

Bill Melton... From Agony to Ecstasy

By JEROME HOLTZMAN

CHICAGO, Ill. — In baseball, as elsewhere, yesterday's goat is often today's hero.

Yesterday—was it only last year? —Bill Melton of the White Sox was suffering from the agonies. He was charged with 10 errors in the first 24 games. In early May, a foul fly, which he was about to catch, hit him in the face and fractured his nose.

In addition, he set or equaled several major league strikeout records, including most whiffs in successive official times at bat, 11, and most strikeouts in a doubleheader, 8.

Melton also had his moments of glory. He slugged 33 homers, breaking by four the previous club record shared by Gus Zernial and Eddie Robinson.

But as Melton was to say later, "It was the best-kept secret in baseball. I knew I hit 33, but I don't think anybody else did."

Melton shrugged his ample shoulders and winced, recalling his painful experiences. "The worst thing in the world," he explained, "is to play on a last-place club because you can do no right."

Bill Helps Sox Rise

The White Sox limped home last in 1970 but, under new management, suddenly have surfaced and are now clearly in view. They are currently challenging the Royals for second place in the American League and already have passed their total 1970 home attendance by more than 250,000, creating belief in the slogan here that "The Sox Will Rise Again."

Their rise can be credited in large measure to William Edwin Melton.

It is as if a new White Sox hero has arrived. The only thing, however, is that Melton isn't new. This is his fourth year with the White Sox and his third full season in the Big Top. He entered the '71 campaign with 1,179 major league at-bats, 58 homers and 199 runs batted in. Yet, only recently, a sportswriter interviewing him at the All-Star Game asked him how it felt to win a spot on the All-Star team in his rookie season.

"Hell," Melton said, "this is my third year."

What Melton should get is the year's award for true grit, symbolizing constant practice and determina-

tion. Prior to this season, Melton was so poor in the field that many veteran observers indicated strong belief he never would make it big, not so long as he carried a porous glove.

But Melton woke up. The awakening, he said, came early in spring training.

"I picked up one of those little magazines that had a rundown on the prospects of all the 24 clubs," Melton said. "When they came to me, the writeup read, 'A below mediocre third baseman.'"

The next day, Melton asked White Sox coach Al Monchak if he would start hitting extra grounders to him. Monchak did. By the hour. Simultaneously, Melton started listening to Chuck Tanner, the club's new manager.

Tanner Unimpressed

Tanner had seen Melton the previous September and didn't especially like what he saw—a flatfooted third baseman who couldn't move more than one or two feet to either side.

The education of Melton continued throughout the spring. Melton was taught that he must charge ground balls and not lay back and allow the ball to play him. He also was taught that, by crossing his legs, in a quick scissors-like motion, he was able to increase his lateral movement considerably.

Melton's glove, though still not 24-karat gold, is no longer made of iron. He now crouches and moves in as much as two or three steps with every pitch. The metamorphosis is remarkable. Through the Sox' first 124 games, Melton had committed only 14 errors. Said Manager Tanner proudly, "This guy is now the second best fielding third baseman in the league." Tanner concedes the No. 1 rating to Brooks Robinson.

Melton's improvement in the field has doubled his value to the club, and also his baseball pleasure.

"I enjoy going out there and making two or three good plays," Melton said. "It's as gratifying to me as a homer because I know how poor I was. I've had a couple of writers on the road tell me I'm playing a helluva third base."

Melton's teammates are telling him the same thing. Said catcher Tom Egan, who came over from the Angels in a winter trade. "Hey,



Once Dubbed the Iron Glove, Bill Melton Now Is a Highly Competent Third Sacker.

that sonofagun knows how to play the bag. I always thought he was supposed to be a bad fielder."

Such praise brings a smile to Melton's handsome face.

"I feel good out there," he said, "even when I'm in a batting slump. It's great to come into the dugout and have your teammates slap you on the back and say, 'Nice play. Great play.'"

Big Man at the Plate

Not surprisingly, Melton's excellent work in the field has helped him at the plate. He is more relaxed and has considerably more confidence. It is as if the pressure is off. He doesn't have to hit 33 homers merely to wind up on the plus side. He knows now he is of genuine value on defense.

At the plate, Melton is still the big slugger. With six weeks of the season remaining, he was leading the league in homers with 27 and seemed certain to increase his 1970 homer total. He also should finish among the leaders in runs batted in.

