

Searching For Answers

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Wednesday, April 16 2008 7:00 PM -

Man, the baseball season is a grind. And it's really tough when your team goes through stretches like this one. In his latest, Paulie C focuses on the bullpen. Due to a lack of other realistic options, Paul doesn't necessarily blame the Indians for picking up JoBlo's option. But is angry the team didn't do anything when it was apparent in spring training that he had lost velocity. Paul also offers up some suggestions on the composition of the new non-Borowski bullpen.



Not too much to be happy about in the wigwam right now. The Red Sox scurried out of town, swiping two games out from under the Indians' noses thanks to the efforts (or lack thereof) of two different bullpens: "The Borowski Bullpen" and "The Non-Borowski Bullpen".

As for last night, realize that it takes quite a bit for me to leave my perch in the Mezzanine prior to the 27th out being squeezed at a Tribe game. But watching the reigning Cy Young winner give up 9 ER in 4 IP while seeing a player (who may or may not be The Big Cat) who was traded by the pitching-starved Texas Rangers (for a AA outfielder named Michael Gonzalez in February of this year, by the by) give up 1 hit through 6 innings while mowing through a toothless Tribe lineup swinging early and often?

Yeah, that will get me out of my seat and en route to the Family Truckster.

Searching For Answers

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Wednesday, April 16 2008 7:00 PM -

But back to the matter at hand - the bullpen. While the situation with Brodzoski (The Close) has caused much hand-wringing and rising blood pressure on the North Coast and elsewhere, I think that we've seen the last of the JoeBo. While a "strained triceps" sounds a lot like "we have no idea what happened to him other than that the guy who threw in the Speed Pitch booth for a Shell Gas card in the 7th inning had comparable velocity, so here's an injury"; it's obvious that Borowski has little to nothing left in the tank after years of "grinding it out" and bringing a "warrior mentality" to the mound. Ultimately, his lack of stuff and velocity caught up with him and, unless he's magically able to suddenly find those missing 7 MPH on his fastball in rehab starts, or through rest, I can't see a way that he makes it back to Cleveland in any capacity, much less a closer.

Of course, Borowski's implosion has caused the argument to surface that the Indians should have addressed their tenuous closer situation in the off-season by not entering 2008 with Borowski as their assumed 9th inning option. I suppose there's something to that, until you consider the options that were out there in terms of available relievers not already in the Tribe organization - Brad Lidge (really, is he a better option, particularly considering he'd be going from the NL to the AL?), Francisco Cordero (who got a 4-year, \$46M contract), Eric Gagne (whose last appearance in the AL for Boston didn't excite anyone outside of opposing batters?), Scott Linebrink, David Riske...you see where I'm going here? Obviously, Mo Rivera wasn't leaving Gotham and teams aren't exactly in the practice of putting effective relievers, much less closers, out on the trade market if they think that said reliever is going to remain effective.

So, with few better alternatives available outside of the organization, the Indians went into Spring Training sticking with the closer that led the AL in saves, as terrifying as many of them may have been, with the idea that the other relievers (namely the two Rafaels, the Fist of Iron and the Fist of Steel, because "if the left one doesn't get you, then the right one will") could be elevated to the closer role if Borowski struggled at any point.

Now, in spring training is where things get interesting and where this whole Borowski thing could have ostensibly been avoided with some preemptive measures. In the past few days, our crack Indians' beat reporters have reported that Borowski actually injured himself on March 14th in Winter Haven and the Indians effectively hid his injury from the press and protected Borowski from any kind of radar gun that would have exposed the reduction in his velocity.

Searching For Answers

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Wednesday, April 16 2008 7:00 PM -

This, right here, is the moment that the Indians needed to act on this ... in spring training. The Indians should have shelved Borowski, installed Betancourt as the de facto closer and allowed the rest of the bullpen to shake out through the last couple of weeks of spring ball, perhaps ingratiating the likes of Perez and Lewis into the progression of relievers that we now see the Indians attempting to establish in the third week of the season.

With knowledge of Borowski's injury and ineffectiveness that accompanied it, the plan should have had their relievers ready to start the season in these roles, right out of Winter Haven:

Betancourt - 9th

Perez and Lewis - 8th, depending upon who's coming up (LH or RH)

Kobayashi and Julio - 6th and 7th

Breslow - LOOGY

Mastny - Long relief

That's what we're looking at today, but instead of those roles being established in Winter Haven, these pitchers are going to have to acquit themselves to a new progression (now in the season, facing the likes of Manny and Youkilis in games that count), something that didn't look to be a smooth operation last night as both Julio looked lost pitching with a lead and Perez and Lewis seemed uncomfortable in their trips to the mound.

Is anyone really surprised that Borowski's arm gave out this year?

Not really, given numerous reports of looming arm trouble.

Did anyone expect it to be this early?

Only if you knew that he was hurt on March 14th....which, apparently, somebody (or somebodies) did without acting on it.

So right now, the Indians' bullpen is forced into the mode of evolving on the fly and hoping that some semblance of a progression can be established before the bullpen sabotages multiple games for the team. The current bullpen (without Borowski) is talented, if generally unproven in the roles that they are thought to and there may be other options that present themselves if one of the current inhabitants of the bullpen continually...oh, I don't know, walks two batters to start

Searching For Answers

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Wednesday, April 16 2008 7:00 PM -

the 6th inning with a lead.

Atom Miller is still in Winter Haven but certainly could help at some point, so it will be interesting to see where Miller pitches when he finally makes the trip north to Buffalo. If he's pitching out of the bullpen for the Bisons, he won't stay down there much longer than to get used to the routine of a reliever as his arm certainly qualifies as an upgrade over the likes of Julio and Mastny.

Outside of that, the team could look at Aaron Laffey as a reliever (assuming that Cliff Lee and Paul Byrd pitch well out of the Cleveland rotation) if the bullpen casualties start mounting. Laffey, while obviously more valuable in the long-term as a starter, is a groundball pitcher who pounds the strike zone and has good K/BB rates, which could translate into becoming a solid contributor out of the bullpen.

Obviously, it's a little early to start looking for replacements for relievers that are still beginning the process of settling into their new roles, but the fact that the pitchers are just now settling into their new roles (and not with two weeks left in Spring Training) is an error that the team will have overcome in the early season and hope that it can be overcome before the bullpen puts the team further behind the 8-ball than they are with the suddenly resurgent Tigers (only two games back of the Tribe despite numerous eulogies about 10 days ago) arriving tonight.

At this point, in terms of the bullpen, only one thing is a certainty in mid-April - the Brodzoski (The Close) Era is over in Cleveland, likely never to begin again, and the rest of the bullpen has little time to pull themselves into shape before the season starts circling the drain, sabotaged by a gas can-wielding bullpen.