

# Frankly Plank

By Duane Plank

Finally got to make a trek down to the place where the turf meets the surf, Del Mar racetrack, last week. Thanks to the graciousness of local trainer Paul Aguirre and wife Lisa, *Plank* and the kid were among a group of more than a dozen folks who were snuck into the track to settle into box seats overlooking the finish line at the beautiful track down south.

Soccer coach *JS*, who gets the credit for setting up the excursion, drove one of the vehicles down to Del Mar. We were scheduled to leave around 11-ish, which should have given us plenty of time to make it to the windows to play the 3 p.m. first race. But, shockingly, we got a late start and then had to make a "quick" stop somewhere in Irvine to pick something up from someone. Not sure what we picked up or who the someone was, but I am sure it was all on the up and up. But it did cost us about 45 minutes, and by the time we hit the dreaded traffic a few miles outside of Oceanside, we were actually running late.

Finally arrived a few minutes before post time, but one of the group had come down sick and had to be stashed on the couch at the Aguirre condo adjacent to the track to recover. She never made it to the track. Neither did her mom. So we lost two of the party before we entered the facility. And, in the third week of August, incredibly, we were actually greeted by more than a few drops of rain as we settled into our seats.

We missed seeing the first race live and watched the contest on television from the Aguirre condo, but that was no big deal because there would be eight more equine puzzles to solve, to steal a phrase used by trainer Roger Stein on his weekend radio show. And solve one I did cuz *Plank* hit the trifecta in race three, which paid \$137

bucks. Not a life-changing event for sure, but a nice way to start the afternoon. Except there was a little glitch. Like there usually is for me when I play the ponies. I screwed up, or the clerk at the window screwed up. Guess it falls on me. Anyway, when I went to place the bet prior to the race, my intention was to play a trifecta. Somehow, the guy at the window heard exacta. So he printed my slip for the exacta. I foolishly didn't check it out before I left the window and was a tiny bit ticked when I looked at my "winning" trifecta ticket and saw that it was only for the exacta. Which paid a measly 18 bucks. Idiot. Me, not the ticket guy...but I avoided his line for the rest of the afternoon.

Course I didn't cash another ticket the rest of the day. Don't bet much when I go to the track, preferring to take in the spectacle and enjoy the scenery. And let me tell you, on a Friday afternoon at Del Mar, there is some mighty fine scenery. Even if the weather was a bit overcast. Whole different ballgame than attending the races down the road at Hollywood Park.

Since we were in some prime seats, saw many of the top-notch trainers like Bob Baffert and Ron Ellis enjoying the afternoon. We ended up sitting in the area where many of the owners and trainers have their boxes. Stood in line to place my wagers a few times next to ex-Halo hurler Chuck Finley, who looked to be about seven feet tall and was sporting a grungy beard. Wonder if Chuck knows the difference between a trifecta and an exacta?

Also saw at least a half dozen or so locals from the good old South Bay environs wandering around the clubhouse area. Lots of familiar faces. Anyway, the kid struck out in his wagers, but it seemed like a couple of the soccer coach's offspring cashed a ticket or two. Good for them.

Had previously mentioned a horse, *Seeuat Stickstein*, with local ties. Well, that horsie ran in race four and finished a credible third. All in all, a good but long day. Left the mansion a little after 11 in the a.m. Didn't return until nearly 11 p.m.

Heart be still, *Brett Farce* went and changed his mind again and reported to the Minnehaha Viking camp last week. And the marketeers were already peddling purple number four jerseys in honor of the washed-up QB. Trying to look back in the archives of the *FP* columns and see the exact date that I predicted the greybeard would finally show up in Minnesota after missing as much training camp as possible. I know that is what I predicted back a few months ago. Honest injun.

Alluded last week to a little problem that iconic Louisville basketball coach Rick Pitino has been embroiled in recently. Seems that Pitino, who said he had been drinking, hooked up with some woman after hours in a restaurant six years ago. Turns out that the

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# Super Bowl or Bust for the San Diego Chargers

By Duane Plank

With the NFL embarking on week three of their money grab called the exhibition season, time to look at a few of the AFC teams that are probably still going to be playing with the old pigskin after the 16-game regular season winds down on January 3.

Our little cousins to the South, as the venerable scribe and occasional radio guy Doug E. Krikorian refers to the citizens of San Diego, will be frothing at the mouth over the exploits of their Chargers. The Bolts are the consensus pick to waltz through the AFC West, towering over the recently stumbling threesome that includes the Kansas City Chiefs, the Denver Broncos and the Oakland Raiders. The Chargers stumbled their way to a pathetic 4-8 start last season, only to somewhat miraculously win their final four games and watch the Broncos implode, handing the Chargers the division title on the final day of the regular season.

A 1-1 playoff drive ended with the San Diegans dropping a 35-24 contest to the eventual Super Bowl champs in Steeltown. Time may be running out on this group of players, who saw little roster turnover in the offseason. Linebacker Larry English was selected in the first round of the collegiate draft, and with the expected return of difference-maker Shawne Merriman who is back from season-ending knee surgery, the backers could be a devastating force.

