

# Fizzle or Flash--Flighty Zoilo Prime Puzzle for Twins' Brass

Shortstop Versalles Pulls Off Dazzling Play, Then Boots Simple Grounder

By TOM BRIERE

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

Dashing Zoilo Versalles remains the **Twins'** No. 1 enigma.

Just when the 21-year-old Cuban Comet looks like the best shortstop in the American League, he makes the worst play—or doesn't make the easiest play in the Little League book.

Just when the **Twins'** managerial masterminds think he'll never get another hit because he over-swings on every pitch, he hits a home run to win a game.

Cut-and-slash Zoilo, a potent righthanded batsman for his 145 pounds, hit a two-run, seventh-inning home run on May 12 at the Met off John Wyatt to give the **Twins** a 5 to 4 decision over Kansas City.

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## Hot Home-Run Pace

It was Zoilo's sixth homer, tying him with the Third Baseman Rich Rollins for the club lead, and gave him 16 runs batted in, second-ranking on the club. It was Zoilo's second game-winning hit over the first 30 games to tie him with Bob Allison in that respect.

Although lacking in consistency, Versalles stands 1-2-3 among the best fielding-hitting shortstop combinations in the American League, according to qualified scouts.

He hit .280 in 1961, his first major season. Only Dick Howser of Kansas City could match that. Not even Tony Kubek of the Yankees hit as well. Versalles "vacationed" a month in midseason—homesick for his homeland and wife in Cuba—to gain permanent residence in the **Twins'** doghouse. But this is a "new" Versalles,

## Cuban Comet



Zoilo Versalles

the 1962 model. His attitude is better, his outlook more mature. Whether it's because he's a one-year veteran, because he's a new papa with Mama in Minneapolis, or because the **Twins** carry Orlando Martinez ready to pick up Zoilo's glove at the slightest let-down is not important.

Important is Versalles' game-winning—or losing—contribution. "How do I look—good?" was Zoilo's pat question in 1961. Now he's more philosophical, more of a team performer and talker.

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## Puts Victories First

"I do good some days, some bad. But we win. That's the big thing," he offered recently.

One game after hitting well, he received all compliments and then replied: "Yah, but we lose."

It has been said that the **Twins** would be a better ball club "if Versalles would swing like Earl Battey and Battey would swing like Versalles." But Len Green replied, "Versalles wouldn't be as good a ball player if he changed his style by trying to go to right field, etc." Battey, a 220-pounder, punches often and seldom takes Zoilo's big swing.

Versalles batted seven homers

Just as Tutors Tab Him Hopeless at Platter, He Socks Winning Homer

last season and possesses surprising power for a man so slight.

Often, it seems the **Twins** would rather Versalles didn't hit frequent homers, hoping the idea of going to right field more often might dawn upon him.

Zoilo has the arm, the bat and the speed of foot. He stole 16 bases last season, but should make smarter use of his speed. He can make all the plays even though he often boots the easiest. Perhaps it is asking too much for a youngster in his fifth season of baseball to be "the complete player," just at voting age.

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## Zoilo Boosts Average

President Calvin Griffith of the **Twins** predicted at the outset of the season that "Versalles will lead the club in batting average over the season."

He might. Although he started at sub .100 levels, he has batted .326 over the past two weeks to lift his average near the .250 mark.

Veteran Vic Power, who joined the **Twins** this spring on trade from Cleveland, has been a good baseball influence on Versalles. He has talked frequently with Zoilo on trips—about attitude, outlook, performance, etc.

Last season, Versalles was like a man without a country. Not even Cuban teammates paid much heed to Zoilo, who was lost without company. This season, Power has at least given him the conversational time-of-day.

And a little praise means almost as much as a base-hit to Zoilo, who holds no fear of American League pitching.

# Mele Tests Kid Hurlers in Hunt for Solid Starter

Bonikowski and Stange Promoted From Bull-Pen Roles—Moore and Stigman Deliver in Assignments as Firemen

By TOM BRIERE

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

With all due respect to the world's champion Yankees, Manager Sam Mele of the **Twins** hasn't seen anything in the American League to make him think the race is over—or that the **Twins** are out of it.

"I haven't seen any clubs we need be frightened by," said Sam, taking a look back over the first month of the season. This sophomore manager knows of the Yankees' might, naturally.

