

Lightweight Zoilo Carries Big Load in Twin Swatting Scheme

By MAX NICHOLS

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

"Walk around Harmon" is an old game for American League pitchers. The idea is to walk Harmon Killebrew with an important runner on second base, get the next batter—or hitters—out and beat the Twins.

And the only way the Twins ever have been able to win that baseball version of chess over an extended period of time is to follow Harmon with a couple of consistent sluggers.

Bob Allison carried the load for years. And in more recent seasons, he's had help from Jim Hall and Don Mincher. But Mincher and Hall are gone now—traded to California. Allison is trying to make a comeback as the Twins' No. 5 hitter, but he needs help in the power middle.

"It really takes two hitters following a man like Killebrew to make him effective," said coach Jim Lemon, Twins' batting instructor. "Sometimes they can afford to walk Harmon and the next man, and sometimes they will get the man after Harmon out leaving it up to the No. 6 hitter."

And into that No. 6 job walked shortstop Zoilo Versalles.

Now, Versalles is well known in the A. L. as a strong hitter for his 158 pounds, a dangerous hitter who can pop a home run once in a while and average 25 doubles or more a year.

Versalles Flashes Speed

But he's even better known for his speed. He batted leadoff for more than three seasons. He scored 126 runs in 1965 when he was the Most Valuable Player in the A. L. He's never been really considered for a role in the run-production heart of the lineup.

Until this spring.

Versalles started off this season as the Twins' only hitter who delivered consistently with runners on base. He was inserted into the No. 6 lineup spot behind Allison and within a week he came through with five hits in ten times at bat with runners in scoring position.

"I like batting sixth," said Zoilo. "Always before, I've hit up at the top of the lineup—No. 1 or No. 2—



Harmon Killebrew

or down at the bottom—in the eighth spot. Only a few times have I batted sixth.

"But I like hitting with runners on base. You concentrate more. It's a tough job. They're going to walk Harmon a lot in tough games. We've got to score runs."

Versalles' job will be complicated by the fact that the Twins can expect to see only the best left-handed pitchers this year. So far the Twins have fielded only two or three left-handed hitters at a time—Tony Oliva, rookie Rod Carew and now and then catcher Russ Nixon.

But Zoilo started off at a .350 pace, while the rest of the Twins' run-production department appeared to be standing still.

Zoilo hit his big one in Detroit

Cal's Son Joining Twins On Road to Learn Ropes

TWIN CITIES, Minn. — Clark Griffith II, son of Twins' President Calvin Griffith, has started traveling with the Twins this spring as a move toward learning the operation of the club.

Calvin started out as batboy and worked as farm club manager, farm general manager, traveling secretary and farm director before succeeding his uncle, the late Clark Griffith as the club's president.

Clark II is a graduate of Dartmouth University. He had to drop out of law school this year because of illness. This summer he will help co-ordinate the ticket sale for an exhibition game with Atlanta.

when he tripled in the ninth with two runners on base to break a 2-2 tie. Killebrew had been walked. One week before, Zoilo had singled home two runs in the eighth inning with a chance to win.

"Versalles has taken even cuts instead of taking a big swing for the home run," said Manager Sam Mele. "He's making sure he hits the ball, and that's what we need. "I considered moving him up to the No. 2 spot, but we have to have help down below in the lineup."

