THE GAME

Yale, Harvard battle for Ivy League title

BY BRODY GILKISON
STAFF REPORTER

Team 152 will be playing its final regular-season game at the Yale Bowl on Saturday, and The Game will be one of the highest-stakes contests in recent history for both of the teams involved.

The No. 25-ranked Bulldogs (7–2, 5–1 Ivy) will host No. 10 Harvard (9–0, 6–0 Ivy) in a matchup of the Ivy League's premier teams. Having first met 150 years ago in 1875, this will be the 141st matchup between the rivals. Yale leads the head-to-head rivalry 71–61–8, and the Elis also have a record-high 18 NCAA-recognized national championships compared to the Crimson's eight.

This year, for the first time in 80 seasons, both teams have a chance to earn another championship and be crowned the champions of college football. Last offseason, the Ivy League voted to allow its football teams to take part in the Football Championship Subdivision playoffs, which had previously been outlawed since 1945.

Yale, with a win over Harvard, would earn the Ivy League's allocated automatic-qualifying bid to the playoffs, while Harvard would likely make the playoffs with or without a bid due to its high ranking. In a historic season for the conference, it is possible that the Ivy League will send not just one, but two teams to the postseason.

Nothing new

Being the underdog is nothing new for Yale. Just a season ago, the unranked 'Dogs shipped up to Boston and wiped the floor with the No. 17-ranked Crimson. Going into The Game last season, the conference championship was out of reach for Yale, and the playoff rule change had yet to happen, so the Bulldogs were playing for themselves.

But this year, with more riding on the game and an opponent that is even stronger — at least according to Vegas — it could be easy for the Bulldogs to get distracted and thrown off their game. But Team 152 appreciates the stakes.

"I like that, we are the show," star defensive back Abu Kamara '27 told CT Insider in an interview. "That is the kind of vibe I will get when I am playing in front of big crowds, so I kind of lean into that a little bit."

Last year in Harvard Stadium, Kamara helped an injured Yale secondary take down the Crimson with countless dazzling plays, including a pick-six off a Jaden Craig pass to help swing the momentum heavily in the Bulldogs' favor. This year, Kamara has continued to play up to his preseason All-American honors, wreaking havoc all over the field and causing headaches for opposing offenses.

Another star of last year's contest who could be a key player for Yale is captain Josh Pitsenberger '26. The running back leads the Ivy League in both rushing yards and touchdowns this season, and he has been picking up accolades and honors left and right as he continues to dominate. Many Bulldog faithful remember Pitsenberger's 39-yard touchdown in Harvard Stadium, where he took a short screen pass to the house, cutting back and forth in front of a roaring Yale student section until he crossed the goal line to help cement Yale's lead.

Yale will need more of Pitsenberger's hard-nosed running to help score points against a tough Harvard defense.

Previewing the Crimson

Without a doubt, the Crimson have put together a solid squad. Yet, while still undefeated on the season, some cracks have started to appear in Harvard's foundation.

One of the team's and league's biggest stars this season quarterback has been Jaden Craig. Craig, a senior, has thrown for 2,456 yards and 21 touchdowns through nine games this season and has been picked off just five times.

Yet, despite his impressive statistics, the Yale-Harvard game might be Craig's kryptonite. In his last three years with the Crimson, Craig has yet to end a season without a Yale field rush following Bulldog victories in The Game.

On the defensive side of the football, Harvard has been one of the best teams in college football. The Crimson have allowed just 98 yards per game on the ground and only 184 yards per game through the air this season, which puts Harvard at the top of the Ivy League and in the top-five in Football Championship Subdivision.

However, even high-caliber units have their flaws. The pass-rush, while top three in the conference, has been Harvard's weakness all season. With just 20 sacks this year, many coming against subpar opponents in garbage time, the defensive line has not been able to generate constant pressure at a high rate against quality opponents. Last week, against a weaker Penn team, the Crimson surrendered 43 points, over 400 yards of offense, and did not sack Penn quarterback Liam Penn a single time.

Yale, whose offensive line has been impressive all season, has allowed just six sacks, while also opening gaping holes for their rushers. The Bulldogs could set the tone for The Game early in the trenches and put stress on the Harvard defense.

Bulldogs by the numbers

While Yale has a few returning stars that played big roles in last year's victory, the team has several new faces, as well.

One of the biggest additions of the offseason was quarterback Dante Reno '28, the son of head coach Tony Reno, who transferred in from South Carolina over the summer. This season, Dante Reno has thrown for 1,767 yards and 14 touchdowns and has only been picked off six times. He is rated the second-best Ivy League signal caller in terms of efficiency, trailing only Craig.

