

SPORTS

“Education is a beautiful, liberating thing.”
MIN JIN LEE ’90 AMERICAN WRITER

FOR MORE SPORTS CONTENT,
VISIT OUR WEB SITE
yaledailynews.com

Seniors led first playoff run in history, four victories over Harvard

FOOTBALL
BY BRODY GILKISON
STAFF REPORTER

The bar for making a splash in Yale’s football history is high. The Bulldogs have 18 college football national championships, the most in the history of the sport. Walter Camp, class of 1880, known colloquially as the father of football, headlines a deep list of accomplished Yale alumni in the sport’s chronology.

But the seniors still managed to leave their mark on the program throughout a career that ended with Yale’s first playoff run in history.

After joining a team that had gone 5–5 in its previous season and ended its year with a heartbreaking loss to Harvard, the now-seniors saw a stark contrast during their rookie season.

Although Team 149 dropped its first game of the season to Holy Cross, it went on to win eight of its final nine games, including a 19–14 victory over Harvard, and became the Ivy League champions.

Among the only members of the class of 2026 to get meaningful playing time on Team 149 were Josh Pitsenberger ’26 and Inumidun Ayo-Durojaiye ’26, both of whom would become foundational pieces on future Yale teams.

In the now-seniors’ sophomore season, Yale’s 150th football team took the field looking to defend their conference title.

The Bulldogs got off to a slow start, losing their first two games to Holy Cross and Cornell. But from there, the Bulldogs won six of their next seven games, entering the week of The Game with a 6–3 record.

At The Game, Yale took down the rival Harvard Crimson to win the Ivy League Championship for the second year in a row. With the win, the class of 2026 were now two for two in conference championships – and against the team from the North.

The 2024 season brought adversity, with two early conference losses handicapping Team 151’s chances of winning its third straight Ivy League championship. However, the Bulldogs persevered, fighting all sixty minutes of every game that season.

This time around, Team 151 entered the week of The Game with one goal and one goal only. Yale, with a record of 6–3 overall and 3–3 in conference play, was mathematically eliminated from winning the conference title. The only thing



This season, the class of 2026 led the Bulldogs in claiming the Ivy title, which, under a new Ivy League rule, allowed them to reach the Football Championship Subdivision playoffs for the first time in history. The seniors also leave behind an undefeated record against Harvard.

left to do in the 2024 season was to take down the Crimson for the third year in a row.

In an absolute barn burner that Yale led the entire game, the Bulldogs upset the Football Championship Subdivision No. 17 Harvard, winning 34–29. Among the top moments of the game was Pitsenberger’s unforgettable 39-yard touchdown catch and score, where he seemingly juked out half of Harvard’s defense en route to the end zone. It was the class of 2026’s third straight victory over the Crimson.

The following offseason was unlike anything Ivy League football had ever seen before. In a shocking announcement, the Ivy League adopted a rule change allowing its teams to play in the postseason. This meant that, for the first time ever, the conference champion would receive an automatic berth in the Football Championships Subdivision playoffs following the end of the regular season.

Yale, a program that has long held the record for most national championships, was given a chance to compete for their first title since 1944, when the Ivy Group Agreement was created.

With the stakes now as high as

they had ever been before, Team 152 entered the 2025 season led by team captain Josh Pitsenberger.

The Bulldogs started strong, with two straight wins to kick off the season. Then, Yale fell 31–13 to Lehigh University, led by then-coach Kevin Cahill. The following week, Yale’s defense surrendered a last-second game-winning field goal to Dartmouth to fall to 2–2 for the season.

The Bulldogs bounced back a week later with a 40-point win over Stonehill College to right the ship. From there on, it was smooth sailing for Team 152 as they rattled off four consecutive victories over Ivy League opponents to set the stage for the 141st playing of The Game.

No. 8 Harvard entered the final week of the regular season with a perfect 9–0 record, the heavy favorite to be the inaugural Ivy League automatic qualifier.

But Yale, with just one conference loss up to this point in the season, still had good reason to keep its Ivy title hopes alive. A win over Harvard would have put both teams at 6–1 in conference play, with the head-to-head tiebreaker then favoring Yale.

Yale stripped Harvard on

the first play from scrimmage, deep in Crimson territory, and never looked back. A quick score and another field goal put the Bulldogs up 10–0 nine minutes into the first quarter.

A few drives later, Pitsenberger punched the ball in for the first of his three touchdowns on the day to put the Elis up 17–0. While Harvard finally managed to put points on the board, in the following drive, wideout Nico Brown ’26 hauled in a 64-yard touchdown pass, sending the Bowl into pandemonium.

Yale maintained its lead throughout the game, and the Bulldogs secured their third Ivy title in four years. In addition to their fourth-straight win over the Crimson, Yale had also punched their ticket to their first-ever Football Championship Subdivision playoff appearance.

The first-round playoff matchup saw Team 152 traveling to take on Youngstown State University.

Down 42–14 halfway through the third quarter, the Bulldogs pulled off the unthinkable. Overcoming a 0.2 percent win probability, Yale came all the way back to knock off the Penguins 43–42. In an instant classic, the Bulldogs won their first playoff

game in school history.

The following week, Yale’s Cinderella story came to a close with a close road loss to the eventual champions, Montana State University.

Many of the Team 152 seniors have since found new homes. Pitsenberger recently signed as a priority undrafted free agent with the Houston Texans, while Ayo-Durojaiye signed with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats of the Canadian Football League.

With eligibility still remaining, many other seniors found new homes with high-major FBS programs as well.

Michael Bennett ’26 recently departed to join the Oregon Ducks, while Brown, Ezekiel Larry ’27 and Wilhelm Daal ’26 all left to join ACC programs in Stanford University, the University of Virginia and Duke University, respectively. Center Leo Bluhm ’26 is headed to Rice University, defensive lineman Ejiroghene Egodogbare ’26 committed to the University of Houston and safety Josh Tarver ’26 transferred to Tarleton State University to round out the Texas crew.

Contact **BRODY GILKISON** at brody.gilkison@yale.edu.



LIZA KAUFMAN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR