

Frankly Plank

By Duane Plank

Been fighting off some kind of illness for the past three weeks. Started with a hacking cough that kept the wife up at night. Soon, nights weats were added, and then the sucker spread to my head, severely hampering my hearing. Oh, and I was spitting up some ugly green stuff... phlegm, they call it. Aren't you glad that you asked?

Went to the doctor after a couple of weeks, and after pocketing my co-pay, the doc said I had a cold. Brilliant observation! Now I realize why I wait till the last second to visit the doc's office. He told me to keep doing what I had been doing, which was drinking any and all of the NyQuil and DayQuil that I could find, and living on Halls Mentho-Lyptus lozenges. Problem was, the meds weren't seeming to do a darn thing. He did prescribe some allergy medicine, but didn't give me any antibiotics, which I was shooting for.

By the time this column hits the old newsstand, hopefully I will have recovered, and can return to being my pain-in-the-butt self. Or maybe I'll be quarantined?

On the home front, we have added a third hound to the kennel that we seem to be running at the Plank mansion. We welcomed a puppy, a Dachshund/Chihuahua into the family. Was initially going to call the little tyke "Daisy," but the mini-dog looks more like a "Tiny," so that's the moniker that we are sticking with.

Unfortunately, because the doggie is part Chihuahua, "Tiny" can't be entered in the all-important Weiner dog races at Los Alamitos race track this summer. So we will probably sit the races out again this year, still feeling the shame of Carmel's pathetic performance two years ago when the hound walked out of the starting gate and then flat-out stopped. I may push for a fourth dog so that we can be competitive in the darn race!

Perfect segue into another story involving dogs. Disgraced ex-NFL quarterback Michael Vick, who was convicted of running a murderous dog-fighting ring, has been released from federal prison and will be spending the final two months of his sentence incarcerated at his home in Virginia until his release from federal custody on July 20.

Vick, who turns 29 in June, had played QB, somewhat erratically, for the Atlanta Falcons until his nefarious activities involving canines surfaced in the spring of 2007. At the time, it appeared that if Vick were actually found guilty of his crimes and sent to the hoosegow, that the Falcons would have to fold their franchise and the NFL would be severely crippled.

Right! Proving again that the game is bigger than the individual no matter what the blowhards at ESPN scream at us. Vick went to the can, the Falcons regrouped and had a fantastic season in '08, and the NFL continues to be numero uno in America.

So if Vick toes the line, will he get a shot

in the NFL? Should he get an opportunity to again chuck passes erratically over the gridiron and tuck the ball and run when he should hang out in the pocket and pass?

The answers should be yes, and yes. Dude paid his dues to society. Some argue that unless Vick is truly remorseful for the heinous acts that he took part in, he shouldn't be allowed back in the league. Well, only Vick will truly know if he is repentant for his crimes. That's between him and a higher power.

If Vick looks for football work this summer, where might he land? According to reports, my St. Louis Rams, the Seattle Seahawks, the San Francisco 49ers and the always lurking New England Patriots are possible training camp destinations. Gotta say that if Vick surfaces in Ram camp, I hope he makes the team. I can't take another pigskin season watching incumbent QB Marc Tinman Bulger backpedal his way through a wasted year, collecting his enormous paychecks.

And speaking of the Rams and Vick, did you know that St. Louis has a defensive end on their roster, one Leonard Little, who was guilty of involuntary manslaughter back in 1998 when Little killed Susan Gutweiler in a drunk driving crash? If you can find a spot on the roster for Little, who also paid his dues to society, doesn't Vick deserve a shot?

Tried to hide this toward the bottom of the column, but I gotta report that the Mighty Mariners were knocked off in round one of the local Little League playoffs. Dropped the opener of the double-elimination tourney 5-3 to the Dodgers. Who outplayed us, and, dare I say, outcoached us.

I did a miserable job as the offensive/third base coach. Didn't do a darn thing to help the kids. Least that was what I was told by *RJ the Golfer*, who along with *New York Johnny*, attended the contest to add their support to the Mariner bandwagon. We played last night in a loser's bracket game, and if all went well, will continue in the tourney Saturday at 2 p.m. at the old ballyard.

The first edition of this year's Freeway Series concluded last Sunday with the rubber game in the three-game series between my Angels and *Dodger Girl's* Blue Crew. The Halos outlasted the Dodgers in the marathon third game of the series, finally prevailing 10-7. Won a small side bet from *Dodger Girl*, which is a good thing, I think.

Halo centerfielder Torii Hunter had a great series, walloping a three-run dinger ON Saturday night, and patrolling the pristine Dodger outfield grass with his usual zeal. Second baseman Howie Kendrick continues to befuddle *Plank*, what with his asleep at the switch play covering (or not covering) second base in the eighth inning of Saturday evening's Angel bullpen meltdown. And can someone, anyone, teach shortstop Erick Aybar the age-old art of bunting?

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Mustangs in Rally Mode



The Mustangs are playing well for Coach Mike Neily.