Reno's two favorite receivers are also taking on big roles in The Game for the first time in their Yale careers. So far this season, Nico Brown '25 has hauled in just under 800 yards and caught a league-leading nine touchdowns, while Jaxton Santiago '28 has brought in four touchdown receptions and over 500 yards as well. Combining the strong air attack with Pitsenberger's ferocious ground game, the Yale offense is in a good place to fight back against a strong Crimson defense.

On Yale's defense, there has been no shortage of new talent on that end, either. After the departure of several stars, namely Tamatoa McDonough '25, Jake Biggs '25 and Dean Shaffer '25, the Bulldogs have adopted a next-man-up mentality. Defensive lineman Zeke Larry '27 has quickly become a star this season, leading the Ivy League in sacks with 9.5. Cornerback Brandon Webster '27 has also emerged as a sort of Swiss Army Knife for Yale, locking down some of the league's best receivers on the outside while also racking up a handful of sacks this year.

"We don't feel as if we're underdogs," Webster said. "The guys have just been focused on keeping it YvY and doing what we do well. Of course, we respect our opponents, but we're just keeping the main thing the main thing, which is executing our gameplay and worrying about us."

Second on the team in tackles, linebacker Phoenix Grant '27 has also made his presence felt on defense this year. In his first year seeing significant playing time, he has racked up 75 tackles so far and has collected a few sacks and an interception.

"I think all the young guys are ready for the moment; we've been treating this week just like any other week," Grant wrote to the News. "It's YvY 10, and at the end of the day, as long as we play our brand of football, it doesn't matter who steps out there or how many people are in the Bowl, we'll be able to execute at a high level."

Saturday will be many of the players' first times seeing significant time in the rivalry matchup, but the Bulldogs appear to be prepared for what's to come.

The Game kicks off at noon at the Yale Bowl on Saturday. It will be televised on ESPNU.

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


Rachel Mak, Photography Editor

McInnis, Lewis predict Yale will beat Harvard

BY ISOBEL MCCLURE
STAFF REPORTER

Yale's top administrators are confident that the Bulldogs will extend their Yale-Harvard game winning streak this weekend.

University President Maurie McInnis predicts that Yale will "prevail" over Harvard in The Game with a winning score of 31-27. Dean of Yale College Pericles Lewis similarly said that he expects a win from the Bulldogs, through a close game with a 24-21 final score.

"Who do I think will win? As the song says: 'Harvard's team may fight to the end, but Yale will win!'" Lewis wrote in an email to the News, while acknowledging that Harvard is currently undefeated. "History buffs will note that Yale has won more than half of the 140 games so far, including the last three."

Lewis said he is a "big fan" of the Bulldog Walk — when the Yale players are led onto the field by their captains, the marching band and Handsome Dan. He noted that the tradition, which occurs in other matches, is particularly "historic" during the Yale-Harvard game.

"It's the season's last contest and a chance for seniors to finish strong," Lewis wrote.

The Bulldogs currently stand at a record of 5–1 in the Ivy League, with the Crimson just edging them out at 6–0.

McInnis wrote that she plans to attend The Game with her husband, Dean Johnson, and predicts that the competition will be "close."

"I want the students to know how proud I am of them and how much our community is behind them," McInnis wrote, noting that she learned last year of the "longstanding tradition" that the president relays "words of inspiration with the football team in the days before The Game."

When asked what advice she would give to first-year students attending The Game, McInnis said she hopes that first-year Yalies "take it all in and enjoy being part of this great tradition."

She expressed gratitude for alumni returning to cheer on the team and this contribution to Yale's traditions and community.

"The best advice I have for students attending the game is to dress for warmth and eat a big breakfast—the dining halls are all open for hot breakfast on Saturday," Kimberly Goff-Crews '83 LAW '86, the secretary and vice president for university life, wrote in an email on Wednesday.

Ferentz Lafargue GRD '05, an associate dean of Yale College, echoed the remarks, describing The Game as "tradition unlike any other." He wrote that first years from across Yale College and the University's graduate and professional schools should be "prepared to marvel at the experience, and it's perfectly fine to do so."

"A lot of people work hard to make the weekend happen, and the forms of joy can range from indulging in some cotton candy or kettle corn at the concession stands, striking up a conversation with some alums or classmates who you've just met because they are seated near you, or watching your best friend perform in the band or as a cheer leader," Lafargue wrote in an email.

He wrote that he plans to attend with his two daughters. His younger daughter, Ella, is "constantly looking for any bit of Yale supremacy to hold over her mom, who had the audacity to attend grad school at Harvard," he wrote.

Saturday's contest will be the 141st Yale-Harvard game.

Olivia Woo contributed reporting.

Contact
ISOBEL MCCLURE
at isobel.mcclure@yale.edu.


Ellie Park, Senior Photographer


Yale News