

I don't know about you, but Joe Borowski has shaved some years off the back end of my life this year. In his latest piece, Brian McPeck analyzes Joe Bo's season, and admits to being scared stiff at the proposition of him closing out playoff games for us in October. But with the Indians lacking other options, we will sink or swim with Joe. Hang on for dear life Tribe fans!



Seeing is believing. At least that's the cliché.

Unless you're talking about Tribe fans and Indians closer Joe Borowski. Then it appears that seeing becomes denying and finding justification for that denial instead.

The cold hard numbers tell us that Borowski, entering this weekend's series with the Chicago White Sox, leads the American League in saves with 39 and trails only the 41 saves of Arizona Diamondbacks closer Jose Valverde in all of major league baseball.

Those numbers are true.

And baseball is a bottom line sport. You win or you lose, you get the clutch hit or you fail. No one cares that your game winner was a looping fly ball of the fists that fell in harmlessly. And no one cares whether you hit a laser into the gap that the

centerfielder ran down and caught with a dive.

Pass or fail.

Sink or swim.

And Borowski fans will defend him vigorously given that he's saved far more games than he's blown (6).

They will stand firm on the save numbers as justification for praising him. They also laud his competitiveness and his ability to forget yesterday's outing and take the ball today.

But while those fans are quick to throw out the saves numbers that back up their opinion, they are also quick to minimize other Borowski numbers that are at the same time both telling and foreboding. Borowski has an ERA of 5.60. That is 1.20 runs higher than the league average. Not only that, but you can look at the top 22 ranked closers (ranked by the bottom line number of saves they have accumulated) in the American League and not one of those pitchers is within a run of Bowowski's 5.60.

His WHIP (walks + hits/innings pitched) is 1.48. Again, that is above the league average of 1.40. Allowing runners to reach base and to score with the frequency they do against JoBo is not the blueprint to success as a closer.

They do, however, help explain why Borowski has given up at least one earned run in 19 of the 58 games in which has appeared and given up multiple earned runs in 5 of those appearances. We won't get into the tight ropes he has walked successfully despite 400-foot outs and line drives at fielders. He's living on the

edge every single time he takes the mound. We also won't get into how the same fans that fiercely defend Borowski chided and castigated former closer Bob Wickman in 2005 despite the fact his ERA was 3 runs lower than JoBo's, he saved 45 games and he had only 5 blown saves that entire season.

To folks who cling to the bottom line like it's a life preserver, those numbers and those facts should be sending up red flags all over the place. But the Borowski defenders quickly change the rules. They will tell you that you need to throw out a few of his appearances to get a more accurate view of what he has done.

This argument is a bit odd. The reason it's odd is that I don't hear it applied in regard to anyone else. Prior to his last start, C.C Sabathia had gone 5 straight appearances in which he allowed two earned runs. He was 1-4 in those 5 starts. Yet the same fans supporting Borowski lauded Sabathia for pitching so well and blamed the Indians offense for not supporting him with runs.

Bottom line: C.C was 1-4. He lost 80% of those starts. You can't have it both ways. If Sabathia (and Fausto Carmona, for that matter) pitched well and got unlucky is it not possible that Borowski has pitched poorly and been very fortunate? If you believe the numbers lie, you better be very careful in what numbers you provide to support your position.

What if we throw out 10% of Trot Nixon's at-bats and chalk them up to a couple bad days? We can quickly make Nixon a .285 hitter. Is that an accurate reflection of Nixon's season?

There is not one pitcher currently on the Indians roster with an ERA higher than Borowski's. The 5 pitchers who went above and beyond his 5.60 are Fernando Cabrera, Roberto Hernandez, Cliff Lee, Jeremy Sowers and Ed Mujica. Anyone see a pattern there? None of them are with the major league club and 2 of them are out of the organization. None got the benefit of a mulligan for any given appearance.

Paul Brown once allegedly told a bus driver who had gotten the team hopelessly lost, "I don't blame you. I blame the guy who hired you." This logic applies to the Borowski situation as well. The Indians made overtures about acquiring a closer prior to the start of the season. The market was bad. The front office decided to take its chances with Borowski and Keith Foulke. Borowski had just failed a physical in Philadelphia and Foulke was a physical mess and retired during spring training. There was a fear, after the Carmona fiasco last season, of giving the job to a young prospect. By default, Borowski walked into the role.

I don't look for the Indians to rely to on Borowski next season. They know they are more than fortunate to be where they are in the standings despite him, not necessarily because of him.

I do agree with the Borowski supporters in that he is competitive and he has the right mentality for the job. I applaud the man for going out there when the game is on the line and facing down good hitters with his ordinary stuff. But where I agree most is that the Indians truly have no choice but to run him out there in save situations because, for the remainder of the season, there are no other options. But if you don't see a pattern of mediocrity or worse with his performance, you have your head buried in your Chief Wahoo blanket and you're whistling past the graveyard.

Hang onto that Borowski bandwagon with both hands. The ride to the stretch run and beyond is not likely to get any smoother.