

## Frankly Plank

By Duane Plank

What the heck am I going to do with myself without Little League baseball to coach, BP to throw, bases to coach, moms to schmooze? Hope that my wife doesn't peruse *FP* this week; I believe that she has an answer or two for what I can do with my spare time.

Anyway, broke down and bought a couple or four CDs the other day. Okay, I really didn't buy 'em. I took advantage of a gift card that was so graciously sent my way by the wife and kid. Either on my birthday or Father's Day. One or the other. Picked up a great little CD called *Aural Six* by my current faves, Counting Crows. Also left the store with a couple of Springsteen's best and a vintage Queen effort. Miss the long-ago passed Freddy Mercury, Queen frontman, and I know that you do, too.

Got back to the mansion, eager to open and play the CDs. Which of course took about 20 minutes. To open the discs from the Crows and Queen, which were shrink-wrapped to the gills. And had the damn barcode plastered over one of the sides. Bruce's discs were fan-friendly, packaged in a very easy to open cardboard package. Which even I could figure out. Finally opened the Crows disc, wiped the blood off of my finger from the knife cut, and enjoyed the heck out of it.

Need to listen to more of the music. Y'all know I run around the town daily, trying to battle my French fry diet, keep my weight under 200 pounds and relieve whatever imagined stress that I have conjured up. Started to listen to sports talk on el radio instead of plugging in my iPod thingee. But I need the musica. Pumps me up, energizes me, makes me feel upbeat.

Okay, on to the sports, but I reserve the right to digress and mix in riveting non-sports stuff. Here's some breaking sports news: Tiger wins a golf tourney, Ball-Bender Beckham scores a goal against Barca but gets booed by the faithful, and the men's pro tennis tourney played on the Westside is won by someone virtually nobody in the world has ever heard of. Enough of that!

So now we all know why the Angels continue to get their butts kicked in the postseason by the Red Sox. Because the Sox had a bunch of steroid cheaters. Ramirez, Ortiz, maybe others. Love the Ortiz quote earlier this year, when he said that anyone caught cheating should be suspended for a year. Way to go, Big Papi. Are you going to volunteer for that suspension?

And, whoa is me, are you trying to tell me that Man-Ram was cheating back seven or more years ago? Said it ain't so, Joe. An intelligent person, which includes all of my readers, may surmise that if Ramirez was cheating in '03 and was again caught cheating this year, that he may have been cheating for all of the years in between? Whad'ya think, smart, well-educated readers of *FP*?

You know what I have written about the beisbol and the steroid era. Don't care anymore, as singer Phil Collins said in one of his tunes. Pitchers cheated, hitters cheated. Hell, looking at some of the bloated coaches in the MLB, maybe *they* cheated, too. Mix in a salad, fellas. Or use the treadmill a little more. Or a lot more.

But most Dodger fans apparently could

not care less that the dreadlocked one was majoring in pharmacology. And I am sure the frenetic fans who used to scream obscenities at Barry Bonds when old-helium-head patrolled left field at the Ravine for the hated ones now wish that they could apologize to the ex-Giant outfielder. Sure they do. It was Manny poster night last evening at Dodger Stadium and I assume that the building was sold out, with Man-Ram fans turning a blind eye to the multiple indiscretions of their hero.

And you know who was scheduled to be in attendance last night in the tilt against the Milwaukee Brewers? *Plank* and the kid, who were graciously given tickets by a very generous Dodger employee. And yup, I was going to pick up a Manny poster or two and immediately try to off-load them on eBay. If I could figure out how to sell something on eBay. Or maybe I could go the generous route, the nice guy route, and give a poster to big-time fanista *Dodger Girl*, who could bestow the artwork on her young Dodger Blue daughters?

Such a dilemma. Make a buck, or be a good guy. Who was it that said nice guys finish last, by the way? A little research uncovers the possible truth: The statement was attributed to baseball manager Leo "the Lip" Durocher, who managed the Brooklyn Dodgers and Chicago Cubs, among other teams. The full quote attributed to Leo by a semi-believable Internet source, is as follows: "All nice guys. They'll finish last. Nice guys. Finish last." Durocher was talking about the makeup of an opposing baseball team that was not winning many games, not some dude. See how things can get spun around?

So neither the Dodgers, nor the Angels were able to pry Roy Halladay away from the Toronto Blue Jays. The stud righty will finish out the '09 season in the Great White North. And again miss out on the playoffs.

The Halos stood pat at the trading deadline, but reportedly were working hard to acquire either Halladay or San Diego closer Heath Bell, who would have been a nice alternative to the always-possibly-implosion Angel closer, Tito Fuentes. Guess what, Angel fans? If the playoffs started today, the boys from the OC would match up against the fellas from Beantown in a first round playoff series. Wonderful.

And the Dodgers picked up lefty George Sherrill from the Orioles for virtually nothing. Sherrill was a closer for the Birds, but will be used as a set-up man and bridge to closer Jonathon Broxton.

Okay, *RJ the Golfer*, you can now rest easy because your Lakers have inked the deal with big man Lamar Odom. Odom, who most observers consider an extremely pivotal part of the Laker puzzle, re-upped for a reported \$33 or so million, spread out over the next four seasons. The fact that Odom, or his agent, nixed a four-year, \$36 million deal early in the negotiations can now be forgotten.

