

SPRING TRAINING IN N.Y.

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What did you drink for a pick-me-up today? In Port St. Lucie, Fla., this afternoon, the Mets' 48-year-old Julio Franco — the oldest major leaguer by more than four years — will slurp down his usual: a liquefied stew of beets, cauliflower, celery, broccoli, garlic, onions and apple. "It tastes nasty," he told a New York Times reporter, "but it's so good for you and 100 percent natural."

Like Franco, whose two-year Mets contract extends past his 49th birthday and who is determined to play to at least 50, I too am entering the second half of my baseball career. Spring training for Gotham Equipment Supply, the Pelham, N.Y., bar-league softball team for which I play shortstop, commences Saturday. I read the Franco article with great interest, as he was once a shortstop, too.

I drove to a local organic food shop to purchase the ingredients to his drink. The article did not specify the type of apple Franco prefers. After some thought, I settled on a Red Delicious. I decided its sweet flavor would provide a pleasant counterbalance to the acrid onion and garlic. I chopped it up and tossed it in the Cuisinart, along with the beets, cauliflower, celery, broccoli, garlic and onion. I added a cup of bottled water and hit the switch.

The machine chopped, stirred, whirred. After a minute I shut it off. I'd expected some sort of beverage. Instead, I'd produced a foul-looking, raspberry-colored Slushie that brought to mind the aftermath of the toga party in "Animal House." I poured myself a glass, but couldn't bring myself to drink it.

How badly do you want to keep playing? I asked myself. I went on the Internet and looked up Franco's career stats: 1991 American League batting champion, lifetime .299 hitter. I shut off the computer. I was convinced.

The first swallow wasn't bad. A bit chunky, perhaps. Thank goodness for the apple. I took a second sip. That's when the onion and garlic cut through. *Oh ... my ... god.*

Clearly, Franco will do anything to keep playing. I'll give him props at Shea Stadium in Flushing, Queens, (123-01 Roosevelt Ave., [Web site](#)) Apr. 11, when the Mets host the Phillies. ([Buy tickets.](#))

As for me, I got back in my car and drove past the organic food store to the local grocery, where this week the entire Entenmann's line is on sale. I purchased the Apple Nut Loaf Cake, which, its package claims, is "made with whole grains" and is "a good source of calcium." I figure that should offset its 12 grams of fat, 40 milligrams of cholesterol and 210 calories per serving.

If you ask me, range factor for shortstops is an overrated stat.