SPORTS

"Most real failures are due to limitations which men set up in their own minds."
OUTWITTING THE DEVIL NAPOLEON HILL

Bulldogs' campaign, over after NIT loss, spanned records and letdowns

BASKETBALL FROM PAGE 10

team in the league, but one Bulldog had emerged as the frontrunner for the Ivy League's player of the year. Team captain Nick Townsend '26 was, at that point, averaging an impressive stat line of over 17 points per game, seven rebounds per game and four assists per game.

After the team's fourth straight win following the Princeton game, Yale head coach James Jones sang his captain's praises in a postgame press conference.

"He's just terrific. You just come to expect Nick to do this every night, and there's going to be a night when he doesn't, but hopefully that won't be in my lifetime, right?" Jones told the News.

However, the following night — Jan. 31 — the archrival Harvard Crimson put an end to Yale's streak as they knocked off the Bulldogs in New Haven with a last-second banked-in three-pointer. With the win, Harvard tied Yale at the top of the Ivy standings with half of the season's conference play remaining.

Once again, the Bulldogs squad showed an ability to bounce back from defeat, as they went on yet another four-game conference win streak putting pressure on the Crimson.

In the middle of that Ivy League win streak, Yale took a rare mid-season trip to Washington, D.C., to take on an out-of-conference opponent, the Howard Bison, in one of the most exciting games of the year.

The Bulldogs took the court against Howard on Feb. 9, and the Bison, a team that went on to win the Mid-Eastern Atlantic Conference and earn a March Madness bid, looked as if they had secured the victory as the game entered its waning moments. However, Yale guard Jordan Brathwaite '28 had other plans, and he hit a fadeaway corner three with a second to go in regulation to tie the game and send it to overtime, in which Yale came out on top.

After that victory, all Yale had to do to secure the top seed in Ivy Madness was go 2–1 in their final three Ivy games. The Bulldogs dropped the first of the three to Cornell in a buzzer-beater loss, but the Bulldogs once more bounced back and won the final two matchups to finish with an 11–3 conference record and a 23-5 overall record in the regular season.

As the top seed in Ivy Madness, Yale matched up with Cornell for the third game of the year between the two squads. Prior to the semifinal, Townsend worked to ensure that the Bulldogs' mental preparation was on point ahead of the contest.

"I think in the past few years, our team has done a great job of locking in and focusing in on the details just a little bit more around this time, so it will be key for us to do that again this year," he told the News.

Engaged from the tip, the Bulldogs managed to put away the tournament-hosting Big Red thanks in large part to high-scoring efforts from Isaac Celiscar '28 and Trevor Mullin '27.

The following day, though, Yale fell victim to a historic 44-point performance from Penn's TJ Power in the Ivy League championship game. The Bulldogs lost in an overtime thriller, 88-84.

Before the loss, Yale was projected by most bracketology experts to be slated as a No. 12 seed in the NCAA tournament. However, Penn secured the Ivy League champion's automatic bid, and the Bulldogs found themselves left out of the tournament for the first time since 2023.

For Jones, the loss to Penn was disappointing, but the next game on hand was already in view. After all, the Bulldogs did have some more basketball left to play, as they were awarded the No. 3 seed in the National Invitational Tournament and were set to host UNC Wilmington at home two days later.

"We're going to have to pick ourselves up," Jones said after the game. "It's going to be a long bus ride back to New Haven, but we'll have to pick ourselves up and get ourselves ready."

On March 17, Yale got off to a strong start against UNCW, holding a lead as large as 14 in the second half, but the Seahawks climbed their way back into the game with several clutch shots from deep. Ultimately, the Bulldogs' inability to make free throws at the end of the game proved fatal. Shooting a season-worst 9-22 from the charity stripe allowed UNCW to escape with a one-point win and end Yale's season.

The team finished with a 24–7 record. The three seniors on this year's team — Ivy Player of the Year Townsend, Devon Arlington '26 and Ivy Defensive Player of the Year Casey Simmons '26 — will leave Yale with the highest win total of any class in program history, a whopping 89 wins in four seasons.

In addition to the three exiting seniors, center Samson Aletan '26 also announced his intention to enter the transfer portal last week in a post on Instagram. Aletan, who came to Yale as a member of the class of 2027, will be graduating early this spring before joining a new team in his final year of eligibility.

The 24 wins this season marked the most of any Yale team under Jones, who became the team's head coach in 1999.

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Yale falls to Penn in overtime, dashing hopes for March Madness return

MEN'S BASKETBALL

BY WALTER ROYAL
STAFF REPORTER

ITHACA, N.Y. — The Yale Bulldogs (24–6, 12–4) fell to the Penn Quakers (18–11, 10–5) 84–88 in overtime in the Ivy League championship final this month, as Penn forward TJ Power carried his team to the win by scoring a tournament-record 44 points.

The loss on Sunday, March 15, all but ensured that Yale would not return for a third straight year to the NCAA tournament, after the Elis won the Ivy League championship and earned automatic March Madness bids in the past two seasons.

