

# Twin Problem Kids Roland, Nieson and Cimino Eye Hili Jobs

By MAX NICHOLS

ORLANDO, Fla.

One year ago, Cal Ermer took over three major pitching problems of the Twins' organization when he became Denver manager.

Jim Roland, Pete Cimino and Chuck Nieson all had shown major league ability at times. But there they were, struggling to win in the Pacific Coast League instead of pitching in the American League.

Now all three 23-year-old hurlers are back in the Twins' spring camp. And all three are in the thick of a struggle for the rare pitching jobs open on the Minnesota staff, which will defend the American League pennant.

1. Roland, a lefthander, was sent down to Denver last spring after two years on the Twins' staff. He had been a 20-year-old whiz in 1963, but was a confused young pitcher in 1964 who finally flopped back to the minors—disillusioned and discouraged.

2.—Cimino, a righthanded fast-baller, had been a high school hero and a \$12,000 bonus rookie who entered professional baseball with a lackadaisical attitude. He threw that fast ball in the minors for four seasons before Ermer taught him how to win baseball games.

3.—Nieson was another righthander with a "major league arm" who could do everything but win. In 1964, he had a 4-17 record at Atlanta in the International League.

## Cal Read Riot Act

Ermer worked on Roland until he straightened him out, sometimes right out on the mound. And he helped Cimino and Nieson find themselves in the Denver bull pen.

"Roland is throwing the way he did in 1963—hard and low," said Twins' President Calvin Griffith after watching an intrasquad game from behind home plate. "He looks good. I've talked to him. I am sure he is straightened out."

Jim won six games and lost seven in the 1963 and 1964 seasons for the Twins. But six of those losses came in 1964, when he had the confidence knocked out of him. He had leaped from Class B in '62 to the majors. And he admits he made several

## Mincher Opens With Rush: Homer and Pair of Singles

ORLANDO, Fla.—Don Mincher opened the spring exhibition season for the Twins with as many hits as he slammed in his first 12 at-bats last spring.

The slugging first baseman, hoping for his first full season as a Twins' regular, rapped three hits—a three-run homer and two singles. He wound up with three runs batted in while playing nine of 11 innings in a 7-6 loss to Houston.

Last spring, Mincher needed five games to get five trips to the plate. And he managed only four hits for the whole Grapefruit League season. But he was playing behind Harmon Killebrew, who has moved from first to third base.

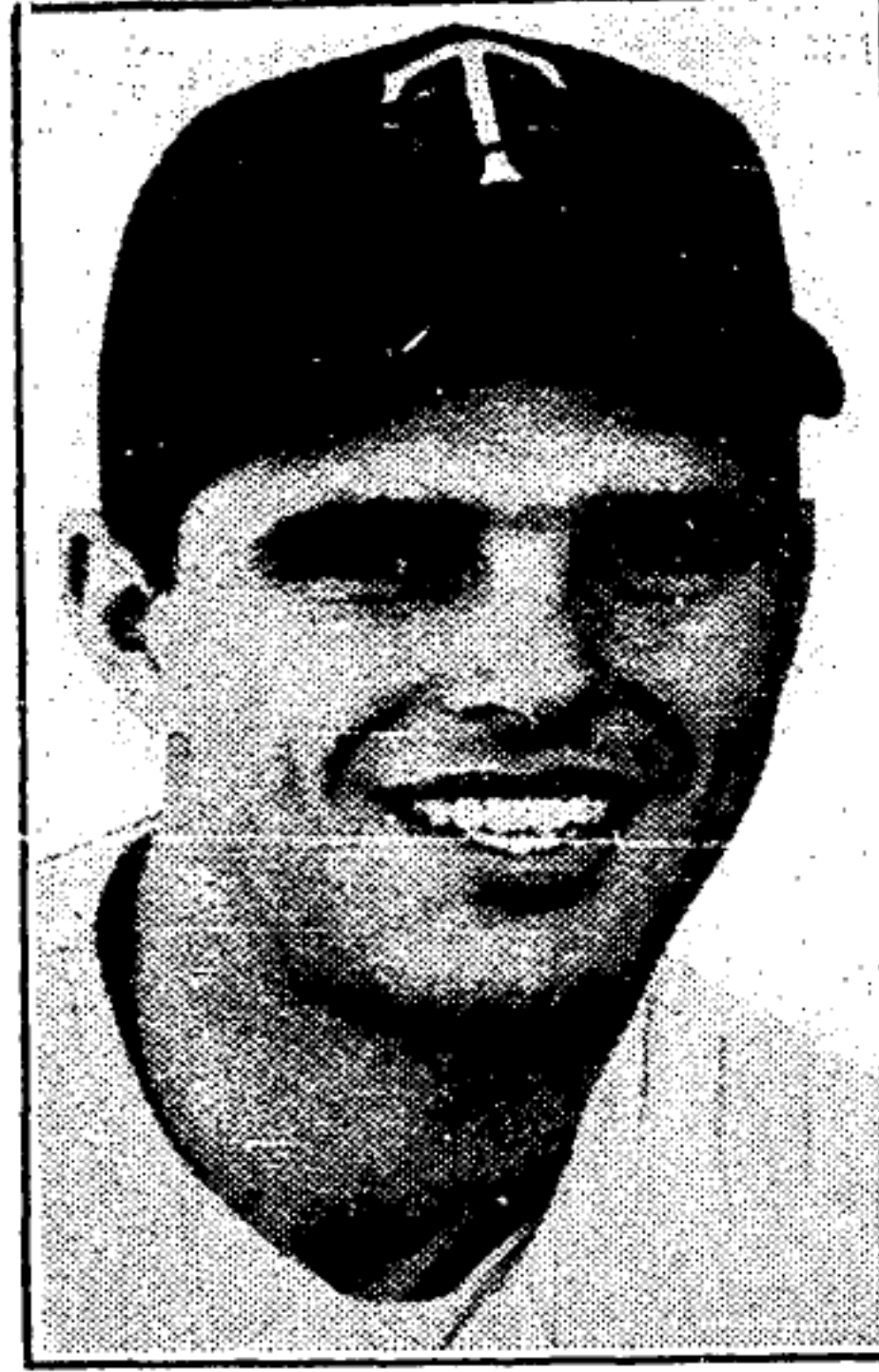
mistakes—a big sign that he has matured.

