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.