

Three Twin Posts Up in the Air; It All Depends on Speedy Tovar

By MAX NICHOLS

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

One year ago, Cesar Tovar was a rookie with no set position and only an outside chance to land a job on Minnesota's 25-man squad.

This spring, the speedy little Venezuelan again will begin training in Florida, still uncertain which position he will wind up playing. But there's a difference.

Instead of a man without a position, Tovar this spring will be considered "versatile." That's because the positions are trying to find him, instead of him trying to find a position.

At least two Twin positions and possibly three will be settled only after Tovar has been settled—second base, center field and possibly even left field.

"I'm predicting that Tovar will make the All-Star team at second base," said Billy Martin, Twins infield coach. "We can have the best second base combination in baseball with Zoilo Versalles at short-stop and Tovar at second."

Manager Sam Mele, however, is not even predicting for certain that Tovar will play second.

"I'm going to have Tovar work out both at second base and in center field," said Mele. "If Ted Uhlaender can't make it as a hitter, then Tovar will be the only man I've got for center field."

"Right now, there are only three positions set—Versalles at short-stop, Tony Oliva in right field and Harmon Killebrew at first base."

So while pitching has grabbed the winter attention of Twins fans after the trades for Dean Chance and Ron Kline, the most interesting factor in the Minnesota camp could center around Tovar.

Six Vet Starters

Pitching is a unique problem—with six experienced major league starters plus Triple-A 20-game winner Jim Ollom battling for the starting jobs. But it's certain that Jim Kaat, Chance, Dave Boswell and Jim Grant will get thorough chances as starters.

And it's even more certain that Kline and Al Worthington will monopolize the two primary bull-pen jobs.

Nothing is nearly so certain at the positions of left field, center field, third base or second base.

Tovar played 76 games at second base last year, earning the regular job at that position as well as the Twins' leadoff batting job. He made eight errors for a .978 fielding average.

He also played 31 games at short-stop as a replacement for Versalles, plus 24 games in the outfield. Of his outfield games, he played four in left field, where he had the best single fielding day of any Twins' left fielder in his first game at the position.

Cesar Improved at Keystone

"I think right field is my best position," Tovar once said. But with Tony Oliva young and healthy, he won't see much action there. He improved tremendously at second base last summer under the coaching of Martin.

"Tovar covers so much ground he actually ran me off a ball out there by second base," Versalles said after one spectacular play.

"He was so good, in fact, he made me look bad."

Tovar's No. 1 asset is his speed. He covers more ground right and left than any second baseman has for the Twins since they started playing in Minnesota in 1961. He was adequate on the double play, and his glove has improved.

Last spring, Martin started out coaching him with the most fundamental aspects of picking up ground balls. For hours, Tovar worked at bouncing the ball off a wall to improve his reflexes on grounders.

As it stands right now, Tovar is the Twin second baseman with Uhlaender the center fielder. That's the way Mele played it from June 25 to the end of the season in most of the games. And it was on June 25 that the Twins checked their early-season slide.

But Mele knows Tovar can also



Cesar Tovar

play a strong center field. And since Uhlaender hit only .226 last year, he wants to be ready in case Uhlaender can't improve on that showing this spring.

What happens if Tovar goes to center field?

"Well, I've got Frank Quilici to play second base," said Mele. "And there is Ron Clark. He has played a good second base in Venezuela this winter, I understand. Quilici did a good job for us the second half of 1965 at second, so we'll be all right."

And it should be pointed out that Versalles had his best half season ever the second half of 1965, when he put on the drive that won the Most Valuable Player award—with Quilici alongside him.

Tovar could figure in the left field plans if Uhlaender makes the grade in center and no one takes over in left.

Right now, Bob Allison must be listed as the top candidate in

Twins Corral Ruettiman, Hitting, Pitching Phenom

TWIN CITIES, Minn.—Already the Twins have signed three of their top four choices in the January free-agent draft, including a "modern-day Clint Hartung."

Gerald Ruettiman of St. Paul is the player compared with Hartung of the post-war New York Giants by scout Angelo Giuliani—because of Ruettiman's ability as a hitter and pitcher.

Playing in the Third Infantry Division in Germany, Ruettiman had a 23-3 pitching record over two years. And he batted .367 over those two seasons with 17 home runs each year. He was the most valuable player there both times.

Others signed included Leonard Weems of Ecorse, Mich., first-round choice, and Edwin Figueroa, third-round choice catcher from New York City.

left field. But Bob had a poor season last year and a below-par one in 1965—both complicated by injuries.

"I don't want to say Bob has the job now and then have to give it to someone else," said Mele. "He will have to win the job. But it will sure help if he does. He's a good fielder, and we can use his power."

In Tovar's first experience of last season in left, he threw out Jose Cardenal and Bob Rodgers of the Angels at home plate.

Rollins No. 1 at Third

With Harmon Killebrew set at first base, Rich Rollins again becomes the leading candidate for the third base job.

