Moon) or Steve Young and Dan (Marino) and John (Elway) and those guys, and we would talk about the league, and they would be getting ready to play the NFC East that year. That would be the division they were matched up against. I'd tell them, 'Hey, good luck,' and they got a taste of what it was like. But that division

back there in the early and mid '90s was as difficult as there was.

Q. Troy, what do you think is harder, being a quarterback in the NFL or being an analyst?

TROY AIKMAN: Being an NFL quarterback, I think, is one of the toughest things to do in sports, just because the demands on that position and what he's required to know and the decision-making that has to be done in such a short period of time and under extreme duress for the most part.

I'd love to sit here and tell you that being an analyst right now is the hardest thing there is. But there's no question in my mind being a quarterback is extremely difficult. As an analyst -- I mean, I guess as a quarterback the scoreboard pretty much says it all. And I've always said that regardless of what somebody thinks of Joe Montana, it's pretty hard to argue that that guy was one hell of a quarterback.

Whereas, in this profession, as an analyst, it really is so subjective as far as what somebody thinks in terms of someone being good or bad, that sometimes that lends itself to some real frustration as an analyst. Because there is no scoreboard. It's just what the public likes. And some of them are going to like you and some of them aren't. You just try to do the best job you can.

Q. Troy, being a former quarterback and now an analyst, what do you think of Eli Manning's development and you, like everyone else, looking forward to that Manning Bowl to start the season with the Giants and the Colts?

TROY AIKMAN: I think his development is really where it should be. Everyone gets -- everyone got, I think, a little bit, you know -- I don't want to say too excited, because he certainly gives you a lot of reasons to get excited. But he went through a stretch there where he was able to win some games late. And immediately I think he got labeled as if he had already arrived.

And so when he went through a period last year where he was struggling a little bit, all it did was really pronounce that and everybody then wanted to say, 'Well, what's wrong with Eli?' And I don't think anything has been wrong with him. I just don't think he's been given an opportunity to really grow into the position and learn the game at this level at the rate that most

quarterbacks get.

And he really hasn't had a chance in his whole life to do that. You know, because he's always been measured against what his brother and what his father have accomplished.

So I think he's doing just fine. I think there are areas of his game to where he's got to get better if he's going to be able to continue to make the improvements that I know he wants to make. And if that team is going to be able to make the improvements from where they were a year ago, that a lot of that improvement is going to rest on the development of Eli Manning.

I think it's unfortunate that here he is as a quarterback going into his third season, and he's not given the opportunity to throw to his top three wide receivers throughout the off season. I think that's a real mistake for Jeremy Shockey and Plaxico Burress and Sinorice Moss not to be there with Eli Manning getting some timing down. I don't think you can get that in a mini camp. I don't think you can get it in four weeks of training camp. I think it takes a lot of time and a lot of repetition. And they're not getting that kind of time.

Maybe that lends itself to some of the inaccuracies that Eli had last year.

Q. When you were going to Henryetta High School, did you ever in your wildest dreams think that Henryetta would one day be on Troy Aikman Drive and you'd be in the Ring of Honor and be in the Hall of Fame and all these types of things?

TROY AIKMAN: No. When I first moved to Henryetta, Oklahoma, I was wondering why my parents had decided or what I had done to deserve such punishment. I grew up in California until the age of 12. I could ride my bike anywhere I wanted to go. And we moved to Henryetta, we lived seven miles out of town on dirt roads with very few neighbors. It wasn't conducive for a young boy that all he ever wanted to do was to play sports. And, you know, I just couldn't readily get access to those types of things.

So there were some real frustrations I went through early on when I was in Henryetta until at least the school year started. But now I would say I think every kid should be given the opportunity to live in a small town, because it really shaped me in a lot of ways. It provided me a lot of the values and core beliefs that I hold today.

But, no, I always had aspirations to be a professional athlete, and I always believed that I

would be given the opportunity. I didn't dream that I would be the number one pick in the NFL Draft or that I would ever be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, but I knew I would be given the opportunity to be a professional athlete, either football or baseball.

But, no it's been really great for me and for someone who wasn't born in Henryetta and spent a short period of time in Henryetta, I'm very appreciative they've adopted me the way they have.

Q. Troy, when people think of you as a quarterback, they think of poise and composure during rough times and stuff. Have you thought about the emotion of the weekend coming up and how you're going to handle that and, you know, emotions, how they seem to get caught up in the moment? But have you thought about what this is going to be like?

