"The Indians Roundtable" will be a regular weekly Sunday feature throughout the baseball season. One question. Several different answers from TheClevelandFan.com Indians panel.

Last week, we tackled the question or whether it was good or bad news that the Indians were reportedly close to extending Indians GM Mark Shapiro.

This week? Well, in the wake of the sudden and unexpected retirement of closer Keith Foulke, the Indians closing situation and bullpen depth took a serious knock……or did it? TheClevelandFan.com Indians writers express their thoughts on the topic:

Steve Buffum: I think it helps to step back and consider some perspective here. In November, without doing much digging, my knee-jerk reaction to the pursuit of Keith Foulke was, "Great googly moogly, that guy is Toast on a Stick ! He's finished! Kaput! Why are we even mentioning his name?!" It was then pointed out to me that Foulke came back from a stint on the DL and actually pitched quite well in the back half of the season, and I softened my stance.

Since we signed him, the inclination has been to practice the typical human behavior of accepting the data you like and minimizing the significance of data you don't: he was very effective late last summer, he must have recovered, he will be a good closer, we'll just give him a cortisone (Xanax, morphine, thorazine, heroin) shot for any lingering elbow (knee, shoulder, pancreas, medulla oblongata) pain. Of course, if you wanted to be contrarian or at least try to stem the tide of unfounded enthusiasm, you were expecting him to break down during the season anyway, or in the worst case be Danny Graves (pitch well enough to make the roster, pitch like Danny Graves once on it).

Frankly, my coping mechanism is to go back to what I thought in the first place: Foulke was a medium-high-risk medium-high-reward signing. It wasn't something to COUNT on, it was something to HOPE for. It didn't work. So now we're down to ... Borowski, Hernandez, Betancourt, Cabrera, Davis, Miller, Fultz, Lara, Perez, Mastny, Sipp, Mujica ... wait a minute, that's a lot of guys. Granted, of these, exactly one was an effective major-league closer in 2006, and the eighth inning has become less "obvious" as well, but in the grand scheme of things:

1) The bullpen would have been better with a healthy, effective Foulke

2) The chances of this were, objectively, about 20%

3) There were enough alternatives built into the fallback plan

4) So I'm not getting too worked up about it

Tony Lastoria: Losing Foulke was not as devastating as some think. What Foulke provided was an insurance policy and good depth at the backend of the bullpen. The loss of Foulke doesn't hurt this team in the short-run, as Borowski at closer is just as effective and the likes of Betancourt and Hernandez can handle the setup role. The real problem here is we no longer have that fallback option in the event our closer goes down to injury for any length of time. That is what concerns me the most right now (although, do note, this concern can be applied to any team).

For those familiar with the NBC TV show "Deal Or No Deal", I look at it like this: We held one unknown case (closer) in our possession, and there were six cases still on the board and two of them were of good value (Borowski $400,000 and Foulke $500,000). Sure, they were not the mega-prize of $1 million, but I'd settle for $400-500K any day instead of going home with one of the other numbers on the board like $500 (Cabrera), $1000 (Betancourt), or $25,000 (Hernandez).

At this point in the game, we only need to select one case at a time in each round, which means if you have two high amounts, you can gamble a little more because no matter what you still have a high amount to fall back on. This is why I felt good about a Foulke/Borowski combo at the backend of the bullpen. On their own, they had their warts and scared me to death, but together my concerns were almost evaporated as I felt very confident that with the two of them our closer issues from last season were behind us.

Of course, things are a lot different now that we just selected a case (Foulke's $500K) and he is off the board. Now we are left with one big number (Borowski's $400K) and a bunch of really insignificant amounts at $25K or below. NOW there is nothing to fall back on, and NOW concern has crept in. Not to mention The Banker is laughing hysterically at us.

We took the risk that one of those two cases on the board would be the one we would be holding in the end, and the odds of that just took a huge hit. Was it possible that the $400K and $500K would make it through the entire game (season)? Of course not. But, we were hoping one would be the case we were holding. Only time will tell on this one as the season unfolds whether that final case we are holding is $400K and we hit a good sized jackpot, or if

we get stuck with another $500 or $.01 case like we did last year.

Jarad Regano: I'll take "Obvious Outcomes" for $200, Alex.

"What you get when your only free agents are one-year players, coming off injuries, and potentially not even interested in baseball"

"What is....Exactly what happened to the Indians this week?"

The quantity over quality bullpen experiment has taken a painful turn for the worse before camp even opens. The idea of throwing $3-5 million dollar deals at several people and hoping for the best has already claimed its first victim. Shapiro must now rely on his potential closer from candidates that include a guy who failed another team's physical, and a guy who receives senior discounts on McDonalds coffee.

Lord knows I hope the national media is right, but I just see a third place team who needs a whole lot to go right in order to contend.

Rich Swerbinsky: You play with fire, you get burned. If you depend on reclamation projects and injury risks, the chances are good that they're going to get hurt or fail to perform.

In Shapiro's defense, there was little else out there on the free agent market in terms of relievers. I advocated on the record that the team go after Justin Speier, who signed with Anaheim. They didn't want to give him three years, and preferred to settle for a guy that no other team was willing to give even two years to. But again, given the circumstances, I had

no problem with the Foulke signing considering that no one else was left on the market, and we were risking nothing but money at that point.

