

MONDAY, JULY 25, 2011

PERSPECTIVE

## Drama at the diamond: the Donnelly Pine Tar incident of 2005

By Dan Lawton

As lawyers, we like a gripping story — any good trial has one. Add some revenge, cunning, cheating, and pride. Stir in some colorful characters. Now you've got something special. Legal dramas, both real and fictional, have all these elements. In this way, legal dramas resemble the game of baseball. Each has moments, which combine revenge, cunning, cheating, pride, with colorful characters. The result can be a great climax. Such a moment happened on the night Frank Robinson caught Brendan Donnelly cheating on the pitcher's mound at Angel Stadium — June 14, 2005.

### FIRST IN A TWO PART SERIES

Our drama has four characters — Mike Scioscia, the Angels' manager; Brendan Donnelly, his relief pitcher; Frank Robinson, the Nationals' manager; and Jose Guillen, his star outfielder.

Our first character, Mike Scioscia, is passionate, yet nearly always utterly calm. A former major league player himself, he has lived baseball for over 40 years. He epitomizes the cool, collected leader. He is 47-years-old, but old school, preaching fundamentals and team first. Yet he relates well to young, pampered stars who were not yet born when he was still playing for the Dodgers in the early 1980s.

Enter our second character, Jose Guillen — a talented, but troubled, outfielder who wore out his welcome so often that he had played for seven teams in the last nine years. He had played for Scioscia in 2004, after stops in Pittsburgh, Tampa, Arizona, Cincinnati, and Oakland. That year he made a big impact, clubbing 27 homers and driving in 104 runs for the Angels. But late in the season in 2004, he threw a public, "me-first" tantrum on the field after Scioscia removed him from a game for a pinch-runner. The Angels suspended him for the rest of the season. In a day of coddled, overpaid players who often outlast their lesser-paid managers, management had backed its manager and disciplined the player. In the offseason, Guillen and his \$3.5 million contract were gone, traded to the Washington Nationals.

Guillen's new team, the Nationals, had a special manager too. He is our third character, Frank Robinson. On this night, Robinson was 70 years old. He had had a stellar playing career and entered the Hall of Fame in 1982, on the first ballot, a no-brainer. He had even played for the Angels once (in 1973), hitting 30 homers for them that year at age 38 in the pre-steroid era. Later he became the first African-American field manager in history. He even received the Medal of Freedom — America's highest civilian honor — from President George W. Bush. He had once said of himself: "Baseball isn't a popularity contest. Some players are afraid of losing friends. Not me. I'm not out there to win friends. Just ball games — and I'll do that any way that I can."

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And so Scioscia, Guillen, and Robinson found themselves in Angel Stadium on the night of June 14, 2005. Before the game, Guillen and Scioscia had kept to the high road in public, each disclaiming any hard feelings toward the other and saying the past was behind. Yet the events of that night would prove one of them — Guillen — a liar.



Associated Press

Dan Lawton and his father attending an Angels baseball game in Anaheim.

The Angels built a 3-1 lead. But their starting pitcher, Ervin Santana, had tired by the seventh inning. Scioscia emerged from the dugout and signaled for a fresh pitcher. Santana walked off, head down, to a standing ovation. Modestly, he tipped his cap to the fans.

Enter our fourth character: Brendan Donnelly. A journeyman reliever, Donnelly had broken into the major leagues as a "replacement player" during a players' strike in 1994. Before that, it had taken him 10 years to get to the major leagues. By now Donnelly had been an Angel for four years, and had helped them win the World Series (in 2002). But he was 33-years-old, losing velocity, and trying to hang on. His pitching had begun to decline. Talented, younger, lesser-paid relievers were coming up behind him.

But on this night, Scioscia gave Donnelly the ball in the 8th inning, as usual. Donnelly took his eight warm-up tosses. While the PA system played music and fans chatted, the Nationals' on-deck hitter got ready to step in. Unknown to anyone, the moment had arrived. Our four characters — Scioscia, Guillen, Robinson, and Donnelly — would now collide, right in the middle of the diamond. Revenge, cunning, cheating, and pride would force them together. The result would be the climax of the drama that had been rising

since the Guillen-Scioscia conflict of the year before.

*Tomorrow, in part two of this series, Scioscia, Guillen, Robinson, and Donnelly collide — and a near-melee results.*



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# Daily Journal

www.dailyjournal.com

TUESDAY, JULY 26, 2011

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## Drama at the diamond: the Donnelly pine tar incident of 2005

By Dan Lawton

**T**his series is about the Donnelly pine tar incident — an episode that combined revenge, cunning, cheating and pride in a baseball drama that climaxed at Angel Stadium on June 14, 2005. In yesterday's installment, Angels relief pitcher Brendan Donnelly had just completed his warm-up tosses and was preparing to pitch in the top of the 8th inning with the Angels sitting on a 3-1 lead over the Washington Nationals.

### LAST IN A TWO PART SERIES

This continues part one, which appeared on Monday. The columns are collected at [www.dailyjournal.com](http://www.dailyjournal.com)

could it be? Tschida listened. (When Frank Robinson talks, you listen.) After a minute, Tschida signaled his three fellow umpires. Then, in a single instant, all four umpires closed a four-man net around Brendan Donnelly. I figured Robinson had accused Donnelly of cheating — perhaps doctoring the ball with something? I studied Donnelly's face, like a juror would a witness' while under cross-examination. I wanted to see if it betrayed guilt, innocence, puzzlement, or some other emotion. If Donnelly was innocent he would lift his palms upward, widen his eyes, and say, "What is it, fellas?"

