

FROM THE FRONT

"The ending is nearer than you think, and it is already written. All that we have left to choose is the correct moment to begin.."

ALAN MOORE WRITER

Women’s basketball team floundered under new coach

BASKETBALL FROM PAGE 1

A new sheriff in town
Eshe was named the 11th Joel E. Smilow Class of 1954 Head Coach of Yale Women's Basketball on April 25, 2022. As a first-time head coach, she introduced a new style of play that she hoped would lead the team to its first Ivy championship in more than 40 years.
“We’re gonna enjoy the grind and the process that it takes to prepare to win championships,” Eshe said at a ceremonial press conference two days after the announcement.

Eshe, who played college basketball at the University of Florida, had a brief professional career in the WNBA before playing in overseas basketball leagues. In 2014, she began her college coaching career as assistant coach at East Carolina University. She then held assistant coach roles at LaSalle University and Princeton University before being named the Yale head coach at age 37.

Every coaching change brings some challenges, and Yale’s gamble on a first-time head coach was bound to present some uncertainty, former player Grace Thybulle ’25 said.

Thybulle explained that coaches often play vastly different “systems,” characterized by the players’ positioning on the court and the types of plays they run. Five people on or close to the team in the last three years described how Eshe’s decision to introduce a new style of basketball, a departure from previous head coach Allison Guth, has proven difficult to execute.

“The two systems are completely different,” said Alexandra Maund ’19, an alumna of the team who now commentates on its games for ESPN+ broadcasts. For one thing, under Eshe, the “post players,” those who play primarily near or below the basket, would move farther beyond that area, often setting a screen before moving there, Maund explained.

“When I first came to a practice last year, I was very confused by what I was seeing, and so I couldn’t imagine what the players were feeling,” Maund, who remains close to the team, said.

But Eshe’s new style went beyond decisions on the court. She aimed to instill a new ethos.

“The first thing is about establishing the culture,” Eshe told the local radio host Barbara “Babz” Rawls-Ivy, speaking last fall about her transition to Yale. “These first two years, that’s pretty much what it’s been about.”

But her efforts to remake the team’s culture have not been well received, according to four former players, including one who spoke on the condition of anonymity to maintain a relationship with Eshe.

Three former players said Eshe would bash previous teams for their lack of commitment to the game and criticize players formerly on the team for their attitude towards the sport.

While Guth, the prior coach, built practice schedules each semester around players’ class schedules, Eshe wanted her team to follow her own schedule pref-

erences, said Nyla McGill ’25, who played one season under Guth and two under Eshe before the dispute with her new head coach.

Thybulle said there was a “disconnect” between the way players sought to balance academics and athletics and the way Eshe expected them to do so.

“A lot of people who came to Yale, basketball wasn’t necessarily the most important thing in their lives,” she said. “They were more so coming to Yale because they valued other things. I think that was looked at as ‘OK, here’s this group of girls who have been recruited here who aren’t necessarily hungry to win.’”

When asked in April about the allegations about her coaching style, Eshe wrote in a statement to the News that “success stems not only from what we accomplish on the court, but from the environment we create around our student-athletes every day.”

She added: “I remain deeply committed to fostering a program where our athletes can thrive — both academically and athletically.”

Losing players

In recent years, the team has also struggled with an unusual amount of player turnover.

Since 2023, seven players have split from the team and graduated or are on track to graduate without using their entire four years of NCAA eligibility, according to rosters published on the Yale Athletics website.

That attrition marks an increase from previous seasons. Between 2010 and 2019, the team averaged one non-injured player departing the roster during or after each season. Since 2023, that average has more than doubled, to 2.33 players per season.

McGill said she was removed from the team in March 2024 after an argument with Eshe. McGill was initially suspended from the team after missing a practice due to a midterm exam, she said. A conversation with Eshe about her future on the team culminated in Eshe kicking McGill out of her office using an expletive, which another player confirmed hearing from the nearby locker room.

“Coach D wanted the players to be at her beck and call,” McGill said, referring to Eshe. “All she cared about was whether you could deliver on the basketball court.”

When asked in March about McGill’s departure from the team, Eshe did not offer an explanation but wrote to the News that “the personnel on every team changes year to year.” Eshe did not comment on the exchange with McGill when asked in an email this week.

Christen McCann ’25, who quit the team in December 2024, said Eshe and her coaching staff seemed not to understand the “true nature of the 18- to 22-year-old kids,” at least compared to Guth, the head coach her first year.

“Being able to recognize and implement the proper way of going about shaping these kids and showing them the way is something that needs to be valued by every coach,” McCann

said. “My freshman year, the biggest difference was that there was space to just be.”

Avery Lee ’25 left the team for the 2023-24 season and returned in her senior year as the captain. Lee declined to comment for this article.

Just after the 2024-25 season concluded, two players, Lola Lesmond ’26 and Abigail Long ’28 entered the NCAA transfer portal, as first reported by the sports website On3. Neither player ended up transferring to a different school, and both are absent from the 2025-26 roster available online. Lesmond and Long each declined to comment.

“I think it is concerning to lose so many people, especially on such a small team,” Thybulle said. “Every loss, every quit is really felt.”

A rookie roster

The team entered the 2024-25 season short on top talent even before McCann, Lesmond and Long left.

Jenna Clark ’24, the team’s leading scorer for the prior two seasons and one of the best assisting players in the country, graduated in 2024.

Jenn Hatfield, who covers the Ivy League for The IX Basketball, a website about women’s basketball, described Clark in a phone interview as “difficult” to replace.

