FOR THE FANS

Football for dummies

How does a football game work?

BY AUDREY KIM
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

This Saturday marks the 150th anniversary of The Game, a football rivalry between Harvard and Yale that was first played in 1875.

American football is the most watched sport in the country and has been around since 1869, with the National Football League being formed in 1920. For many fans, The Game is the best opportunity to show school spirit and let loose in the middle of a long fall semester.

"Drink plenty at the tailgate and be extra loud when you cheer for Yale. A loud stadium helps the defense," offensive lineman Charlie Humphreys '28 said.

However, for first time fans, football can be confusing at times. For those looking to make informed remarks to friends about play on the field Saturday, the News has you covered with a football survival guide.

In simple terms, the offense wants to move the ball forward and towards their opponents endzone, and they get four chances, called "downs," to gain a minimum of ten yards. If a team is not able to advance the ball by third down, they will usually use their fourth down to kick a field goal or punt, forcing the opponent's offense to start further back.

If the offense is able to gain ten yards by fourth down, they will receive another first down. However, if they aren't, the ball will be turned over to the opposing team, meaning that their opponent will now be on offense.

Turnovers can also happen when a defensive player intercepts a pass or if the offense fumbles, or drops, the ball and allows the defense to recover it.

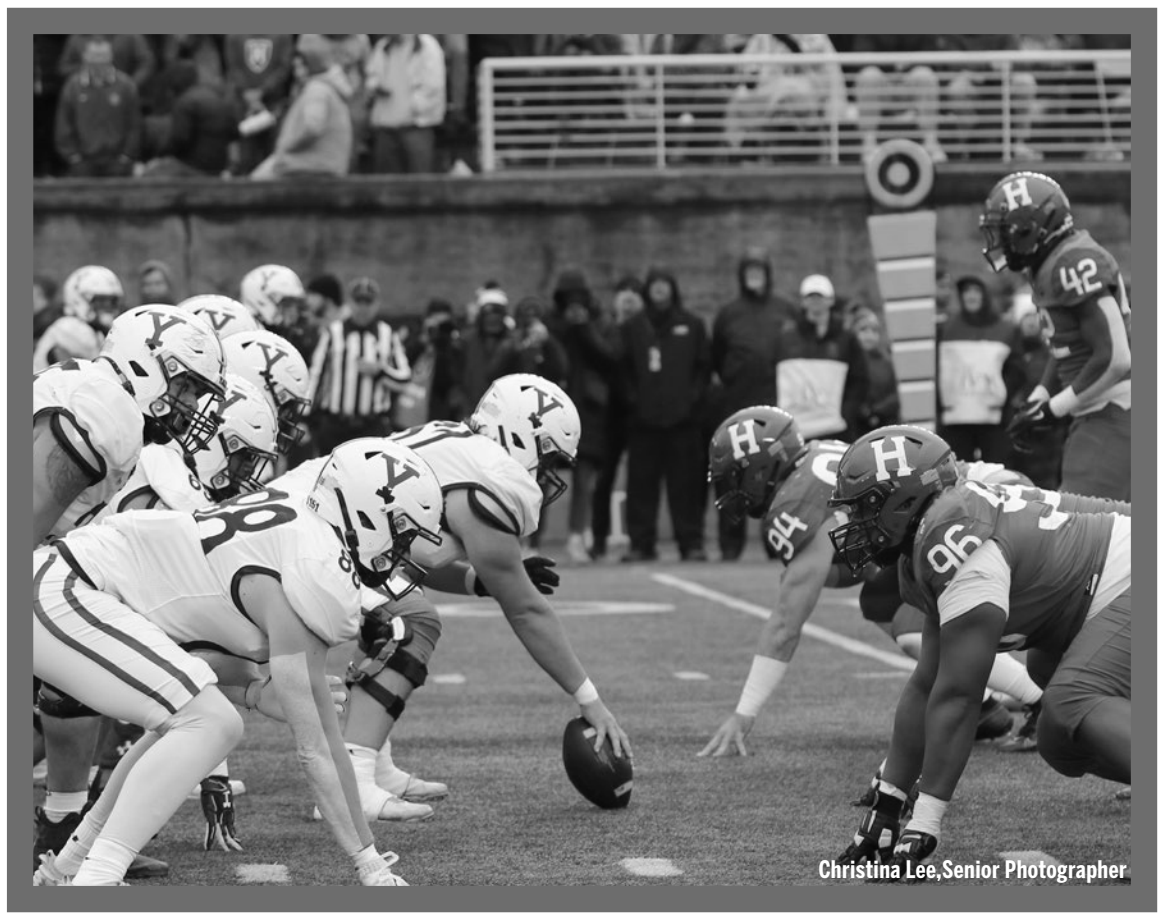
"Watch the ball, offense wants to protect and score with it. Defense wants to take it," Humphreys said. "And when in doubt, shout 'give it to Pits!'"

