

SPORTS

“You can’t just talk politics all the time — it’s boring.”
CHRIS CUOMO ’92 AMERICAN NEWS BROADCASTER

With passion and proficiency, seniors played to postseason highs

WOMEN’S LACROSSE
BY LIZA KAUFMAN
SPORTS EDITOR

Before the Yale women’s lacrosse class of 2026 arrived in New Haven, the Bulldogs had never won an outright Ivy League regular season title. Four years later, the team has won two.

During the six graduating seniors’ four years with the program, Yale won two Ivy League championships, earned two conference tournament titles and made three consecutive NCAA tournament appearances, including back-to-back quarterfinal runs in 2024 and 2025.

Head coach Erica Bamford wrote in a text to the News that the seniors “helped to solidify the standard of excellence and success for Yale Women’s Lacrosse.”

Before the current seniors’ sophomore year, Yale had only won regular season titles in 1980 and 2003, and both were shared with a different team in the

Ivy conference. The Bulldogs’ championships in 2024 and 2026 marked the first outright titles in program history.

The team’s three straight NCAA tournament runs in 2024, 2025 and 2026 also transformed Yale’s postseason resume. From the program’s inception as a club sport in 1975 until 2024, the Bulldogs had only made three NCAA appearances — in 1984, 2003 and 2007.

The recent success of the program is the only latest stretch in a period of growth that began when Yale hired Bamford in July 2015.

Bamford, a four-year starter at North Carolina who won gold during her time on the U.S. Women’s National Team, made an immediate impact on the program.

In her second season at the helm, the team not only broke records for goals, points and draw controls but also beat its first ranked opponent in seven years.

Across her eleven seasons coaching, Bamford has guided the program to unparalleled success: two Ivy titles in three

years, back-to-back conference tournament championships and three consecutive NCAA tournament runs.

Following the team’s record-breaking 2024 season, Bamford was unanimously voted Ivy League Coach of the Year. Bamford credits the sustained success of the program to the student-athletes.

“Our women are passionate about lacrosse, fiercely competitive, and are grateful for the opportunity to represent Yale,” Bamford wrote.

In 2022, during Yale’s first season back after COVID-19, the Bulldogs finished second in conference play with a 6-1 record and reached the conference tournament title game, signaling a program on the upswing.

Then, in 2023, when the current seniors joined the team, Yale rebounded from the previous season’s loss to Princeton at the Ivy League tournament, edging the Tigers 11-10 to advance to the trophy game. There, they fell to the

University of Pennsylvania 14-15 in overtime.

During the 2024 season, the team mounted a major comeback. After leaving 2023 with a 4-3 record in conference play, the Bulldogs concluded 2024 with a 17-3 overall record and a perfect 7-0 showing in the Ivy League.

The Elis opened that year’s season, during which the current seniors were sophomores, with a 13-12 victory over Stanford that kick-started a nine-game win streak. The team went undefeated in Ivy League play to clinch Yale’s first-ever outright Ivy League regular season title. In the semifinals, the Bulldogs knocked off No. 4 seed Harvard 14-10 and then triumphed over No. 3 seed Penn 10-9 in the finals to win the program’s first conference tournament championship and secure the Ivy League’s automatic NCAA berth.

No. 6 seed Yale then cruised to a 17-4 victory over unseeded Binghamton University and defeated Johns Hopkins University 9-7 in the second round to advance to the quarterfinals. Yale’s season ended in the NCAA quarterfinals with a loss to Syracuse University.

Yale again emerged as one of the nation’s top teams in 2025. No. 8 Yale opened the season with a bang, upsetting No. 4 Michigan University 12-6 at home. The victory extended to a seven-game win streak that was ultimately snapped at Stanford University. Although the team struggled in early Ivy play, they flipped the script in April with a 13-10 victory over No. 6 Syracuse. Four consecutive conference victories later, the Bulldogs entered the Ivy League tournament as the No. 2 seed.

The team then went on to beat the No. 3 seed Quakers 11-10 in the semifinals before destroying the No. 1 seed Tigers 17-6 in the title game to win the tournament. The back-to-back 2024 and 2025 conference tournament titles made history for Yale women’s lacrosse.

That year, No. 7 Yale made its second straight NCAA run, defeating the University of Albany and No. 19 Syracuse, before the postseason campaign ended with a loss to No. 2 Boston College.

After graduating 16 seniors following the 2025 season, Yale entered 2026 with no

returning starters in the midfield or attack. The senior class stepped up to support their team — one of the youngest in the Ivy League.

“Our senior class did an exceptional job leading a young team,” Bamford wrote. “They embraced the challenge of a young team and the results followed.”

Senior defender and captain Emmy Pascal ’26 showed consistency throughout the season. Aside from missing one game, Pascal has started every contest for the Bulldogs since her first season and won multiple All-American and All-Ivy honors. Defender Bella Saviano ’26 established her position as a cornerstone of Yale’s defense from her rookie season and has started every game for the past two seasons, while attacker Ashley Newman ’26 had a breakout senior season, emerging as an offensive leader with 30 goals and 15 assists.

This season, the class of 2026 helped secure the team’s ticket to the national stage. The Bulldogs started the season with seven wins, highlighted by an 11-6 upset over No. 5 Michigan, before dropping a narrow 5-6 battle to No. 9 Syracuse. However, the Elis quickly regained momentum, and a 7-4 win over Penn punched Yale’s ticket to the Ivy League tournament as the No. 1 seed.

Senior Day proved to be more than just a celebration of the six seniors’ contributions to the program, as a 14-13 victory against Harvard clinched Yale’s second outright Ivy League regular season title in three years.

