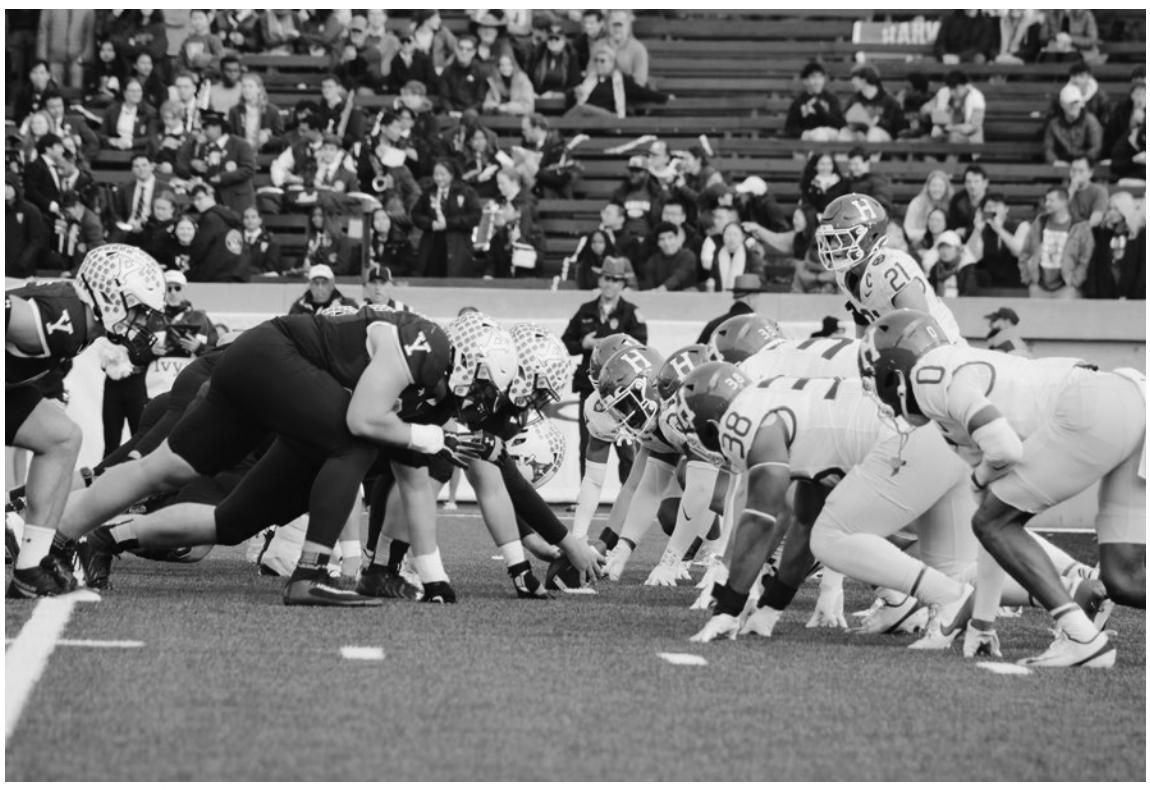
BASICS

"It's all in the game of love"
THE GAME OF LOVE SANTANA FT. MICHELLE BRANCH

A Yale student's guide to football



LIZA KAUFMAN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
The News compiled an overview of the formations, rules and background of football to know before kickoff at Fenway Park.

BY BEATRIX LOZACH AND ELI RATNER
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER AND STAFF REPORTER

The Yale Bulldogs will ship up to Boston and take the field at Fenway Park on Saturday to face the Harvard Crimson for the 142nd rendition of The Game.

The rivals will participate in a sporting tradition over which they have both loomed for the past century and a half. Yale boasts a host of alumni who have been influential forces in the sport, including Walter Camp, class of 1880, who is known as the father of American football. Camp, a three-year captain at Yale, fundamentally changed the rules of the game and popularized the sport.

North American football originally made extensive use of kicking, but teams shifted to running with the ball in 1874 when Harvard drew with McGill in a scoreless game played under rugby rules. In 1876, the Massasoit Convention formalized the adoption of the Rugby Code, establishing standards for football that Camp would upend just a few years later.

