SPORTS

Storybook Ending

A rout of Yale brings another Ivy League trophy.

Rebounding from a rocky start, the football team defeated its first six Ivy League opponents and scripted a stunning finale by routing a previously unbeaten Yale squad, 37-6. The Yale Bowl upset dashed Old Eli’s hopes of completing a perfect season, and brought Harvard its fourth outright Ivy title since 1997. Not since the grand opening of the Bowl in 1914, when Harvard spoiled the occasion with a 36-0 shutout, had Yale been so abjectly humiliated by a Crimson squad.

The lopsidedness of The Game was a source of wonder even to those responsible for it. “People had pretty much left us for dead [when our record was] 1-2,” said head coach Tim Murphy. “We dreamed we’d get this kind of dominance.” Harvard’s fero- cious defense, led by end and captain Brad Bagdis ’08, held high-scoring tailback Mike McLeod to 50 yards rushing. Senior quarterback Chris Pizzotti, in his first start and excelled. The Crimson offense ran 91 plays to Yale’s 56. “This is the ultimate, perfect, storybook ending,” said Bagdis. “It’s just phenomenal.”

The team’s stellar Ivy campaign began with a 24-17 defeat of Brown in the first night football game ever played at the Stadium (see “Lights! Camera! Action!” November-December 2007, page 83). That win was bracketed by hard-luck losses to two Patriot League teams, Holy Cross and Lehigh, each in the last half-minute of play.

In another stroke of adversity, a shoulder injury at Lehigh ended quarterback Liam O’Hagan’s season. O’Hagan had put up league-leading total-offense numbers as a sophomore, but had struggled the next year. This fall he’d begun well, passing for two touchdowns and running for a third in both the Holy Cross and Brown games.

But better times were at hand. Pizzotti, who’d started five games a year earlier, took over at quarterback and excelled. The Crimson offense ran 91 plays to Yale’s 56. “This is the ultimate, perfect, storybook ending,” said Bagdis. “It’s just phenomenal.”

The team’s stellar Ivy campaign began with a 24-17 defeat of Brown in the first game, Harvard defenders intercepted four Lafayette passes, with cornerback Steven Williams ’08 returning the fourth for a 91-yard score. The defense had another four-interception day a fortnight later, picking off one Dartmouth pass at the Harvard three-yard line and another in the end zone to arrest scoring drives. Senior safety Doug Hewlett had three of the steals, the most in one game for a Harvard player since 1967. At Columbia, the defense had six quarterback sacks.

Picking up where O’Hagan had left off, Pizzotti quickly established himself as the league’s best passing quarterback. He had a big day against Princeton, completing 23 of 35 passes for two touchdowns and 365 yards—the fourth-highest single-game passing yardage in Harvard annals. The footwork of sophomore back Cheng Ho, who ran for more than 100 yards against Holy Cross, Princeton, Dartmouth, and Columbia, helped balance the Crimson offense.

With the season’s end two weekends away, only Harvard and Yale were still unbeaten in league play. Every other team had at least two losses, ensuring that The Game would decide the Ivy championship. Penn—always a tough team, but with three league losses on its record—was Harvard’s last Stadium opponent. Quacker back Joe Sandberg, the Ivies’ second-ranking rusher, injured a knee on the game’s first play, and without him Penn was held to 198 yards in total offense—Harvard’s best defensive effort so far. With 43 seconds left in the first half, a 20-yard pass from Pizzotti to wide receiver Corey Mazza ’07 (‘08) staked Harvard to a 7-0 lead. Receiver Matt Luft ‘10 made a leaping catch in the end zone for a second-half score, and Ho broke off tackle for a 20-yard touchdown to clinch it, 23-7.

Yale extended its unbeaten streak with a 27-6 victory at Princeton. Co-titlists with the Tigers in 2006, the Eli were now

Hoisting the Ivy League trophy: (clockwise from lower left) quarterback Chris Pizzotti, captain and defensive end Brad Bagdis, head coach Tim Murphy, and fullback Noah Van Niel

Running the Table

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<th>Team</th>
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<td>Holy Cross</td>
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<td>Brown</td>
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<td>at Lehigh</td>
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<td>Princeton</td>
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<td>Dartmouth</td>
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<td>Penn</td>
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within range of Yale’s first outright Ivy title since 1980, its first unbeaten-untied season since 1960, and its first 10-victory season since 1909. But it wasn’t to be.

For the first time since 1968—the year of the storied 29-29 tie—Harvard and Yale went into The Game with spotless records in Ivy play. The prospect of an epic clash between archrival teams stirred excitement in the media and elsewhere. “This is going to be a game people will talk about forever,” Yale coach Jack Siedlecki told the Boston Globe’s John Powers ’70.

Yale had a right to be cocky. The previous year’s team had treated Harvard to a 34-13 mauling. The Blue had the Ivies’ best rushing attack and its top-rated defense. Junior tailback McLeod led the nation in rushing with 174 yards per game, and had scored 23 touchdowns. Yet almost nothing went right for the Eli.