Moreover, Melton is only 25 and still has many big years ahead of him. And some day, soon perhaps, he'll even conquer his boyish habit of shouting at himself in anger as he often does when he fails to deliver in a crucial situation.

For example, one out and a man on third base. Melton, a fly-ball hitter, is at the plate. He grounds out,

returns to the dugout and yells at himself, loud enough for everyone to hear, "What's the matter with you? You shouldn't be hitting fourth. You should be hitting eighth."

Melton insists that chiding and embarrassing himself in front of his teammates has a beneficial psychological effect. He says it makes him a better hitter and makes him try harder next time, and the time after that.

In time, Melton most likely will outgrow such flagellation just as he has shown signs of maturing in the matter of being hit by pitches. He has been somewhat of a target this season, getting hit 10 times.

Angered Melton Sounds Off

As late as a month ago, he was vowing vengeance against the pitchers. He said if they kept it up, he might wind up throwing a few punches, an action which would increase the number of pitchers gunning for him.

The best and perhaps only effective way for the batter to reply in such situations is with a torrent of base-hits. It is significant that Melton is no longer publicly accusing pitchers of purposely throwing at him, another indication of maturity.

Said Melton: "I am up pretty close to the plate. I don't think I get away from those inside pitches as quickly as I should. Instead of turning

my shoulder and getting away the way most players do, I throw my hands up in front of my face. That's why I've been hit on the hand so much (six times)."

There is no doubt that Melton can handle himself physically. At 6-1 and 198 pounds, he is not a weakling and, on or off the field, has an unmistakable virility about him. Put him on a horse, give him a 10-gallon hat and a couple of six-shooters and chances are he'd make feminine hearts flutter.