By Gregg McMullin

The Mira Costa baseball team has had plenty of highs and lows during its 2009 schedule. Though the Mustangs ended their regular season with one-run losses to fourth-ranked Palos Verdes, they did qualify for the CIF Southern Section Division II playoffs and had to play a wild card game. With their convincing 6-1 win over Valencia in the wild card game and a come-from-behind 7-6 win over highly touted Upland in the first round, the Mustangs are playing on a high note. "This is getting fun," quipped Mustang coach Mike Neily.

Brent Weber has been one of the Mustangs' most reliable pitchers all year long and for good reason: He leads the Mustang staff in innings pitched, strikeouts and games won. So it was obvious who Neily would give the ball to for the first game of the playoffs, and Weber lived up to his leadership role as the starting pitcher. The result was a combination of Weber's overpowering fastball and great defensive efforts from both the infield and outfield. Though Weber wasn't convinced it was a great outing for him, he did say the defense behind him played great. "I don't think I had my best stuff, but our defense made plays all day," he said.

Valencia managed just two hits off Weber and scored their lone run in the third inning, but after that the Tigers were silenced. The Tigers did get runners on the corners in the fourth inning and were poised to sustain a rally, but Weber calmly got out of the jam and Valencia went quietly the rest of the way. Weber, who finished with four strikeouts and two walks, retired the final seven batters.

The Mustangs' bats came alive early when Kyle Demarco walked, was balked to second base and scored on a single by Jake Jelmini. Holding a 2-1 lead in the fourth inning, the Mustangs scored two more runs with the help of an error by the Tigers. With a runner in scoring position, Austin Chavira banded a single to centerfield. The Tigers' centerfielder

threw the ball towards home plate, but the ball sailed past the catcher and Chavira raced to second base on the errant throw. Chavira wound up scoring later in the inning.

The Mustangs, who were victimized by their own mental mistakes against PV, weren't going to allow themselves to break down again, and they were going to capitalize on their opponents. "You realize just how important each play can be when you wind up losing on a mental error and I think it cost them (Valencia)," said Neily.

Leading 4-1 in the sixth inning, Lucas Whitehill hammered a 385 foot, two-run home run to left field to give the Mustangs a 6-1 lead. With Weber cruising on the mound and the defense sharp in the seventh inning, Valencia had no chance and the Mustangs advanced to play Upland in the second round.

The Mustangs were rewarded for their wild card victory to travel to play Upland, one of Division II's top teams, in the first round of the CIF playoffs. The Highlanders came into the game as the top team from the Baseline League, sporting an impressive 20-4 record and featuring a hard throwing pitching staff full of prospects. The drama of a seventh inning Mira Costa comeback coupled with the outstanding relief pitching of Michael Beals helped the Mustangs come away with an improbable 7-6 victory.

The Highlanders struck first off of Mustang starter James Glawe in the third inning when they scored three runs, highlighted by a home run by Frankie Christman. Upland took a 5-0 lead when highly touted Ryan Goodman hit a two-run shot. But the Mustangs struck back in the top of the fifth inning with four runs of their own. Chavira and Demarco each had RBI singles and both scored when Jelmini doubled them home to make it 5-4. The Highlanders scored in the bottom of the inning on a triple by Tim Helton to make it 6-4, setting up an unbelievable Mustang comeback.

In the seventh inning, the Mustangs worked the Upland pitchers for a couple of walks and a hit to load the bases. Lucas Whitehill then walked to force in a run to make it 6-5 and Jackson Morrow's long fly ball for a sacrifice RBI tied the game at 6-6. With two outs, Kris Cayton then hit a bad hop infield single for the go-ahead and eventual winning run. Beals, who came in relief of Van Orden in the sixth inning, put the Highlanders away and the Mustangs first round victory was in the books.

The Mustangs' rally in the final few innings and in particular the seventh inning didn't surprise Neily, though. "We've been in this situation before and these guys have a lot of fight in them," he said. "I just hope we can get and keep a lead next time."

The next time he was referring to was the second round of the playoffs the Mustangs played at home Tuesday against Foothill. The Knights (20-5) are the second place team from the Sea View League and are one of the top-ranked teams in Division II. They have a potent lineup that includes Nick Falbo (.482) and Tanner Gore (.432). Should the Mustangs win, they would be playing today (Friday) against the winner of the Chino Hills/Notre Dame game in the quarterfinals. The semifinals are slated for Tuesday, with the finals for Division II June 6 at 4:30 p.m. at Angel Stadium. •

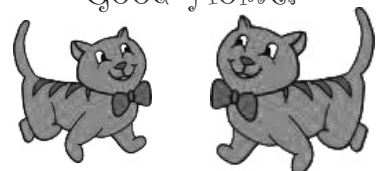
Kitty

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We have several weekly adoption events in the Westside. On Saturday/Sunday we are at a venue located in Mar Vista at 3860 Centinela Avenue, just south of Venice Boulevard. On Saturday only, we are in West Los Angeles at 11055 West Pico Boulevard at Pico and Sepulveda; and on Sunday, we are in Santa Monica at 2910 Wilshire Boulevard at Yale Street. Adoption hours at these venues are noon to 3:30 p.m. We also have our fourth Saturday of the month

venue in Manhattan Beach located at 1816 North Sepulveda Boulevard, with adoption hours from 10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. •

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