Despite coming into the game as favorites and the tournament's No. 1 seed, the Yale defense failed to contain an offensive explosion by Power. While just one other Quaker scored in double digits, the Bulldogs had no answer for the 6-foot-9 junior. A late three from Power forced overtime, where Penn outscored the Bulldogs 13-9. Power was named tournament MVP afterwards, with Yale's Trevor Mullin '27 also making the All-Tournament team.

The game's final minutes played out in a way few would have predicted. Penn's Cam Thrower, however, said Penn head coach Fran McCaffery instilled a mindset that was key to the Quakers' victory.

"Winning doesn't happen the way you want it, but if you know that the end result is that you're going to win, you're not going to get rattled, you're not going to get phased by anything and you're just going to keep staying with the course and getting to that end result," Thrower said at a press conference after the game. "That was his message, in timeout huddles and halftimes."

The first four minutes of action showcased both teams' stout defenses and elite three-point shooting. Samson Aletan '26 and Isaac Celiscar '28 both blocked shots in the paint, but a pair of Quaker threes and a hook shot by Power gave Penn the lead entering the first media timeout.

The Bulldogs then pulled off an 8-0 run, jumping out to a 13-8 lead off the back of four points and an assist from Trevor Mullin '27. The Quakers were largely held in check by Yale's stout defense, but then Power began to assert himself. A layup and two threes by him on the next three possessions helped Penn keep pace with the Elis, who made three layups of their own.

With the lead at three, the Bulldogs once again made a move, going on a 6-0 run capped by a violent Aletan rejection from behind on a would-be Quaker layup. A three by Penn's Michael Zanoni and five more points from Power, however, annihilated the Penn deficit, bringing the score to 25-24.

The teams wrestled for another three minutes before Power drew a foul on a tough three-point attempt. While the shot did not land, the junior forward drilled all three free throws to give Penn the lead. After an AJ Levine steal, Power knocked down yet another three to push his point total to 23. With 3:44 remaining in the first half, Yale head coach James Jones called a rare timeout.

The Elis regained their footing coming out of the pause. Neither team got a leg up in the next three minutes, with Power on the bench for two of them. McCaffery, the Penn head coach, drew up a play for Power on the last possession, but a good contest from Casey Simmons '26 forced a miss. Still, Penn led Yale 39-41 at the half.

Coming out of the break, a brief 5-0 run gave the Bulldogs a lead, and a three by Thrower tied the game at 44. Five more minutes of play passed, with neither squad able to pull away. Penn then made a move, scoring four quick points on a layup and a tough fadeaway jumper from Power. Simmons responded with a cutting layup, sparking a 9-0 Yale run to give the Bulldogs a commanding five-point lead, 63-58. A Power three ended the fun for Yale, but the Quakers remained on the back foot.

The teams traded blows into the final two minutes, where the margin sat at four. A Power layup put the score at 71-69. The Bulldogs made a defensive stand but could not score an insurance basket as time wound down. A missed Levine layup with 16 seconds remaining forced the Quakers to foul. A pair of Mullin free throws pushed the lead to four.

With the game on the line, Power brought the ball up himself, then pulled up from 25 feet for three. That shrunk Yale's lead to one, 73-72.

Fouling again, Penn sent Mullin to the line for another two. After the junior made both, Power brought the ball up again. Sprinting up to the left wing, he let another three-point shot fly.

"I thought I was going to catch it and they were going to foul," Power recounted in the post-game press conference. "Instead they backed up, so I kept pushing it down the floor. Casey's a good shot blocker, so I put a little extra on it."

The shot sailed in. With less than a second remaining, the score was tied, 75-75. Mullin's heave clanged off the back iron, and the game went to overtime.

A tightly contested first three minutes of overtime left Yale down by one with 1:22 to play before a Thrower layup stretched the deficit to three. The Bulldogs then committed a shot-clock violation. However, Mullin intercepted the Penn inbound pass, giving the Elis a second life.

Yale came up empty on the ensuing possession and was forced to foul. Power hit both free throws before Riley Fox '28 nailed a tough three to keep the game within one score. After another foul, Zanoni nailed two more free throws to give Penn a four-point lead with five seconds left. The Bulldogs missed their last shot, and as the clock struck zero, the scoreboard showed 84-88.

Jones took responsibility for the Elis' decision not to foul at the end of regulation — which would have forced Penn to make consecutive free throws, foul Yale, then be in the same situation they were before, albeit with less time on the clock.

"I'll take the hit for not fouling at the end to give them an opportunity to get the game in the overtime," Jones said at a postgame press conference. "I'm very proud of my guys."

Penn will now compete in the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2018. The Quakers' opponent will be announced on the selection show starting at 6 p.m. Sunday night.

The loss to Penn was the last game for Yale's illustrious senior class. Having set the record for most wins as a class, surpassing the class of 2025's mark at 85, the group of Nick Townsend '26, Simmons and Devon Arlington '26 still had the opportunity to compete in the postseason, thanks to the National Invitation Tournament.