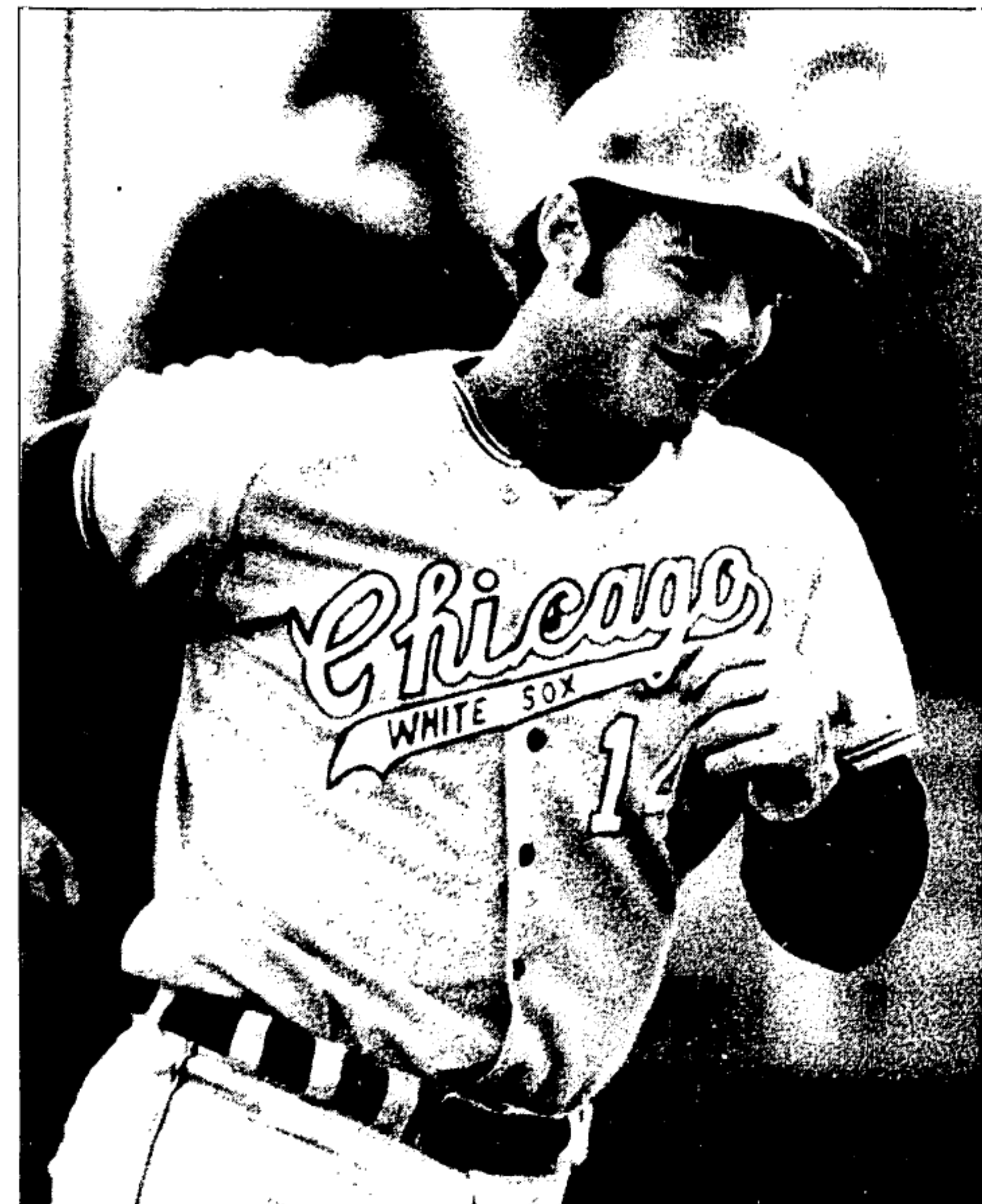
Cutting Down on Whiffs

But Melton, though raised in Southern California, has no hankering for the flickers. A matinee idol he doesn't want to be. All he wants to do, essentially, is continue learning the strike zone, to the point where he'll stop biting at bad pitches.

That he has shown improvement in this area is also quite evident. After suffering the embarrassment of 11 consecutive strikeouts last year (and, remarkably, all of them against left-handed pitchers), Melton is making certain this doesn't happen again. His longest whiff string of the current season is four.

Melton doesn't consider himself an especially colorful fellow.

"I have no hobbies or any big interests," he said. "All I want to do is play ball and maybe improve so I can be a consistent .300 hitter."



Slugger Melton Circles Bases After a Home Run.

Huntz' Travels End in Chisox Lineup

By JEROME HOLTZMAN

CHICAGO, Ill. — "Welcome Home 'Babe' Huntz, Whoever You Are."

This hand-lettered sign is now hanging above the Comiskey Park locker of infielder Steve Huntz, the newest of the White Sox who finally appears to have found a home—after eight years of wandering through the minor and major leagues.

Hunt, though only 25, already has been the property of five major league organizations. He originally was signed by the Orioles, drafted by the Cardinals, traded to the Padres and traded again to the Giants.

"I guess you can say I've been bouncing around," said Huntz, a husky six-footer who is a switch-hitter and swings a potent bat.

The White Sox acquired Huntz from the Giants this past spring in a deal for relief pitcher Steve Hamilton. Huntz immediately was as-

signed to their Tucson farm in the Pacific Coast League.

He stayed at Tucson for almost the entire season and was batting .303 with the Toros when the Sox recalled him. The idea, originally, was that Huntz would fill in for infielder Rich McKinney during the two weeks that McKinney was away on military drill.

Makes Hit With Tanner

But after watching him for less than a week, Manager Chuck Tanner had other ideas.

"He isn't going anywhere," Tanner said. "He's staying right here."

Huntz broke in with the White Sox August 7 in rather difficult circumstances. Tanner used him as a seventh-inning pinch-batter against Oakland's Vida Blue. Huntz struck out.

"Vida can do that," Tanner said.

The next day, Tanner put Huntz into the starting lineup and the results have been quite remarkable. Huntz hit safely in nine of the next 10 games and in this sequence was ripping away at a .343 pace.

Moreover, Huntz was getting his hits in the clutch and in two consecutive games drove in the winning run. Moreover, in the third game in this stretch Huntz doubled to right and then scored the winning run, coming in all the way from second base on a wild pitch.

"What a hustler that guy is," said catcher Ed Herrmann in admiration. Then Herrmann asked, "Hey, where did he come from, anyway?"

White Sox fans were asking this same question, especially after an August 17 twi-nighter against the Ti-

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Agony of Errors... Ordeal of Chisox' Melton

By JEROME HOLTZMAN

CHICAGO, Ill.—If you want to take a deserving ballplayer to lunch this week, we have a recommendation. Try **Bill Melton**, the handsome, 24-year-old third baseman of the White Sox.