Camp altered rugby to favor swifter players by reducing the number of athletes on the field from 15 to 11. This allotted more open space and fostered more interesting plays. He also replaced the scrum with a line of scrimmage. In a scrum, players are huddled together, trying to get at the ball after a play starts. In a line of scrimmage, players are separated before the play starts, lined up with the offense on one side and the defense on the other.

The line of scrimmage also led coaches to develop a variety of formations, such as single-wing, short punt, long punt and T formations. The arrangements all heavily relied on the tailback, an offensive player, to take the snap, while the T formation poised the quarterback to take the snap and then pass the ball. Most modern offenses use variations on the T formation.

Camp also developed the sport's series of downs. A down is a period of 10 yards that typically starts with a snap and ends when the ball is declared out of bounds, when it's dropped or when the player with the ball is tackled. A team gets four initial downs. After a team has advanced 10 yards with the ball, they get a first down, which resets their number of downs. A touchdown happens when a player gets the ball across the goal line. The goal line is not at the very end of the field but separates the main playing field from the 10-yard endzone.

At the turn of the 20th century, the game of football underwent more codification, and in 1910 it was regimented into four 15-minute quarters.

As the length of play has been standardized, so have the positions on the field. The offense is led by the quarterback — Yale's fearless leader is Dante Reno '28 — who receives the ball from the center and either throws it to a wide receiver — the Bulldogs' Jaxton Santiago '28 or Lucius Anderson '29 — or hands the ball to a running back, Hugo Djeumeni Kemeni '29.

Reno is protected by his offensive line, made up of two guards, two tackles, a center and sometimes a tight-end — Yale's Graham Smith '27 — stationed on the outside of the tackles.

The offense has four opportunities to gain 10 yards to get closer to the end zone. If they reach the end zone and score a touchdown, they earn six points. A successful kick by Yale's Noah Piper '29 through the goalposts would add one point. If they fail to advance, then the defense earns possession. Typically, on a fourth down, the offense will elect to punt the ball away to push the defense back, and a kicker will take the field. The offense can also attempt to kick a field goal through the uprights for three points.

The defense's job is to ensure the opposing offense doesn't advance the ball. The receivers are guarded by cornerbacks and safeties, whose mission it is to not let a wide receiver catch the ball. Inside, the defense has linebackers who stand a few yards off the line of scrimmage, ready to tackle anyone who runs towards them or guard a receiver who enters their zone, depending on their play. Finally, the defense is rounded out with the defensive line, who match up against the offensive line, hoping to control the line of scrimmage, and either sack the quarterback on a pass or tackle a running back for a run play.

The most common penalties in football are false starts, offensive holding and defensive pass interference.

False starts occur when an offensive player moves before the snap, which starts off each play. Then, the line of scrimmage moves back five yards, and the down is redone.

Offensive holding occurs when an offensive player grabs a defender to prevent them from getting to the player with the ball. The offense then moves back 10 yards, and the down is redone.

Defensive pass interference penalties vary between professional sports and college football, but in both cases, they occur when a defender physically prevents a receiver from catching a pass. For college football, the line of scrimmage moves forward 15 yards and the down is repeated.

The Bulldogs will take on the Crimson on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. at Fenway Park.

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Key players to watch at this year's game

BY AUDREY KIM
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Team 153 will enter Fenway Park on Saturday aiming to defeat Harvard for the fifth consecutive year. The Bulldogs will need standout showings all over the field to pull off the feat.

Bulldogs on both sides of the ball have garnered particular attention from the media. Yale football play-by-play announcer Jim Cain said the team's biggest playmakers have been quarterback Dante Reno '28, running back Hugo Djeumeni Kemeni '29 and wide receivers Lucius Anderson '29 and Jaxton Santiago '28. On the defense, he said, cornerback Brandon Webster '26, defensive back Osize Daniyan '27 and linebackers Phoenix Grant '27, Jesse Schutzman '27 have stood out.

At the end of last season, Santiago suffered a season-ending leg injury in the fourth quarter of Yale's game against Youngstown State. This season, he's back and leading the Elis in receiving yards and touchdowns.