Rollins Tough in Clutch

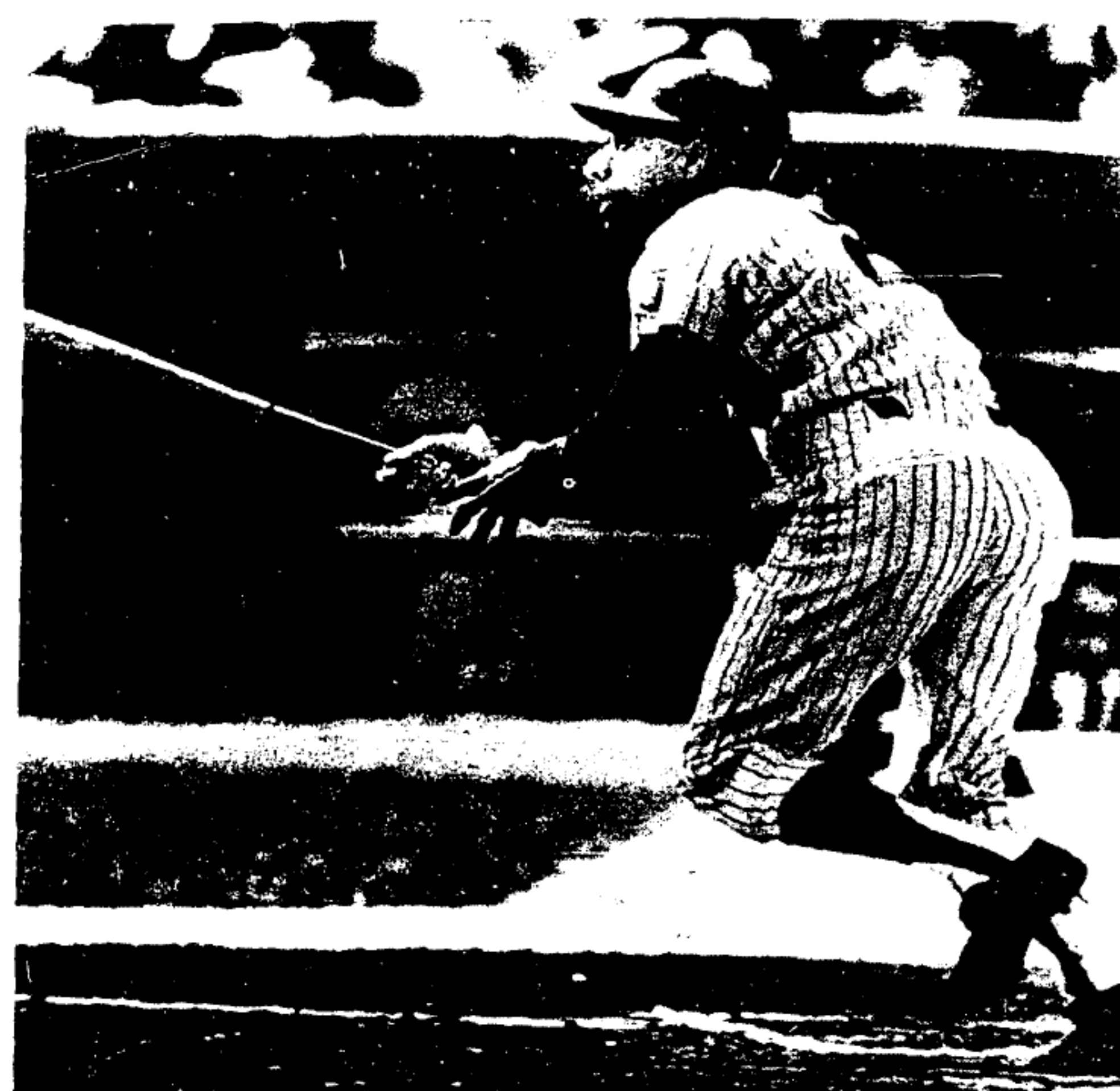
There are other possibilities for that No. 6 job if Versalles falters. Earl Battey batted sixth for the Twins for several years. And Rich Rollins is a specialist at driving in runners from second and third. But neither started out hitting in April.

And Battey was sidelined for more than a week by a torn rib cartilage, adding to the pressure on the Twins' offense.

"We started with Carew batting fifth," said Mele. "But I think that's too much pressure for him right now as a rookie. I want him to relax."

"Allison belongs in the middle with his power. If he gets going this spring, it will be a big help."

It's been said and written that



Zoilo Versalles . . . A Tough Man With Runners Aboard

the Twins are banking more on their pitching staff than ever before.

But Allison feels the Twins' lineup will produce the needed runs over the long season.

"I'll bet this club hits more home runs than we did last year (144) or the year before (150)," said Allison. But the Twins' history indicates that Killebrew can use help in home-run hitting.

When Mincher, Hall and Allison had trouble hitting the first half of 1966—batting behind Killebrew—opposing pitchers seldom gave Harmon anything good to hit.

Harmon has often said: "It helps to have someone hot behind you. But you still have to hit the ball."

