

Skipper Choose Mele as Manager of the Year

Twins' Pilot Tops Alston And Franks

By MAX NICHOLS

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

Sabath Anthony Mele, a man schooled in baseball by major leaguers since boyhood, has been voted **THE SPORTING NEWS** Manager of the Year by his fellow managers of the American and National leagues.

He earned the honor by leading the Twins from sixth place in 1964 into the World Series this year. And he received more than half the votes to win the award over Walt Alston, who performed the same feat with the Dodgers.

Herman Franks of the Giants received the third-highest number of votes, and Gil Hodges finished fourth in piloting the improved Senators.

But no manager led a club that improved its performance over 1964 as much as the Twins.

It was only a year ago that Sam was feeling fortunate to have a job managing any team in the majors. His Twins had played miserably the second half of that season and had finished 20 games behind the pennant-winning Yankees with a 79-83 record.

102 Victories in '65

This year, the Twins won 102 games—23 more than last year—and they did it with much of the same personnel they had in 1964.

Not only that, but they did it in spite of injuries that sidelined every major star except shortstop Zoilo Versalles.

"We had more injuries than any team, and that includes the Yankees," Mele said. "No one had as many frontliners out of their lineup for as many days. But this was a 25-man effort. Every man on this club contributed."

How much did Mele have to do with this remarkable leap from sixth place into the throne room of baseball royalty?

The answer to that must begin way back before the end of last season. That was when Mele finally won consent of Twins' President Calvin Griffith to switch slugger Harmon Killebrew from left field back to first base beginning this spring.

And the answer must continue with the hiring of coaches Billy Martin and Jim Lemon, the revamping of spring training methods and the decision to make more use of the Twins' speed.

Killer Shifted to Third

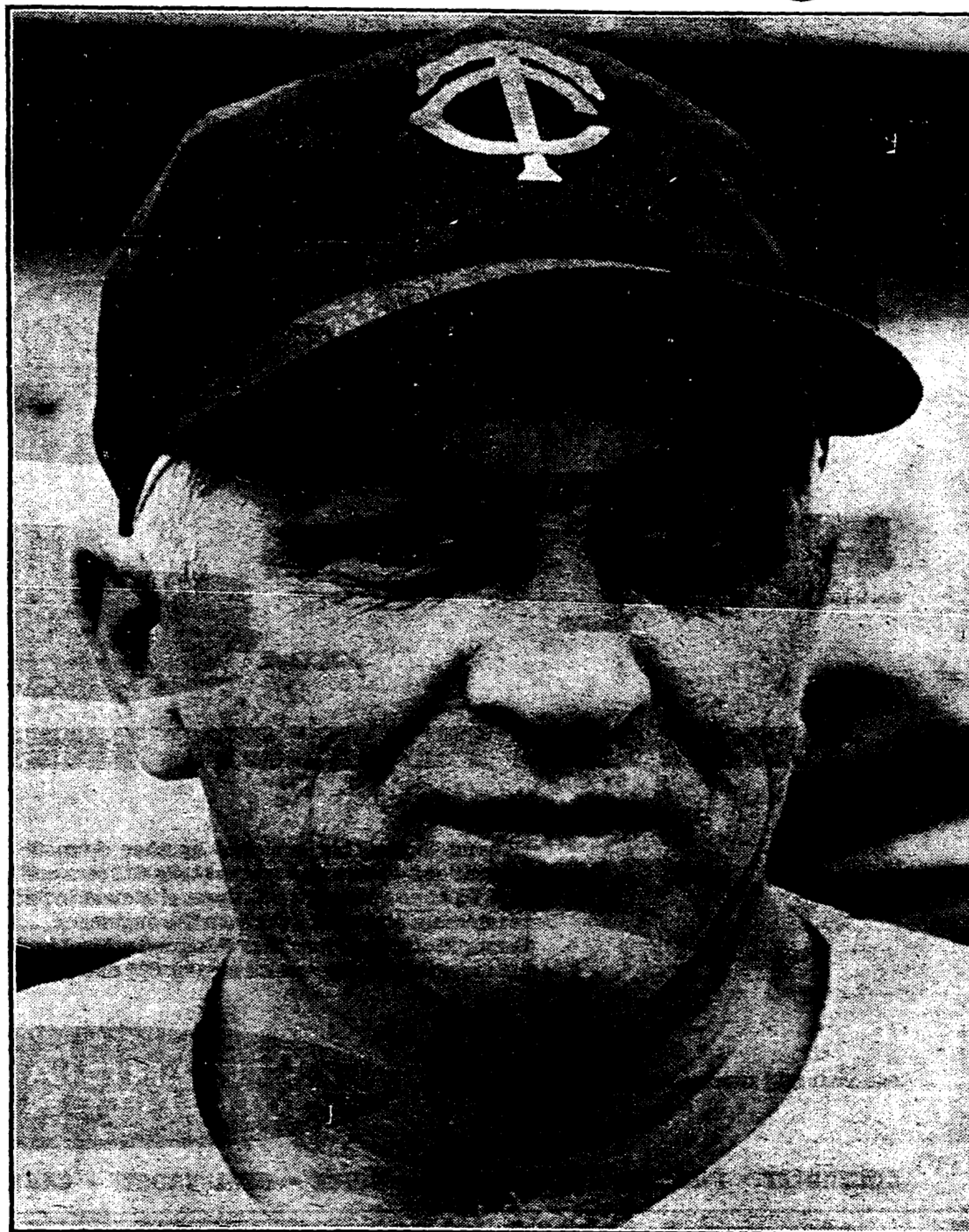
Mele's person and personality were interjected into the Twins at several junctures—the handling of Don Mincher, Jim Grant and Zoilo Versalles in spring training, the switching of Killebrew to third base, the gradually increased use of Mincher and Sandy Valdespino and the methodical use of his bull pen.

