

Mincher's Booming Bat Helps Twins Put Pinch on Bad Guys

By MAX NICHOLS

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

Just before the American League season opened, Don Mincher of the Twins went on television in Orlando, Fla., and said in effect:

"If the Twins aren't going to play me more, I would like to be traded away."

"I have played so little in spring training that I am not ready for the season."

Manager Sam Mele had been doing his best to get Harmon Killebrew ready to play first base after a switch from left field. So Harmon had played more than ever before in the spring while Mincher had to try to sharpen up in batting and infield practice.

But Mele handled that situation so well that Mincher continued as one of the hardest-working players on a team that moved into first place as a tightly-knit unit. Mincher started working out in left field and at third base to be ready to help.

By mid-June, even Killebrew came up with an idea to get Mincher's bat into the lineup when the occasion demanded.

Killer Goes to Third

"If you want to get Mincher in there against certain pitchers in certain parks, I'll be glad to play another position," Killebrew said to Mele. And a week later, he was playing third base against Chicago's Joel Horlen and at New York against Bill Stafford.

Again, Mele handled the situation perfectly.

"I had told Harmon I wasn't going to move him anymore this year after switching him to first base," Mele said. "But he volunteered. That's how much he wants to help this club."

Mincher responded with a home run that broke a 0-0 tie and led to an important 3-1 victory over Horlen. It kept the Twins in first place, where they had been since Memorial Day.

Killebrew and Mincher often have joked between themselves about their situation. But Mincher remains serious about wanting to play and Killebrew sincerely regrets that Mincher has had to be on the sidelines so much after hitting 23 home runs in 278 trips to the plate last year.

