

Frankly Plank

By Duane Plank

Congrats to the kids playing for the Chula Vista Little League team that captured the LL World Series on Sunday. Did you know that in an earlier tournament, that they got merced 18-0 by the kids from Torrance? And did you know that the kids from Torrance barely beat our kids from Gundo? We were so close to going to Williamsport. Okay, not that close. But we did hang in there with the Torrance kids. For a while.

Almost time for you to get your first dose of Fantasy Football info from *Plank*. The kid and I played in a family league the past two years, winning a ton of money last season after getting royally hosed by Philadelphia Eagle running back Brian Westbrook at the conclusion of the '07 campaign. Mr. Westbrook had the audacity to think of his team first as opposed to racking up fantasy points for us wannabes, and his selfish motives cost us a big-buck victory a few years back. Westbrook will not be included on either of our teams this fall. Probably. The dude just turned 30 and is coming off ankle surgery. No dice.

Anyway, the kid and I shared a team in years one and two, but this season one of the Fantasy players dropped out of the competition. Probably couldn't take the losing, or maybe actually has a life, so the kid and I each have our own team.

We took part in the preseason draft last week, and ...Whoops! We were supposed to take part in the draft last week, but it turns out that one of the players didn't get signed up in time, so our draft had to be rescheduled. And to think, I was all prepared for the big event, sitting in the front room of the mansion, poised over the keyboard, bonding with the kid as we pondered who we were going to select in the draft. Coulda been another great father/son moment, but I guess it will have to wait until whenever. Can't fret about things that you have no control over, right?

Speaking of no control, how would you like to be USC back-up quarterback Aaron Corp? The sophomore signal-caller had been anointed by Coach Pete Carroll as the number one one guy behind center for the men of Troy. But the kid screwed up, suffering a leg injury on August 10, an injury that apparently hasn't healed sufficiently enough for Corp to regain the mobility that helped him beat out freshman Matt Barkley and seemingly perennial back-up Mitch Mustain.

Okay, Corp didn't screw up. He was hurt. But while he was on the shelf, Barkley took charge of the number one offense and performed well enough for Carroll to promote him to the starting job.

The 18-year-old is slated to start for the Trojans Saturday when they demolish San Jose State at the Coliseum. But guess who played better last Saturday in the final scrimmage?

Carroll didn't think Corp was sufficiently healed up to start this Saturday. Said the coach to reporters after the decision was announced: "It's going to be awhile (with Corp). He's not okay...I need to protect him longer."

Barkley, who struggled with interceptions last season as a senior at Mater Dei High, has also tossed a boatload of picks during preseason workouts and scrimmages. But the Trojans could probably play without a quarterback and still win against SJ State, which is traveling south for a nice payday and some quality sightseeing time in L.A. Don't miss the Hyperion plant!

The kids from San Jose State should be nothing more than a tune-up for next week's biggie, when Carroll and the boys trek to Columbus, Ohio to tangle with the Ohio State. We'll see how young Mr. Barkley deals with that frenetic environment. It could be raining interceptions.

Stop the presses! Schism reported in Minnesota. Nice word, "schism." Apparently certain members of the Minnehaha Vikings aren't in love with the has-been QB (Brett Favre) who is now piloting the Vikes. Reports surfaced that some players would rather see Tavaris Jackson or the Joe Namath clone Sage Rosenfels run the show up north. Lots of words being spewed by lots of folks, but I guess that is just another sports soap opera that will play out over the course of the next five months, right? Nothing to lose but football games for the Vikes, right?

Anyone out there ever lose anything? Oh, I don't know, like your car, or your keys, or your purse, or your wallet, maybe? Well, when I was a young boy and couldn't find something, my fantastic mom Lupe would tell me, "It's right where you left it." Which is pretty sound advice. Except Mom didn't necessarily listen to her own advice. When she lost something and asked me if I had seen said item, I never gave her the smart-alecky

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Pigskin Preview

By Duane Plank

One week from the kickoff to the NFL season, and tell me the truth, Raider and Ram fans. How many games do you think your and my sad-sack teams will win this season? Do you think that they will get to double digits? Not each team, kind reader, but if you combine the Raider and Ram victories for the '09 season, will they total 10? Let's hope so. Raiders looked great on Saturday, losing about 73-3 to the Saints. At home. Pride and poise, baby. Ayiyi!

