

# HANDLING SUCCESS...HOW WILL THE COWBOYS RESPOND AFTER LAST YEAR'S DOMINANCE? BY RICK WEINBERG



Rick Weinberg

When the question is posed to Dallas Cowboys quarterback **Troy Aikman**, the confidence in his voice wilts, and the grin that graces his

face turns to a look of concern, of uneasiness.

*Troy, how will the Cowboys respond to last year's success?*

Aikman, the Most Valuable Player in Dallas' Super Bowl romp last January, slowly reaches into his back pocket, pulls out a can of Copenhagen, and shoves a huge wad of the chew inside his lower lip, all the while contemplating the question.

"Historically, teams coming off a Super Bowl win don't do well," he finally says, "so I'm real interested to see how we handle success. Looking back at other Super Bowl winners, either contract squabbles, egos or personality clashes tore the team apart. I don't see that happening to us. We're a tight team, an intensely focused team."

Aikman, the man who made Joe Montana's past playoff heroics look almost ordinary by completing 68 percent of his passes with no interceptions during the Cowboys' three playoff blowouts, cracks a smile while reliving his euphoria of last January.

"You know," he says, getting serious, "I honestly can't understand how a team can play in the Super Bowl, experience the elation and power of the game, and not want to get back there again and again. There's nothing like it, nothing I've ever experienced. I can't understand how a team, once they've gotten a taste of the Super Bowl, could be content not to get back there. I had that taste, and all I know is that I want it again."

Which is why Aikman can't fathom how only one team has repeated in

the last 13 years—the 49ers in 1990.

"Problems always seem to crop up," Aikman says. "After winning a Super Bowl, I guess players feel like they're more valuable, that they want a bigger piece of the spotlight, bigger

contracts, more endorsements. It becomes a big ego thing, and then before you know it, bam—your focus isn't on the game but on inconsequential, petty stuff. I know there are no guarantees for us, none whatsoever, despite how everyone

views our talent. Yeah, we were dominant last year, particularly in the playoffs, but we were also very fortunate. We had no serious injuries, no serious personality problems. We started peaking just at the right time and went into the playoffs with tremendous momentum and confidence."

They played flawlessly, just as the Redskins did a year earlier during their equally dominant playoff run. And as Aikman points out, "We all know what happened to the Redskins [last year]."

"Before [last year's] Super Bowl was over, people were already talking about 'The Dallas Dynasty,'" Aikman says. "I don't know about that. Winning gets harder every year. Every year, a team takes on a new personality. What kind of personality we take on this year, I don't know. But with the approach our ownership and coaches take, it's hard to imagine we'll have a collapse. With our talent, the way we execute, and with the way our coach [**Jimmy Johnson**] keeps us focused, we probably will repeat."

They'd better, because Johnson and Cowboys owner **Jerry Jones** will accept nothing less. "There'll be no complacency here, believe me," says Jones. "No one in this organization,

from the man on top to the man on the bottom, has lost sight of what it's like to be humbled. We remember what it was like going 1-15 [in '89]. We remember what it was like losing in the playoffs [to Detroit] two years ago. Complacency won't exist here."

On Aug. 1, **Reggie Jackson**, whose combination of charisma, flamboyance and showmanship was, is, and always will be unparalleled, will stand at a podium in Cooperstown and accept his admission into baseball's Hall of Fame. He will cry, he will laugh, he will be controversial. He will also be alone. Alone in the spotlight, alone on the stage. And that's just the way it should be.

No one thrived in the spotlight like Reggie. "The ultimate showman," his former manager **Gene Mauch** calls him.

Today's youth will never experience the drama Reggie created. **Barry Bonds**? No comparison. Reggie hit .357 with 10 homers in five World Series—all of which his team won. Bonds has yet to crack a career mark of .200 in the playoffs, let alone carry his team in the World Series. Drama? Reggie hit three home runs in three straight at-bats off three different pitchers—all on the first pitch—in the clinching game of the '77 World Series on Broadway's biggest stage, Yankee Stadium. Drama? Hell, Reggie's strikeouts were more dramatic than Bonds' homers.

Reggie is a complex personality: bombastic, egotistical, cruel one minute, provocative, charming, hysterically funny and accommodating the next. He was always the central figure—at the plate, in the clubhouse, and around the batting cage, where he thrived on ragging opponents and writers. He loved to intimidate the media. "We had some battles," he said to me recently, wrapping his arm around my shoulder, reminiscing about the days he played for the Angels and I covered them. He loved calling legitimate questions "stupid," just to intimidate. So when he asked some bonehead questions while doing postgame interviews for ABC dur-



Troy Aikman

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