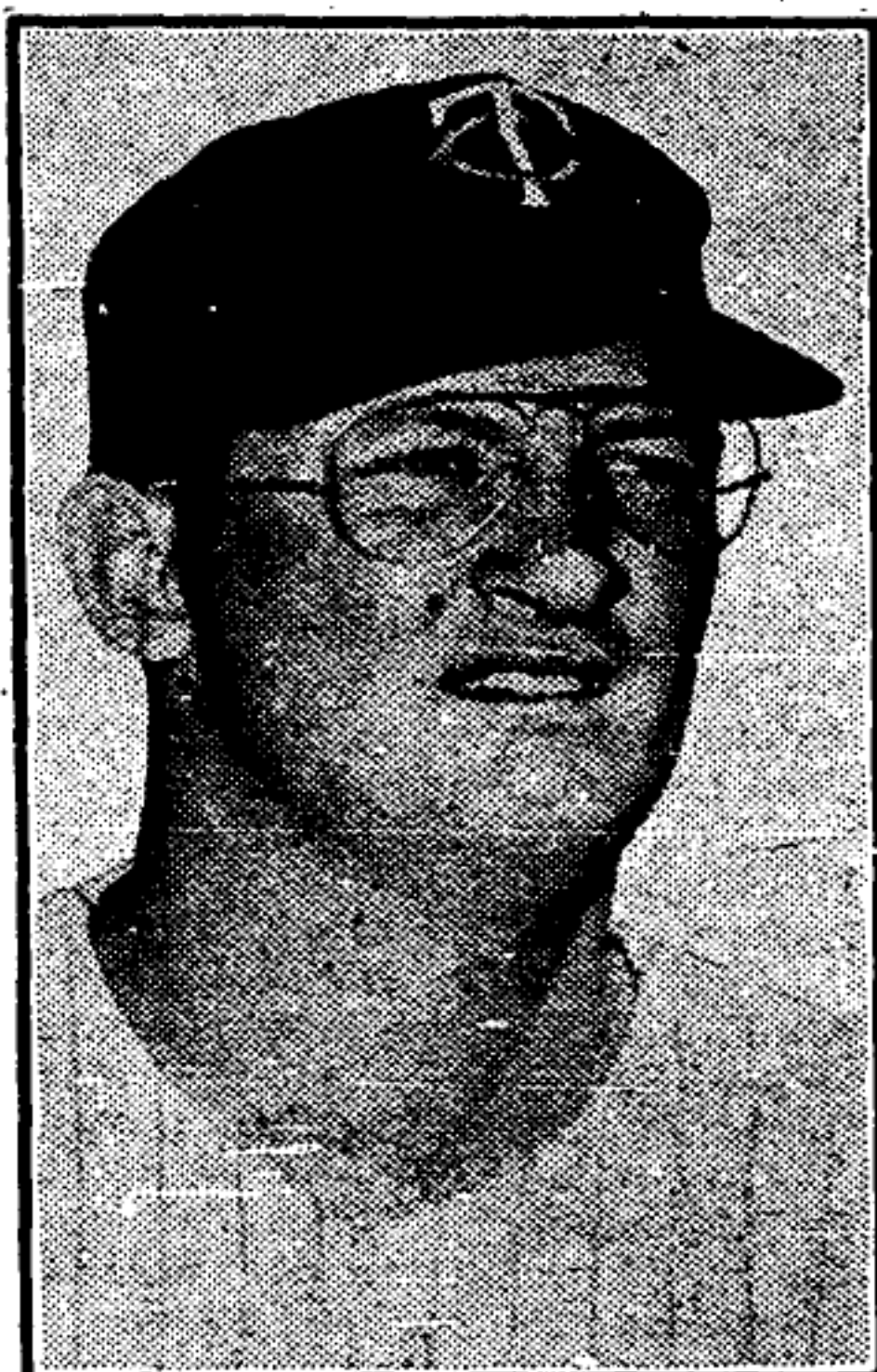
Don Rusting on Bench

"The only thing I didn't like about moving to first base is that Mincher has to stay on the bench," said Harmon.

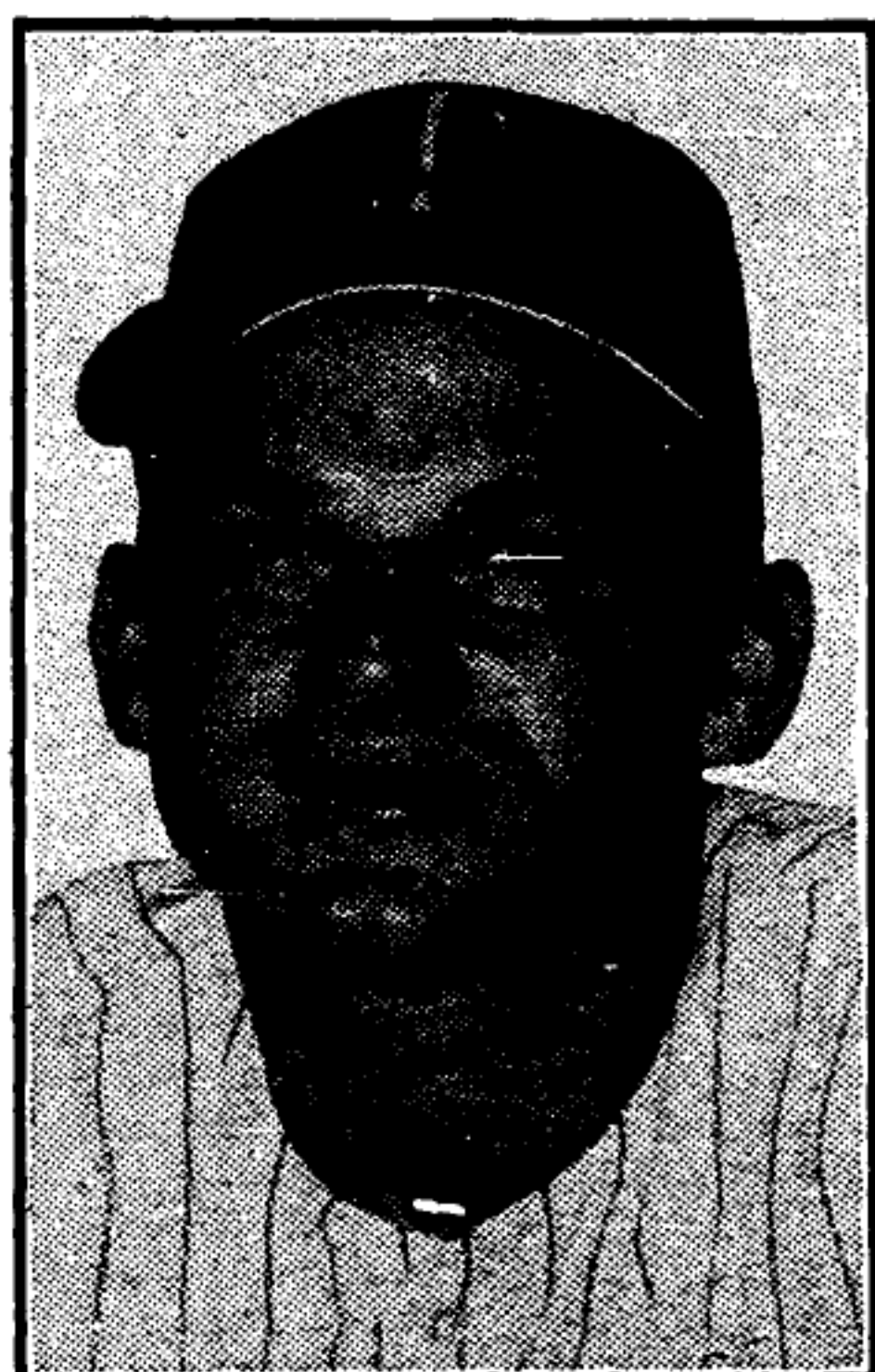
"A fellow 27 years old with that much talent should be playing. Now is when he has to play to go anywhere in this game."