"Pits" is a nickname for team captain Josh Pitsenberger '26, the starting running back for the Bulldogs, who has accumulated 1095 rushing yards this season.

In football, the offense has two ways to move the ball: passing and running. Pass plays occur when a player throws the ball to their teammate, an exchange that usually happens between a quarterback and a receiver.

"While football appears dangerous and complicated initially, it's actually very easy. So whenever you hear someone in the crowd say 'Why didn't you catch that?' It's probably because that person in the crowd is much better than the players on the field," Holden Taylor '26 said.

Wide receivers, or wideouts, catch most of the passes during a game and line up furthest from the offensive formation, allowing them to run and get open for a pass from their quarterback. Tight ends, who act as dual receivers and blockers, often catch shorter passes as they line up at the line of scrimmage with the offensive formation, giving them the flexibility to either get open for a pass or help block defenders.


Christina Lee,Senior Photographer

Run plays happen when a player, usually the running back or quarterback, holds the ball and runs with it, trying to gain as much yardage as they can before getting tackled. Most run plays happen when the quarterback hands the ball off to the running back, but the quarterback can also choose to run the ball himself.

During run plays, the offensive linemen and tight ends attempt to block defenders, opening up space for the runner. The offensive line also blocks during pass plays, with the goal of giving the quarterback time to throw and protecting him from a tackle, or sack.

Like many other sports, football has both offensive and defensive players. However, a team's offense and defense do not play at the same time. For example, when Yale's offense — and quarterback — takes the field, Harvard's defense will face them, while Yale's defense and Harvard's offense waits on the sidelines. This may be confusing for some new fans.

"For a while, I thought the quarterback was always on the field," first-year Mika Salomone '29 said.

The scoreboard will usually have a football shaped marker to indicate which team is on offense, but when in doubt, saying "go Bulldogs!" always works.

The defense consists of three main parts: the defensive line, the linebackers and the defensive backs.

The defensive line starts opposite of the offensive line, and their goal is to pressure the quarterback and stop run plays. Behind them, the linebackers will position themselves to stop short passes and act as a second line of defense for run plays. The defensive backs will line up furthest from the defensive formation and will usually defend against longer passes.

Offenses have two ways to score in football, touchdowns and field goals. A touchdown occurs when a team runs or catches the ball in their opponent's endzone, earning six points for their team. After the touchdown, the team can choose to either kick a field goal from the three yard line for one extra point, or go for a two-point conversion, which is when the team attempts to make another touchdown from the two yard line for two extra points.

A field goal awards the offensive team three points, and requires the ball to be kicked through the goalposts behind their opponent's endzone.

The Game will begin at noon on Saturday and will be streamed on ESPNU.

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Yale cheerleaders look forward to new routine

BY JOLYNDA WANG
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Yale's cheerleading squad is preparing for The Game with a revamped routine.

Highlights will include a new uniform, dynamic prop work and more advanced stunts, such as higher pyramids and basket tosses. In addition to their performance, the cheerleaders will engage fans with a T-shirt toss. Members of the cheer team voiced their enthusiasm for performing at The Game and optimism for a potential Yale win.

"We've been counting down to this week because it's our favorite game," Riley Avelar '27 said in an interview. "It's the only game in the season where the Bowl is almost filled to the brim."

Coach Ashlee Cole said she expects the turnout at The Game will be 10 times their usual crowd. While anticipating the pressure of performing for a larger audience, Cole said she wants the team to bring their "highest level of skill," which will include more tumbling than the squad has done all season.

"This is the most important game of the season, so we're always looking to increase our skills, show a new level of pyramids and make sure that we're the most entertaining," Cole said in a phone interview.

Cole joined the team in September. Avelar noted that, before her arrival, the team could not practice tumbles or stunts without supervision. Despite the late start and being behind on skills, Cole said the team has adapted well to her coaching style and the culture she's introduced.

