WETHER OR NOT her kick in the womb was especially strong, forward Joey Yenne ’03 of the women’s soccer team showed competitive fire very early in life. “Joey was a very bright and aggressive child, an independent young thing,” recalls her mother, Susan Yenne. In kindergarten, Joey’s teacher suggested that the wee girl needed a team sport to channel her intense energies in a social direction.

The team sport that Yenne took up was soccer, and the channeling of energy has worked out fine. Last year, as a mere sophomore, Yenne (yen-e) led the Ivy League in goals scored with 11, and added four assists. Naturally, she made the all-Ivy first team. And after three games this fall, she had amassed 51 career points—already eighth on Harvard’s all-time list.

Though she has thrived in the team context, Yenne has also kept her soloist’s flair alive. “I’m a take-on artist—I love to take on a defender, one-on-one,” she says. “It’s great to beat a player and then slot the ball in the corner of the net. I have a drive for goals—when I get the ball, I’m looking to score.” Yenne has several talents: she’s quick, has an exceptional ability to hold and control the ball with her feet, and can rip hard, accurate shots with either leg.

Her coach, Tim Wheaton, says, “Joey is probably the most competitive athlete I’ve ever coached—every day, every practice, every drill. She just hates to lose.

Yenne, the Ivies’ top scorer, shows where she likes to put the ball in the net.
Yenne is incredibly competitive, and that raises the standard for all of us.” Yenne’s love of competition has deep roots. For much of her childhood, her journalist parents worked for rival Detroit newspapers. Both the News and the Free Press appeared daily at the breakfast table, accompanied by plenty of who-scooped-who parental banter.

Yenne, who had a goal and two assists in this season’s Ivy opener, a 4-0 drubbing of Brown, also sees the field well and distributes the ball effectively to teammates. An especially young and deep side joins her on the pitch this fall, with only one senior starter, Caitlin Costello, who notched two goals and an assist against Brown. Harvard defenders include backs Liza Barber ‘05, Lauren Cozzolino ‘04, and Caitlin Fisher ‘04. Cheryl Gunther ‘03 stood tall—at 5 feet, 10 inches—in goal last year, posting a goals-against average of 1.13 and three shutouts. She blanked Brown and Yale to start this year’s Ivy campaign, which included a five-game losing streak near the end and placed the Crimson fourth in the league, a disappointment for a side that had been one of the Ivy’s top two for the six previous years, with four league titles. Yet the team got an NCAA tournament bid and finally showed what they could do, trouncing Hartford 3-0 in the second round to avenge a 2-1 regular-season loss. In the third round, Harvard fell 2-0 to the nation’s number-one ranked side, Notre Dame, both goals coming off corner kicks.

To prepare for this season, Yenne spent last summer in Memphis, Tennessee, interning for a corporate law firm by day and playing soccer for a semi-pro team, the Memphis Mercury of the W League, at night. The W League is a level below the newly formed women’s professional soccer league, the Women’s United Soccer Association (WUSA). (Emily Stauffer ’98, a midfielder for WUSA’s New York Power, is one of the Crimson’s assistant coaches this fall.) The W League’s summer season was “one of the highest levels I’ve ever played at,” says Yenne, noting that the Mercury roster included three members of the Irish national team and two collegiate all-Americans. “I was challenged as a player,” she says. “We played in places like Houston, Dallas, Tulsa, Kansas City, Cincinnati, Asheville. Road trips, like a college season.”

Yenne is used to mobility: she grew up in Texas, Michigan, Florida, and Minnesota, completing high school in the small town of St. Cloud, Minnesota, where her parents still live. At age 9, she was already playing on a select team of girls from several towns. During her last two years of high school, Yenne drove three nights a week to the Twin Cities—70 miles away—to practice with a club team in sessions that might run from 11 p.m. until 12:30 a.m. She nonetheless finished first in her class and got recruiting letters from the likes of soccer powerhouse North Carolina. But Yenne turned down all free rides to attend Harvard.

The government concentrator, who lives in Winthrop House, acknowledges that she “would love to continue in soccer and try to play in the WUSA.” Despite her many years of 24-7-365 soccer intensity, she shows no signs of burning out. Yenne plans to take the Law School Aptitude Test this year, but is also interested in consulting and investment banking. “I really like doing something competitive,” she says. Quelle surprise.

~Craig Lambert