

30 Homers -- That's Goal of Four Twins



TONY OLIVA, HARMON KILLEBREW, BOB ALLISON AND JIMMIE HALL — BIG MEN FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY

Killer, Oliva, Allison, Hall Top Siege Guns

By MAX NICHOLS

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

Even though Manager Sam Mele has them running as much as slugging this year, the Twins again have a chance to feature four 30-homer hitters.

It would be the first time in major league history if it happens.

Mele, in fact, already has four musclemen who have hit 32 or more in a major league season. Tony Oliva became the fourth last year when he whacked 32 as a rookie.

Jim Hall hit 33 as a rookie in 1963. Defending home-run champion Harmon Killebrew has hit 31 or more for the last six years. And Bob Allison has hit 35 and 32 the last two seasons.

Having a quartet with such credentials alone is unique, if not a record. But the real trick is to get them all to hit 30 in the same season. With the Twins steamrolling to a first-place start, Mele figures this could be the year—running game or no running game.

"They will hit more homers just trying to hit the ball than they will pulling for the fences," Mele said. "Hall is finding that out, hitting the outside pitch to left field. Allison always swings his best when he is trying to hit the ball where it is pitched with a good cut."

Batley's Peak Was 26 in 1963

This is the third straight year the Twins have had an opportunity to plant four men in the 30-homer circle. But never have they opened a season with four men already qualified.

In 1963, catcher Earl Batley had his best slugging year with 26 homers. He hit 20 by August. The heat slowed him down, or he might have joined Killebrew, Allison and Hall.

Last season, the Twins became the second team ever to employ six 20-homer men. Zoilo Versalles and Don Mincher each hit 20 or more with the four others. But Hall fell off to 25 while readjusting his method of swinging.

"I found out I'm not really a home-run hitter," Hall said. "I hit too many that are blown down by the hard wind at Metropolitan Stadium. It blows toward left field. But for a

Broad-Shouldered Jim Hall Called Wedge by Teammates

TWIN CITIES, Minn.—Jimmie Hall is the lightest of the Twins' four major home-run sluggers at 180 pounds, but his weight does not indicate his strength.

Hall has only a 34-inch waist. But he wears a 43 or 44-inch coat over his broad shoulders and has to have each one cut specially. He developed his broad shoulders working with a plow horse on a North Carolina farm as a boy.

"That's why we call Hall 'The Wedge,'" said one teammate. "He's shaped like a V."

lefthanded batter like me, it's a cross wind if I pull the ball. "I've hit several that might have gone if I had about 20 more pounds on me."

Nevertheless, while rapping the outside pitches toward left field, Hall was ahead of Killebrew for the leadership among the Twins with 16 homers as the Twins passed the 77-game mark.

This was less than one-half of the way through the 162-game schedule.

Jim Beats Out Infield Hits

Jimmie was batting .325 at that point—partly because he had beaten out 11 scratch hits. He was getting those infield hits because he was hitting slow grounders to the left side of the infield, and it made a difference of more than 50 points in his average.

"It helps in another way that people might notice," said Mele. "Jimmie has helped us win several games by getting down to first base so fast that he has avoided double plays. We have scored important runs from third because of his speed in this situation.

"Jim is hitting the ball right where it is pitched. And he is getting his share of homers to left field."

Hall avoided 11 double plays with his speed during the first 74 games and had yet to be doubled up. And while swinging straightaway, he hit one drive to center field that would have been a homer at the Twins' Metropolitan Stadium in 1964.

The fences have been moved back from 410 feet to 434. Vic Davalillo caught one on the warning track, only a few

Powerful Club Boasts Six 20-HR Swatters

feet from the 434-foot mark and saved a game for Cleveland.

"That's one of the hardest balls I ever hit," said Jimmie. "When I hit a couple of bloopers for hits against Washington, someone told me I probably would really hit one the next day and come up with nothing."

Then, after turning both palms up, he said: "That's what I got. Nothing."

Oliva started this season overweight and hitting more like a power slugger than the amazingly frequent hitter who won the American League batting championship as a rookie batting .323 last year.

Tony Off to Slow Start

The Cuban right fielder batted only .270 through his first 77 games. He suffered injuries to each knee twice. And he had numerous line drives caught.

But even through all of this, he continued to lead the Twins in runs batted in and was among the leaders in homers. His 46 RBIs were second on the Twins.

The odd thing was that Tony was hitting more for power than for overpulling. The lefthanded batter still was driving the ball often to left field. Four of his 11 homers were hit that way, including way up into the screen over the left field wall at Boston.

"I hit the ball good, two, three times a game. But every time they catch the ball. No luck. They pitch me the same as last year," he said.

Tony did have some trouble with a slight uppercut in his swing. And, after six weeks, he decided it might be best to take a few pounds off. He was up to more than 190, which he said was largely because he had not been allowed to play winter baseball. Last year, he played at about 180.

"Tony is going to hit," said Mele. "You don't have to worry about him. He hasn't started getting his chop hits through the infield yet because he's been uppercutting."

A swollen knuckle on the middle finger of his right hand

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