There was an important point, when Mele nearly siugged umpire Bill Valentine in the face and took a \$500 fine, plus a five-day suspension. Through this and through all of the injuries, there was the confidence he expressed in every reserve as well as every regular.

When Killebrew was in injured and when the pennant pressure increased in August and September, this confidence counted. Unknowns such as Joe Nosssek, Frank Quilici and Valdespino helped the Twins produce victories without such names as Killebrew and Bob Allison.

Mele had always felt Killebrew should play in the infield.

"Killebrew has infield actions," he said. "He throws like an infielder



SAM MELE . . . Remarkably Juggling Job Paved Way to Throne Room

and he is relaxed making plays. Allison was rigid playing first base. He covers more ground in left field than Killebrew and will hold runners better."

That switch brought forth the first bright light into the darkness that still was left over from sixth place. The hiring of Martin and Johnny Sain, pitching coach, was next.

Martin and Sain have received much of the credit for developing the talent of the Twins. Mele himself has agreed.

Aggressiveness Paid Off

"Sain has done wonders with our pitching," he said. "I wanted Martin to help us use our speed with more aggressive base-running. And aggressive base-running is one of the major reasons we are here (in first place)."

It should be remembered that Mele chose Martin from a list of potential coaches. And it was Mele who put the ideas of Sain and Martin to work—completely reversing some of his own policies.

"I've always felt the starting pitchers should work every fourth day," said Sain in his Arkansas drawl. And when the season opened, every fourth day they started. In 1961, '62, '63 and '64, Mele had chiefly used a five-day rotation.

"I expect Martin to be the same

Mom Just Couldn't Believe That Sam Lost His Temper

TWIN CITIES, Minn. — Mrs. Anna Mele, mother of Sam Mele, couldn't believe it when the Twins' manager was fined \$500 and suspended five days for nearly hitting Umpire Bill Valentine.

"I saw the picture of Sam with his fist in the umpire's face and couldn't believe it," she said. "Sam almost never lost his temper. He was always patient."

"All I can say is he must have been right."

Mrs. Mele came to Minnesota for the first time when the Twins opened the World Series against the Dodgers.