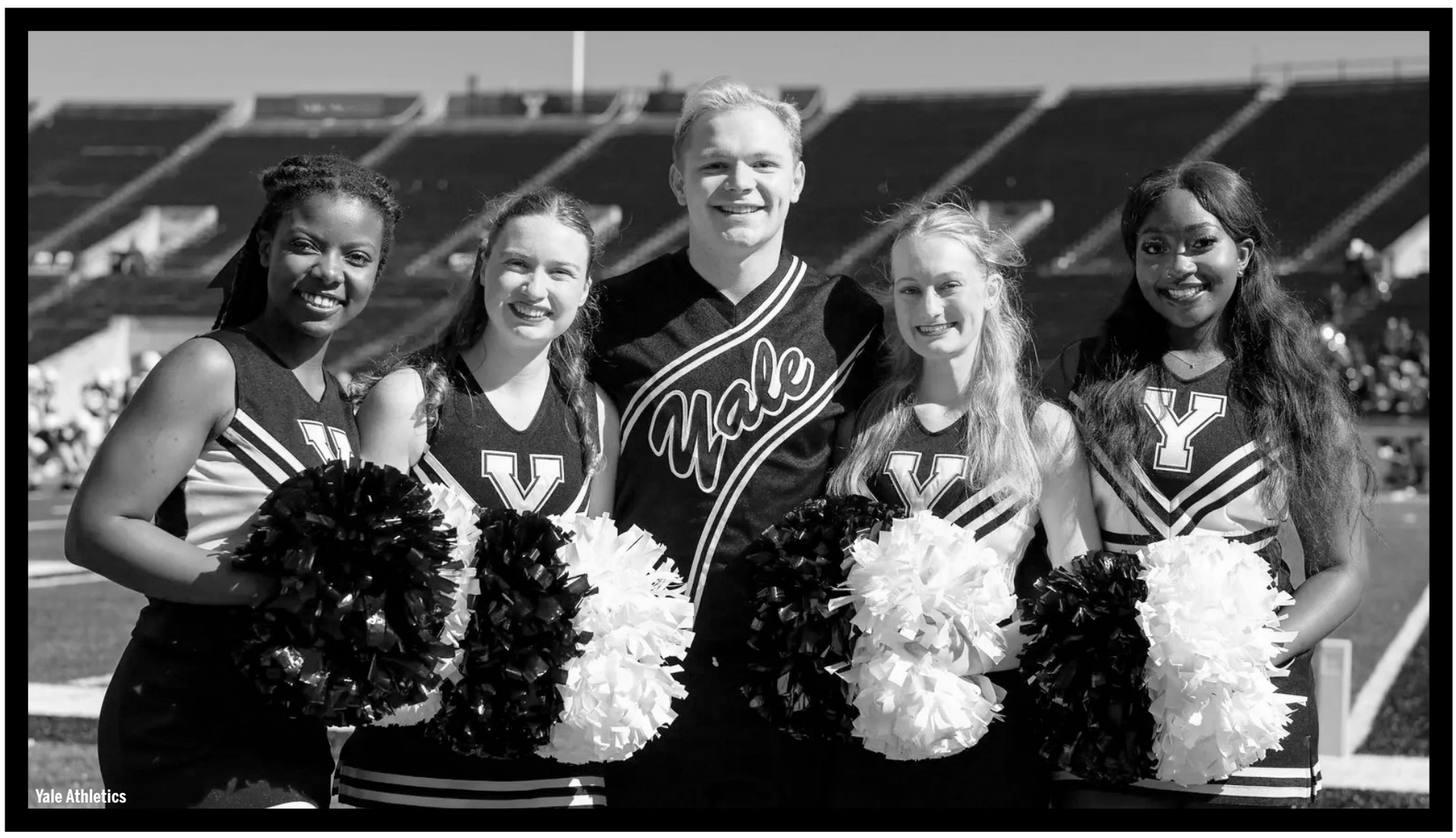
"Now with Ashlee as our new coach, there's a lot more structure and organization leading up to the game," captain Gaby Lord '27 said in an interview. "I feel like it's taken a lot of stress off of our shoulders and made us a lot more excited to be there."

Lord described the conditions this year as the "best case scenario." With a home-field advantage, a successful football season so far and good weather on Saturday, she encouraged students to come out and demonstrate school spirit.

"We have one day a year to be a sports school, to be obnoxious, to have the fun that I swear the majority of other colleges are doing every single weekend," Lord said.

The Yale Cheer Team was founded in 1912, according to Yale Athletics.

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Yale Athletics