Reusse: Tommies have a tough time at Harvard. **C2**

Top 10 Sports section in the nation

Awarded by the Associated Press Sports Editors (2023)

Lynx face do-or-die in Game 2 at Connecticut. **C3**

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2023 StarTribune STARTRIBUNE.COM/SPORTS • SECTION C

SPORTS

NO. 20 NORTH CAROLINA 31, GOPHERS 13 6:30 p.m. Saturday at Northwestern (B1G)

U is roughed up on Tobacco Road

Tar Heels' Maye shows off arm

By RANDY JOHNSON
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CHAPEL HILL, N.C. – Over the past couple of seasons, the Gophers defense has built a reputation of shutting down big plays by the opponent, ranking first nationally in fewest gains of 20 yards or more allowed in 2021 and eighth in 2022.

On Saturday, however, blown coverages and the big arm of North Carolina quarterback Drake Maye combined for a flurry of big plays by the 20th-ranked Tar Heels in their 31-13 victory over the Gophers at Kenan Stadium.

Maye passed for 414 yards, including 287 with gains of 46, 55 and 39 yards in the first half as North Carolina built a 21-10 lead. Considered a top five pick in the NFL draft next spring, Maye finished 29-for-40 as the Tar Heels gained 519 total yards.

"Their quarterback looked like a top five quarterback," Gophers coach P.J. Fleck said of Maye. "That's what they do. That's what they look like."

Meanwhile, the Gophers offense couldn't capitalize fully on Maye's two first-half interceptions, netting only a field goal. Quarterback

See **GOPHERS** on C9 ►

REINHOLD MATAY • Associated Press
North Carolina receiver Nate McCollum was tackled by Gophers defensive back Justin Walley in the first quarter.

Sloppy Gophers fail litmus test

CHIP SCOGGINS

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. – The game was billed as a litmus test, a chance to find out more about the Gophers football team and better assess its strengths and weaknesses against a ranked opponent on the road.

The answers revealed over 60 minutes of action were as clear as the blue skies that provided a postcard setting.

The Gophers flunked the test.

The passing game was abysmal.

The defense sabotaged good moments by allowing an uncommon number of explosive plays and third-down conversions.

More than anything, the Gophers undermined their chances of staying undefeated with self-inflicted mistakes and general sloppiness that cut to the heart of their 31-13 loss to the 20th-ranked North Carolina Tar Heels at Kenan Stadium.

"Just not much went right," coach P.J. Fleck said.

The optics of the performance were as painful as a tooth abscess.

See **SCOGGINS** on C9 ►

One thousand, five hundred and twenty-two. That's how often the Twins had struck out this season after Friday's game. They are on pace to set the MLB record. But does it matter?

Trevor Larnach struck out swinging in first inning of a 2-0 win over Kansas City in season opener.

Edouard Julien, right, went down on strikes in 3-1 loss to Toronto on May 26.

Twins strike out a season-high 18 times in 9-7 loss to Seattle at Target Field.

Kyle Farmer struck out looking in the ninth inning of a 10-2 win over the White Sox on Friday night for K No. 1,522.

A paradox of whiffing, winning

Story by PHIL MILLER • Photo by AARON LAVINSKY • Star Tribune

Donovan Solano remembers that devastating trudge back to the dugout, the shame he felt as a boy playing baseball in his hometown of Barranquilla, on the Caribbean coast of Colombia, whenever he struck out.

"I remember sometimes crying when I strike out. You feel so bad walking away," Solano said. "You want so much to do good things, but you have to deal with it. It was hard."

Whew. Just imagine the Twins' Kleenex budget if that was a typical reaction today.

On Sept. 6, with the Twins trailing the Guardians 2-1 in the top of the sixth inning and Max Kepler on first base, Carlos Correa swung over the top of a two-strike curveball from Sam Hentges that broke in on him. Correa marched back to the dugout, unaware he had made some ignominious team history: It was the 1,431st strikeout of the season, more than any Twins team has ever whiffed.

"Nobody wants to strike out, but it's part of the game," Correa shrugged. "Strikeouts happen."

Sure do — a lot. More this year than ever before, and more in Minnesota than anywhere else. The Twins have gone down on strikes 1,522 times through Friday, the runaway MLB leader this year and already the 17th-most by a major league team. And at their current pace of 10.3 strikeouts per game, they will shatter the Cubs' two-year-old record of 1,596 whiffs by more than 70.

The Twins strike out in 26.9% of their at-bats.

See **TWINS** on C5 ►