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Demonstrating that they refuse to be one-upped by the Browns, the Cleveland Indians announced today that free agent signee Keith Foulke was retiring, even before the first pitch of spring training was thrown. All that's needed now to make this mini-drama a complete re-rerun of the Browns pre-season is for Joe Borowski to blow out his arm on his first pitch and for Foulke to claim in Bob Hallen fashion that the reason he retired was due to a previously undisclosed mystery ailment.

While this all smacks of déjà vu all over again, only with Foulke playing the Bob Hallen role, remember that the "retirement" of Hallen was or should have been much more unexpected. Hallen didn't appear to be injured, just unable to cope with the pressure of starting. Foulke, on the other hand, has been plagued by numerous injuries for the last few years and reportedly was now experiencing elbow pain. Whether and when he was going to retire or go on the disabled list were the only real questions. In fact, the same can be said for pretty much everyone Shapiro signed in the off season. It's the kind of thing that's going to happen when an underfinanced team forces your general manager to craft a strategy that rests on signing free agents with injury histories.

Mark Shapiro, the Indians general manager, has been getting good play nationally for the off-season he put together, mainly because he theoretically addressed the major holes on this team, particularly the infield and the bullpen. The Indians in many ways do appear to be

stronger. But the way the bullpen was addressed was a perfect set up for what took place with Foulke. It's just that the collapse happened much quicker than anticipated.

Frankly, it's getting both tiring and boring writing and re-writing the same thing about the Indians. But unless and until ownership decides to fund this team properly, what happened in 2006 is just as likely to happen in any given year as what happened in 2005. And the way 2007 has now started can't be the kind of encouragement Shapiro or Indians fans generally needed to help them rid the goblins of the disaster that was last season.

The argument has been made, with some validity, that given what was out there and coupled with the insane run-up in salaries during the off-season by teams more desperate than the Indians, Shapiro didn't really have much of a choice in how he went about cobbling together this year's bullpen. But the run up in salaries was just one factor that forced Shapiro to scour the injured list for his free agent signees. Bad decisions are at least as much a part of it as anything else. The decision to go hard after Trevor Hoffman at the expense of Bob Howry and the give away of Bob Wickman to the Atlanta Braves both figure prominently into the mix.

It's probably not much of a stretch to suggest that Shapiro knew this was coming given the otherwise odd signing of Cliff Politte this week. But in the grand scheme, Politte was the perfect Shapiro signing. He has a decent track record and recent should surgery. With Foulke going down, Shapiro might want to consider adding Nolan Ryan as insurance. He's barely older than Roberto Hernandez and he just got out of the hospital a few weeks ago.