Martin he was when he played," Mele said. And with that statement, he sanctioned the needling which Martin made so famous. It was plain Mele agreed with Griffith that Martin was needed to "light a fire under the Twins."

In spring training, the name of the Twins' game was changed from home run to hit-and-run, while the names of regulars and the manager remained much the same.

"We worked on fundamentals—

much more than ever before," Mele said, "and it paid off. Where our outfielders missed cutoff men game after game last year, it seldom happened this year. And we hardly ever butchered a rundown play."

Don Spoke His Piece

When Mincher spoke out on television that he wanted to play more or be traded, Mele complimented him for talking up for himself. By the start of the season, Mincher was ready to play his role of understudy to Killebrew at first base without resentment.

When Grant said Killebrew and Allison get too much special treatment by the club, Mele called all three into his office. The issue was never heard about again.

When Versalles took it a little too easy in an exhibition, Mele showed how tough he could be. Versalles was fined \$300.

"That fine sticks or I quit," Mele said, or words to that effect. The fine stuck. Versalles has not loafed since. He played all but one game until the pennant champagne flowed.

In May, Mele started using Valdespino in left field to rest Allison and Mincher on first base to rest Killebrew.

"They may beat us, but they don't

Sam Copped Flag Despite Injury Wave

scare us," said Baltimore Manager Hank Bauer. And that's what happened. The Twins no longer scared anyone with an output of 221 home runs. But they continued beating the opposition with only 150 homers.

Mele also started resting catcher Earl Battey with Jerry Zimmerman in double-headers. And when Battey was taken out of the lineup 13 times with injuries, Zimmerman was ready to help effectively. The Twins won often with Zimmerman in the lineup.

Mincher played first base against righthanded pitching. This maneuver really paid off when Killebrew suffered his elbow dislocation. Mincher was ready and led the club in runs batted in during the six weeks Killebrew was out.

Perry Came to Rescue

Much the same thing happened on the pitching staff. Mele went to his bull pen much more often than ever before. When Camillo Pascual was sidelined with an injury, Jim Perry was waiting in the wings.

And Sain pointed out: "There is not one man on this staff we have not called on in a tough situation."

Mele's education started long before this year, long before he became manager on June 23, 1961. When he was a boy, two of his uncles, Tony Cuccinello and Al Cuccinello, were playing in the majors.

"My uncle Al helped me more than anyone," Sam said. "He used to teach me and he helped me when I was discouraged."

"I remember he used to hang a noose over a doorway in our house. When we would lose, he would tell me to hang myself. It would make me laugh and I would be all right."

Sam was born on January 21, 1922, in the Astoria section of Queens, New York City. He is the son of Anthony and Anna Mele. His mother, Anna, is the sister of Tony and Al Cuccinello.

Immigrant From Italy

Mrs. Anna Mele came over from Avalino, Italy, when she was eight years old. She has lived on 23rd avenue in Astoria ever since—remembering the days when there were farms along that street.

And Mrs. Mele has lived for 41 years in the house where Sam and his seven brothers and sisters were raised. She and Sam's father moved there in 1924. Sam's father died in 1960.

"I remember," said Mrs. Mele, "Sam coming into the house and standing in the doorway with his glove in one hand and his bat in the other. He said, 'I've just pitched a no-hitter.'"

"We all laughed. We never thought he would be a ball player."

Sam played basketball at New York University before he went into the Marines in 1943.

In 1946, Sam batted .342 for Scranton in the Eastern League. By the end of the season, he was with the Red Sox. As a rookie in 1947, he batted .302. He was Rookie of the Year in the American League. Sam played in the majors until 1956.

In 1960, Sam became a coach with the Senators. When Cookie Lavagetto was fired as Twins' manager the next June, Sam took over and started managing for the first time.

The Twins finished second under Mele in 1962. When they finished third in 1963, his salary was cut by Griffith to about \$30,000.

It's a cinch he'll get that cut back, plus his fine, with interest for 1966.