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Charlotte firms team up with NFL, NBA pros

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Two Charlotte firms see major growth ahead in a partnership that combines top-level athletic training with sports medicine and rehab under one roof. A Nashville company, D1 Sports Training, first tapped [local site search company Sports Med Properties](#) as D1 began expanding in the Southeast in 2010.

Several years later, Sports Med realized the time-consuming chore of starting over in each new expansion city with architects and construction firms needed to be more efficient. [Randy Russell](#), president of Sports Med Properties, considered partners in Nashville and other cities before finding a suitable partner in his backyard: [Charlotte-based A M King](#). Their joint D1 projects include Denver, Louisville and Birmingham.

D1 Sports Training has ramped up a franchise model in recent years that pairs a pro athlete — often from the NBA and the NFL — with a training center. [Football players Tim Tebow, Peyton Manning and Von Miller are among the D1 investors](#) in various locations. A local health-care provider usually adds to the project with rehab and sports medicine clinics.

[Will Bartholomew](#), the D1 founder, [played football at the University of Tennessee and suffered a career-ending knee injury](#) while attempting to make the Denver Broncos' roster as an undrafted free agent. While rehabbing his knee in Tennessee, Bartholomew began informal training of high school players and soon realized he had a potential business.

And thus D1 — short-hand for Division I, the top level in college sports — was born. Specialized coaching and training is offered at the centers for youth athletes of all ages, while adults can join and participate in workout regimens that might put them next to NFL players and other notables there for off-season conditioning.

Charlotte had a D1 facility for three years before it closed last winter. In February, *The Charlotte Observer* quoted a D1 executive in Nashville [who said a new location here could open within two months](#).

This week, D1 founder [Will Bartholomew](#) told *CBJ* his company hopes to re-open in Charlotte in the near future but didn't disclose any details. Retired NFL player Steve Smith was one of the lead investors at the D1 here, which was located in Matthews. OrthoCarolina, one of the tenants in the original D1 here, is converting the Matthews site into a sports therapy and wellness center.

Sports Med has helped D1 open and plan 34 locations across the country. Since Russell found A M King, the two Charlotte companies have collaborated on seven D1 locations and Bartholomew recommends the firms to franchisees, though they are under no obligation to use them.

This month, Sports Med and A M King broke ground on their latest D1 facility. It's a \$6.5 million project scheduled to open in December in the Dallas suburb of Carrollton and will be owned by [Aqib Talib](#), a nine-year NFL defensive back who now plays for the Denver Broncos. Talib lived in Dallas in middle school and high school.

[Brian King](#), AM King president, said his company has benefited from working with clients in other industries that are also involved in multiple states. That made it easier for A M King to help Sports Med and D1 with a more national approach to development, he said.

In August, a D1 training center steered by Sports Med and A M King will open in Indianapolis. [Jeff Teague](#), a former Wake Forest standout who now plays for the Indiana Pacers, is a principal investor in the project.

Talib told *CBJ* this week he was planning to open a training center in the Dallas area and was approached by D1 about becoming a franchisee. Bartholomew suggested Talib meet with Sports Med and A M King and Talib came away impressed.

"I'm the sole owner," Talib said. "It's on me."

With that in mind, Talib said he has been careful in choosing his business partners. His older brother, Yaqub, is the general manager and his two sisters will work at the D1 in Carrollton, too.

What sold him on the Charlotte firms? Russell, the Sports Med president, whom Talib described as "sharp, intelligent and all about business."

Talib's D1 includes a 100-yard pro-style football field next to a 25,000-square-foot training and rehab facility.

Sports Med Properties had extensive experience with real estate searches and transactions for doctors' offices and other health-care buildings when Bartholomew met Russell. [George Lehnerer](#), A M King project manager, said one of the challenges is to find sites that fit within the budget, but are also located in and around retail centers to pull in youth athletes and others with convenient access.

D1 facilities range from 4,000 square feet to 50,000 square feet, though most are in the range of 15,000 square feet, the principals said. Sports Med and A M King pegged the development cost for a D1 location in the range of \$120 to \$200 per square foot, or \$1.8 million to \$3 million for a 15,000-square-foot center.

Bartholomew said his 16-year-old company now has 36 centers in 13 states, with more on the way. In North Carolina, former Wake Forest player and current NBA star [Chris Paul](#) opened a D1 in 2015.

Teague told me he heard about Paul's Winston-Salem training center and wanted to do something similar in Indianapolis. Teague's father "is a big fitness guy" and has been involved in AAU basketball for many years. The Teagues are from Indiana and [Jeff Teague](#) said several family members, including his dad, will help run the D1 location there.

Privately held Sports Med declined to disclose revenue; A M King generates \$100 million to \$150 million annually, [Brian King](#) said. Food manufacturing and processing accounts for 70% of A M King's revenue and those clients include grocery retailer Aldi.

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