But here again the situation becomes complicated.

If a strong hitter, such as Allison or Andy Kosco, takes over in left field, then Mele can afford to use a defensive standout at third with less hitting ability. That could be Clark, a rookie who is considered a top-notch fielder at third base, but is untested as a major league hitter.

He batted .294 at Denver last year and better than .300 in Venezuela. But that still is not in the majors.

Rollins, meanwhile, is a bona-fide major league hitter. And right now he's the leading candidate at third.

Earl Battey once again heads an experienced staff of catchers. Jerry

Minnesota Fans Buy Tickets on Credit

By MAX NICHOLS

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

It had to happen eventually, and in Minnesota it already has.

Credit cards have been applied to the business of selling Twins' baseball tickets, and the Minnesota club's regular customers are jumping at the idea.

Charlie Lavender, ticket manager of the Twins, set up the plan to use credit cards in selling Twin tickets. Now he's swamped with the result.

"We sent out letters to our best customers—people who buy a lot of tickets—and told them they could apply for credit cards," said Lavender. "I've got hundreds of requests on my desk right now."

Customer Gets a Card

"Here's the way it works, basically. We send a customer a card with his name and a number on it. We have a duplicate card with the same name and number. He's a customer who already has bought season tickets or large numbers of tickets.

"These same customers often want extra tickets quickly—when a client or someone comes to town. When this happens, the customer calls us, orders his tickets, gives us his name and the number of his card. We take our duplicate card and run it through the credit card stamping machine that puts his name and number on his order. Then we bill him."

"It's not open to everybody—just our good customers." The Twins have set up three primary standards for

customers to meet in order to be eligible for credit cards—season ticket buyers, persons buying any of the club's three special ticket plans and fans who buy gift certificates in lots of \$125 or more.

"We decide who gets the credit cards," said Lavender, "so we can control the plan."

Response Beyond Expectations

"Little did we realize the kind of response we would get. We're always trying to come up with ideas to accommodate, simplify and stimulate sales of season tickets and special ticket plans. But these efforts don't always meet with the enthusiasm that our credit card plan generated."

To add to the convenience, the Twins even have a special telephone number reserved for credit-card calls.

Season ticket sales are near the 4,000 mark now. They reached 4,200 last year. Other ticket plans include a "sunshine special," which includes 12 Saturdays, 12 Sundays and July 4; the evening special including 38 night games, and a combination of the two. All three include opening day.

In another Twin business note, a computer has been installed for the use of the club's accounting office. Tom Mee, Twin public relations man, said it is possible that in the future Twin statistics may be figured on this computer.



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Zimmerman and Russ Nixon give the Twins a strong catching bench. George Mitterwald must be rated an outside chance to win a job with the Twins.

All of this brings us back to the pitching, which has been strengthened by any set of standards with the addition of Chance and Kline. Mele plans to let spring training determine most of his setup of the Twins' starting rotation.

He would name only Kaat, his 25-game winner, as a sure starter. But it's pretty certain about the others.

"I want Chance to start," he said. "He'll certainly get every opportunity. I would like Boswell to start, but he had a sore arm last year at the end of the season. We'll have to find out for certain in spring training if that is all right."

Relief Role for Some

"Then comes Jim Grant. And we also have Jim Merritt and Jim Perry. But some of these guys are going to have to relieve. They will just have to do what is best for the club."

Along with the 34-year-old Kline and the 38-year-old Worthington, Mele would like to add a lefthanded reliever. This could be Jim Roland, who was with Syracuse last year.

One of the interesting aspects of the Twins' spring training will be Early (Gus) Wynn working as the new Twins' pitching coach. He replaces John Sain, who switched to Detroit.

Mele and Wynn are old friends



Ted Uhlaender

and should work together well. Wynn says he plans to go with the individual methods of the pitchers, rather than try to change them all to one particular style.

Sam, after meeting with Wynn, said he has not decided yet whether to go with a four-day starting system as he used the last two years or to use the five-day rotation system.

"That, along with a lot of other things, will be decided in spring training," he said.

More Trades in Wind

There is a possibility the Twins will do more trading toward the end of spring training. Twins' President Calvin Griffith likes to trade after his men have scouted other players in spring training.

"I would like to have a good lefthanded hitter in left field to go with Oliva," said Mele. "If Uhlaender doesn't make it in center field, Oliva would be our only lefthanded-hitting regular." Griffith said the Twins will trade only for a regular left fielder, not a part-time player.

Twin Tracks: Infielder Graig Nettles, originally scheduled to join the Twins in spring training, instead will go into the Army for six months. . . . The exodus has begun from the Twin Cities for Florida, and none too soon. By the first week in February, the Twin Cities had been hit by 56.5 inches of snow this winter. March is usually the big snow month here. . . . The Twin Cities Baseball Dinner again showed enough profit for the baseball writers to continue giving at least \$1,000 per year in baseball scholarships.