

## Frankly Plank

By Duane Plank

Holy rollers, folks. Time must fly. I guess they say that it flies when you are having fun. So I must have been having fun for the last 17 years while Jay Leno took over *The Tonight Show* from the inimitable Johnny Carson. Adios, Jay.

Remember sitting in front of the old TV 17 years ago when Carson signed off. Yes, that makes me old, *Dodger Girl*, who takes the occasional opportunity to rib me and call me "Pops." Which is what my 75-year-old-dad likes to be called.

Watched the Leno finale Friday, although it was not that big of a deal to me. Couldn't sleep after the Laker series-clinching win over Denver. Heart be still. But Leno did have James Taylor crooning a tune, so I guess it was worth staying up late. Some Conan dude took over for Leno. Mostly Greek to me.

Might as well get to the bad news right off the top. Those of you who follow the Gundo Little League, and in particular the Majors Division, already know that the defending 2008 league winners, the Mighty Mariners, were unceremoniously jettisoned from this year's double-elimination playoffs, bowing out in two games.

Ugh. I could again say we were outplayed and outcoached, which must be true cuz we lost both games. I did nothing to help the cause, and will forever hang my head. Not in shame, but in disappointment for the 12 young men who we have worked with for the past four months. The kids led us to first place in the regular season, which right about now doesn't seem to mean a whole lot, but in reality, means our boys played some darn good baseball this spring.

I guess we still have some more baseball to play in a bit; there is a tournament called "King of the Beach" in which some of the teams that don't qualify for the Tournament of Champions compete for a highly-coveted

trophy. One of those teams is the Mighty Mariners. We'll win that sucker, guaranteed. Like the confidence? I like that we still get to play another game or four. Hope the games are played at or near the beach, with the stands dotted by bikini-clad lovelies, but I kinda doubt it.

Last add Mariners, at least this week. We were behind early in both of the games in the postseason tourney. Which compelled us to coach a little cautiously. Or at least me to act like a wimpy third-base coach. Which is not Mariner baseball. And any of you who have seen my act know that I like nothing better than to windmill a runner around third base, as I run down the third base line, way too close to home plate. And way out of the third base coaches' box. Which I guess is some infringement on the rules.

Kinda figured out after the fact that even though we were playing from behind, we should have stayed aggressive, run the bases like banshees and tried to force the other guys into making mistakes. Just like we had done all year. As we won the meaningless regular season title.

Even an old guy can learn new tricks. I vow to never again coach third base like I am wearing a dress (sorry, ladies), in case anyone needs a little coaching help next season. I believe that the Mariner manager may be moving on? My coaching rates, as I have mentioned, are negotiable.

Quick aside. In game one of the meaningless regular season, a coach complained to the ump that I had "touched" a runner rounding third. Which I didn't. But which is exactly what I did last year in the 11-year-old All-Star tourney, nearly costing us a game. Thankfully the kids bailed me out that time. I mentioned the incident in the column, which seemed to tweak the coach. Which was my intention, by the way.

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## Lakers in the NBA Finals! LeBron Sitting at Home?

By Duane Plank

Okay, time to talk playoffs. Yeah, yeah, yeah, the hometown heroes dressed in the Purple and Gold will be playing host in Game One of the NBA Finals tonight down the street at Staples Center. Big deal and all to some, not such a big deal to *Plank*, who has been castigated by some of the minions, who shall go nameless here, lest they demand a retraction, as not being a true Laker fan.

Bolshoi, bolshoi, and more bolshoi. Just cuz I don't hyperventilate over every turnover and non-traveling call during the interminably boring NBA regular season, I must not be a true fan? Just cuz I don't sport the little Laker flags on my new Mercedes, I must not be a true fan? Did ya see the new Mercedes, by the by? Yellow on purple. Yeah, right.

Anyway, I was gonna write a little about the greatest sport in the Canadian World: Hockey. And the Stanley Cup. But I guess I'll save that for the bottom of the page, under the fold as we in the hifalutin' newspaper business call it.

Okay, right to the predictions. Lakers in five, says the kid Phillip. I'm thinking Lakers in six. Brother Chris has the Lakers in seven. See a pattern here? Great minds think alike, as they say.

Couldn't find a local who would go against the grain and select the Orlando Magic to win the series, which starts with two contests in L.A., moves to the fine state of Florida for two or maybe three games, and then is slated to return to SoCal for games six and seven, should they be necessary.

If the series goes the distance, game seven will take place on the Staples hardwood on Thursday, June 18. By the way, how long do you think it will take the network broadcasting the finals, ABC, to bore us with the requisite shots of Jack Joker Nicholson and the other

celebs texting each other as they perch on their million-dollar courtside seats? I can't be the only one tired of those pictures, am I?

So most in the know weren't expecting the Magic to still be playing hoops in the first week of June. But they ousted the hated Boston Celtics in seven games, and dusted off King James and his entourage in six. They have a guy playing for them by the name of Dwight Howard, a center, who is somewhat under-publicized by NBA standards.

Under-publicized because his name isn't Kobe, or King James or D-Wade. We all accept the fact that the NBA is a superstar first, team second league. At least that's the way the NBA suits and their marketing arms see it.

Here is a thumbnail sketch on Howard, who should have multiple field days in the next two weeks as he battles Laker bigs Pau Gasol and Andrew Bynum: Twenty-three-years-old, 6-foot-11. Averaging nearly 22 points per game in the playoffs, pulling down 15-plus rebounds per contest. Howard will be a handful for the Lakes. Let's see if coach Phil "Colonel Sanders" Jackson can devise a defense that will stifle the young superstar.

On to the Stanley Cup Finals, which in case you didn't know involves the defending champ Detroit Red Wings and last year's also-rans, the Pittsburgh Penguins. Yup *LJ*, the Pens are back in the finals, and this year they are going to win the Cup in six. Or that's what I initially thought.

The Pens dropped games one and two on Detroit ice, and faced a virtual must-win game at home on Tuesday. Game four is tonight in Pittsburgh, and that seems like a good time for superstar Sidney Crosby to show the hockey-watching world why many touts have compared the kid to one Wayne Gretzky.

My friend *SW*, who inexplicably was

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