Well, that was quick. This morning, the Indians announced that free agent acquisition Keith Foulke will retire from baseball due to pain in his throwing elbow. The injury ends the Tribe's closer battle before a pitch was even thrown, and changes the landscape of the teams bullpen in a number of other ways as well. I provide my flash analysis this morning after hearing the news.

Well, that was quick.

This morning, the Indians announced that free agent acquisition Keith Foulke will retire from baseball due to pain in his throwing elbow. Foulke, a dominant closer for about a five year stretch, was best known for recording the final out in the Boston Red Sox World Series sweep of the St. Louis Cardinals. He was signed by the Indians to a one year, five million dollar contract this off-season, which had incentives that could have pushed it as high as seven million dollars. There was also a mutual option for 2008 on the deal.

The injury apparently ends the career of the 34-year old Foulke, who has battled injuries for the better part of the last two seasons, and also ends the Indians closer battle before it could even begin. The job now goes to Joe Borowski, who turns 36 in May, and has also battled injury problems through his mid-thirties. Borowski initially signed a two year contract with the Philadelphia Phillies, who backed out of the deal after Borowski failed his physical. The Indians later signed him to a one year deal after having their own doctors check him out.

Closer role aside, the unexpected retirement of Foulke changes the landscape of the bullpen in other ways as well. The loser of the Foulke/Borowski battle was supposed to become the Tribe's main set-up man, and now, Rafael Betancourt and Roberto Hernandez will likely be the early frontrunners for that role. In addition, the seventh and final spot in the bullpen was likely to come down to a battle between Matt Miller, Jason Davis, and Fernando Cabrera. Now, all three are favorites to make the team out of camp. Lastly, this opens the door for youngsters like Tony Sipp, Juan Lara, Rafael Perez, Eddie Mujica, and Tom Mastny to potentially compete for a spot with the big league team, or perhaps to be an early call up the first time the team needs an arm this season.

The Foulke retirement also helps explain the teams signing of veteran reliever Cliff Politte a couple days ago. Politte will not be ready for action until May, but was excellent for the division rival White Sox two years ago in a seventh and eighth inning role before regressing terribly last

season.

While losing Foulke on the first day of camp is disappointing, even more disheartening is the fact that those dollars could have been used elsewhere had the Indians known about his still faulty elbow. Now, with the start of camp upon us, the start of the season just six weeks away, and teams unwilling to deal legitimate bullpen arms ... the Indians can do nothing to fill the role Foulke was set to occupy. In addition, it gives this Tribe fan serious concerns about the Indians medical staff that cleared the team to give this guy five million dollars with a bum elbow.

Let's just hope and pray that their analysis of Joe Borowski's arm was more sound, as losing him to an injury would now put the team in a serious bind.