

A New Twist for the Twins: Mauch Will Stress Defense

By BOB FOWLER

TWIN CITIES—Gene Mauch's second visit to Minnesota was longer than the first and, frankly, more informative.

You might recall his first appearance. It was in late November, a few months after he had been hired by Calvin Griffith as the Twins seventh manager. Then he stayed only a few hours before returning to the sun and golf of Southern California and his home near Palm Springs.

His comments centered around his thoughts about leaving the National League, where he had managed for 16 years, for the American League with its designated-hitter rule.

Some six weeks later, he returned to the cold and snow of Minnesota for a three-day public-relations tour of the Twin Cities. He had had more time to think about his new job and the club he was inheriting.

HE WAS, NATURALLY, optimistic, saying, "This is the first time I've started with a team that has a lot of talent. When I took over at Philadelphia (1960), it was a last-place team. And Montreal (1969) was less than that because it was an expansion team. If I didn't think the Twins could overtake Oakland and Kansas City, I wouldn't be here."

Yet Mauch was realistic, too. And the impression he left was that the Twins would be changing their ways in 1976.

For years, this team has survived, or failed to survive, with its offense. Defense wasn't high among players' priorities. But the new manager indicated it no longer will be treated as a secondary phase of the game.

"Gene Mauch needs a catcher and a shortstop," he said. "Defensively, the game revolves around those players. Although some players might not like it, we'll stress defense because the quickest way to lose pride is to play poor defensively."

"YOU SUSTAIN interest, too, with good defense. No one wants to see a sloppy team in the field."

"While great defensive players are instinctive, you can improve through repetition. If you do something over and over, some moves become instinctive. You don't have to think before you do them."

"It may be tedious during spring training to practice defensive plays constantly, but I'd rather have the players mad at me than mad at themselves later in the season because they lost due to weak defense."

Then the manager added, "I'm not saying we don't already have a catcher and shortstop," referring to Glenn Borgmann and Danny Thompson.

But the inference was clear. If those players are to hold their positions, they'll have to do it with their gloves, not their bats.

OTHERWISE, Mauch would like to see the Twins improve their run production. Last season was typical of the club's offensive showing for the past several years. While it finished second in the league to Boston in team batting and made only three fewer hits than the Red Sox, it finished third in runs, scoring 72 fewer times than Boston.

"I don't like the RBI situation, but that's not unusual when you have young players like (Lyman) Bostock and (Dan) Ford," Mauch said. "They should be better with a year's experience behind them, and Larry Hise should be at that stage in his career where he's ready to have a super season."

Hise missed almost three months due to an elbow injury, finishing with 51 RBIs in 80 games.

As for offensive leader Rod Carew, who won a fourth straight batting title (fifth overall) while leading the team in RBIs with 80, Mauch said he'd be at first base this season.

"I'M NOT WORRIED about that switch," the manager said. "He has so much ability he can play anywhere."

Finally, Mauch came up with a solution to the Tony Oliva situation.

After serving as the team's full-time DH the past three years, Oliva, who is recovering from a seventh right knee operation, had been offered a coaching job by Griffith. Tony said he wanted to go to spring training on a trial basis to see if he could run well enough to continue playing. If not, he said he'd like to be the club's first base coach and batting instructor.

"No player wants to sit around during the winter and be told that he's through," Mauch said. "Of course, Tony wants to go to Florida and prove it to himself, one way or the other. I'm agreeable to that."

"I'd like to have him be 30 years old again and running well. But if he can't run well enough, I'd be tickled to death to have him as a coach."

AFTER A FOUR-HOUR meeting with the new man-

ager on the night he returned to Minnesota, Oliva left the next morning for Florida to begin working out with Cuban friends living in Miami.

"He's a first-class guy," Mauch said. "I was impressed with his knowledge of the game and his dedication."

Mauch learned something else about Oliva that others have known for some time—he doesn't like cold weather.



Gene Mauch . . . New Priorities



Steve Glodek

Age 27

Single

M.A.

Guidance Counselor

Likes swimming, hiking, movies, music, meeting other people

Ambition: To make the world a better place to live in.

Believes the way to do it

is to work for a society

that values people more than power,

spirit more than comfort.

Takes God seriously in his life,

feeling the richer for it.

Counts on the support of others

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