

Frankly Plank

By Duane Plank

Amazing Amanda, if the scurrilous rumor is really true and you will be leaving us for the white wasteland that is Colorado, know that you will be really, really missed. You helped make the incredibly tedious nights of research a little less lonely. Good luck to you and the hubby, and when you get tired of freezing your whatever off, you will be welcomed back, no questions asked.

Attended the American Martyrs fair last weekend. For a very short time. Fair number 39 for my old grade school in the fine city of Manhattan Beach. Talk about glory days, folks. I was a fifth grader at the iconic Catholic grammar school when they decided to hold the first gathering. It was so darn exciting! All we had to look forward to back in the days prior to the fair were Thursdays, which were "Hot-dog days."

Grab a couple of chili dogs, a donut or two, some milk, and then inhale said food before heading out to the playground to work up a sweat in our nice little salt-and-pepper-colored school unis. Ah, the simple things in life.

Back then, the fair involved games of chance, which you could never win, as well as spinning rides that took up the outfield spots on the grass playground. And made willy nillys like myself puke. They have long since ridded themselves of the rides, for whatever reason. Maybe it was the liability deal, maybe the rides didn't provide substantial revenue, maybe they didn't favor wimps like me throwing up. The vomit wouldn't look too pretty on the AstroTurf stuff that was installed a while ago on the playground field.

So now instead of standing in line to puke, you can stand in line to get your face painted, or have a fake tattoo applied, or pet some animals. Progress? Not sure there. First time we took the kid back to the old alma mater was about 11 years ago, and I remember that he rode some Big Wheels in the southwest corner of the parking lot and shot some plastic hockey pucks at some cardboard goalie. Also long gone.

But they still have the pizza, the teriyaki, and I believe I may have spotted a booth, hidden away in the back, that sold a brewski. Some things never change.

Seems that most of the time the weekend of the fair arrives, it coincides with the USC vs. Notre Dame football tilt. And there is usually a baseball playoff game on the docket, this time with the Halos taking on the Yanks in game two of their ALCS Series. Luckily for us fairgoers, the really hard-to-find beer booth comes equipped with a couple of big old TVs. Can't escape technology, can we?

Find it curious that the soon-to-be unemployed Manny Ramirez has been struggling at the plate for awhile. Remember that the dreadlocked jaker apparently took some type of pep pills made for the ladies when he was caught by the steroid police of the MLB? One of the times that the slugger was caught cheating. Allegedly.

Well, Ramirez doesn't seem to have the same pep in his stick, does he? Can't seem to "get around" on a quality major league fastball, bat dragging through the hitting zone. So the dude was taking female pep pills, and now he is "late" at the plate. Hmmm. Dodger fans' patience may be wearing a bit thin with the jaker. Received a text from a huge Dodger fan immediately after another recent Ramirez flameout. It said: "Manny SUX!"

And folks, I try to point out when I am wrong, as rare an occurrence that that might be, and of course, I quickly point out when

I am correct. So it is with much glee that I'll inform you about a prediction that rang true recently. Watching game two of the Dodger/Philly series, and mentioned to the guy next to me, who appeared to be snoozing, that Philly second-sacker Chase Utley looked pathetic in the field and was going to botch another critical play or two in the series. And bingo, an inning or two later, Utley completely unraveled as the pivot-man on a sure 5-4-3 double play. He messed up the footwork around the bag and unleashed a horrible throw to first, high and wide of the first baseman. Ball ended up in the dugout, pinch runner Juan Pierre scored the game-tying eighth inning run, and the Dodgers went on to eke out a 2-1 win in the very important second game of the NLCS.

Utley had made a similar screw-up in the first game of the series, but the Phillies won the game, so his oh-so-shaky defensive lapses were pretty much ignored.

For his part, the ex-Air-Force Blue Bruin didn't have any excuses. Said Utley, after game two: "Just a bad throw." When asked if the runner bearing down on him caused the errant toss, Utley said nope, that "I had plenty of time to turn it. I just didn't make a good throw."