Melton had perhaps the most embarrassing first month of any major leaguer, and even outranks Chisox pitcher Tommy John for the early-season sympathy award. John, after losing his first five starts, has recovered and is now 2-5. But poor **Bill Melton** still was floundering.

Melton actually is a strong hitter and could soon emerge as one of the American League's top power men. Even during his early-season travail, Melton was doing the job at the plate, keeping his average above .300.

It was at third base where Melton suffered incredible woe. He committed the whopping total of 10 errors in the Sox' first 24 games.

He had scored only nine runs, which meant he had to carry another run across to balance off his horrid fielding performance.

Melton and the White Sox left town on May 7 for a brief eastern swing. Melton sighed in relief. At least for one week, a stretch of seven games, he wouldn't have to play on the White Sox' artificial grass infield.

He Hates the Rug

"That rug has got me psyched," Melton admitted. "I just can't handle it. Those balls just whiz by."

The first stop was Baltimore and a three-game series with the tough Orioles. Prior to the opener, Earl Weaver, the Baltimore manager, was saying that he thought his team was playing well, but he was disappointed with his club's defense.

"We've already made 17 errors this season," Weaver said as he looked at a Baltimore statistic sheet. "Isn't that awful?"

Weaver didn't get much sympathy.

"Check the White Sox," a reporter told him. "They're a lot worse."

Weaver then looked at a sheet of White Sox statistics and gasped. "Thirty-seven errors!" Weaver

exclaimed. "And I thought our defense was bad."

Weaver also noticed that, at that moment, Melton had committed only seven fewer errors than the entire Baltimore team.

"That's a shame," Weaver said. "Melton isn't that bad. He must have the jitters—or something."

That Melton had the jitters and was uptight was apparent during the next two hours. He fumbled a routine grounder in the third inning for error No. 11 and three innings later, in the sixth, suffered the utmost in agony and embarrassment.

Trouble With a Popup

With one out, Bob Johnson lifted a high foul popup. The ball was about five feet foul and Melton camped under it ready to make what appeared to be a routine catch.

But, at the last instant, Melton lost the ball in the lights. The ball struck the heel of his glove and then smashed into his nose. He fell to the ground and, for a minute or two, was unconscious.

Up in the press box, Lou Hatter, the official scorer, said, "It's got to be another error. There's no other way you can call it."

Melton was charged with his 12th error as his White Sox teammates carried him off the field on a stretcher. The stretcher was taken to the Baltimore dugout and then into the Oriole clubhouse, where there was a doctor.

Boog Powell, the big Baltimore slugger, was among Melton's stretcher bearers and reported later that Melton was an awful sight.

Joked Despite Injury

"There was blood coming out of both nostrils," Powell said, "and it was coming out of his mouth, too."

Melton was taken to Union Memorial Hospital and on the way there managed to joke about his situation.

"The way I'm going, this had to happen," Melton told Howard Roberts, the White Sox secretary, who was in the ambulance with him. "I'm not surprised."

Melton was kept in the hospital overnight and the following day

returned home and entered Chicago's Mercy Hospital. He will be out for at least a week, maybe two weeks, with a broken nose.

Chisox Manager Don Gutteridge was sympathetic. Like everyone with the club, Gutteridge figures that Melton eventually will overcome his erratic fielding.

"He's a potential All-Star," Gutteridge explained. "When he's ready, I'm going to put him right back in there."

"He's going to have to conquer this thing himself."

No Bad Bounces

Gutteridge disagreed that the White Sox' AstroTurf infield is a handicap. A one-time infielder himself, Gutteridge maintains that the AstroTurf isn't that slick. "And besides," Gutteridge added, "you never get a bad bounce."

Melton's early-season difficulties were somewhat typical of his entire baseball career. It's been a rocky road for him. He never played high school baseball and only seven games during the year and a half he attended Citrus Junior College in Glendora, Calif.

"The coach kicked me off the team when I was a freshman," Melton explained. "He caught me smoking one day and told me not to come back."

Melton didn't return to the club, but instead started playing Sunday ball with a White Sox rookie team in Pasadena. Hollis Thurston, then the chief Chisox scout in California, recommended Melton to General Manager Ed Short, who signed him for a modest bonus.

Worked on Docks

Melton didn't have it too easy when he was growing up in California. All through high school, he lived with a married sister in San Diego. He had to work to help support himself and during the summers of his junior and senior years held a full-time job, working on the San Diego docks as a "boilerman."

