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"Fans are always an x-factor, and so the more fans we have, the louder it is, and the more fun an environment it is for the girls to play in"
DALILA ESHE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL HEAD COACH

Bulldogs jump to early lead but fall victim to second-half UCF comeback

MEN'S BASKETBALL

BY BRODY GILKISON
STAFF REPORTER

The Yale Bulldogs (1–1, 0–0 Ivy) fell to power conference opponent University of Central Florida Knights (2–0, 0–0 Big 12) in Orlando on Friday night.

The Bulldogs entered the contest after prevailing over Howard University in Monday's season-opening game. On Friday, after jumping out to a 33-22 lead in the first half, the Bulldogs could not maintain their advantage against the Knights, who a season ago made their way to the Big 12 quarterfinals and earned a bid to March Madness. Yale tallied their first loss of the season, 87-75.

"Teams don't always come out shooting the ball great when they are playing far from home, especially this early in the season," Riley Fox '28, who led the team in scoring with 24 points on the night, said in a phone interview. "We're a really good offensive team, and after our first game where we didn't perform up to our expectations, we wanted to prove to ourselves that we have what it takes to compete at the highest level."

The Bulldogs struck first on Friday. Wings Fox and Jordan Brathwaite '28 got off to a great start, scoring 14 of the team's first 16 points as Yale took an 18-11 lead eight minutes into the contest.

As the Bulldogs continued to build their lead, the team kept crashing the boards hard against a much larger UCF team. The trio of Courtney Wallace '29, Jack Sullivan '29 and Daniel Ogunyemi '29 were relentless as they grabbed rebounds and gave Yale multiple second-chance opportunities in the first half.

The Bulldogs capitalized on those chances with a pair of Fox threes as well as a few buckets by Wallace, and, with just four minutes to go in the half, the lead was 35-23 in favor of Yale.

But the lead stopped there. Fresh off a 41-point showing in the Knights' opener against Florida Gulf Coast University, Dior Johnson found his rhythm in the waning minutes of the half. Finishing the first with 15 points, Johnson willed his squad back into the game and managed to cut the lead to just three points entering the break.

As the second half got underway, UCF took its first lead of the game just a minute in on a pair of free throws and a dunk by John Bol. But Brathwaite and Wallace kept the Bulldogs in the game with a handful of buckets of their own, and the game was tied at 56 points apiece with 11 minutes to go.

UCF's Riley Kugel laid the ball in to take a two-point lead, but Mullin responded with a three-pointer, giving Yale a 59-58 lead. A pair of buckets by the two teams saw the lead tied back up again at 61 with exactly 10 minutes left in the affair.

The Knights then took the lead, and the Bulldogs never regained their advantage. With many players in foul trouble, coach James Jones had to be picky with who he put on the court. Mullin, Brathwaite and Fox continued to convert on any scoring chances they got, but Johnson was unstoppable against a worn-down Yale team, and the Knights built their lead to double digits as the clock ticked down.

Finishing with 28 for the game, Johnson and the Knights handed Yale their first loss of the season by a score of 87-75.

"We had a great first half. We shot the ball really well, and we moved it," Jones said in the postgame press conference, according to a Yale Athletics press release. "That was a big part of what made you feel good. There was an opportunity to win the game, and we had a 13-point lead in the first half but just couldn't maintain it. We got into foul trouble, and that really hurt us tonight."

Despite the loss, the Bulldogs showed plenty of potential and gave fans reason to be excited. Fox tallied 24 points and seven rebounds, Mullin scored 17 points and Wallace finished with a career-high 14 points.

Although UCF featured a much larger roster than Yale, the Bulldogs finished just five boards behind them in total rebounding — a good sign for the team, which will face much shorter teams when they return to conference play in January.

But for the time being, Yale will need to keep up their physicality. Another Big XII opponent awaits when they travel to Waco, Texas, to take on Baylor University. In the Tuesday matchup, the Bulldogs will clash with the Bears and former Bulldog Isaac Celiscar.