"But of all the other clubs I've seen, I like the White Sox' balance best," he recited. "Cleveland has good infield defense, good pitching and some good hitting, too."

"I think Kansas City is better. Los Angeles may be stronger, but I don't think Chavez Ravine will look with as much favor on the Angels' home-run hitters as Wrigley Field did a year ago."

"There is probably better balance around the league, but I think we're stronger, too."

"I'd like some more pitching," he admitted frankly. "I could use a left-handed pinch-hitter, but pitching mainly."



Sam Mele

There has been little consistency on the **Twins'** mound staff. Veteran Camilo Pascual (4-2) and Rookie Joe Bonikowski (3-1) have been the most effective, but they also had their ups-and-downs.

Bonikowski won his major league letter, May 13, with an eight-hit, 10 to 3 victory over Kansas City at the Met in his first A. L. start. Working out of the bull pen, the 21-year-old righthander fashioned a 2.40 earned-run average and did nothing to harm it in his first nine-inning stint.

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## Kralick Recovers From Shaky Getaway

Originally, Mele set up Pascual, Jack Kralick, Don Lee and Jim Kaat as his starting foursome. Lee and Kaat have been to the bull pen and back. Kralick started shakily at 0-2, but lately has shown signs of finding his old groove.

In search for another starter, Mele has spotted Lee Stange and Bonikowski from the bull pen to starting jobs. Stange pitched one good one against Detroit and then was knocked out by Kansas City. But Kaat came in to pick up his second victory with a two-hit effort over the last 7½ innings.

Ray (Farmer) Moore and Dick Stigman have done well in relief roles. Moore, particularly, seems to have benefited from Mele's day-of-rest program between appearances. He has one victory and two saves.

"We could use another starter," said Sam. "Stange and then Bonikowski won his first start. Between the bull pen and starting, we can find spots for them." At the least, perhaps the **Twins** can recall Relief Southpaw Bill Pleis from Vancouver of the Pacific Coast League.

"Young pitchers like Stange and Bonikowski and young infielders like Don Mincher, Rich Rollins and Bernie Allen have helped us in the early going," Mele added. "Some of the veterans haven't started to produce yet, but I'm sure the established guys like Harmon Killebrew and Bob Allison will help us soon."

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## Len Green Shakes Off Early Skid at Plate

"That's the sign of a good club when one or two guys can pick up the others. Len Green is starting to hit, Vic Power has helped and Earl Battey and Zoilo Versalles are contributing. I like what I've seen of our club thus far. And I think we'll get better," Mele added.

Over the first month, Twin pitchers led the American League with 147 strikeouts and only 70 bases on balls, ranked third in ERA. That much was encouraging from last year's seventh-place pitching rank in the A. L.

**Twin Topics:** The **Twins'** hospital list is improving. Outfielder Jim Lemon is on the disabled list until June 8, but Mayo Clinic doctors at Rochester, Minn., have given Jim assurance that his pulled left shoulder muscle can be healed without operation. . . . First Baseman Don Mincher was released from the hospital, May 11, after suffering a concussion in a collision with Cleveland's Don Dillard. He made the eastern swing with the **Twins** and was told he could return to action in a week. . . . Outfielder Bob Allison was due to return to regular duty after missing two weeks with a pulled rib cartilage. . . . A record 9,890 Knot Hole Kids watched the **Twins** beat Kansas City, 5 to 4, at the Met, May 12. . . . Due to the shortage of outfielders, infielders George Banks and Orlando Martinez have been taking special schooling in the outfield to prepare for any emergency. . . . Bill Tuttle went 0-for-24 while playing with a pulled leg muscle. . . . Bernie Allen's hitting streak ended at 13 games, longest of the season for the **Twins**. . . . Harmon Killebrew was setting a fast pace to lead the **Twins** with 20 strikeouts and 26 walks. . . . The **Twins** failed to reach .500 on the recent home stand, showing an 8-9 mark at the Met. That was an improvement over an 0-5 start, however.

## Ramos Denies 'Bush Town' Charge

TWIN CITIES, Minn.—Ex-Twin Pitcher Pedro Ramos of Cleveland never pitched a ball in the recent series at the Met, but he made news with a couple of salvos. He was quoted as calling Cleveland a "bush town" and branding Owner Calvin Griffith of the **Twins** "cheap."