"I don't want to just say goodbye to those guys yet," Jones said. "They got some more basketball to play. We're going to have to pick ourselves up. It's going to be a long bus ride back to New Haven, but we'll have to pick ourselves up and get ourselves ready."

Playing at home, the Bulldogs lost to the University of North Carolina Wilmington last Tuesday in the NIT's first round.

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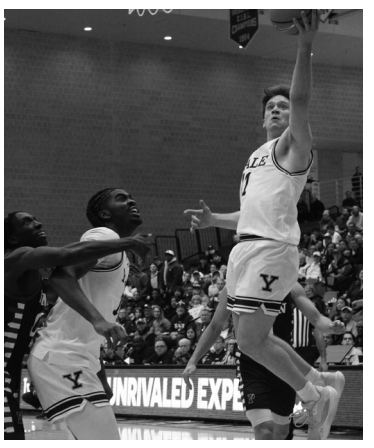

BEN RAAB / SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER
The Bulldogs lost to the Penn Quakers in a Ivy League championship game.

Amid NIL drain, both Ivy final teams got unlikely boost from transfers

MEN'S BASKETBALL

BY BEN RAAB
STAFF REPORTER

ITHACA, N.Y. — Since the NCAA began allowing athletes to profit from their name, image and likeness in 2021, Ivy League basketball has faced a mass exodus of talented players to programs that can pay them. But this month's Ivy League championship game between No. 1 seed Yale and No. 3 Penn featured a rarity in the NIL era: transfers who came to the league instead of leaving it.

Penn's (17–11, 9–5 Ivy) top three scorers — Ethan Roberts, TJ Power and Michael Zanoni — all began their collegiate careers elsewhere. For Yale (24–5, 11–3 Ivy), forward Casey Simmons '26, the Ivy League's Defensive Player of the Year, transferred from Northwestern before the 2023–24 season. Across the rest of the conference, only two other transfers played consistent minutes this season.

Meanwhile, 11 players who could have been on Ivy rosters this season left the league, including six who transferred to high-major programs. At those schools, starters typically earn between $100,000 and $500,000 in NIL deals, while top players can make millions. Former Princeton guard Xavian Lee, now playing for Florida, has reportedly earned more than $6 million this season.

"They want to play a high level of basketball, but they're coming here for the right reasons," Penn coach Fran McCaffery said of his team's transfer players at a press conference on Friday, March 13, before the Ivy League tournament began. "They're coming here for education and for networking opportunities with some of the most powerful people on the planet."

The transfers reflect a lingering faith in the Ivy League's long-standing "40 not four" pitch -- which emphasizes the value of a 40-year career boosted by their education over a four-year basketball career -- even as more immediate financial opportunities exist elsewhere. The Ivy League remains the only Division I conference where athletes can neither receive athletic scholarships nor be paid directly by their schools.

In January 2025, the Ivy League declined to join the House v. NCAA settlement that allows schools to share up to $20.5 million in annual revenue with athletes, with the league's executive director writing in a statement at the time that the move preserved an athletic culture "focused on academic primacy and the overall student-athlete experience."

Yale and Penn, despite their success, have been no exception to the talent drain. The Bulldogs lost Danny Wolf '26, now with the Brooklyn Nets, to Michigan two seasons ago and saw one of their top class of 2029 recruits, Nolan Groves, decommit from Yale in April to play for Texas Tech. The Quakers lost second-team All-Ivy guard Sam Brown to Davidson, while former guard Tyler Perkins is now at Villanova.

The addition of Power, a former five-star recruit who transferred from Virginia after beginning his career at Duke, has helped fuel the Quakers' return to the Ivy League championship after missing the tournament in the past two seasons. He led the team with 15.8 points per game before the conference final and earned first-team All-Ivy honors. For Yale, Simmons has served as a defensive anchor while contributing key rebounding and nearly 10 points per game.

The transfers have helped keep Yale and Penn ahead of other Ivy programs hit harder by NIL competition. Princeton, long a fixture atop the standings, fell to seventh place this season after losing all three would-be seniors to the transfer portal, including first-team All-Ivy players Xavian Lee, now at Florida, and Caden Pierce, who is headed to Purdue. Brown slipped to last place after losing key contributors Kalu Anya and AJ Lesburt to the portal.

The ability to insulate themselves from the loss of talent will likely be an important measure of success for Ivy League programs moving forward. That task will only grow harder as long as the league is unable to pay players, said Richard Kent, a sports attorney and NIL expert.

"Kids aren't buying the 40-year argument when you're looking at $500,000, $600,000 offers from other schools," Kent said.

Spending on NIL products and services tied to men's and women's basketball reached an estimated $932.5 million in the 2025–26 season, according to a report from the NIL platform Opendorse.

Penn defeated Yale 88-84 to claim the Ivy League title.

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