Yale beat Brown 11-6 in the tournament semifinals before falling to Princeton after the Tigers’ six-goal fourth quarter explosion. Despite the loss, Yale earned an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament, where their season ended against Boston College.

The seniors now leave behind one of the most successful stretches in program history.

“The legacy that this team leaves behind is their steadfast belief, trust, and confidence in themselves and each other,” Bamford said.

During their four years, the team held a 57-18 overall record and went 22-6 in conference play.

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LIZA KAUFMAN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
The graduating seniors saw the women’s lacrosse program through years of unprecedented success, including the team’s first-ever outright Ivy League championship win and three consecutive appearances on the national stage.

Following after big stars, seniors leave court as most decorated class

MEN’S BASKETBALL
BY WALTER ROYAL
SPORTS EDITOR

The Yale men’s basketball team has won a record 85 games over the past four years. This spring, the three seniors graduate following a pair of NCAA tournament appearances and a thrilling sophomore season win over No. 4 seed Auburn.

The members of the class of 2026 stepped onto the collegiate court with team expectations already sky-high. The men’s basketball program was coming off its second NCAA Tournament appearance in three years and teemed with talent.

Though pressure abounded, the friendships forged among the now-senior class helped ease the players’ transitions as first years.

“It was just a shell shock for me just to be at Yale, coming from California and moving out here,” Devon Arlington ’26 said in a phone interview. “But Nick and Danny, those are my boys from day one,” he added, referring to Nick Townsend ’26 and Danny Wolf.

The 2022-23 Ivy Conference season placed the first-year crew in the midst of a title race, in which both Yale and Princeton finished 10-4 in league play. Yale handled the Tigers in both of their regular season matchups, winning both by double-digit margins.

The Ivy League Tournament final featured a third edition of the rivalry that season. A heroic effort on the glass, coupled with a few costly Yale turnovers, however, lost Yale the opportunity to go on to the NCAA Tournament as the Ivy representative. The Bulldogs lost to

Vanderbilt in the first round of the National Invitation Tournament to end their season.

Following the end-of-year heartbreak, Casey Simmons ’26 transferred to the team from Northwestern. The team immediately embraced Simmons, according to Townsend, who is the outgoing captain and reigning Ivy League Player of the Year.

“I feel really grateful for the people that I’ve played with, no matter the year, but especially my class. I think Casey really made our group whole when he came in,” Townsend said in a phone interview.

While the entire class of 2026 saw improvement as sophomores, it was Danny Wolf that took the spotlight for the Elis during the 2023-24 season. Wolf, who is currently a power forward for the NBA’s Brooklyn Nets, was a member of the class of 2026 before he transferred to the University of Michigan and was subsequently selected for the NBA draft. As a sophomore, Wolf led Yale in scoring en route to a chaotic 2024 Ivy League tournament.

Princeton, the 12-2 Ivy No. 1 seed and presumptive favorite following a Sweet Sixteen run the prior year, dropped its first-round match in a shocking upset by Brown, the No. 4 seed who went 8-6 in conference play. With the door wide open, the Bulldogs stepped up to fill the void. Yale, led by Wolf as well as the NBA-bound duo of John Poulakidas ’25 and Bez Mbeng ’25, snagged the Ancient Eight’s automatic bid to the big dance, where a juggernaut Auburn squad awaited them.

The Tigers jumped out to a 41-34 halftime lead before the Elis came roaring back, outscor-

ing Auburn 44-35 in the second half. As the buzzer sounded, the team swarmed the court, Townsend said, adding that his role model and close friend Jack Molloy ’25 hoisted Townsend in the air.

“I don’t think I’ve been picked up very many times in my life,” Townsend said. He characterized the moment as one of “pure elation.”

An NCAA second-round loss did little to dampen the team’s mood, as the Bulldogs entered the 2024-25 season primed for their best season yet. Though Wolf had transferred to Michigan, both Townsend and Simmons stepped up to the plate. Townsend led the Ivy League in rebounds and averaged 15.4 points per game, while Simmons’ 103.6 defensive rating placed him in the top 10 players in the conference. All of this culminated in a 13-1 conference record, and following wins over Princeton and Cornell, the Bulldogs were back in March Madness for the second year in a row.

A loss to Texas A&M University in the first round did not dilute the impact of the historic 2024-25 season. Yale had never before made back-to-back NCAA tournament appearances, and Mbeng became the first player in conference history to be designated both Player of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year.

The class of 2026, rather than rest on their laurels, took another leap forward in their senior seasons. Arlington emerged as a critical piece, becoming the team’s second point guard and steering the second unit. Simmons took home the Ivy League Defensive Player of the Year award, continuing to show

his prowess on both sides of the ball. Townsend, the captain, was a unanimous first-team All-Ivy selection and the Ivy League Player of the Year.

The 2025-26 season got off to a hot start, with the Elis sneaking into the top 50 in the Kenpom rankings. The season ended earlier than many hoped, however, with a shocking University of Pennsylvania Ivy League tournament upset dampening the thrill of a second consecutive Ivy regular season title.

Still, the accomplishments of the class of 2026 are unprecedented in the history of Yale men’s basketball. Arlington, when asked the secret to the senior’s success,

gave a simple answer.

“We’ve always just stuck together. We try to lead by example every year and learn from our upperclassmen and pass the torch, keep the culture going for our team. I think that’s why our team has had so much success in the past years, and I think that’s why it’ll continue,” Arlington said.

Townsend and Simmons both plan to play professionally this upcoming season, while Arlington will join Stonehill College as a grad transfer.

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LIZA KAUFMAN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
This year’s seniors bonded amidst player turnover and found unprecedented success, setting the men’s basketball program record for most wins as a class.