"Third base should be a little easier for me since I have been playing in the infield. But you have to use a different glove, and you have to throw hard at third. I'll do the best I can."

Killebrew broke into the major leagues as a third baseman. He played there until 1960, when he started playing first base. He played



Don Mincher



Harmon Killebrew

45 games at third in 1961, then he moved to left field until the decision was made last winter to return him to first base.

But this move by no means was permanent.

It was just one more example of the way Mele has been juggling his talent this year.

Mele has tried to return Mincher's loyalty by placing him in every situation possible to help.

Sam Lauded Mincher

When he heard about Mincher's speech in Florida, Sam said:

"I don't blame Mincher. He wants to play and I'm glad he wants to play. He has to realize that I'm trying to get Harmon ready for the season. But Mincher is a valuable man to us. He's the kind of player I want."

As soon as the double-headers started popping up in May, Mele started using Mincher in one game

Harmon's Double, Triple Travel Farther Than HRs

TWIN CITIES, Minn.—Harmon Killebrew slugged a double and a triple that traveled farther than two home runs at Yankee Stadium as the Twins split an important four-game series.

In a 5-3 loss, Killebrew hammered a triple more than 460 feet against the fence in dead center field. The next day, he powered a drive that bounced onto the top of a screen that covers loud speakers in left-center—also 460 feet from home plate.

Harmon was given a ground-rule double on the second one because it came to rest on top of the screen. Then he hit two homers, one in a 6-4 victory and one in a 7-4 victory. And both went over the much shorter fence nearer the left field line.

"I don't worry about losing homers in a big park," said Harmon. "There is nothing you can do about it. It's just being a dumb hitter—hitting to the wrong place."

and giving Harmon a rest. It was the first time in Mele's five years of managing that he ever rested Killebrew except to help him get out of a major slump.

Mincher started against Dean Chance of Los Angeles, Robin Roberts and Jim Palmer of Baltimore, Joe Sparma of Detroit and Mel Stottlemyre of New York. Each time the Twins won.

Against Palmer, Mele moved Mincher to left field.

"Don has been working out there and has looked good," Mele declared. "I think he will be all right in the outfield. He handles fly balls well and seems to be able to get the ball away fast."

Don Turns Into Sphinx

Mincher, through all this, has kept his mouth shut except when questioned and except when joking with Harmon.

Once, when a reporter asked Harmon how he felt about resting in twin-bills, Mincher cracked from a nearby locker:

"Be careful what you say, Harmon, I'm listening. Don't hurt my feelings." Later he added:

"Since they didn't trade me, I expect to play quite a bit," Mincher said. "At my age, I've got to play. I like this club and I want to be part of it."

"There is no way I can have any hard feelings toward Harmon. He is a great player. We're all just doing the best we can."

After hitting that homer against Horlen, he said:

"It's wonderful to help win a game."

Mele, figuring he is fortunate to have a man with as much power as Mincher waiting on the bench, figures he loses no punch when he does rest Killebrew these days. And

Bat Days Could Help Twins to Their First Million Road Gate

By MAX NICHOLS

TWIN CITIES, Minn.

"Bat Day," the newest rage in promoting baseball, could result in the Twins drawing more than a million fans on the road for the first time in the history of the Griffith organization.

The Twins already have participated in three "Bat Days" on the road plus one at home. And by the time they walked away from a double-header victory before 71,245 bat-swinging, paid fans at Yankee Stadium, they had drawn 526,355 fans in 31 road dates.

That's a pace that could put them over the million mark in their schedule of approximately 70 road dates.

On days on which bats have been given away, the Twins played in front of 42,367 at Chicago and 50,393 at Detroit before the twin-bill at New York. They also had 30,665 at home, June 6, for a bat day for a total of 194,670 bat-waving fans.

The Yankees gave away 35,000 Louisville Sluggers to the biggest crowd in major league baseball since the Yankee-Detroit double-header of July 4, 1961, at Yankee Stadium.

"Rudie Schaffer started this promotion years ago with the Browns," said Frank Ryan, sales representative of Hillerich and Bradsby, the company that makes Louisville Sluggers. "Then when he went to Chicago, they started it about three years ago."

It All Started When Rudie Was With Browns

Schaffer said the promotion all started "by accident" back in 1953 when he was with the St. Louis Browns.

"There was a man in St. Louis who would buy up the inventory stock of bankrupt companies and sell it in wholesale lots," said Schaffer. "He bought out a bankrupt bat company and sold the whole bunch to me at about 15 cents each."

"So we had the first Bat Day. Some weren't even finished—just cut roughly out of the wood. But it went over great. So when I went to Toronto, I had a Bat Day there every year for about five years."

Last year, it started spreading and now it's all over the American League. The Twins filled their park (limited because of construction on the left field bleachers) in spite of rain all morning and during the game for a Washington contest.

"When they have all those people hold up their bats for pictures, the stadium looks like a petrified forest," said Birdie Tebbetts, manager of the Indians.



Rudie Schaffer

Killebrew has led the American League in home runs for three years.

"I just hope the front office realizes Mincher's situation and pays him well," said Mele.

Twin Tracks: The Twins, who had a 1-9-9 record in double-headers last year, were 3-1-1 in their first five this season . . . Mele feels it's largely because he has been able to rest such key players as Harmon Killebrew, Bob Allison and Earl Battey half of each one. . . . Bernie Allen was recalled from Denver, and Frank Kostro was sent down to replace him. Allen, regular second baseman for more than two years, was expected to play more often at third since Jerry Kindall has taken over solidly at second base. Allen's knee, operated on last fall, at last appears solid. . . . Kindall missed three games with a badly-bruised leg and hip after a collision with Moose Skowron of Chicago at second base.

Killebrew's First Homer Was Tape-Measure Smash

TWIN CITIES, Minn.—Sluggish Harmon Killebrew of the Twins, who has led the majors in homers the past two seasons, bagged his first big league homer as a member of the Senators on June 24, 1955. He was only 18 at the time.

The homer was a tape-measure smash, landing 24 rows into the left field bleachers at old Griffith Stadium. It traveled an estimated 475 feet.

Billy Hoefft of the Tigers was the victim. The Tigers, however, went on to win, 18-7.

Killebrew didn't wait long for No. 2. He got that two days later against the Tigers' George Zuverink. AL KERMISCH.

Johnnie Walker Red
...smooth enough to be the world's largest selling Scotch