"Showing up for spring training at 223 pounds (40 overweight) was certainly a mistake," he said. "No ball player should do that. I did it in 1964 and it really hurt me."

"I didn't like it when I first went back to the minors. I had to learn that all of this is part of becoming



JIM ROLAND



PETE CIMINO



CHUCK NIESON

a major leaguer. It just isn't so easy. It takes a lot of growing up to get here.

"I still throw the same pitches I threw when I was here before—fast ball, slider and curve. But I think I can make much better use of them now."

"I know more now—when to throw them and what to do with them."

## Pair of "Silly Accidents"

Twice last season Roland was injured in what he calls "silly accidents." He suffered an injured knee when he jumped up and down in protest of an umpire's decision. And his wrist was hurt when he tried to tag a runner hard in a game at San Diego.

"Roland got some chewing out for that silly play on top of being hurt," said Ermer. "When he first came down to Denver, being in the minors really bothered him after two years in Minnesota."

"Several times he walked away from me on the mound when I came out to bring in a reliever. Boy, did I get him for that!"

"I blasted him right there on the mound."

"But he finally calmed down. And he became a good pitcher

## Twins' Whitby Finds Big Booster In Miss Charlotte Hornet of 1964

ORLANDO, Fla.—Miss Charlotte Hornet of 1964 is the strongest booster for rookie pitcher Bill Whitby in the Twins' training camp.

She is now Mrs. Whitby. "Bill," she exclaimed, "is a big league pitcher. I know it."

The former Donnelle Ranson of suburban Charlotte, N. C., had seen only one baseball game in her 18 years before meeting Bill in August of 1964 at the Charlotte ball park. Whitby was pitching for Charlotte (Southern).

"He was my escort in the beauty contest-swim suit competition," said Mrs. Whitby. "I won the contest and a trip to spring training at the Twins' minor league base in Melbourne, Fla., last spring. I've been lucky since I met Bill that night."

Bill, now 22, and Donnelle dated during the 1964 and '65 seasons. He put mileage on his car in the off season, driving to see her from his home in Victoria, Va. They were married last February 12.

Now they're staying in a trailer camp on El Punto Lake, just a few miles from the Twins' Tinker Field base, and Mrs. Whitby says she's delighted with her Florida honeymoon.

again. He has major league ability, no question about that."

Roland also started wearing glasses last year. He says this helped him, too.

"My depth perception wasn't good," Jim said. "The plate looked farther away than it was."

Ermer, described by Griffith as a "major league manager right now in my estimation," had different problems in Cimino and Nieson. And Cimino admits his attitude was bad.

"They said for a long time I wasn't aggressive enough," Pete said. "I was lackadaisical."

"I really like relieving now. I am still pitching high. Everyone says pitch low, but my fast ball rises, so I have to pitch high. Today I feel confident, not cocky."

## Nine Wins for Cimino

Cimino pitched in 49 games for Denver as a finishing reliever last year, winning nine games against seven losses and saving numerous wins. Just as he was called up to Minnesota, he suffered an injured hand. He got over it in time for one major league inning.

"I got through it without allowing a hit," he said. "So I have the lowest ERA in the majors—0.00. Boy, was I shaking after I finished that inning! I sat on the bench and couldn't stop shaking. This spring I don't feel nervous. When I'm in there, I feel good."

