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BRODY GILKISON '27

Team 153 set to take on the Crusaders in season kickoff

Football

BY BRODY GILKISON
STAFF REPORTER

The defending Ivy League champions are set to kick off the 2026 football season this weekend against the Crusaders of Holy Cross.

Just a season removed from the program's first-ever FCS Playoff appearance and victory, the Bulldogs will look to build on their past success, even with a new leader — Head Coach Kevin Cahill — at the helm.

Team 153 begins the season ranked No. 19 in the nation in the FCS, one of two Ivy League teams currently ranked, with Harvard coming in at 25th.

On the other side of the ball, Holy Cross (0–3, 0–2 Patriot) is still looking for its first win of the season after dropping three consecutive games to FCS teams Lehigh (3–0, 3–0 Patriot) and Colgate (2–1, 2–0 Patriot), along with FBS Miami University (1–1, 0–0 MAC).



LIZA KAUFMAN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
The Yale football team will commence its season on Saturday afternoon as the Bulldogs play against the Holy Cross Crusaders in Worcester, MA.

A look at the Crusaders

Though rosters turn over every year, the Bulldogs have become familiar with Holy Cross. After meeting for the first of 39 times back in 1903, this is now the ninth consecutive year that the two teams have played. Holy Cross has also been Yale's season opener for the last eight years, and the Bulldogs currently hold a 31–8 record in games against the Crusaders.

Holy Cross' offense has been mediocre at best both in the air and on the ground. Having started every game at quarterback, David Lynch has completed 57 percent of his passes and thrown for 240 yards per game, but has a horrifyingly low 2:5 touchdown-to-interception ratio. Lynch is still looking for a true first option at receiver, as not one has caught more than 12 passes this season, and none average more than 70 yards per game.

Now, the run game hasn't exactly made it easy on Lynch and his receivers, as the Crusaders average just 61 yards per game as a team. They have just one rushing touchdown as well, which is perhaps an indicator as to why Holy Cross has only averaged nine points per game over their first three contests.

On the defensive end, the stat sheet doesn't look a whole lot better. Holy Cross opponents have averaged 38.33 points per game thus far and have been gaining well over 400 yards per game as well. The secondary has done a decent job, having surrendered just 214 yards per game through the air, but the problems lie within the front seven.

The Crusaders have given up an astounding 211 yards per game on the ground, as well as seven touchdowns. Outside of linebackers Adam Due and Will Miller, wrapping up the ball carrier has become a large problem for the Holy Cross defense, and one thing that the Yale coaches will need to take advantage of.

Yale's key to victory on Saturday

With this in mind, the Bulldogs should be looking to tear it up on the ground. With a tremendous returning offensive line, including Quinton Lewis '27, Grey McGown '29 and Jackson St. Aubyn '27, as well as a plethora of capable running backs, Yale will seek to aggressively attack a weaker Holy Cross defensive line.

Behind center, quarterback Dante Reno '28 — who put on an impressive sophomore campaign last season — has a chance to get connected with his receivers and fine-tune the offense before tougher opponents appear on the Bulldogs' schedule. Receivers Jaxton Santiago '28 and Lucius Anderson '29 will be receiving plenty of attention downfield, but it will be interesting to see how Reno works with his tight end duo of Graham Smith '27 and Brady Wagner '28, which could very well end up being the X-Factor for the Bulldog offense this season.

On defense, expect Yale's strong defensive line to cause problems for the Crusader rushing attack. A group that has continued to be one of the best running and pass rush defenses year in and year out regardless of roster changes, the Bulldog defense should have a field day against the Holy Cross offense.

One thing to look out for is the linebacker group. While Phoenix Grant '27 is already expected to anchor the group, it will be interesting to see who the Yale coaching staff trots out there to assist him after losing a few key defensive players last season.

The Bulldogs will kick off their season at 2 p.m. on Saturday at Fitton Field. The game will be streamed on ESPN+.

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

Stat of the Day

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