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 kicker Patrick Long and an early-fourth-quarter touchdown pass to tight end Jason 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, the Red Sox helped energize him for a sabbatical.” The strategy worked. He won 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.