But Donnelly did not do that. His face fell. He muttered an inaudible expletive. Donnelly was guilty — dead, caught red-handed. It was written on his face. The umpires seized Donnelly's black glove and examined it. There was going to be a forensic examination, right there on the mound. Out trotted Mike Scioscia. Over came the Angels' shortstop, David Eckstein, to ask the umpires to give him the ball — an attempted distraction, if only for a moment, to help his teammate? Tschida tossed the ball to Eckstein. The infielders gathered and chatted, pretending nonchalance. Their eyes were trained on the little conclave on the mound.

My eyes wandered back to Robinson. He stood, alone, just outside the first-base line. At age 70, his frame was slightly stooped and his hair gray under his cap. But he was still formidable. He now resembled an angry old dad who could still scare the piss out of you with just a silent stare. He had chosen his moment to pounce. He had waited to play his hand until the game was on the line and Scioscia's reliever of choice was on the mound. And that reliever was Donnelly. Robinson stared hard, straight at him.

Tschida finished his forensic exam. The contraband was right there on Donnelly's glove. It was a mass of pine tar, an illegal substance which, when daubed on a pitched ball, can alter its flight. A straightforward violation of Rule 8.02(b), which says: "The pitcher shall not have on his person, or in his possession, any foreign substance. For such infraction...the penalty shall be immediate ejection from the game." Tschida raised his right arm and threw it forward — Donnelly was gone, ejected, without having even thrown a single pitch! Stunned, he walked off the mound, with as much dignity as he could muster. His pine tar-laden glove remained behind, with Tschida. Caught cheating in front of 43,874 people — it had to be embarrassing.

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The climax was still to come. Robinson had started this. Scioscia would finish it. Scioscia walked over to Robinson and said he would be sure to "undress" Robinson's pitchers from now on. Scioscia turned and walked back toward the Angels dugout. Robinson was livid. This wasn't over! Now he pursued Scioscia, saying that Scioscia had no right to talk to Robinson that way after Scioscia's pitcher had been caught cheating red-handed. Scioscia turned, and the two managers started screaming at one another.

Now 50 players poured out from the dugouts and flooded the diamond. One of them was Jose Guillen. He made a beeline for Scioscia — and it was on. Guillen went crazy — screaming at Scioscia, waving his arms. Two teammates and a coach had to restrain him and drag him back into the dugout. It was one of those baseball rhubarbs, a big 50-man scrum, a lot of big men yelling and arm-flailing but not actually hurting one another. It had all happened so fast. A fan who had gone to the men's room while Donnelly had taken his warm-up pitches would have missed it.

Order was restored. Now drama turned to light comedy. An Angels atten-

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Associated Press

Los Angeles Angels reliever Brendan Donnelly delivers a pitch to Cleveland Indians' Ryan Garko, in 2006.

dant casually began to run Donnelly's glove off the field, toward the Angels dugout. Tschida stopped him — "not so fast," he seemed to say. (It was a good try.) Tschida sternly pointed him toward the umpires' room — the umpires were going to impound the guilty glove. And now a man's glove was being escorted off the field. For me, as a fan, that was a new one.

It was Guillen who had the last word that night. He came up in the 8th inning with the Angels leading 3-2 and slammed a game-tying homer into the bullpen. The home crowd booted lustily. I watched Guillen circle the bases. I had seen his home run trot a few times before. And now he was slowing it down a notch, savoring every step. When he got to the dugout, he high-fived his teammates a little harder than usual. The final score in Washington's come-from-behind win was Nationals 6, Angels 3. "I've never been so happy in my life to win a baseball game," Guillen said the next day.

The next day, Donnelly did not deny having pine tar. But he was quick to add it was a "safety issue" to help him grip the ball better, so that his pitches wouldn't "hit someone in the head." (A necessity defense!) Guillen ignored the pine tar issue, but had this to say about Scioscia: "I don't got truly no respect for [Scioscia] anymore because I'm still hurt from what happened last year...Mike Scioscia, to me, is like a piece of garbage.... He can go to hell.... Any time I play that team, Mike Scioscia's managing, it's always going to be personal to me."

What had happened on the field seemed clear. But what had happened off it? It didn't take a detective to figure it out. As an Angel, Guillen had learned of his then-teammate Donnelly's cheating ways. He'd left Anaheim in 2004 with nothing but hate in his heart for Scioscia, whom he felt had humiliated him. And so in 2005 he'd ratted out Donnelly to his new manager, Robinson — who waited to spring until the moment in which he could catch Donnelly dead to rights. And Robinson had done it.

For Guillen, there was revenge — the chance to get one more word in with Scioscia (not in a private office, but instead in front of a packed stadium), and a key homer against his old club. For Robinson, the hard-assed old timer, there was the satisfaction of catching a snot-nosed cheater. For Scioscia,

there was pride — the need to remind his adversary, wily Hall of Famer or not, that two could play at this game. And for Donnelly, there was just trying to hang on, by cheating if necessary, after years of climbing the ladder to the highest level in baseball.

Life went on. Donnelly drew a 10-game suspension. Late in the season, the Nationals sputtered, finishing in fourth place. The Angels made the playoffs, but lost in the second round to the Chicago White Sox.

Today, the only one still working in the major leagues is Scioscia, who remains the Angels' skipper. He has the widespread respect and admiration of players, management, and fans alike. Donnelly and Guillen are both out of baseball, each later found likely to have used steroids to enhance their performances and prolong their careers. Robinson, a baseball mandarin with no more worlds to conquer, is retired. What brought them all together that summer night were the classic elements of any good drama: revenge (Guillen's), cunning (Robinson's), cheating (Donnelly's), pride (Robinson's and Scioscia's), and their own colorful characters.

Baseball is still just a kids' game. But the elements that produced that night's little drama are timeless in law and in drama both.



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