"I'm very grateful to be healthy this season after the way last season ended," Santiago wrote in an email to the News. "We have an amazing athletic training staff and strength staff that helped me get healthy for this year. My position coach, Coach Knight has also played a vital role in helping me improve from week to week. I think focusing on trying to get better every day has really helped."

Santiago's athleticism has allowed him to escape defenders and make critical catches for the team. He has gained 722 yards for the Bulldogs this season and has totaled nine touchdowns, more than any other Yale player.

"I have a great relationship with Dante and it's a lot of fun to go out there and play together," Santiago continued, referring to Reno. "I think I personally, as well as everyone on the team, just want to continue focusing on striving to be the best we can so that we can perform to our potential come game time."

Reno has also been vital to Yale's offense ever since he transferred from South Carolina in 2025. This season, he has thrown for 1,828 yards and 21 touchdowns and has had only six interceptions.

Harvard's starting quarterback, sophomore Charlie Smith, has recorded 2,113 yards and 19 touchdowns but has given away 11 interceptions to opponents. Despite the interceptions, Harvard's offensive statistics top Yale's when it comes to the passing game, with Harvard ranking first in passing offensive efficiency while Yale ranks second.

"They are very balanced offensively and very aggressive defensively. They have play makers on both sides of the ball that will impact the game if we are not sharp in our execution," Yale head coach Kevin Cahill wrote in a statement to the News, referring to Harvard.

Both Harvard and Yale have found success in the pass game, but the Bulldogs' offense holds a significant advantage over the Crimson when it comes to the run game.

"Some of the key players on offense are sophomore wide receiver Lucius Anderson and sophomore running back Hugo Djeumeni Kemeni," Santiago said in an interview. "Both of them are super explosive players that can score any time they touch the ball. They have each had great years and I'm excited to see them finish out strong."

Djeumeni Kemeni has gained 1,158 yards on the ground across 217 carries this season and has scored six touchdowns for the Elis. He leads Team 153 in carries, rushing yards and rushing touchdowns by a wide margin, and his size and speed allow him to take advantage of gaps in the defense and break defenders' tackles.

On the other side, Harvard's rushing leader, running back Xaviah Bascon, has recorded a gain of 417 total yards across 94 carries and has scored three touchdowns.

Yale also has many talented players on the defensive side, who have worked hard to counter the Bulldogs' opponents this season.

Santiago highlighted Kamara, Daniyan, Webster and Grant as "senior leaders on our team. They each have a knack for the ball and are always ready to make big plays."

Linebackers Grant and Schutzman, along with defensive back Daniyan, lead the team in tackles, totaling 69, 42 and 50 tackles each, respectively.



LIZA KAUFMAN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
The Bulldogs boast several strong players on Team 153 which will seek to catapult Yale to victory on Saturday.

Yale's defense ranks first in the Ivy League when it comes to the run game. The Bulldogs' defense has only allowed a total gain of 900 rushing yards and eight rushing touchdowns, while Harvard's defense, which ranks sixth against the run game, has allowed 1,235 yards and six touchdowns.

In defending the pass game, Yale defensive back Webster has been one of the biggest playmakers for the team and has broken up 15 passes so far. Defensive back and captain Kamara has also been a key player for Yale, and this season, he's recorded 39 total tackles, three passes defended and two interceptions, which he returned for a total gain of 50 yards.

According to Ivy League statistics, Harvard holds the advantage over Yale when it comes to guarding the pass game. The Crimson, which ranks first in both defense and defensive efficiency in the pass game, has allowed 142 completions out of 255 attempts and recorded 15 interceptions while only allowing 1,287 passing yards and eight passing touchdowns throughout the season.

Against the passing game, Yale's defense ranks third and comes in at fourth in defensive efficiency. The Bulldogs have a slightly lower completion percentage than Harvard, allowing 139 completions out of 272 attempts, but they have given up 1,732 passing yards and 16 passing touchdowns this year.

"We have a very tight team that play hard for each other," Cahill wrote. "That bond has been built over time and has started to show up more in the later part of this season."

Yale and Harvard will kick off at 3:30 p.m. at Fenway Park in Boston on Saturday, Nov. 21.

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