Recalled Melton: "It was hard work—but I enjoyed it. I worked in the boiler rooms. They'd turn the boilers down to about 160 degrees and then we'd put on asbestos suits and go in and clean and rebuild 'em. We worked on

all kinds of ships—aircraft carriers, LSDs, fishing boats—all kinds of stuff."

Melton's minor league career was generally undistinguished, he said. He batted only .196 in the Florida State League in 1965. "When I was in the minors, I was so bad in so many things I never thought I'd make it," Melton explained.

But Melton has made it to the majors and at least one man isn't surprised. Eddie Stanky, the one-time White Sox manager, thought Melton had the stuff and some day would surface to the big leagues.

Melton was still on a minor league roster in the spring of 1967, but was invited to the Sox' training camp in Sarasota, Fla. He didn't get into any games with

the White Sox and just sat and watched. One day he found his name on the traveling squad to Fort Lauderdale for an exhibition game with the Yankees.

Melton was puzzled by this sudden and unexpected promotion until Stanky explained it.

Chance to See Mickey

"Stanky told me Mickey Mantle would probably be retiring and he wanted me to see Mantle play at least once," Melton said. He said, "Just sit on the bench and watch him."

Some day—maybe 10 or 15 years from now—a major league manager will bring a kid into Sarasota and say to him, "Sit here and watch. I want you to see **Bill Melton** play."

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Bill Melton Goes Over a Point or Two With White Sox Manager Don Gutteridge.

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Melton Combines Sizzling Bat With A Dazzling Glove

By EDGAR MUNZEL

CHICAGO, Ill.—Belting 'em again. Going into the final week of June, he already had hit eight home runs for the month and was five days ahead of his last season's pace when he established a White Sox club record with 33 home runs.

All of which has delighted Manager Chuck Tanner, especially since, along with it, Bill was hitting near the .300 mark and he had driven in more than 40 runs. But he expected this sort of performance offensively.

What really has brought a grin of satisfaction to Tanner is the fact that Melton has made such a tremendous improvement defensively at third base.

"He's fielding so well now that he's an All-Star third base candidate as far as I'm concerned," said Tanner. "As a matter of fact, when age finally catches up with Brooks Robinson, Melton will be the No. 1 candidate."

"Bill is now a solid all-round third baseman. Nobody at third in our league has a better bat and lately nobody has had a better glove except Brooks."

Normally, any player would rather talk about his hitting. Melton is an exception. He's proud of the progress he's made with his fielding.

Tested in Outfield

And that is understandable inasmuch as he had problems at third base early last season. Eventually, he was switched to right field by the previous regime.

Melton made 10 errors in the first 24 games last year and, in one instance, suffered a fractured nose from a pop foul that he somehow lost in the lights. This didn't help his confidence any. Along about midseason, he was shifted to right field.

As soon as Tanner took over as manager last mid-September, however, Melton was restored to third base. And Tanner immediately taught Melton a little shuffling technique that turned Eddie Mathews into a good-fielding third sacker.

"Melton was sort of glued there at third base," said Tanner. "He was flatfooted, just like Mathews was when he came up with the Braves. They got Mathews to move a little bit as the pitch was delivered, take little steps just barely inching forward. And that's what we got Melton to do."

Covering More Ground

"Really, it's worked great for me," said Melton. "I'm mobile now. I cover more ground because I can break for a ball easier. I know that I'm getting a lot more assists than I did last year."

"In fact, I just feel a lot better all around as far as fielding is concerned. I've made nine errors, but almost all of them have been on throws. Six of them, to be exact."

"I'm like Aurelio Rodriguez and Sal Bando. We take a little more time and throw the ball hard, while Brooks and Graig Nettles don't throw hard, but concentrate on getting rid of the ball faster. Well, when you throw hard, your ball sails once in a while or sinks into the dirt."

"Two of my errors," Melton said, "were on throws to second base in attempts to start double plays. In each case, I got rid of the ball before I had a good grip on it."

As it is, Melton already has cut down almost 50 percent on his errors at third base. Last season, he played only 70 games at third and had 18 errors. His nine so far this season have come in 64 games.

Melton's success at the plate this season is evidence that he's improving as a hitter, too, because the pitchers are working on him more, remembering his 33-homer performance last year.