Pete had a 3-6 mark the year before at Atlanta. Ermer said he first saw Cimino when he (Ermer) was in the Baltimore organization.

"I said to myself when I first saw Cimino—there is the kind of pitcher I would like to have for a finishing reliever. With that fast ball, he can come in and strike out that big batter with runners on base."

"So what did I do at the first of last year? I started him. He couldn't get going, so I told him the same thing I had told Hal Reniff when I was at Richmond. 'If you want to get to the major leagues in a hurry, do a job as a finishing reliever.' And he did the job."

When Mele first saw the new

Cimino this spring in an intrasquad game, the first thing he said was:

"With a good live fast ball like that, he looks like the kind who can come in and strike out a man when you need it." Sound familiar?

The ironic thing is, it took Cimino's injury for Nieson to get the chance to do the same thing. The Denver staff was short with Garry Roggenburk and Jim Merritt called up and Cimino hurt.

## Nieson Improving Fast

Nieson became the finisher the last two months of the PCL season and also pitched in 49 games. He wound up 8-5 with a 4.37 ERA in 134 innings.

Mele says Nieson still may be a year away, but at least he is on the right track now.

"I like relieving," said Nieson. "Working under Ermer sure gave me confidence. When he gives you a job to do, you feel he is certain you can do it. He says, 'Now get this guy out and we can go home.' He doesn't ask if you think you can get him out."

Nine Twin pitching jobs are pretty well cinched with Jim Grant, Jim Kaat, Camilo Pascual, Dave Boswell, Jim Perry, Merritt, Johnny Klippstein, Al Worthington and Dick Stigman. So this trio will be battling with Billy Pleis, Roggenburk, Mel Nelson, Dwight Siebler and Bill Whitby for whatever jobs are left.

**Twin Tracks:** Mel Nelson is out of the hospital after an appendectomy. . . . He is expected back in uniform by the last week of March.

. . . Jim Kaat overcame a sore back early in spring training to start the first Twins' exhibition. . . . Joe Nosssek had to wear a corset because of a sacroiliac condition.

. . . Harmon Killebrew sat out the first two exhibitions with a slightly pulled leg muscle. . . . Whitby started out fast in his quest for a Twin job by pitching three innings with only one hit given up in his first exhibition stint. . . . The Twins started right out running again, stealing four bases in their first exhibition and barely missing on a double steal.

## Mele Priming A. L. Champions To Brake Enemy Base Forays

By MAX NICHOLS

ORLANDO, Fla.

Manager Sam Mele intends to stay one jump ahead of the American League in the redeveloping of running baseball—by stopping the expected onrush of enemy runners.

Last spring, the Twins spent much time learning to run the bases aggressively under the waving arms of third base Coach Billy Martin. He taught them how to "go."

Now Mele has Martin trying to teach Twins' pitchers and infielders how to "stop" or at least slow down the enemy. Mele expects to see other major league managers follow the Twins' pennant-winning formula of speed and power.

## More Pickoff Plays

"We've already worked more on pickoff plays than ever before," said Mele. "I want the pitchers to get used to throwing to the bases, even if they throw the ball away. And I want the infielders to get used to calling the play."

"Last spring, when we were first starting to run, a lot of our guys were hesitant. They thought they might be thrown out and have to answer for it."

"This is the same. When they



Sam Mele

realize they can work these plays, it will become fun. If our pitchers don't pick off runners, at least they will hold them close to the bag."

Twins' pitchers have had their problems in the past with base runners. The case became famous in the World Series, when the swift-footed Dodgers ran the Twins right out of Dodger Stadium.

But Mele says it's what he expects in the future that influences him to emphasize pickoff fundamentals.

Instead of trying to change all the pitchers, Martin is putting the burden on the infielders.

"We have the infielder signal to the pitcher if he wants a pickoff throw," said Martin. "The pitcher answers. If the pitcher misses the

signal, he pitches and nothing is lost.

"And, at the same time, he knows that when he throws, someone will be there."

"It's the play that makes it work, not just the pitcher's move."

White Sox Manager Eddie Stanky, New York's Johnny Keane and Kansas City's Al Dark all have said they will use more "inside" baseball this year on the bases.

Mele also plans to run more than ever.

## Eager Base-Runners

"We started running earlier than last year," said Mele. "I was afraid their legs might not be ready, but they jumped right into it the first week. Our base-runners have stolen three or four bases in every intrasquad game. So our pitchers have plenty to work with in the pickoff plays."

The Twins used an extra diamond for the increased work on fundamentals this year. There is nothing new about the plays in baseball or to the Twins. The plays actually are simpler than ones used in other years, rather than more complicated.

"The difference," said Harmon Killebrew, "is when you use them."