Meanwhile, McGill’s departure left the team without its top defensive player. She was the Ivy League Co-Defensive Player of the Year in the 2022-23 season.

With the team’s highest-scoring player graduated and best defensive player off the roster, Eshe had to find contributions elsewhere last season. But players with collegiate experience were few and far between, due to the departures and recruiting gaps such as the signing of only a single player — a sophomore last year — for the class of 2027.

Last season, the team had one standout: Mackenzie Egger ’25. Egger, who contributed an average of just 3.9 points per game throughout her first three seasons with the Elis, led the team in scoring last season with 15.3 points

per game, more than double that of the next-best scorer, Thybulle. Egger led the Ivy League with 245 rebounds — 75 more than her closest competitor.

“Mac has always set the gold standard for hard work, and her commitment to refining her shot and building confidence in the off-season has truly paid off,” Eshe wrote in her March statement to the News.

Eshe also relied heavily last season on her five first-year recruits, as well as a sophomore transfer. By Feb. 7 last season, Yale was the only Ivy League team with five first-year players who had each seen action in 15 or more games, according to a Yale Athletics news post.

In the March statement, Eshe called the class of 2028 “outstanding.”

“We’re excited to see their continued development and the impact they will make next year,” she wrote.

However, a heavy first-year rotation still presented challenges. Hatfield said the prominence of first years resulted in a team “more reliant on players with less experience.”

When asked about what led to the team’s troubling record, Thybulle also named the prominence of first years playing as a reason.

“There was just a high margin for error,” Thybulle said. “And I think everyone’s in the process of learning.”

What comes next?

Looking toward next season, it remains unclear how Yale women’s basketball will chart a path forward, still with an underclassmen-heavy roster.

Since Lesmond quit the team, Kiley Capstraw ’26, this year’s captain, will be the only senior on the team this season. The team’s only non-transfer junior tore her ACL last season, which will likely cause her to miss the 2025-26 season, a former teammate told the News.

On July 2, the program announced its six-player incoming first-year class, which is larger than the previous year’s class of

five recruits. Two junior transfers are also joining this year’s roster.

Two of the first years and the two junior transfers are over six feet, bringing some much-needed size to Yale’s frontcourt.

Over the summer, one of the team’s assistant coaches, Amber Raisner, left Yale to join West Point’s women’s basketball program as an assistant coach and recruiting coordinator. Raisner, who in March was honored as one of 30 “up-and-coming women’s basketball coaches” by the Women’s Basketball Coaches Association, had been the last remaining member of the original four-member coaching staff Eshe hired in 2022.

The program announced on July 30 that Anna Kim, a player in a Korean basketball league from 2020 to last year, would fill Raisner’s shoes. Kim had served as the coordinator for player development at the University of Washington’s women’s basketball team for two seasons, her only job with a collegiate team according to her biography on the Yale Athletics website.

Less than a week later, the team left for an overseas tour in France and Spain from Aug. 5 to 15. International tours — which the NCAA permits teams to take only once every four years — are often scheduled in the hopes of building team culture and as a recruiting incentive, Matt Brown, who writes a newsletter about college sports, told The IX Basketball in a June article.

The team played two games on the tour, against the Barcelona-based athletic club El Pacto on Aug. 8, and the French club Antibes Select on Aug. 11. In those games, the Bulldogs fell 73-66 and 76-65, respectively.

Yale women’s basketball is scheduled to play its first game of the 2025-26 season on Nov. 7 against Northeastern at home.

Meredith Henderson contributed reporting.

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Delila Eshe speaks at a news conference in April 2022, two days after being named the women's basketball head coach / William McCormack

Yale, YPD union negotiations warm after two tense years

UNION FROM PAGE 1

“We have not reached an agreement yet but hope to have one soon,” Sarno wrote.

Reached by phone Thursday afternoon, Head of Public Safety Duane Lovello said he was as “anxious to move this forward as anyone else.”

Under the current contract

extension — which was instituted after the last contract expired in June 2023 — the union was prohibited from striking while the agreement remained in effect.

Instead, over the past two years, the YPBA has capitalized on highly visible events to stir community support for its demands. During Bulldog Days in the spring, more than 30 union members gathered outside the Schwarzman Center to hand out leaflets encouraging students and parents to support a fair contract for “the people protecting you.”

However, as first years arrived on campus for move-in on Aug. 17 — and upperclassmen returned only a few days later — the YPBA was noticeably silent, after two consecutive years of applying public pressure on Yale during move-in days.

Hall explained the organization’s silence as the outcome of “significant progress” made over the summer in negotiations between the union and the University.

“We didn’t think it was necessary to do anything on freshmen arrival,” Hall said.

In November 2024, University negotiators had presented their “Last, Best and Final Offer” to the union. The union promptly rejected

the offer, which did not meet its demands for long-term disability benefits for officers injured in the line of duty, wage adjustments and enhanced due process protections.

Hall previously told the News that the union provided a counterproposal a month later and Yale refused to respond.

It is unclear whether the University has agreed to meet any of the counterproposal’s demands over the summer negotiations.

Last spring, Officer Richard Simons, the caretaker of the Yale Public Safety service dog Heidi, had expressed his hope to retire with Heidi once the new contract came into effect.

Simons told the News this week that he is confident he will be able to retire by the end of the month.

Simons’ and Heidi’s retirement party is currently scheduled for Sept. 22.

The last YPD contract was ratified in 2018 and expired in June 2023.

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The Yale Police union entered into contract negotiations with the University in June 2023. After two years of rallying and a move to strike, the union’s president said a new contract is finally near. / Ellie Park