Yale will tip off against Baylor University at 8 p.m. at Foster Pavilion, and the game will be streamed on ESPN+.

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LIZA KAUFMAN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
After owning a double-digit lead in the first half, Yale suffered their first loss of the season on the road to the University of Central Florida. Hot shooting faded, though the Bulldogs played their power conference opponents close the whole way.

Yale starts the season 2–0 after crushing Division III Saint Francis

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

BY TANNER BATTLE
STAFF REPORTER

The Yale women's basketball team (2–0, 0–0 Ivy) beat Saint Francis University (0–1, 0–0 PAC) by 82 points at home on Friday.

The 106-24 final score marked the second consecutive matchup in which the Bulldogs eclipsed the century mark in points. The Red Wolves transitioned from Division I to Division III this year, and their entire roster from last season transferred or quit the team. Yale Head Coach Dalila Eshe said she used the game's low stakes as an opportunity to test drive different parts of this season's game plan.

"We got some of the rust out, and we got some of the nerves out, but also we were able to work on different components of our defense," Eshe told the News. "We got to play a little bit of zone today, also some other pieces within our offense and get the spacing and the flow and everything right."

In the game's first three quarters, Yale held firm on defense, allowing Saint Francis to score just 10 total points. In the fourth quarter, the Elis appeared to tire and conceded 14 points, more than double each of the other quarters.

The Bulldogs' transition offense held strong through the game. The Elis scored 35 points, about a third of their total, in transition.

Ciniya Moore '28 led the team in scoring with 15 points, and Sophia Gibson '29 had a double-double, tallying 11 rebounds and 13 points.

Despite Yale's stellar performance Friday night, fan turnout was significantly lower than at Monday night's men's basketball game. The men's game drew 915 attendees, more than four times the 205 spectators at the women's game.

"Fans are always an x-factor, and so the more fans we have, the louder it is, and the more fun an environment it is for the girls to play in," Eshe said. "We are going to do a bit of the legwork too."

The Bulldogs' next game will be the first real test of their ability. Loyola Maryland (1–1, 0–0 Patriot League) will be the first DI team they will face this season.

Like the Bulldogs, the Greyhounds had a strong season-opening performance against DIII opposition, routing Notre Dame of Maryland (0–1, 0–0 United East) 76-30 in a game where five players scored in double figures.

The Greyhounds then faltered against their first DI opponent, La Salle University (1–1, 0–0 A10). Loyola fell 61-69 despite a second consecutive strong performance from star guard Takeira Ramey and a reasonable defensive performance from the team, limiting La Salle to 31.9 percent shooting from the field.

On the Yale side, with high scorers Moore and Lea Vukic '30 firing on all cylinders so far this season, the Bulldogs will look to break through the Greyhound defense and put their best foot forward at the start of DI play.

Stamina will play a big role in Tuesday's matchup. Last year's meeting between the two sides ended 48-73 in favor of the Greyhounds. The game remained close until the third quarter, when Loyola began to take control of the scoreboard.

In that game, the Greyhounds drew on 12 players for minutes while Yale played just eight. Yale will look to capitalize on their improved roster depth this season, with first years like Vukic offering newfound reliability alongside year-in-year-out starters like Moore, Marisa Chapman '28 and Luisa Vydrova '27.

With a well-balanced squad energized by a flying start to the season, the Bulldogs will look to start the season with a 3–0 record for the first time since 2021.

Yale will take on the Loyola Maryland Greyhounds this Tuesday at 7 p.m. at Reitz Arena in Baltimore, Maryland.

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TANNER BATTLE / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
The Bulldogs beat the Saint Francis University Red Wolves 106-24 at John J. Lee Amphitheater on Friday night. Yale will play their first Division I foe, Loyola Maryland, on the road on Tuesday in what will be the first serious test of their ability.

STAT OF THE DAY

THE MEN'S BASKETBALL GAME HAD 915 STUDENTS IN ATTENDANCE, WHILE THE WOMEN'S GAME HAD 205.