

Frankly Plank

By Duane Plank

Last year, the Halos couldn't put down a bunt in their walk-off playoff loss against the Red Sox that sent them packing. This year they couldn't figure out how to handle a bunt--no, *two* bunts, in the bottom of the eighth in their final cataclysmic loss to the money-is-no-object Yankees. What will they screw up next year, the intentional walk? Yup, I am ticked off.

By the way, A-Rod? Steroid cheater. Andy Pettitte? Steroid cheater. Look it up, folks.

Ah, the perils of a deadline. Wrote in the column published last Thursday that Vlade, yup Vlade, Guerrero should be benched by Angel manager Mike Scioscia. The man didn't pay attention to me, started Vlade in game three of the ALCS, and lo and behold the creaky-kneed DH cranked a critical two-run home run in the Angels' first victory in the series. And lashed two critical hits in the Halos thrilling game five come-from-behind victory. Plus three hits in game six. Guess I jumped the gun on that one.

Also raved about Dodger starting pitcher Vicente Padilla. Hoped that he would start game five against the Phillies in the NLCS. Got my wish--seems that the brilliant Trolley Dodger manger Joe Torre and I think alike. Padilla started in lieu of Clayton "Koufax" Kershaw. That didn't work out too well, did it?

Oh, well. I promise to keep throwing stuff at the sports wall, hoping that some of it will stick.

All right, sometimes I *may* talk too much. No need to confirm that, you folks who know me. But ran into a situation the other day when my alleged acerbic wit didn't work out too well.

Walked into a local candy store, hoping to pick up some high-cal chocolates. The lady behind the counter was very, very, nice, gave me two samples of said candy, and then excused herself to go into the back of the store to get some stock for the shelves. She trusted me not to loot the joint, which I thought was very sporting of her.

In walks a grey-haired maven. She circles the floor very quickly, obviously in a hurry, then approaches me, and asks, "Is anybody working here?" Sure as heck ain't *me* working there, maam. So I answer, "Yes." But I couldn't resist the chance to reverse fields and add, "No. They just let us customers walk in and help ourselves." What a smartass. Couldn't help myself. The old bitty shot me a very nasty look, turned on her heel, and exited the store, probably to return to whatever happy spot she had quickly emerged from.

Great. When the lady who actually *did* work there returned, I told her what had happened, how I had driven out a potential customer with my not-so-funny sarcasm. The lady was cool about it, said no worries, and I went on my merry way.

But I may have cost her a sale. I gotta watch the sarcasm. As actor Stephen Baldwin said in the horrible sequel to *Slap Shot*, which was the greatest hockey movie in the history of the world, when questioned about some of his demons, he answered, "I'm working on it." So am I. Work in progress.

More peeves regarding the baseball play-offs. Nice to see the dunderheads at FOX finally figured out a little bit of the English language. For at least a game and a half in the Angel/Yankee series, the moron in charge of graphics gave us a little box in the upper right-hand corner that said "NYY *leads* 1-0." Okay, I guess they were trying to be helpful, letting us know who was leading the best-of-seven series.

Since the peeps over at FOX were openly rooting for the Yanks, wonder if they would have focused on the same info if the Halos

had taken the series lead?

Anyway, fan, phrasing it "New York Yankees *leads* 1-0" is an abomination, and this wordsmith was a bit torqued off. Mentioned it to the fellas whom I was watching with and they agreed, although they probably could not have cared less. Or spelled abomination. But you know what? Midway through game three, a game the Angels actually won, FOX folks changed the box to read "NY *leads* 2-0." Which was correct grammatically. Hallelujah!

And are you a fan of the box in the bottom right-hand corner of the TV on TNT that immediately lets you know if a pitch was a strike or a ball? According to "Big Brother?" I am sure that the umps love it. But maybe they need a little accountability. Or a lot of accountability. Some of those guys shrink the strike zone down to the size of a pillbox. Maybe that is one of the reasons that some of these games take about four hours to complete.