Looked last week at a few of the presumed contenders in the AFC as the regular season beckons. Time to take a quick gander at the favorites in the NFC to advance to the January playoff tournament. And if I don't list your favorite team, relax, I am sure to mention them somewhere down the line. Either to make fun of their ineptitude or to laud their stellar exploits on the old gridiron.

We'll start in the NFC West, with the almost-Super-Bowl-defending-champion Arizona Cardinals, quarterbacked by the bounce-back signal-caller, Kurt Warner. Warner, you may recall, had the Birds on the verge of a SB championship very, very late in February's contest, only to see his defensive mates falter and allow the game-winning Ben Roethlisberger TD pass in the final minute. Too bad, so sad.

He returns at QB, keeping ex-USC thrower Matt Leinart standing on the sidelines, sporting a nifty visor, holding a clipboard. Maybe Matt can do some Tweeting while he watches the contests? But give Leinart credit; he did throw for three TDs and 346 yards last week against Green Bay.

Kurt put up some great numbers in '08, surprising the heck out of most all alleged football gurus, who counted the ex-St. Louis Ram SB-winning quarterback not only out, but down and out. He set franchise records for attempts, completions, touchdowns and passer rating. And avoided getting injured, working behind a line that was no better than average by NFL standards.

Course, it doesn't hurt that the Arizona aerial circus that Warner will be flinging the pigskin to houses the best wide receiver corps in the game. Superstar Larry Fitzgerald had a breakout year in '08, with 1,431 yards and 12 TDs. He presumably scares the daylights out of opposing D coordinators, who know that if they double-cover the man from the University of Pitt, Warner can look across the turf for Anquan Boldin or the up-and-coming Steve Breaston.

The Cards should improve upon their rather pedestrian 9-7 regular season record. If, that is, the QB stays healthy and the Birds can locate some semblance of a running game. RB Edgerrin James has departed to division rival Seattle, but the Edge had become a somewhat disgruntled afterthought by midseason last year. Rookie tailback Beanie Wells, drafted

with the 31st pick out of the Ohio State, has been banged up in the preseason, but is expected to add a big play dimension to the Arizona offense. And he did last weekend against the Packers.

So some of the preseason publications were touting the Minnesota Vikings as the NFC North favorite before coach Brad Childress bent as far over as humanly possible and allowed himself and the Vikings to be played by the has been Brett Favre. The Vikings had a productive season in '09, winning the division with a 10-6 mark before folding in the playoffs, bowing out in game one to the Philadelphia Eagles. Much more will be expected this season of the guys once known as "The Purple People Eaters."

Will Favre make a difference? Maybe. Should be an upgrade over the now-benched QBs Tavaris Jackson and Sage Rosenfels. But this ain't the Brett Favre of 1999, folks. In fact, a case could be made for the fact that the waffler Brett has had only had one standout season, 2007, in the last five. But stats are stats and can usually be twisted around to fit darn near any scenario.

Whoever takes the snaps for the Vikings will be spending a good part of each game handing off the ball to Adrian Peterson, who led the NFL in rushing last season, finishing with 1,760 yards and 10 TDs. Some say Peterson is a late-game liability, cuz he does put the ball on the turf (nine fumbles) and isn't renowned as a blocker. Sure, like Peterson has ever been expected to lower a shoulder pad and block a blitzing linebacker. Kinda like making Chef Emeril hit the restaurant floor and wait on the customers. The Vikings must advance deep into the playoffs, or the ax could fall on Childress, who may regret selling his soul for Favre.

On to the NFC East, where the New York Giants should be the team to beat. At least that is what most of the East Coast-biased networks will tell ya. Some publications pick the Cowboys to lead the pack, but the Dallas-based circus seems to find a way to implode each season, and with erstwhile Coach Wade Phillips being set up as the fall guy in case of another flameout, I gotta believe the steady-eddy Giants and their happy-go-lucky coach Tom Coughlin will come out on top of the division.

The Giants return Eli Manning at the QB position, and while Peyton's younger brother has his detractors (don't we all?), facts are that he just signed a big-time contract, and probably isn't going anywhere. And has a Super Bowl title on his resume. Even though, some say, he lucked into that title because of the once-in-a-lifetime circus catch by David Tyree in the Giants' SB upset of the Patriots. Manning will have to work with a less experienced group of wide receivers, what

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