A CLOSER LOOK

"Loving you is a losing game."
ARCADE DUNCAN LAURENCE

Key stats to watch in Saturday's matchup

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LIZA KAUFMAN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

Data suggests that Harvard is the favorite going into the upcoming iteration of The Game, but recent history is on Yale's side. Standou t showings from both the Bulldog offense and defense could book a win at Fenway Park for the first time in Yale history.

The 142nd edition of The Game will kick off on Saturday, taking place at Fenway Park for the second time in rivalry history. On paper, Harvard is the heavy favorite, yet key figures show where the Elis can close the gap.

Last year, Harvard and Yale entered The Game in the Ivy conference's first and second spots, respectively. This year, only Harvard (8–1, 5–1 Ivy) is playing for the title, as Yale (5–4, 3–3 Ivy) is out of contention — though an upset on Saturday would keep the Crimson away from winning the title outright. Harvard has, however, already clinched the Ivy League's automatic bid to the FCS playoffs.

Harvard has scored an average of 28.9 points per game this season, a drastic drop from their sky-high 40.7 points per game in 2025. Yale's scoring output is nearly level with Harvard's this year, with the Bulldogs tallying 27.8 points per game.

However, the Crimson's defense has been the team's X-factor this season, allowing a league-low 13.9 points per game. Yale lags behind, allowing 21.6 points per game and ranking fifth in the Ivy League. The figure is nearly six points worse than last year's mark for the Bulldogs.

To break through, Yale will need to rely on its offense's greatest strength — its ground game. Yale runs for 172.8 yards per game, matching up favorably with Harvard's run defense, which allows 137.2 yards per game, ranking sixth in the Ivy League.

The matchup to watch this weekend, however, will be on the perimeter. Yale has some of the Ivy League's top aerial threats by yards per game. Lucius Anderson '29 averages 83.6, and Jaxton Santiago '28 averages 80.2.

They will be lining up against Crimson junior superstar Xaden Benson, who has logged an FCS-high nine interceptions, 15 passes defended and one forced fumble. The outcome will play a huge role in determining whether it will be a Crimson or blue swarm taking the field postgame.

The Bulldogs will, of course, need a stand-out showing from its defense in order to pull off an upset. Last year, their pass rush led the league with 32 sacks. This season, they've regressed to just 14 but have compensated through phenomenal third-down performance.

Opponents have converted on third downs just 24.4 percent of the time against Yale — the best mark in all of FCS. No other Ivy League defense holds opponents below 37 percent. If the unit can put together one more masterclass when the lights are brightest, an upset would be quite possible.

Yale's dominant 45-28 victory at the Yale Bowl last year marked the fourth year in a row in which the Bulldogs emerged victorious at The Game. It was Yale's first such streak since 1947.

Yale leads the all-time series 72–61–8.

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Players will trade turf for natural grass

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When Yale plays at Fenway Park for the 142nd edition of The Game this Saturday, the Bulldogs will trade the artificial turf used at the Yale Bowl and Harvard Stadium for an uncommon material for football fields: natural sod.

This year, Fenway — the home of the Boston Red Sox and one of baseball's most iconic venues — is hosting The Game for the second time ever. While experts have noted that natural sod has fewer negative health effects than artificial turf, the grass caused trouble for players in 2018, the last time The Game was played at the ballpark. But the Bulldogs told the News that they are prepared to beat the Crimson, no matter the playing field.

"Playing on a baseball field definitely brings some differences, but our coaches will do a great job preparing us for them," captain Abu Kamara '27 wrote in an email to the News. "Once the ball is kicked off, it's still football. The focus stays on Yale and executing what we need to."

The last time The Game was at Fenway, players slipped on the infield sod, which had been affected by poor weather conditions in the days leading up, according to the Harvard Crimson.

Head coach Kevin Cahill expressed confidence that Fenway Park will be better this year.

"Previously, the grass on the infield was not ideal. I am sure that Fenway Park has done a great job rectifying that issue from 2018," Cahill wrote in an email to the News. "They have held numerous Bowl Games, College and High school games since then. It will be a great opportunity for us."

Beyond the playing surface, Fenway Park's unconventional layout presents additional logistical considerations. Unlike traditional football stadiums, which typically position opposing teams on opposite sides of the field, Fenway's will require both teams to occupy the same sideline.

While the natural grass presents logistical challenges and differs from what the athletes are accustomed to, some researchers see it as a preferable alternative to the artificial turf used at many collegiate stadiums.

Vasilis Vasiliou, a professor at the School of Public Health who opposed the installation of turf at the Yale Bowl in 2019, called the sod at Fenway a "much better choice."

Vasiliou has previously raised concerns about the potential health effects of chemicals and materials in artificial turf, including microplastics and perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, which are also known as "forever chemicals."

"My opinion has not changed. Still, the concern is microplastics and PFAS. The crumb rubber is the worst," Vasiliou said in a phone interview. "Of course, you can say that there are pesticides and everything, but I don't think pesticides are as important in terms of toxicological value."

Others have also called out the use of crumb rubber. A 2018 study by faculty at the School of the Environment analyzed rubber samples, among which were "six samples used for infill in synthetic turf athletic fields." Out of the compounds detected, nine were known carcinogens and another 20 were recognized irritants, according to the study.

For the Bulldogs, the unusual venue also offers an opportunity to participate in a longstanding rivalry on one of the country's most recognizable sporting stages.

"Playing at Fenway is something none of us will forget," Kamara wrote. "It's one of the most historic venues in sports, and getting to play The Game there makes it even more special."

Fenway Park is the oldest active Major League Baseball ballpark.



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS CASTILLO WEST

While both the Yale Bowl and the Harvard Stadium use artificial turf, Fenway will greet players with natural sod. The natural grass presented trouble the last time The Game was at Fenway, but the Bulldogs told the News they will be prepared.

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