Watching Angels/Yanks. Oh, Angels got screwed on a call. Shock. Oh, guess I gotta say a-ok, Yanks just got screwed on a call. Turnabouts, fair play. Course the guys at FOX replayed the Yankee hosing ad nauseam. Shoot-howdy!

Gotta leave the game, leave the plasma, to pick up the kid, who is practicing soccer in the dark. Great. Soccer in the dark. Seems somewhat appropriate, so help me David Beckham!

The Yankees and their 500-zillion-dollar line-up are leading my little engine that could Angels 3-0. Now it is five-*zip* (A-Rod homer) and the New York umps just made another incredibly biased call. Sheesh.

May not love the Yanks, but I do love Derek Jeter. What a class guy. Hall-of-Famer, stays out of trouble, plays the game the way it should be played. Whoops, 'nother call messed up by the umps, and this call could have been made by the late Helen Keller. Against the Halos, and in favor of the billionaire Yanks.

Wonder who they will buy up next year, those Boys from the Bronx, for the tune of \$175 or so million bucks? Lets see, the \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ Yankees may need an outfielder next season. Maybe they can buy up...fill in the blank. Proud, are you, Yank fans? Specially the gentleman who was hyperventilating last week when the Yanks were *leading* 3-0 in game three, and leading 2-0 in the series. Unbleeping believable!

Anyone, anybody, please beat the Yanks in the next series. Guess that would have to be the Phillies, right? And sorry to my wife, who is a Yankee fan. I support all you are, dear, but find it hard to root for the Yanks nowadays.

Switching to the senior circuit, nice story surfaced after the all-important game four of the Dodger/Philly series. You know, the one that humongo reliever Jonathan Broxton lost in the bottom of the ninth? With two outs. Jimmy Rollins split the gap in right-center, sending a rocket to the wall to score the tying and winning runs. Did you see where Man-Ram was in the bottom of the ninth? He had been replaced in the outfield by Juan Pierre, for defensive purposes, which is kinda funny in its own way.

So where was the steroid-cheater? Watching intently from the bench, cheering on his teammates? Pacing back and forth in the dugout, too nervous to watch Broxton blow the save? Or abandoning his teammates, taking a shower, preparing to get the hell out of the clubhouse and ballpark as fast as he could? Numero tres, folks. More of the Manny being Manny crap, fans. When will it end? How long does this guy have a free pass? •

Yanks vs. Phillies--Who Cares?

By Duane Plank

Angels lose to the Yanks and my dog *Halo* was way ticked off. And my wife, the Yankee fan, couldn't understand the dog's distemper. *Halo? Angels?* Connect the dots. We named the dog after the best baseball team in LA, dear. Get it? Carumba! She was so sad Sunday night. The dog, I mean.

Hallelujah, hoops fans, the Lakers, and for that matter, the joke-that-is/are the Clippers tipped off the regular season with a resounding Laker victory over the sad-sack Clips Tuesday night at Staples Center. I think. Sent this to the powers that be only a mere 36 hours *before* the game, so I am going to take a leap of faith and assume a Purple and Gold victory over the CBA imitators wearing Clip unis.

Should get hoop-a-holic *RJ the Golfer* to chime in regularly this basketball season and add his dubious expertise to the columns. Trust me, if the Lakers started out 1-0, he is probably checking online for playoff tickets. And if they somehow stumbled on opening night to the Clips, he may have already contemplated a long walk on a short pier. RJ has graciously said that he will add his one cent to these columns. Occasionally. If he can spell the words correctly.

Did I tell you that I do know of at least *one* Clipper fan? And she also happens to be a Raider fan? Sorry about the impressive loss last Sunday, *Girl*, but I will protect the identity of the lady, who still supports her fellas, lose or lose. Me, I couldn't handle all of the failure, but then again I support the St. Louis Rams and the LA Kings, so I know a little bit about the pain of enduring loss after loss after another pitiful performance last Sunday, when the Rams were edged by the Indy Colts 42-6. Seventeen in a row for the Rams!