Good for Utley, being a stand-up guy and all when addressing the brilliant scribes after the costly miscue. Now let's see if he can stand up and stand in and turn the double play in the critical contests down the road.

Where the hell did Vicente Padilla come from? Trolley Dodger fans should be oh-so very thankful that the big righty, jettisoned by the pitching-poor Texas Rangers in August, ended up tossing his 94-mph fastballs on the hill at the Ravine. Another great acquisition by Dodger GM Ned Colletti, who may be faced with some challenges down the road after the McCourt divorce proceedings play out. Speaking of that touchy subject, heard the word "Cougar" bandied about. No clue what that meant.

Anyway, Padilla looks like Don Drysdale out there, throwing strike after strike, pounding both sides of the dish. Boy, I sound like I know what I am talking about, don't I? Back to Padilla, enough self congratulations. Padilla will be on the hill again in this series, and isn't that a comforting thought for Dodger fans who had to witness the game one implosion of Clayton "Koufax" Kershaw, or the complete disappearance of one-time ace "Bad" Chad Billingsley. Who had been tossing the pelota more like Barbara Billingsley in the past three months, prior to his very somewhat effective long man stint on Sunday night after the abject failure of starter Hiroki Kuroda.

You do remember B. Billingsley, right? Actress who played momma June Cleaver on the fine prehistoric TV offering, *Leave it to Beaver*? According to semi-reliable research, Miss B. is still kicking it, looking forward to celebrating her 94th birthday in December.

Need to get a peeve off of my virtually hairless chest regarding the baseball playoffs. The umpiring looks to be a tad bit off, doesn't it? Okay, the umpiring has been horrendous. Bad calls at first, missed pitches behind the plate, and maybe the worst call that I have ever seen, when a line drive down the left field line that actually hit the fielder's glove about four feet *in* play, then bounced to the turf about *two* feet inside the foul line, was ruled foul by the incompetent ump who was standing about, oh, four feet away from the play. Shockingly, the call benefited the NY Yankees. And the rich get richer. And all the breaks. Carumba! •

Octoberfest of Sporting Options

By Duane Plank

What a great time of year for the discerning sports fan. Octubre is the time of year when all four of the country's major sports, five if you count NASCAR, collide in a month filled with playoff baseball, key NFL and college football match-ups, and the opening salvos in the NBA and NHL seasons.

Week seven of the NFL season is on tap, and looks to me like the marquee match-up will showing up on the big TV Sunday night, when the defending NFC champion Cardinals and my main man Kurt Warner travel to Nuevo York to tangle with Eli Manning and the Giants. Sunday night could be a monster in the Big Apple, what with game seven in the Angel/Yankee League Championship Series scheduled to take place in the new Yankee Stadium.

Hopefully, the Halos will have dispatched the latest edition of the Bronx Bombers before game seven, but as of this penning, the Angels were bailing water from their lifeboats, trailing the New York big-buckers 2-0. Unfortunately, due to my deadline, had to tap out this column Sunday night while watching the Dodgers get kicked to and fro in the City of Brotherly Love. Manager Joe Torre usually pushes the right buttons, but after the abysmal start on the bump by the rehabbing Hiroki Kuroda, maybe Joe should have pushed the eject button before sending Kuroda out to the mound. Maybe start Padilla on two days rest down the road?

And in regards to my Angels, let it be known that I said it in April, that Big Daddy Vlade Guerrero was done. And big hit, no make that a *huge* hit, against the BoSox notwithstanding, Vlade has to take a seat on the pine. Mind you I am writing this on Sunday night before the Angels host the Yanks in games three to five. But anyone out there who is paying a bit of attention has to see that Vlade is, sadly, a detriment to the offensive attack, especially hitting out of the four hole. He absolutely killed the Halos in that excruciating 4-3, 13 inning loss in game two.

He won't be resigned next season, so I gotta hope that Manager Mike Scioscia did the right thing and benched Guerrero for the week's games at Anaheim Stadium.