Not even the coin toss. Harvard won it and chose to receive. Pizzotti came out throwing, and just 68 seconds into the game he had Harvard on the board with a 40-yard pass to Luft in the end zone. Late in the quarter Luft scored again on a 33-yard aerial. The Crimson added points on its next two possessions, with Ho diving in for a one-yard touchdown and sophomore receiver Mike Cook snaring a 15-yard pass at the goal line. In Yale’s previous five games, its defense had allowed a total of 47 points. By halftime Harvard had 27. Yet things could have been worse: the half ended with the Crimson at Yale’s one-yard line.

A third-quarter field goal by sophomore Miller ’09 completed Harvard’s scoring spree. With four minutes to play, Yale reaped six consolation points on an 87-yard sideline punt return by freshman back Gio Christodoulou. The extra-point try went wide. The Yale offense never got untracked. Slowed by a toe injury, McLeod netted only 36 yards in the first half and left the game after three quarters. Quarterback Matt Polhemus threw two interceptions and hit on just two out of 18 pass attempts.

“We had a horrible day,” Yale coach Siedlecki said afterward. “They seemed to be in our backfield every play, whether we were running or throwing... We got outplayed and outcoached.”

### Gyroball Historian

**In the fall,** the Tokyo publisher Asahi Shinsho released a new title in Japanese, loosely translated as The Unknown Story of Matsuzaka’s Major League Revolution, a 250-page recounting of the saga of star pitcher Daisuke (DICE-kay) Matsuzaka’s rookie year as a starting pitcher with the Boston Red Sox. The book follows Matsuzaka (and his mythical “gyroball” pitch) through the regular season month by month, with commentary on such topics as the globalization of baseball and how sports can build group pride. The author is Folger Fund professor of history (and avid baseball fan) Andrew Gordon ’74, Ph.D. ’81. Gordon is currently a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute, working on a book about the penetration of the sewing machine into Japanese society in the twentieth century, "I thought I’d venture into sportswriting," he says. “A new thing.”

In November 2006, the Red Sox produced a 10-minute DVD expressly for Matsuzaka, as part of their campaign to woo him to the team. It featured Japanese relief pitcher Hideki Okajima, who had already signed with Boston, saying, “This is a great town” in Japanese. Gordon, who is fluent in Japanese after two years of study in college and several years of living in Japan, told the camera something similar in Japanese while standing in front of the John Harvard statue in the Yard. A Japanese book-editor friend of Gordon suggested writing the book, and threw in a press pass. “I’d have to write only 20 pages a month for six months,” Gordon says, “then do a wrap-up.”

He went to nearly all of Matsuzaka’s starts and the press conferences afterwards; Matsuzaka was very sparing with one-on-one interviews, and Gordon didn’t get such access, but he was able to speak with some senior Red Sox figures, including general manager Theo Epstein, and with pitching coach John Farrell, who was “very forthcoming.” Gordon already knew Matsuzaka’s translator Masa Hoshino ’02 (see May-June 2007, page 73), who had taken one of his courses on Japan.

The historian believes that Matsuzaka, who consistently gave an impression of immense seriousness during the season, “is a lot more interesting and fun-loving than he lets on.” Gordon also agrees with the sports-media consensus that, after his year of adjustment, Matsuzaka will probably improve considerably on the 15-12 record and 4.40 earned-run average (ERA) he posted in 2007; in the American League, he made three or four more starts than he would have in Japan, where the travel time is also much less wearing. Even so, the rookie recorded the best ERA in the American League during a two-month stretch; when he seemed to tire later in the year, the Red Sox helped energize him for the playoffs, Gordon says, by giving him “a sabbatical.” The strategy worked. He won the American League pennant-clinching game and became the first Japanese pitcher to start and win a game in the World Series.
Indeed, Yale's play was a study in futility. The respective times-of-possession reflected the Crimson dominance: 37:59 for Harvard, 22:01 for Yale. The Eli made just six first downs, giving up 25. Yale was limited to 66 net yards rushing and 43 in the air—109 yards of total offense against 434 for Harvard. Yale's offense never got inside Harvard's 25-yard line. If a single play epitomized Yale's horrible day, it was defensive back Steve Santoro's near-interception of a Pizzotti pass just before halftime. Santoro juggled the ball, lost control of it, and saw it land in the hands of Harvard's Corey Mazza, flat on his back at the Yale six-yard line (see page 51).

The Harvard faithful may talk about this one forever. Yalies will try to forget it.

TIDBITS: Harvard has won six of the last seven Yale games, and four straight at Yale Bowl. Since the formalization of Ivy League play in 1956, Harvard leads in the series, 27-24-1. And since 1960, when Yale last went unbeaten and untied, Harvard has robbed the Blue of a perfect season four times. In 1968 the Crimson scored 16 points in the last 42 seconds to gain the now-legendary 29-29 tie. In 1974 a 95-yard drive gave Harvard a 21-16 win with 15 seconds to play. And in 1979 the unbeaten Bulldogs were upset, 22-7, by a Harvard squad that had won just two games.

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