

Reliever Perry Strikes It Rich After Weeks of Toil for Twins

By MAX NICHOLS

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

Jim Perry is thankful for the often thankless job of middle-inning relief pitching. And the Twins now are grateful that he has worked so hard to keep it.

It was only a month ago that the Twins' management was talking about trading the righthander or possibly even selling him outright to their Denver (Coast) farm club. But Perry changed all that with the will to make sure he was ready for the few chances he was getting. "I've worked hard, almost every day, in the bull pen, to stay ready," said Jim. "It's not that I haven't worked hard before. I've always worked. But I worked even harder this year."

Bench Riders Click For Juggling Mele

By MAX NICHOLS

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Manager Sam Mele juggled his lineup more than ever before to pull the Twins out of a four-game losing streak and into a winning pace that put them on top of the American League.

With the strongest bench he has ever been fortunate enough to work with, Mele was resting slugging stars Harmon Killebrew and Bob Allison at the same time, giving catcher Earl Battey long rests to recover from injuries and starting to platoon .300 hitter Jim Hall.

To do this kind of juggling, Mele had the services of Sandy Valdespino, a .358-hitting reserve outfielder; Joe Nosssek, an outstanding center fielder,



JOE NOSSEK



DON MINCHER

and Don Mincher, the lefthanded-slugging first baseman who recently learned to play the outfield posts.

He also had Jerry Zimmerman, who played in 24 of the Twins' first 44 games and was involved in 18 of 29 victories while working in place of Battey.

Zimmerman has a lifetime batting average of .217, but he was batting .250 as the Twins moved into June with a slight lead over the second-place White Sox.

"We can't stand pat," Mele said.

Killer, Allison Ride Bench at Same Time

Mele had tried to go with his top nine players as often as possible in other years. And never had he rested Killebrew and Allison at the same time. But he found himself doing this in a double-header at Los Angeles after the Twins' longest losing streak of the season.

Against the Angels' Dean Chance, Valdespino (lefthanded batter) played left field in place of Allison while Mincher played first base in place of Killebrew.

The Twins won in 12 innings with Valdespino crashing three late-inning hits and Mincher a double.

Mele also placed Nosssek in center field against lefthanded pitchers, and the rookie came through with three hits against Washington. So Mele planned to continue this, though Hall was hitting at a .457 pace for 12 games and at .325 for the season.

In the Memorial Day double-header at Baltimore, Mele sidelined Killebrew and Allison against Robin Roberts.

"They usually don't hit so well against Roberts," said Mele. "And besides, I think it helps to rest one game of a double-header." Again the Twins won. And Valdespino again rapped three hits, and stole a base. In the second game of that twin-bill, Mincher played in left field for the first time.

The only place Mele felt unable to rest a player was at shortstop, where Zoilo Versalles has been playing brilliant baseball. The only way to do that would be to move second baseman Jerry Kindall over to shortstop and play Frank Kostro at second.

But while Versalles was still going strong, Mele decided to leave the middle of his infield alone.

"We have a second baby on the way. That will mean another mouth to feed. The major leagues are the only place to pitch. I want to stay."

In the first six weeks of the American League season, Jim pitched only three and two-thirds innings for the Twins. It looked as if he might not stay. There even were reports that he had been waived out of the league.

But he kept throwing in the bull pen, trying to stay sharp and trying to develop a curve under the instruction of Johnny Sain, Twins' pitching coach.

"You have to pull for a guy who has tried as hard as Perry has this year," Sain said. "He has worked harder than anybody on our staff on his own. He has gambled a little, throwing so often, but when he got his chances, he was ready."

Daily Work Preferable

"I think it's best for a relief pitcher to work a little bit every day instead of working hard one day and not the next."

On May 26, after appearing in only four of 35 games, Perry got his chance at Boston. The Red Sox had belted Camilo Pascual for a 6-4 lead during the first two innings.

Perry was ready. He pitched three and two-thirds innings and gave up only three hits and one unearned run. He left with a 9-7 lead and was the winning pitcher.

It was good enough for Manager Sam Mele to give him another chance. The former Cleveland starter was ready again. Within a week, he had pitched four times for 12 innings while allowing only one run, picking up three victories.

