

Even the biggest pessimist couldn't



Reliever's Decision Highlights Shapiro's Weaknesses

Even the biggest pessimist couldn't have predicted this one accurately. Sure, maybe Keith Foulke had a reasonable chance at blowing out his arm on April 20th. Or it wouldn't have been out of the realm of possibilities that he announced he wasn't too into the whole baseball thing come mid-May. But February? Are you kidding me?

Hedging against what he calls the most volatile area of building a baseball team, general manager Mark Shapiro offered up multi-million dollar one-year deals to just about any reliever that would talk with him. Turn him down? Move on to the next guy in line. Ask for two-years? Next! His philosophy is that if you throw enough average or recently injured relievers onto the mound, a few are going to get people out.

Shapiro's bullpen philosophy was one that I have praised him on. I agree that the uncertain nature of a club's pen makes it nearly impossible to predict from year to year.

This is exactly why I never thought Shapiro would allocate nearly \$15 million of his low market payroll to for the "luxury" of mediocre "quantity." Is it not possible that Matt Miller, Rafael Betancourt, Jason Davis and others could be just as productive as the volatile multi-millionaires brought in? If you aren't going to pay a top notch reliever, couldn't that money be better spent elsewhere?

Early indications are that it could have been. One reliever is down and \$5 million is back in Larry Dolan's pocket with no one left to sign. After taking a deep breath from this one, move your attention to Joe Borowski. Your team's medical staff gave him the same Foulke-esque approval, even after the Phillies thought otherwise. Anyone else interested to see how this plays out?

As I have argued for most of the past year, the best cost/risk addition for the Indians would be a bona-fide middle of the order hitter to protect Travis Hafner. The chances of "knowing what you are getting" improve astronomically with a hitter. You can still play the "large number of arms" bullpen game, but with less money invested in it.

Mark Shapiro continues to be the guy ordering five value meal fries instead of the Big Mac Meal, because those dollar fries are a steal. An hour later, he is hungry and thirsty. He looks for value in short-term contracts, whether or not it fits the best overall need for the club.

The national media continues to praise the Indians and includes them in their list of teams to compete for a championship. I see a third place team. Here's hoping I'm wrong.