Twin Tracks: Earl Battey was hoping to recover from his injured side earlier than the medics predicted. He started swinging in cold weather at Cleveland less than a week after the injury. His rib cartilage was torn when he was throwing to second base in a pregame warmup. . . . Jim Grant started the season pitching well, and he hurled one of his very best games in losing, 1-0, to Steve Hargan at Cleveland. . . . That could be an optimistic sign for the Twins in 1967.

White Sox

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than Hansen and Adair—not a peep!"

Stanky then shook his head and grinned crookedly as he recalled his first session with Adair after the White Sox traded Eddie Fisher to Baltimore for him last June.

"You know, I began looking for that take-charge guy from the first moment I took over this ball club in the spring last year," said Stanky. "I just couldn't find him. When we got Adair in June, I thought maybe he would be the man."

"I called him into my office and told him I needed someone in the infield to take charge of things. You know what he said? He bluntly stated, 'I'm the quiet type, myself.' Well, that ended that."

"My best candidate seems to be McCraw, since he's such a standout at his position. I've been talking to him about it. But you really can't change a fellow's personality. He either has that gift of leadership or he doesn't."

Reminder for Pitcher

Stanky was asked just what he expects of a holler guy or a take-charge guy. Does he have to be a demonstrative, flamboyant type, shouting defiance and ready to fight at the drop of a hat?

"No, not at all," said Stanky.

"All I want is for someone to take charge of things in the infield—go to the pitcher and remind him to keep that ball down, calm him down when he's wild."

Sox Yarns: Tommy John developed a blister on the middle finger of his pitching hand when he hurled against the Yankees, April 25, and missed his next turn. His luck was wretched anyhow with Tommy claiming that of the ten blows off him, seven were broken-bat hits. . . . Frank Lane, advance man in trade negotiations for the Orioles, trailed the White Sox for two weeks, but left no nearer a deal for a pitcher than when he arrived.

In the first 14 games, the White Sox grounded into 22 double plays, an average of more than 1.5 per game. . . . Last season, they were low in the American League with 94 for the full schedule. . . . Johnny Buzhardt injured the Achilles tendon of his left foot covering first base against Cleveland April 30. . . . After the first six home dates, the White Sox were 28,634 behind last year in attendance because of the foul weather.

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Fines Sting Twins--Blunders Curbed Quickly

By MAX NICHOLS

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

Manager Sam Mele refuses to take credit for the Twins pulling out of their April nosedive of erratic play.

Base-running mistakes and fundamental fielding troubles seemed to be cut to a minimum immediately after Mele fined two players in Detroit.

The Twins leaped out of their lethargy in the spring of 1965 after Zoilo Versalles was fined \$300. And they won more games than any club in the American League after Versalles was fined twice in a July 1-3 series at Baltimore in 1966.

But even with all that history, Mele refuses to take the credit.

Pitchers Sharpen Up

"How can you tell if the fines were responsible for the club playing better?" he asked. "The players were fined for what they did, and that's all there is to it. I don't know if the fines affected the club. "I do know that it helped for our starting pitchers to start pitching the way they can."

Mele levied two fines after the



Sam Mele

Twins suffered a 12-4 loss that was unusual in disaster.

Tony Oliva's home run was transformed into a single when he passed base-runner Cesar Tovar, who was tagging up at first base. And Jim Ollom stood on the mound after a wild pitch, engrossed in a rhabarb with Detroit's Denny McLain while a runner scored from second base.

Mele did not announce who was fined. But it was believed that Ollom and Tovar were penalized.

"Oliva was doing a natural thing, rounding first base and watching the ball," said Mele.

"Tovar had the play in front of him. It was a long drive to right field. He couldn't have run to second base after tagging up if the ball had been caught by Al Kaline in Detroit's short right field."

Ollom's pitch was in close to the legs of McLain.

"I called him an unprintable name," said McLain. "I had dropped the bat." Ollom offered no alibis.

"The Stupidest Play"

"It was the stupidest play I ever made," he said. "I've always covered home on that play—even in sandlot ball."

There were other mistakes that night, too—a misjudged fly ball, an outfielder shying from a fence, a wide throw to second, a pitcher walking the opposing pitcher.

But the Twins bounced back the next two days and won the series at Detroit—and they continued playing good baseball on the trip.

Maybe Oliva had the answer when he said:

"Sometimes when things go bad—real bad—the players start thinking about it and start playing better baseball. I think that's what happened."