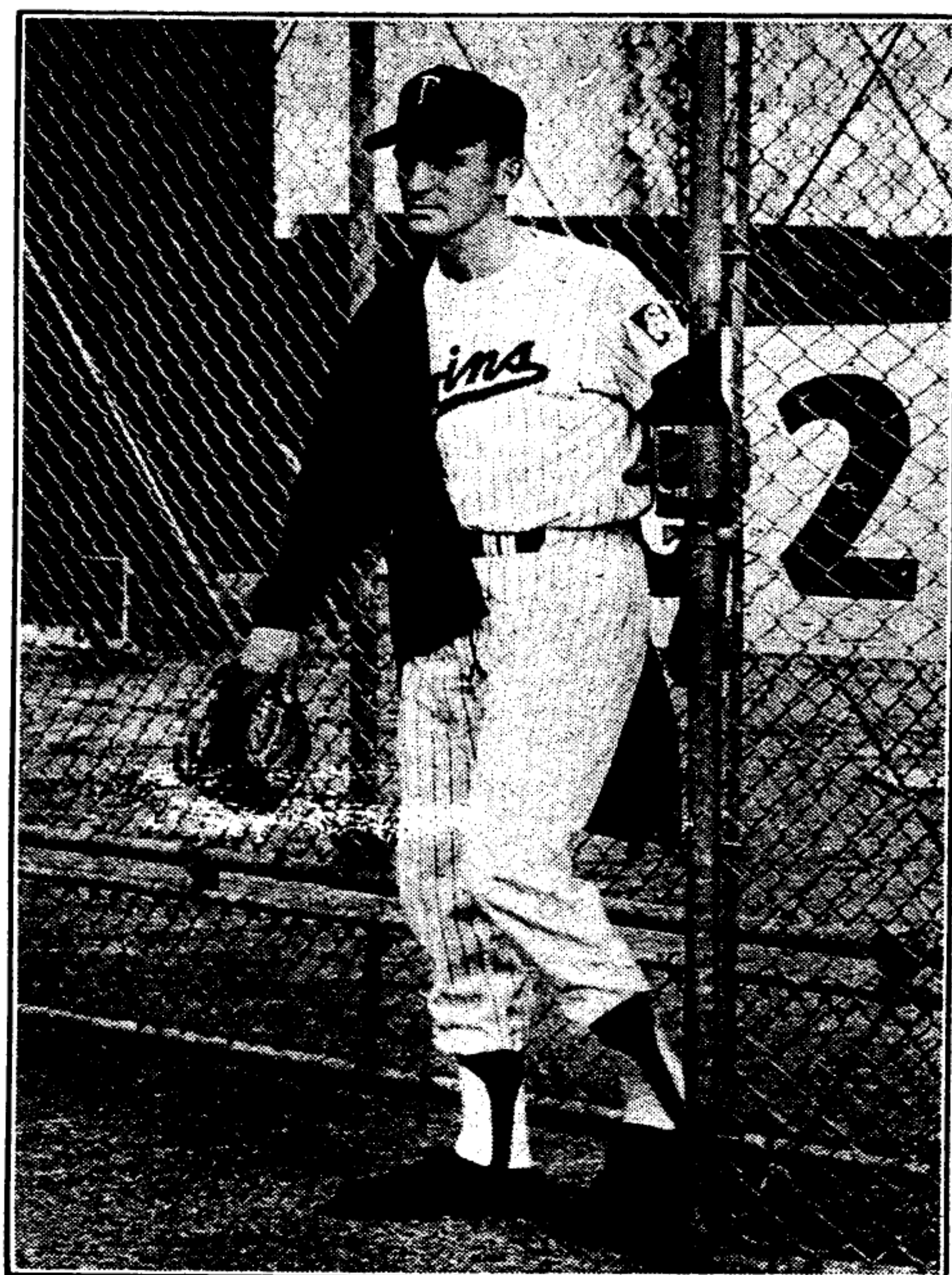
Mele said Perry had established himself as the Twins' middle-inning reliever, a job he did through the last half of the 1964 season.

"You have to have a pitcher to stop them cold when your starter has a bad night," Mele said. "That is what Sain had been preaching. Relievers for those middle three or four innings sometimes are as important as the finishers."

Valuable as Rescuer

"Perry did a good job as a middle-inning man last year. I think he is throwing the ball a lot harder now than he was this spring. I have no intention of starting him. I need him for the middle relief job."

Getting Perry to throw hard consistently long has been an enigma for Mele. The tall righthander was obtained from Cleveland in an even trade for Jack Kralick during the 1963 season. Jim wound up that year with a 9-9 record in 179 innings. He started for two months straight,



JIM PERRY . . . Finds Niche as Ace Fireman

then seemed to have trouble throwing his hardest pitch.

"I remember when he first came to us from Cleveland, he started against Los Angeles," Mele said. "Bill Rigney asked me: 'What are you doing to that guy? He's throwing the heck out of the ball.'"

"But for some reason he didn't throw that way at the end of that season. He had the same trouble part of last year."

Jim Lives in Twin Cities

Perry has established a home in Edina, a suburb of Minneapolis. And he had a good job last winter with a Pontiac dealer. So he did not want to be traded. But his main concern was staying in the majors. And the biggest problem was to avoid worrying about the whole business.

"My wife and friends do all the worrying," Jim said. "All I can do is stay in shape and be ready when I'm called upon."

By staying in a "combat ready" condition, Perry became one of several relief pitchers who played a leading role in helping the Twins move into first place by the first week of June in the American League.

The Twins came from behind for 13 of their first 28 victories. In ten of those come-from-behind rallies, relief pitchers took over for the starters and stopped the opposition while the hitters counter-attacked.

Perry helped in three of those. Al

Worthington finished off seven of them, winning two and officially saving four.

Twin Tracks: Dave Boswell allowed only one run and 12 hits in 26 innings before being sidelined by a blister on his index finger.

. . . Earl Battey was batting .358 with runners on second and third before going to the sidelines with a bruised wrist for his fifth injury. Second among the Twins in hitting with runners in scoring position was Bob Allison with .323.

. . . Most surprising was Jerry Kindall, who was batting .321 while carrying an over-all average of only .200. He rapped nine hits in his first 28 times at bat with runners waiting to be scored. . . . Jim Kaat's Memorial Day shutout at Baltimore was the fifth of the season for the Twins against only one by the opposition.

Last year, the Twins pitched only four shutouts all season and were blanked 14 times. . . . Zoilo Versalles was leading the league in doubles at 15 and tied for the lead in triples at 16 after 44 games. . . . Bernie Allen was returned to the active list and sent to Denver to play his way into shape at second base.

. . . Camilo Pascual equaled the best winning streak of his career when he won his seventh straight. He won seven straight last year and also in Washington before 1961. . . . Outfielder Jim Hall set a .457 pace with 21 hits in 46 times at bat to raise his season batting average to .325.

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