And what's up with my lovely wife, who showed up last Saturday at the research spot, sporting a cool Derek Jeter jersey, a big-domed Derek Jeter action figure, and her own Yankee water mug? Jeez! Would be nice if the lady supported *my* Angels, but I guess her Staten Island upbringing trumps my Angel leanings.

So on the NFL docket this weekend are contests between Minnesota and Pittsburgh, Chicago and the upstart Cincinnati Bengals, and New Orleans and Miami. Atlanta invades Dallas to entertain the rich folk lucky enough to secure a ticket to worship the Boys and owner Jerry Jones in their new crib.

The Vikings continued on their undefeated ways last Sunday, dodging a bullet when a last-second 44-yard field goal off the foot of Baltimore kicker named something Hauschka sailed wide left, giving the Vikings a 33-31 win. Don't know this Hauschka fella. Thought that was what you said to be polite when someone in the room sneezed.

Anyway, the Steelers got back on track last Sunday, beating up on their perennial whipping boys from Cleveland 27-14. Look for Brett Favre and the visiting Vikings to stumble and lose their first game of the sea-

son to a Steeler team that needs the win a little bit more than the Purple People Eaters.

And I would be derelict in my reportorial duties if I didn't note that my Rams will continue their losing ways when they play host to the undefeated Indianapolis Colts and that Peyton Manning guy. Give the Rams a little bit of credit. They actually made it to overtime last week before losing to the run-of-the mill Jacksonville Jaguars.

You Raider fans get to look forward to another presumed beat down when the Silver and Black continue making a mockery of their inclusion in the NFL, playing host to the New York Jets and golden boy QB Marc Sanchez. Who I recently dropped from my Fantasy team, not because he can't play, but because Seattle QB Matt Hasselbeck returned to the gridiron after mending some busted up ribs.

Glad that you asked about my Fantasy team, thanks. Think I was victorious last week, running the record to 4-2, but I was awaiting the results of the Monday night game. My opponent, brother-in-law Pat, who was out here in July scouting out the local talent, needed a big game from Charger running back LaDainian Tomlinson to overcome my slim lead. By the by, when it comes to my fantasies, football players and their exploits aren't really on the list. Can any of you "between-the-lines" readers figure out what *is* on the list?

Back to reality. What, you tell me, the Raiders actually won another game last week? Beat up on the Philadelphia Eagles 13-9? And corpulent QB JaMarcus Russell threw for 224 yards, or about 75 yards less than he weighs?

That loss had to tick off a local restaurateur with Philly connections, but I gotta believe he felt better later Sunday night when the Phillies throttled *your* Dodgers, 11-0. QB Sanchez has returned to earth, leading the Jets to an embarrassing 16-13 home overtime loss to the scuffling Buffalo Bills last week. Sanchez chucked five interceptions in last Sunday's meltdown.

Collegiatly, the men of USC, fresh off a stirring victory over Notre Dame, will play host to the Oregon State Beavers Saturday night. Look for a 20-point Trojan win, but as we have stated over and over in this column, we do love the Beavers. By the way, that was some of the worst play-calling that I have ever witnessed at the end of the SC game, with Domer QB Jimmy Clausen gagging big time. Ain't Oaks Christian, kiddo.

And the Air Force Blue Bruins, who lost 45-26 to Cal last week in the Rose Bowl, will travel to Arizona and lose their fourth consecutive game this Saturday. Guaranteed.

Did you realize that at one point, the LA Kings had posted a 4-1 record, and were sitting pretty near the top of the NHL world? Not that they were starting to print Stanley Cup playoff tickets yet over on Nash Street, but a 4-1 start beats a 1-4 opening. Course the crown shirts did come back to reality a bit, dropping contests to the New York Rangers and Detroit Red Wings.

In the Ranger game, the Kings totally outplayed their Eastern Conference rivals, but were the victim of some suspect goaltending by back-up net-minder Erik Ersberg. Mr. Ersberg needs to ratchet up his play if he expects to see any meaningful time between the pipes for the Kings, who may have to lean on starter Jon Quick to play 65-70 games this season. Or else. •