The off-season revamping of the Indians bullpen continues today, as the team announced the signing of veteran closer Keith Foulke to a one year deal worth anywhere between 5 and 7 million dollars. Foulke joins Joe Borowski, Roberto Hernandez, and Aaron Fultz as the new additions to the Tribe pen ... and figures to compete with Borowski for the closers role in spring training. Tony provides us with all the details on the signing, the Indians current 2007 payroll figures, and other moves the team is still pondering.

The Indians today will announce the signing of right-handed reliever Keith Foulke to a one year contract. Foulke's one year deal reportedly will pay him a base salary of $5M in 2007, but the deal also includes incentives that could push that salary figure for 2007 well over $7M, depending on how many games he finishes this year. The deal also includes a mutual option for 2008 that will be for whatever his 2007 salary ends up being once incentives are factored in.

Foulke is the fourth veteran reliever Indians GM Mark Shapiro has signed this offseason in free agency. With Roberto Hernandez, Aaron Fultz, Joe Borowski, and now Keith Foulke in tow, Shapiro appears done revamping the Indians bullpen this offseason. Given the limited supply of quality bullpen arms available in free agency, Shapiro did a very good job in filling several large holes in the Indians bullpen considering the options available to him.

With all four relievers signed to one year deals, it will give Shapiro some much needed flexibility in handling the bullpen in 2007 and beyond. Not only will the one year deals allow Shapiro to cut bait with any underperforming reliever, but the short deals also will act as an incentive for each pitcher to pitch at a high level since they are pitching for their next contract. This especially applies to Foulke.

Foulke battled various arm and knee injuries in 2005 and 2006, and as a result only pitched in 87 games and logged 95.1 innings over the last two seasons. Foulke's arm is rested, and the low workload over the past two seasons is something Shapiro has openly expressed as a

component when evaluating bullpen alternatives. Shapiro has mentioned numerous times that the studies he and his staff have done show much more volatility in bullpen performance when a pitcher is over-worked the previous year or logs a significant amount of innings or appearances.

While he reportedly passed his physical, the only question that remains with Foulke is whether he is 100% healthy. In 588 career appearances, Foulke owns a career 3.30 ERA and is 190 for 225 in save chances (84.4%). From 2000-2004, as a full-time closer, Foulke was very effective in racking up 162 of his saves in that five year span and compiling a 2.49 ERA in 416.1 innings and 353 appearances. It should be noted, upon returning from injury last year on August 18th, Foulke finished the year with a 2.03 ERA in 15 appearances, and also did not allow a run in his final 11 appearances (11.1 IP). At 34 years of age, if healthy, Foulke should still be an effective closer.

But those that think the Foulke signing pretty much guarantees him the closers role in 2007 should think again. While Foulke will make $5M plus up to a little over $2M in incentives based on games finished, Borowski has almost the same deal in place. Borowski's base salary is $4M in 2007, but he also can earn up to $1.5M in incentives bases on games finished. Borowski can earn an additional $200K if he finishes 40 games, another $200K if he finishes 45 games, $200K if he finishes 50 games, $400K for 55 games, and $500K for 60 games finished. While Foulke's incentive plan is not known at this time, it should follow the same setup as Borowski's.

With this in mind, reports that Borowski and Foulke will go to Spring Training and compete for the closer role are correct. The competition will only help fuel success at the backend of the Indians bullpen, and with two viable options available in the bullpen to close, the Indians are hopeful the 9th inning woes from 2006 are over. With depth at closer, the Indians have insured themselves as best as they can if an injury or poor performance happens. And, with three experienced closers on the roster in Borowski, Hernandez and Foulke - this should also help this team in the 7th and 8th inning as well.

With the signing of Foulke, the Indians payroll for 2007 currently stands at $58M. The Indians still have four players eligible for arbitration in Rafael Betancourt, Jason Davis, Matt Miller and Jason Michaels. Those four arbitration eligible players are not included in the total payroll, but they should total around $5-7M in payroll, which will bump the 25-man payroll to around $63-$65M. The actual salary figures for these four arbitration eligible players will not be known until later this month or early February.

Also, it should be noted, that one Jason Davis or Matt Miller will likely be traded or released before the season starts. With Foulke, Hernandez, Borowski, and Fultz signed, and holdovers Betancourt and Fernando Cabrera filling two more spots in the bullpen, it leaves only one spot in the 7-man bullpen for Miller or Davis. Cabrera and Davis are both out of options, but Cabrera is younger with more upside. It is possible they could still retain Davis and Miller since Miller does have options remaining and he does have a recent injury history.

The Indians off-season shopping in the bullpen is done, but the Indians are not quite done

addressing other areas of the team. Currently, the Indians are finalists to sign left-handed starting pitcher Mark Mulder, and they also still want to find a defensive-minded shortstop to backup Jhonny Peralta at shortstop. A Mulder signing could be announced sometime in the next week, and he reportedly has a two year offer from the Indians on the table.