TROY AIKMAN: Yeah, I have. I've been working on my speech and I barely get through it by myself without really having the emotion of being there at the moment. And so I know it's going to be a very emotional weekend for a lot of reasons. There's a number of coaches and players that I haven't seen in quite some time. Some of them I haven't seen in 30 years. And they're making the trip to Canton to share in this moment with me. So it's going to be very emotional. I'm hoping that I'm able to show some level of composure to get through it.

But I think it's going to be difficult. I know what it was like when I retired from football five years ago. And I know how emotional that was. In some ways I'd like to think that this won't be as emotional, because I'm a little farther removed from the game. But yet I think when you start acknowledging people that had such a significant impact in your life, I think that always becomes very emotional. And I don't anticipate it will be any different for me.

Q. Troy, talk about your relationship with Barry Switzer. Obviously you've known each other a long time both in Oklahoma and then in Dallas?

TROY AIKMAN: Yeah, I believe I've got a good relationship with Barry. And, you know, he was terrific for me when I went to Oklahoma and was very helpful when I was transferring from OU in calling some various head coaches, one of those guys being Terry Donahue and giving him great recommendations and then

allowing me to go on and further my career.

And I don't know that there's been anyone who's been a bigger fan of my abilities than what he was, both when I was in college as well as when I was with the Dallas Cowboys. I think there were certainly some levels of frustration when he came in to be the head coach for the Cowboys, I was very supportive of that decision when he came in. But I think Barry was at a position in his life that he was probably not as committed to the team as what he had been back when I was with him at Oklahoma.

I think he would tell you the same thing. But he's obviously one of the greatest collegiate coaches of all time. He's had tremendous success at everything he's done. And I wish him nothing but the best.

Q. Troy when you look back at how your college career started and how your first two years in Dallas began, does this award become even more meaningful to you?

TROY AIKMAN: I think why this is very meaningful to me is not because of anything that I had to endure, whether it was early in my collegiate career or early in my career with Dallas, why this is so meaningful to me is that I had tremendous confidence in my abilities to throw the football. And I think that I could have played places that there was more of an emphasis on that and put up some pretty big numbers.

I know as an analyst I talk to players all the time. We all hear players when they are talking to the media, and they all say – and they've been saying this for decades – that it's all about the team. And as long as the team wins, then that's all that matters.

Well, you and I both know that for about 99 percent of those players, that's not what matters. What matters is if -- it's okay if we win as long as I get to be showcased and as long as I get to put up some big numbers. We don't have to name names of pretty good examples of that. Not one time during my career, during my 12 years, did I ever comment publicly or privately to a coach or to a teammate that we should throw the ball more than we do because I wanted to showcase my skills or because I wanted to show I could do the things that I believed within my heart that I could do.

So after a career of really putting team accomplishment ahead of personal achievement, when it was all said and done, I'm being bestowed with one of the greatest

individual honors you could ever be given. And to me I'm very proud of that. And I think in there somewhere is a lesson for young kids.

But that means more to me by receiving this honor than anything else.

Q. Troy, were you surprised to be inducted into the Hall of Fame your first year on the ballot?

TROY AIKMAN: I don't want to say I was surprised. I was asked a lot leading up to the vote as to why I felt that I should be in or was I going to be disappointed if I didn't get in. And, you know, what happened was, as I said earlier, I'm very proud of the career that I had. I'm proud of the games we were able to win and the championships that we won along the way.

And during the process of leading up to the vote, I felt like I was being asked to defend what it was that I had accomplished. And I wasn't going to do that. Had I have not gotten in, I would have experienced something, I'm sure. But I don't know exactly what it would have been. I know it wouldn't have been anger, because I don't think that anybody should ever expect to go into the Pro Football Hall of Fame regardless of what their career was like. I think it takes away from those players that are in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and to me it tarnishes what should be pretty sacred.

And so I wouldn't have been angry about it. I don't know -- I wasn't surprised that I got in. And if I hadn't gotten in I don't know that I would have been surprised by that either. It's something that I'm honored with, and happy with, and I just really haven't analyzed it to that degree.

MODERATOR: Troy, thank you very much for joining us today. Congratulations again on your Hall of Fame honor, and we'll see you in Canton in about three and a half weeks.

TROY AIKMAN: Thank you very much.

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