

Rollins Off and Rolling as Rookie Rage

Credits Plate Surge to Tip From Lemon

Started Pulling Ball Again After Relaxing His Index Finger, as Jim Suggested

By ARNO GOETHEL

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

Rookie Rich Rollins, the hot-corner guardian of the **Minnesota Twins** Incubator Infield, required only two weeks to become the redhaired rage of the American League.

As recently as five weeks ago, the 24-year-old off-season school teacher from Parma, O., was just one of many candidates for the **Twins'** third base job and was destined to open the season with Vancouver (Coast).

Then, when the three shortstops in the **Twins'** camp were sidelined, by mumps (Zoilo Versalles), a pulled Achilles tendon (Orlando Martinez) and a sore arm (Nestor Valazquez), Manager Sam Mele inserted first Bernie Allen then Rollins into the lineup at shortstop.

Allen's stickwork and poise afield pushed veteran Billy Martin off second base and Rollins' hitting earned the redhead a shot at the third base job when Versalles returned.

As he has done with every opportunity through his two years in Organized Ball, Rollins made the most of it. In his sixth spring game—against the Pirates on March 28—he drove in the winning run with a ninth-inning single, his third hit of the day, to launch a batting spree that kept him in the lineup every day.

Set Pace in Grapefruit Tilts

He wound up leading the **Twins** with an exhibition average of .400 over 15 games.

Once the pennant race opened, Rollins swung his bat at nose-cone temperatures, hitting safely in each of the **Twins'** first 12 games for a .465 average that led the A. L.

Even more startling was his slugging percentage of .884. His 20 hits included four homers, two triples and two doubles for 38 total bases in 43 at-bats. He also ranked second in the American League with 15 runs batted in.

Defensively, he was coming up with plays at third base that would make the Boyer brothers and Brooks Robinson look to their laurels.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity," Rollins said in a masterpiece of modesty. "A lot of people have shown faith in me and made it all possible."

Born April 16, 1938, in Mt. Pleasant, Pa., Rollins was only four or five years old when his father introduced him to the game. The family moved to Cleveland, where he played second base, third base and caught for his

Power's Mitt Magic Popped Richie's Peepers as Teener

TWIN CITIES, Minn.—Rich Rollins was a junior in high school the first time he saw Vic Power, then with Philadelphia, in pre-game practice in 1954, at Cleveland's Municipal Stadium.

"Power was in on the infield grass, fielding scorches hit to him by a coach," the **Twins'** rookie recalls. "He didn't miss a one. I remember thinking, 'That's how you have to field in the majors.'"

Power now is on the opposite corner from Rollins in the **Twins'** infield.

"He's still a magician with that glove," lauded Rollins. "He saved me five errors by catching bad throws in our first 11 games."

Breaking In

With Big Bang



RICH ROLLINS . . . Minnesota's Fence-Busting Freshman Find

high school team. He advanced to American Legion baseball as a second baseman.

"The turning point in my career came when I received a baseball scholarship to Kent State University," he recalled. "I already had enrolled at Ohio University when Matt Resick, baseball coach at Kent, offered me the scholarship, even though he hadn't seen me play. I was recommended to him by Knobby Lewandowski, a pitcher in the **Twins'** farm system, who was attending Kent."

Encouraged by Tutors

"Resick and Moose Paskert, the frosh coach, helped me so much I could never repay them. They kept me going and told me I had a chance, in spite of scouting reports that I was too small (5-10), couldn't hit the curve ball, couldn't make the double play and had a weak arm."

Then a scout for the former Washington Senators, **Twins'** Coach Floyd Baker, invited Rollins to a tryout camp in Griffith Stadium on June 20, 1960. "I liked his attitude," Baker said. "I knew he was willing to pay the price, to work hard."

Rollins attracted attention at the trial by being the only one of some 50 prospects to belt the ball out of the park. The Senators offered him a contract.

"I was 22 when I graduated earlier that month," Rollins recalled, "and I figured it was too old to begin in Class D. So I said I wouldn't sign unless they sent me to Class B Wilson (Carolina)."