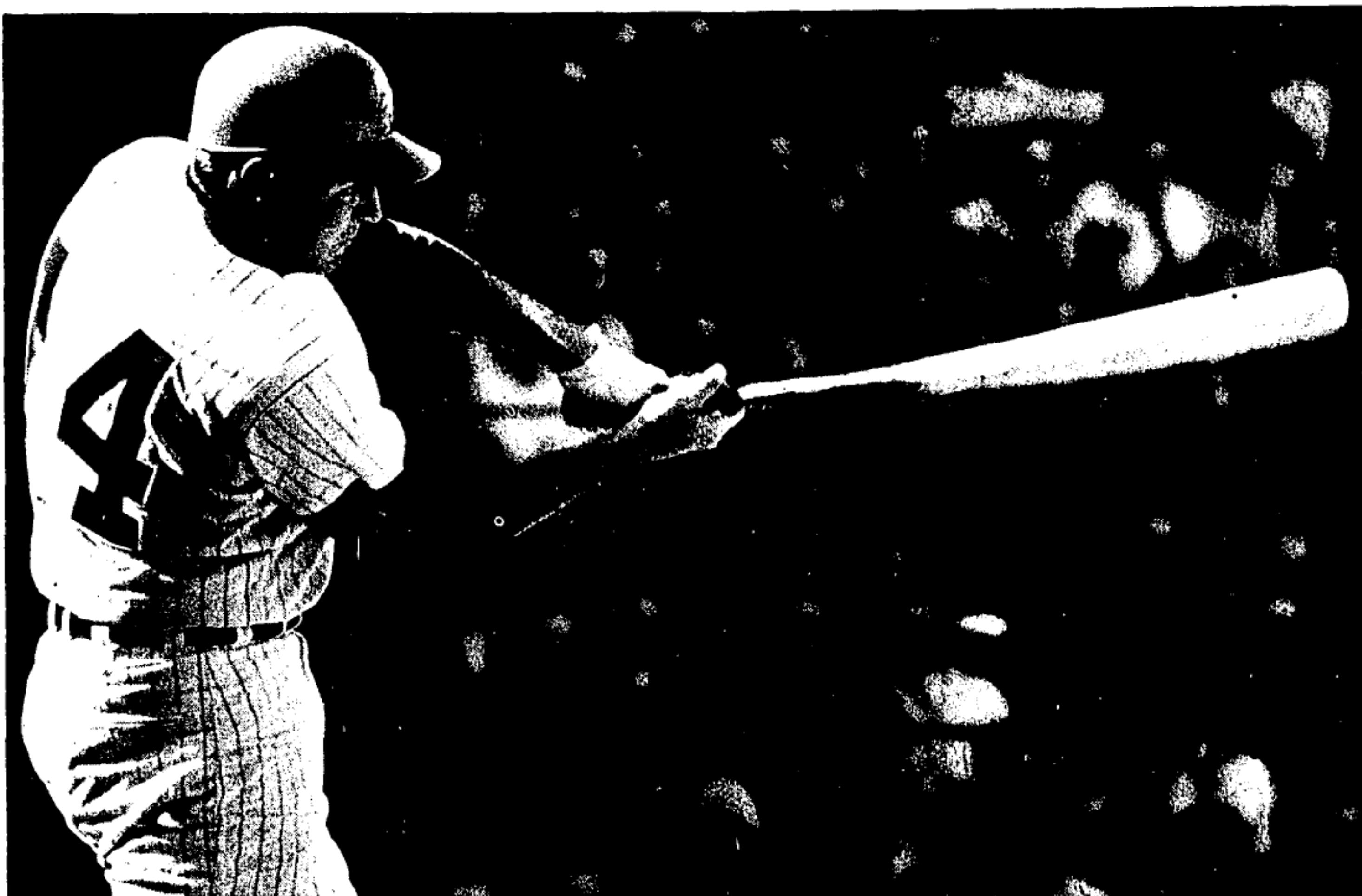
More Breaking Pitches

"They definitely are pitching me tougher," said Melton. "They're feeding me a lot of breaking balls and off-speed pitches. I seldom see a fast ball and, when I do, it's not in the strike area. They just want to show it to me."

There also are two other sources of satisfaction for Melton. One is the fact that he's ahead of last year's homer pace, despite the fact that the temporary fences were removed in Comiskey Park. The other is that almost all of his homers have come with men on base.

Bill has walloped two grand slams and his first 14 homers netted 30 runs.