In prior years, running back LaDainian Tomlinson was the man on the offensive side of the ball. But LT is obviously slowing down, and at age 30 will probably share time with scatback runner Darren Sproles, who at 5-6 is a tough guy to tackle. But the question that Sproles must answer is: Can a tiny RB carry the load? Probably not, but Coach Norv Turner, a renowned offensive guru from the Troy Aikman-led Cowboy days, will utilize Sproles in a variety of ways, trying to get the little guy isolated on a slower defender on the perimeter.

Tomlinson has ended the past two seasons injured, watching the Chargers lose their final contest, huddled in a big-old jacket, gazing impassively from the sideline. The guy did gain more than 1,100 rushing yards last season, but history has shown us, again, and again, that 30-year-old-running backs typically go one way. Downhill. Fast.

Course this isn't LT's team anymore, right? The leader of the Chargers is QB Philip Rivers, who chucked 34 TD passes last season and led the NFL with a 105.5 QB rating. Anyone out there know how they compute that rating, please let me know. Anyway, Rivers is a dangerous passer, and can look to wideouts Vincent Jackson and Chris Chambers when he decides to throw the ball. Plus veteran tight end Antonio Gates is still a force to be reckoned with. For the Chargers, who have won the division for the past three years, it is Super Bowl appearance or bust.

In the AFC South, the old school Indianapolis Colts, led by the very funny Peyton Manning, will presumably battle the Tennessee Titans for the division title, a title that the Titans captured last season only to flame out early in the playoffs. As in game one.

Jeff Fisher, long ago player at the collegiate football factory up the road on Figueroa, returns for his 15th full-season at the helm. Fisher is a top-notch coach, the kind of leader who will always have his team ready to put out maximum effort. But Fisher is not without his detractors, who point to his mediocre 5-6 record in playoff games and last season's early exit from the postseason after achieving the number one seed in the AFC.

The Titan family was rocked by the recent murder of ex-QB Steve McNair, who led the Tennesseans to their only Super Bowl appearance, where they came about a foot from forcing the St. Louis Rams into an overtime period in the 2000 ultimate game won by the good guys.

Kerry Collins returns at QB for Fisher, who made the astute decision early last season of leaving Vince Young holding a clipboard after the ex-Texas Longhorn healed up from an early season injury. Collins seems to be Fisher's kind of field general, the type who doesn't turn the ball over, can find the open receiver, and who thinks pass first, second and third. Which is what a QB is supposed to do, right?

Backup Young, the number one selection in the 2006 draft, will start the season on the bench. But that didn't stop Young from popping off recently, telling *Esquire* magazine that, "I don't know when I will start again. But I will be the next black quarterback to win a Super Bowl. And I will be in the Hall of Fame." Confident young man, eh? Wonder what Donovan McNabb thinks about Young's outburst?

Guess we need to mention another pretty decent team residing in the AFC, the once and future champion New England Patriots, who are probably very happy to be flying low on the old radar screen this preseason.

Dashing Tom Brady is back to captain the Pats, after suffering a nasty knee injury in the first game of the 2008 season. Coach Bill Belichick is probably enjoying the challenge of revamping a team that just missed out on the postseason last year. With an 11-5 record.

Like all great teams, the Pats have had to deal with opponents plundering their coaching staff and playing talent. Offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels landed in Denver as the Broncos new head guy, and player personnel guru Scott Pioli moved over to the Chiefs. Pioli then traded for QB Matt Cassel, who had a fantastic season in '08, stepping in for the injured Brady.

Expect Brady, who led the Pats to 18 straight wins in 07/08 before dropping the Super Bowl to the New York Giants, to find wide receivers Randy Moss and Wes Welker running freely in opponents' secondaries. And expect the ever resourceful Belichick, a barrel of laughs kinda guy, to get the last chuckle as the Pats capture the AFC East title.

Whoops, out of space, and haven't even mentioned the reigning SB champs, the Pittsburgh Steelers. Easy man, have another Iron City brewski. Long season and, trust me, the Steelers will get their share of kudos in this space, so help me Terry Bradshaw. Ben Roethlisberger fan Jen wouldn't have it any other way. •

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7:00-8:15pm Hatha Basics - All Level Leyla

#### Tuesday

5:30-6:45pm Yin Yoga - All Level Via  
7:00-8:15pm Vinyasa Flow - Level I Leticia

#### Wednesday

6:00-7:15am Vinyasa Flow - All Level Jamie  
5:30-6:45pm Hatha Basics - Level I-II Andy  
7:00-8:15pm Hatha Basics - All Level Teri

#### Thursday

5:30-6:45pm Forrest - All Level Theresa  
7:00-8:15pm Beginner Hatha Robyn

#### Friday

6:00-7:15am Vinyasa Flow - All Level Jamie  
6:15-7:30pm Vinyasa Flow - All Level Alex

#### Saturday

9:30-10:45am Hatha Basics - All Level Andy  
11:00-12:15pm Tai Chi - All Level Ara

#### Sunday

8:00-9:15am Hatha Basics - All Level Cathy  
9:30-10:45am Yoga Tune-Up® - All Level Theresa  
5:30-6:45pm Hatha Basics - All Level Andy

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