Ramos wanted to set the record straight in THE SPORTING NEWS. "Why would I call Cleveland bush?"

"After all, it's my new pitching

home," Ramos reasoned. "What I tried to say in my broken English was that I liked Minneapolis better because I knew my way around from last season."

"About Griffith, I don't think he pays his ball players enough, right. But as far as his personal treatment of me, he was awfully good to me. He did things for me he didn't have to do. I want to tell him 'thank you' and I appreciated every thing he tried to do for me."

## Confident Curver

# Brash Rookie Bongo Blooms as Hill Blazer

Bonikowski Climbs to Berth in Big Time From Class D in Less Than Three Years

By TOM BRIERE

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

At 16, sleepy-eyed Joe Bonikowski couldn't make his prep baseball team in home-town Philadelphia, Pa.

At 21, he's a major league winner with the **Minnesota Twins**.

Bongo won his first American League start with an eight-hit, 10 to 3 performance against Kansas City at the Met, May 13.

"It gave me a good feeling," admitted Bonikowski after he went nine innings to run his record to 3-1 with an ERA of 2.59.

Bonikowski, somewhat of a Joe Paolooka character, doesn't lack for confidence, a factor which impressed Manager Sam Mele in spring training. Shows Plenty of Moxie

"I don't know the exact word to fit Bongo," Mele groped for a word picture. "Not exactly cocky, or brash, but he's confident of his ability. He proved to me in spring training he had the moxie."

Mele has never lacked confidence in placing Bonikowski in tough spots. And Bongo has responded with a pair of victories over Kansas City, one in relief, and another relief triumph over Detroit.

Joe's only loss came on a ninth-inning, bad-hop double over Third Baseman Rich Rollins' head by John

## Mother's Day Champ Brings 18 Children to **Twins'** Game

TWIN CITIES, Minn. — Mrs. John Brezinka of Swanville, Minn., won the **Twins'** Mother's Day trip to the Seattle World Fair with a turnout of 18 children for Minnesota's Mother's Special at the Met, May 13.

Mrs. Brezinka's "two teams" of children beat runner-up entries of 16 children. President Calvin Griffith made the award to the winner.

ny Temple as Baltimore rallied for four runs in a 5 to 4 decision, April 24. Temple was the only man Bongo faced as Jack Kralick started and Dick Stigman finished.

## 15 Defeats in D Loop

Bonikowski jumped from Class D to B to AAA and the majors in less than three full seasons. He rated 7-15 at Sanford of the Florida State League in 1959, 14-11 at Wilson of the Carolina League in 1960 and 8-13 with last-place Syracuse of the International League in 1961. Joe showed a 3.20 ERA, eighth in the Int. He had a no-hitter for 8½ innings against Buffalo a year ago before winning, 3 to 1, on three hits.

In 1960, he pitched a no-hitter for Wilson, facing only 27 men. He walked one Greensboro batter, then picked him off first base.

The strong-armed lad throws a sinking fast ball—"one of the best among Twin pitchers," according to Pitching Coach Gordon Maltzberger. Bonikowski has sharpened his curve, slider and change-up.

"I have the best success with a change-up off the fast ball," said Bonikowski. "Maltzberger told me the fast-ball change is better than the curve change-up, which is more apt to hang."

Against Kansas City, Bongo figured, "I made only one real bad pitch. I got a curve above the belt to Dick

## Slab Standout



Joe Bonikowski

Howser and he hit it out of the park for two runs."

Even Bongo admits he's come a long way from Philadelphia. "As a junior in high school, the coach cut me from the squad," he recalled. "I finally got a chance as a senior in relief one day. I protected a one-run lead, we won the game and I had it made."

Bonikowski was dedicated "to making the grade with the **Twins'** this spring."

Mele brought Bonikowski on from the bull pen in relief of Starter Don Lee in the third game of the season at Kansas City. He mopped up on three hits over the last 5½ innings to win, 9 to 5.

During this game, Mele went to the mound to talk with Bonikowski in an eighth-inning jam with the tying run at the plate in the person of southpaw-swinging Manny Jimenez. "When I got to the mound," Mele recalled, "Bonikowski spoke up and said: 'I know this guy is a high-ball hitter; he won't get a high ball to hit.'"

"Jimenez grounded out and I had the feeling right then we had the makings of a good pitcher," smiled Sam.