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Yale's gone stale: Why it's time the Bobcats favor a new rival

By JAMES NOLAN
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The New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox. The Dallas Cowboys and the Philadelphia Eagles. The Los Angeles Lakers and Boston Celtics. Rivalries are one of the premier driving forces in the sports world, and collegiate athletics are no different.

Whether it's Duke University and University of North Carolina in basketball or University of Michigan and The Ohio State University in football, those games are inherently more exciting due to the legendary rivalry, which raises the stakes.

In Hamden, the most widely accepted rivalry by the student body is the ever-anticipated ice hockey's "Battle of Whitney Avenue" between the Quinnipiac Bobcats and nearby Yale Bulldogs. In a recent poll, conducted by The Chronicle, 62.7% of students named Yale University as Quinnipiac's biggest rival, which would seem to make sense. It is annually the most marketed and attended hockey game, but for a meager reason.

Yale is predominantly an Ivy League School, only overlapping conference-wise with Quinnipiac when it comes to men's and women's ice hockey, competing in the ECAC conference. Women's ice hockey between the two schools remains rather competitive. Since 2021, the Bobcats are 6-3-2 against Yale's women's ice hockey.

On the flip side, Quinnipiac men's ice hockey has dominated the Bulldogs. In that same timespan, it is 11-0 when facing Yale. You would have to go back to February of 2018 to find the last time the Bobcats were defeated in the supposedly heralded matchup. The next loss after that would be in 2013, when the two squared off in the national championship.

Of course, that's where the Quinnipiac and Yale rivalry derives from. Two teams, sharing the same road, separated by 10 miles in Connecticut, with all of the hockey world's eyes on them. Yale would dominate the matchup, scoring four goals while blanking the Bobcats.

With that being said, 2013 was a long time ago. The Bobcats are long past due for a rival with a fresh spark, and one that sees them as an equal competitor.

Not to be overlooked is the fact that Yale's first focus is Harvard University, the two sharing a conference in every sport with a rich history dating back over a century. Every year, it is the last game of Ivy League football on the schedule, regardless of the two teams' records. The conference does not allow teams to compete in postseason play, nor does it even have a championship game to determine the conference title. Meaning that more often than not, "The Game" is the culmination of the season.

When you compare that to the relatively lackluster "Battle of Whitney Avenue," it's quite clear that the rivalry is incredibly lopsided. It's unfair to the student body to invest this energy into a one-sport, two-team matchup that is not even reciprocated by the so-called rival.

Quinnipiac's rival should really be the Fairfield University Stags.

Not only are they in-state, but they are also predominantly in-conference. Both the Bobcats and Stags are full members of the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference.

There are 12 Quinnipiac sports that compete for a conventional conference championship.

- Baseball
- Field hockey
- Men's basketball
- Men's ice hockey
- Men's lacrosse
- Men's soccer
- Softball
- Women's basketball
- Women's ice hockey
- Women's lacrosse
- Women's soccer
- Volleyball

Examining the postseason results of the Quinnipiac sports that compete for a conference championship shows a clear trend. No team has ended the Bobcats' season more than the Stags, which has done it eight times.

"We've played three finals all against them," volleyball senior setter Damla Gunes said. "We split the regular season with them the last two years, so it's definitely a rivalry."

Gunes' rookie year, she stunned the No. 1 Fairfield in four sets in the championship. In the two ensuing years, Fairfield claimed the title in four sets itself.

Rider University is next up on that list, who has accomplished the feat four times in that timespan, and no singular sport more than once. Fairfield, meanwhile, has faced the Bobcats in conference championship games six times since 2021. Volleyball, as mentioned, the last three years. Women's soccer the last two.

Time and time again, across a variety of sports, Fairfield and Quinnipiac stand in each other's way of conference success. That's what forms a rivalry.

Following a dominant 5-1 win over Mount St. Mary's on Sept. 20, the women's soccer team stared down the Stags as its next opponent on the schedule.

"Leading to Fairfield, especially being home, I'd love to get a good crowd and get some good goals in," senior forward Morgan Cupo said.

It would seem the student body is behind this decision as well. In that same poll 27.1% of people named Fairfield. The second most behind Yale, and other responses included Sacred Heart (8.5%) and University of Connecticut (1.7%).

Women's soccer would wind up tying with Fairfield 1-1, with the help of a last minute goal from freshman defender Corey Anderson. Head coach Dave Clarke was ecstatic on the sideline.

"Throw in the rivalry too, throw in the fact that we lost to them in the final… In any sport, you don't like losing to your rivals. You know, Mets Yankees. I'm a Spurs fan, I hate Arsenal. I'm a Celtic fan, I hate Rangers. I'm an Irish fan, I hate England," Clarke said, when asked about his excitement.

Gunes and Cupo will aim for retribution this season to cap off their careers in the win column against the Stags.

"They're the best team in the MAAC until someone knocks them off," Clarke said.