And a reminder that *RJ* will be celebrating his birthday week soon. He asked me to put that in. Okay, he didn't. Dude was born on August 12, but I am assuming he will try to string it out for a week or so and gather all of the freebies he can. Good for him. Stay tuned for more all-important B-day alerts! •

## Are you Ready for some Football?

By Duane Plank

Are you ready for some football, NFL-style? Training camps are in full swing as the players in the country's most popular sport ready themselves for opening night, September 10, which features a contest between the defending Super Bowl champion Pittsburgh Steelers and the always-game Tennessee Titans.

The Steelers have off-the-field issues to deal with as they report to camp. QB Ben Roethlisberger was recently accused of rape by a Nevada casino employee, who filed a civil case against Roethlisberger on July 17. Although the QB vehemently denied the charges and held what he hoped was a one-time presser on the ordeal, you gotta believe that the legal status of the two-time Super Bowl winning quarterback will be on the minds of more than a few Steelers as they prepare for the regular season opener.

Third-year Coach Mike Tomlin, who seems to have a pretty good grasp of the realities of the world we live in, said, "If you are going to be good, distractions come with it. I am more concerned about embracing that and dealing with it and performing in the midst of it as opposed to it."

And another QB who would have definitely had an impact on the upcoming season, the nearly 40-year-old Brett Favre, finally decided to say no to the courting being done by the Minnesota Vikings. Favre, who had off-season surgery to fix his bum right arm and had been working out with some high school kids back home in Mississippi, was thought by most in the know to be definitely leaning towards playing with the Vikes. People close to Favre were opining that the ex-Jet QB was merely delaying the inevitable, cuz at nearly 40, Favre didn't really want to spend the full six-or-so weeks in training prepping for the Vikings' opener against Cleveland.

But Favre surprised nearly all who were still interested last week when he told ESPN that he was staying retired. "It was the hardest decision that I have ever made," said the old man. "I didn't feel like physically I could play at a level that was acceptable." So the Favre farce is over. At least for now. Or at least until a starting QB gets hurt, so help me Tavaris Jackson, and the media-fueled rumor monster surfaces again. So if somehow the NFL doesn't call off the season because of Favre's snit, there will be news made by others in the QB colony.

Another wannabe signal caller in the news, the recently released-from-the-pokey Michael Vick, has been looking for a hook-up in the National Football League. Teams seem to have been falling all over themselves to put the word out that they weren't interested in the scatter-armed QB. Someone once said that absence makes the heart grow fonder. Well, Vick has been absent from the NFL for 18 or so months. Remember what he was, when he was a starting QB for the Atlanta Falcons?

Here are some NFL stats from the three-time Pro Bowler Vick's file: Completion percentage: 54. Which is pathetic for a starting QB. Average yards per completion: 6.7. Which is pathetic for a starting QB. And the other stats pertinent to a QB, like his overall rating, which at 75.7 is pathetic... Okay, you get the idea. So it isn't like Joe

Montana is returning to the league, right?

That being said, it says here that Vick deserves an opportunity to earn a living. He did the crime, did the time in the slammer. So he can't be denied an opportunity to make a living, right? Doing something. Does he deserve another shot at playing QB in the NFL? Sure, if a team wants to sign him and deal with his baggage. Can't see him as a starter, but as a clipboard holder who may get into the game with a team that runs a variation of the "Wildcat" offense.

With all the hot air being bandied about regarding Favre and Vick, guess which stellar QB, a surefire Hall-of-Famer, has been quietly preparing for *his* comeback? That would be one Tom Brady, signal-caller for the New England Patriots, who missed almost the entire 2008 season after suffering a nearly catastrophic knee injury in the '08 opener.

The Pats feel confident enough that Brady, who has led the New Englanders to three Super Bowl wins, is fully recovered, that they traded ex-USC bench warmer Matt Cassel to the woeful Kansas City Chiefs. Cassel, remember, stepped in when Brady went down in the opener against the Chiefs and had a breakout year, establishing himself as a quality starter. And earning himself a bucks-up deal with KC.

If Brady goes down again, watch out, Pats fans. Cuz the current back-ups, Kevin O'Connell and Matt Gutierrez, have nada NFL experience.

Since, again, we out here in La La Land are bereft of an NFL quality team, unless you count the college team that plays on Figueroa, we must be content checking out the three teams that have fled our great city. Let's see who the deserters will be lining up behind center come September.

My St. Louis Rams will again, much to my chagrin, be lead by Marc Tinman Bulger. Who has done nothing but regress the past two seasons, chucking the ball here and there--there rarely being into the hands of a Rams' receiver. And now the Tinman must soldier on without his best wide out, Torry Holt, who moved on in the offseason. Congrats, Torry!

So now the Tinman, who needs all the help that he can get, will be flipping the pigskin to a young group of nondescript receivers. And will be coached by a new offensive coordinator and a new QB coach. It could get ugly in the City of Budweiser.

Your Raiders, *D-Girl* and LSU apologist *Randy*, will probably hand the QB job to fatty JaMarcus Russell. Because they are paying him a ton of bucks. Nomad Jeff Garcia has returned to the Bay Area and will be quite available to lead the Raider offense *when*, not *if*, the underachieving Russell puts together a couple of horrible games.

And in San Diego, Philip Rivers returns. To win games, and more importantly for Fantasy Geeks such as myself, put up some gaudy stats. Wow, times up, and I haven't even mentioned my man-crush guy, Kurt Warner. You might see a comment or two about Kurt in the next six or so months. •



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