Can you believe that it is already week ocho of the NFL season? The incredible Denver Broncos visit the Baltimore Ravens, who are in need of a midseason win to get back on the winning track. The choking-away-a-sure-win Miami Dolphins have a road game in New York vs. the Jets and somewhat erratic rookie QB Marc Sanchez, who was being fitted for a bust in Canton by some of the cheerleading morons in the East Coast media before his recent implosion. But then he had the good fortune to square off with the Raiders last Sunday, and that was good for an ego boost win and a shutout victory.

The wife's New York Giants invade Philadelphia for a tussle with the Eagles, who should still be ashamed of themselves after their loss to the Raiders a week-and-a-half ago. Course the Giants are on a two-game losing skid, bowing to Kurt Warner and the Gridbirds last Sunday night.

The undefeated Colts, chosen team of my vivacious neighbor *Shannon*, play host to coach Mighty Mike Singletary and his 49ers. Who almost came all the way back last Sunday in Houston to defeat the Texans. But they didn't win, so who cares, right?

And the Chargers' season will be nearing the precipice if they don't beat the visiting Raiders and corpulent QB JaMarcus Russell. Need to find another couple of words to substitute for corpulent in my weekly critique of J. Russ. How bout out-of-shape fatty, cashing a huge paycheck, can't play?

Guess that is more than one word... Anywho, fatty was benched last week for some Kowski guy; may have finally seen the last of the ex-LSU signal-caller.

Another "worst match-up of the year" involves my Rams, proudly sporting a 0-7 record. The Lambs will play in Detroit, where the tanking economy has created a few issues more important than whether the crappy Lions can outplay the crappier Rams in something as trivial as a football game.

Oh, and I almost forgot another game. Seems the Brett Favre-led Minnehaha Vikings will be the guests of the Packers in Green Bay this Sunday. Beautiful. The prodigal scum returns home. Was that too harsh? Brett did chuck a couple of picks last week in the Vikes' loss to the Steelers, but according to the people paying attention, they weren't his fault.

Bouncing back to the baseball, game two of the World Series was to be played Thursday night. Like I care.

Angel fans, do you think free agent starting pitcher John Lackey will return to the fold? Big John wasn't too pleased with Manager Mike Scioscia when Scioscia micromanaged his ace out of the game in the top of the seventh inning last week against the Yankees. Could have sealed the deal for Lackey to take his glove and balls and move on down the road to the Ravine and chuck for the Dodgers next spring. Or how bout this? Lackey to the Texas Rangers. Only makes sense, guy is from Texas. Stealing him from the Angels would be a really shrewd move for Nolan Ryan, the man running the show for the Rangers. And Ryan has implemented a program where the starting pitchers are actually expected to pitch more than six innings every five days. Quality start, my butt.

Speaking of the Trolley Dodgers, do you think the Blue braintrust might make this trade today: Roy Halladay for Chad Billingsley, plus another decent player and assorted flotsam and jetsam? Until the Dodgers can run a true numero uno pitcher out there every fifth day, and not buffalo us with the nondescript Randy Wolfe, the not-quite-ready Clayton "Koufax" Kershaw, Chad "Barbara" Billingsley, or the guy I touted before he got his butt kicked, Vicente Padilla, they can't be taken seriously as possible World Series participants.

How would "Wackey" Lackey look in the Dodger blues next season? Hate to lose Lackey, as an Angel fan, but if we gotta lose him, rather see him go up the 5 freeway to the Trolley Dodgers than to Halo division rival, the improving Rangers.

Good to see that Raider coach Tom Cable escaped any charges in his alleged altercation with an assistant coach that left the assistant coach with a busted jaw. Maybe the overmatched puppet coach Cable was totally innocent of the charges. And maybe the assistant coach fell off of his chair during a staff meeting, breaking his own jaw. Maybe.

Ain't love grand? Frank McCourt fires his lovely estranged wife, Jamie, from her incredibly overpaid position as CEO with the team. This one's gonna get interesting, folks? Imagine that, a husband firing his wife. Sure that hasn't been considered by any of you, has it? Hope my wife hasn't read this far into the column... •