He has hit only four solo homers. As a matter of fact, the



Bill Melton . . . Proud of His Progress With the Glove.

first six circuit blows were with at least one aboard.

"I know there were some critics last year who kept writing that I didn't hit homers with men on," said Melton. "But I swing the same way whether there are men on or not. It depends on the batters ahead of you whether anybody is going to be on base and the pitcher decides whether you're going to get a good ball to hit."

The temporary fences didn't help Melton much last year. He hit three inside the enclosure out of the 22 he collected at Comiskey Park. This year, he hit four of his first 14 at

home. But this is partially due to a slump in the early weeks. After he hit two on opening day, he was blanked for 29 games before he slammed another homer. But now he's back in stroke.

Sox Yarns: Ed Herrmann, who underwent an emergency appendectomy June 6, began working out with the White Sox again June 21. However, he wasn't immediately restored to the active list. . . . From June 13 to 19, the White Sox lost six of seven games and every loss was by a one-run margin. But then the tide suddenly turned and they won four in a row by piling

up a total of 46 runs. . . . Harry Caray broadcast the White Sox game of June 23 from the center field bleachers and he had several hundred fans clustered around him. And "Holy Cow"—not even the rain stopped him. He just raised a beach umbrella. . . . Walt Williams hit .457 in an eight-game stretch. . . . The White Sox signed their No. 2 draftee, outfielder Bill Sharp of Ohio State, and played him against the Cubs in the boys' benefit game before sending him to Asheville (Dixie Association). . . . Mike Andrews' sore shoulder still is bothering him.

Denny Shuns Sympathy... 'Get Me Runs'

By MERRELL WHITTLESEY

WASHINGTON, D. C.—Denny McLain watched the National Open playoff between Jack Nicklaus and Lee Trevino, and in the Senators' clubhouse that night, McLain was replaying the round.

Denny held his fingers a fraction of an inch apart to show the margin by which Nicklaus missed a half-dozen putts, and for those who did not see the playoff, he described how one of Nicklaus' putts made a complete circle of the cup and refused to drop.

"Poor Jack," Denny said, shaking his head, "I really feel sorry for him. He didn't get any breaks today."



Denny McLain

The next morning, when Nicklaus was reading the sports pages and possibly noted that McLain had been bombed for 16 hits in losing his eighth straight, you wonder whether he said, "Poor Denny, I really feel sorry for him, he's not getting any breaks."

McLain is not looking for sympathy. He would prefer runs to sympathy. In the eight losses, he pitched a fraction under 50 innings. During his time on the mound, the Senators had scored eight runs in his behalf.

Can He Lose 30?

The writers who started with a timid approach to Denny's misfortunes are getting braver by the defeat.

One of the stock questions is, "Do you think you can be the first pitcher to lose 30 games?"

"Not pitching every fifth day," Denny replies. "I might make it if Ted will let me pitch every four days."

"Do you know that the two pitchers who hold the major league record for defeats both pitched for Washington?"

"That figures," Denny replied.

Another McLain quickie is "This is four more games than I won this time last year."

McLain maintains that he is pitching as well as ever, but the difference is the constant pressure of feeling he has to pitch a shutout to win.

"Ask the hitters, they'll tell you I'm the same," and you ask the hitters, and some say he is the same and some avoid a direct answer.

Williams believes McLain has a number of good years ahead at age 28.

However, the Senators' manager believes Denny may be forced to change his style.

"McLain is a craftsman," Williams said the other night. "A couple of times this year, when coach George Susce has told me that Denny has had little warming up, it has been a treat to watch him work."

Outsmarting the Hitters

"He has known it, too, but he worked on the hitters and outsmarted them and played the little game and could have won those games with a little batting support even though he did not have his good stuff."

Ted believes McLain could become the Eddie Lopat type. Williams will tell you that he feels Lopat was just about the smartest pitcher that he ever faced.

Williams and McLain have had several spirited but professional discussions about the merits of Denny pitching every four days. McLain was 4-6 under that routine and has not won while working every five days.

McLain said this has been his life and his arm, his eating and living habits, everything has been based on pitch, three days off and pitch again. "Ted has been swell to me, we just disagree on this," McLain said.

The night that Denny was clipped for 16 hits by the Orioles, his support was atrocious. "The worst game we've played in my three

(Continued on Page 24, Column 4)

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