So he signed for a \$6,000 bonus and the Nats shipped him to Wilson as a second baseman under Jack McKeon. "And McKeon gave me a break,

Rich Rapped 3 Hits, Singled Into Triple Play in O.B. Bow

TWIN CITIES, Minn.—Rich Rollins recalled with a chuckle his debut with Class B Wilson in mid-1960:

"What a night that was and what a way to break in! I had three hits and singled into a triple play.

Yes, that's right—a triple play. I singled through the hole into left field with none out and runners on first and second. The runner from second was thrown out at the plate, the runner from first was caught and tagged in a rundown between second and third and I was nailed in a rundown between first and second.

"Everything got so exciting I hardly knew what I was doing. That same year at Wilson I learned another lesson. My manager, Jack McKeon, was coaching at third and gave me the hit-and-run sign after I had singled.

"As soon as the batter swung, I took off for second. I heard him hit the ball and the shortstop and second baseman gave me a double-play fake. I slid into second.

"Then I saw they were faking and lit out for third, where I arrived with another slide. As I got up I saw that the batter had hit a pop-up to the first baseman and I was doubled up.

"I'll never forget McKeon's face when I came sliding into third."

too. When I reported, we had 30 grounders a day for a week." After four games in the outfield, Clary informed Rollins the **Twins** were going to try him at third.

He played 32 games at third and was hitting .270 when the **Twins**, dumped into last place by a 13-game losing streak, called him up. He joined the **Twins** in Chicago last June 16 and was rushed into the lineup. He hit safely in his first two games but his apparent unsteadiness afield prompted Manager Cookie Lavagetto to bench him.

After Mele replaced Lavagetto a week later, Rollins was used sparingly

but wound up with a .294 average and had a three-run double off Ryne Duren of Los Angeles in 17 at-bats over 13 games.

Billy Martin Spurred Kid With Needle

Veteran's Planned Program of Insults Paid Off, Made Richie Bear Down Harder

ly but wound up with a .294 average and had a three-run double off Ryne Duren of Los Angeles in 17 at-bats over 13 games.

The **Twins** sent him to their Florida Instructional League during the winter, where he hit .250 in 50 games for Manager Del Wilber. "I was having trouble pulling the ball," he recalled, "but Wilber stuck with me."

Exercised During Winter

When he reported for spring training, Rollins said: "I know I wasn't ready mentally to be called up last year, but it helped a lot. During the winter I strengthened my wrists by exercising with weights and playing handball. I feel I'm adjusted."

But the redhead faced a gang fight at third base. Lined up were draftees George Banks and John Goryl, as well as returnees Harmon Killebrew and Bill Tuttle.

It was a tip from Jim Lemon that set fire to Rollins' bat. As Rich tells it:

"I had fallen into a slump at Charlotte about two weeks before the **Twins** called me up. I continued to have trouble through the winter. The pitchers were jamming me and I was popping the ball up.

"Then one day in spring training, Lemon suggested that I relax my index fingers as I gripped the bat. He said it would loosen my wrists, so I could get more snap with them."

Lemon Spotted Trouble

"That tip helped me more than anything. I started pulling the ball like I had two years before. I had been looking for my trouble for a year and a half and Lemon spotted it right away."

It's a tribute to Lemon's selflessness that Rollins' red-hot bat has kept Killebrew in left field and Lemon on the bench.

Billy Martin had a hand in Rollins' emergence, too, although the rookie didn't realize it at the start.

"From the first day I met Martin last year," Rollins said, "he was on me for everything. I began to dislike him and many times felt like punching him in the nose.

"He'd tell me, 'You don't belong out here, kid.' And he'd say, 'You can't go to your left.'

"He got me mad and I tried hard to show him.

"But after the **Twins** released Billy,

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Sundra, Former Yankee, Nat Hurler, Is Cousin of Rollins

TWIN CITIES, Minn. — "My folks have been ideal parents for any kid who wants to play baseball," said Rookie Rich Rollins in tracing his steps toward the major leagues.

"They never let anything stand in the way of my playing ball, even though there were many times they could have used my help with the family treasury. They always encouraged me."

The late Steve Sundra, who pitched for the Yankees and Senators, was Rollins' second cousin. Mike Rollins, Rich's uncle, was an outfielder in the St. Louis Browns' organization a decade ago.