This all said, it's very concerning to me that the Indians medical staff OK'd giving this guy 5 million bucks. And Shapiro's reluctance to give any free agents multi-year deals also factored here, as the team was forced to settle for Foulke, the last legitimate bullpen guy to sign. Bottom line, this team is a Joe Borowski injury away from having a nightmare on their hands in the bullpen.

Todd Dery: The news of Keith Foulke's sudden retirement has me fired up. This is Bob Hallen redux for Cleveland fans. You remember Bob, the guy who was handed the starting Center job after LeCharles Bentley went down only to leave the team and retire one day later. That left the Browns in a severe bind. While the Indians aren't in as deep of a predicament as the Browns were, they are still left shorthanded at a key spot - Closer. I think most people figured Foulke would end up closing with Joe Borowski pitching the 8th inning. Now, the roles are all essentially re-defined.

That is not such a bad thing. Borowski knows he'll be closing. Roberto Hernandez and Rafael Betancourt will be your 7th and 8th inning guys with a little Fernando Cabrera mixed in. Aaron Fultz will be your situational lefty. What is an issue is injury. If Borowski's gimpy shoulder doesn't hold up (remember, he failed the Phillies physical before signing here), GM Mark Shapiro is right back to where he was last year after dealing Bob Wickman - Closer by committee. The happiest man in Cleveland today is Jason Davis. He has pretty much locked in a spot in the bullpen.

As for Foulke - I was never a fan of this signing to begin with, but it was a great insurance policy for Borowski. Mark Shapiro figured he'd strike gold with one of these two. Now, there is zero margin for error. Foulke quitting on the Tribe at this point hurts for various reasons, but

most importantly you never know how much harder the Indians may have pursued an Eric Gagne knowing Foulke wasn't a fall back option. I want guys who want to be here. Good Riddance.

Erik Cassano: Losing Keith Foulke hurts the Indians in the short term, no doubt. A healthy Foulke would have given the Indians a postseason-tested closer, something that might have helped them late in the season.

I'm also not totally comfortable with Joe Borowski as the closer. Even if his arm is totally healthy, I just can't see him repeating last season's 36-save campaign. Having said all of that, maybe Foulke is doing the Indians a favor in the long run. What is the point of putting stock in a veteran closer if he is just going to be on and off the disabled list all year?

Foulke's blame to shoulder in all of this is that he should have retired in October or November, before any team started writing him into their 2007 plans. Losing Foulke now is better than losing him in July, but it would have been better still if he had just called it quits right after last season.

Foulke was worth taking a flier on, given his experience, so I don't blame Mark Shapiro for the signing. If Shapiro and the Indians are to blame for anything, it's for not developing relievers in the same manner they have developed hitters and starting pitchers. While the Tribe brass has set about carefully crafting a starting rotation and lineup largely from their farm system, the bullpen has been left to flap in the breeze. So far, bullpen misadventures have essentially killed two of the past three seasons.

A homegrown bullpen would be a heck of a lot more stable, and would end this year-to-year parade of dice-rolls on banged-up veterans. Unfortunately, when you build your bullpen out of scrap metal and reclamation projects, these kinds of things will happen sooner or later.

(However, as a side note, if Foulke decides in midseason that he actually is healthy and ends up resurfacing with another team, I'm going to be pissed. And he's only in his early 30s. I could see that happening.)

Cris Sykes: Really? Keith Foulke is not going to save 45 games for the Indians this year? I am absolutely shocked by this news. How will I recover?

Like this. No shit Sherlock. Was Nostradamus really required for this bit of inside information? Hell no. All it took was some common sense, logic and thought. The man has had one healthy, successful stretch since 2004, yet we as fans of The Cleveland Idiots, er, Indians were supposed to be hopeful that this was the year he came back strong.

Mark Shapiro, you screwed up, again. The way you handle your limited budget is downright atrocious. When it requires more luck than skill for your team to be a contender, you deserve no credit. When you pin your hopes to a man who would be better served in a wheelchair than one of those old bullpen buggies, you are a moron. Now, with your big off-season hinged to the health of a man that failed a physical for another team before you rode in and scooped him up, we are supposed to be impressed? You had roughly $20 million to spend in free agency and you tied up one quarter of that in someone that will never see the field for the Indians. Congratulations. At least you will still have your ego to keep you company this summer.

Gary Benz: The "retirement" of Keith Foulke wasn't necessarily any particular miscalculation by GM Mark Shapiro nor does it necessarily put the Indians in any more of a bind than they already were in. The main reason, in my view, is that the Indians entire free agent acquisition strategy is built around signing players, usually pitchers, whose risk profile lowers their salary expectations. When that's your strategy, fans shouldn't expect that any of the signees will come through, let alone all of them. If any do, of course, that's a bonus and should be treated as such.

Given the injury track record of Foulke, one way or another, the Indians were unlikely to be able to count on him for the entire season anyway. He was either going to be hurt or ineffective or both. It's what baseball in Cleveland has become. On the plus side, the Indians have "saved" $5 million so that should give them a hedge against having to dump some players later in the season if the on-field performance is closer to 2006 than 2005.