160 Bulldogs Show For Fundraiser

Medical Staff Honored

By Steve Conn

Win or lose, Yale football is stronger than ever based on the turnout of its annual fundraiser golf tournament on Aug. 13 at the Course at Yale. Approximately 160 former players attended some part of the activities that included a scramble-format golf tournament, the Cozza Cup competition (top score, Yale football players only), a corn hole tournament, auctions, raffles and all kinds of great food.

From former tackle Harris Ashton ’54 to current student-athletes like receiver Chris Morris ’13 and kicker Philippe Panico ’13, the course was covered with Bulldog lettermen all day Monday. Hall of fame coach Carm Cozza (1963-1996) and Jack Siedlecki (1997-2008), who followed the legend at Yale, were on hand to play in the tournament as well. That commitment and loyalty to the program made it easier to farm the Yale land that helped produce 49 different flag sponsors.

There were key people working behind the scenes to gather the fruit, like 1982 captain and current football association president Pat Ruwe ’83 and Greg Hall ’77, a former tight end turned spirited, storytelling historian. Don Scharf ’55, in the Yale Athletic Department, also did a fair share of harvesting.

“The support of our football alumni is unparalleled,” said Tony Reno, the Joel E. Smilow ’54 Head Coach of Football, who got to know the par-3 fifth hole (“beat the coach” with 36 different groups) as well as the folks who maintain the course. “We greatly appreciate the generosity of our alumni and supporters and look forward to seeing everyone in the Bowl.”

In addition to celebrating the tradition of Yale football, the day was also about honoring the people who have provided medical attention to Bulldog players the last six decades. Former players spoke on behalf of trainers Al Battipaglia, Billy Kaminsky, Chris Pecora, Rich Kaplan and Dave Dinapoli, in addition to nurse practitioner Molly Meyer. Each of them utilized the brief rebuttal time that was offered.

“It’s family. The family is back,” said Kaminsky, referring to all the familiar faces. “We share the tradition of Yale football together. I made sure everyone of them got something out of this program.”

A class of ’79 team, with help from a former tight end in the class of 1981, brought home both the overall low net and the Cozza Cup with a 14-under 56. Ends John Spagnola ’79 and Bob Krystyniak ’79, center Larry Ross ’79, quarterback Pat O’Brien ’79 and quarterback-turned split end Dan Stratton ’81 captured the 2012 title.

In the first annual Yale Football Corn Hole Tournament, organized and run by John Smoot ’76, over 20 former Elis competed in two-man teams next to the tent that hosted the dinner and sat on the edge of the third fairway overlooking the pond. After two hours of fierce competition, former defensive back Don Viglione ’75 and Jack Sellati ’76, an ex linebacker, prevailed in the finale.
There were also great vacation trips provided for auction by great friend of Yale football, Jack Curren, and there were interesting sports raffle prizes as well.

**Contest Winners**

**Low Net, Cozza Cup Champions (56):** John Spagnola ’79, Larry Ross ’79, Boby Krystyniak ’79, Pat O’Brien ’79, Dan Stratton ’81.

**Low Gross (53):** Philippe Panico ’13, Stephan Panico, Olavo Panico, Andrew Cordia ’14

**Longest Drive:** Matt Handlon ’06

**Longest Drive (W):** Susan Panico

**Straightest Drive:** Kevin Callahan ’91

**Closest to Pin:** Ellan Jortberg

**Corn hole:** Don Viglione ’75, Jack Sellati ’76 defeated Tom Kokoska ’82 and Scott Keller ’76 by score of 22-7 in final.

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**Sports Instead of Trouble**

*by Mike Humby*

Yale senior lineman Allen Davis is a confident, competitive and charismatic guy. He’s a student with many talents and interests beyond his obvious physical play on the football field. He has also had some interesting and colorful experiences that have already shaped his life.

Davis is a well-rounded and skilled athlete. When he was younger, he tried his hand at various sports like basketball, tennis, soccer and baseball, before he zeroed in on playing football. “My mom was really happy that I was always playing a sport because it gave me less time and energy to get in trouble,” Davis said. Once he discovered his true passion, he played four years at Grand Prairie High School in Texas, where he served as football captain and was named their defensive MVP in 2007.

After graduation, Davis spent a post-grad year at Choate Rosemary Hall, where he continued to lead its football team and also had a solid 14-4 record on the wrestling team. While there, he met current Yale teammate Roy Collins, with whom he has developed a close but competitive bond. At Choate, he also played with Charles Holmes, former Yale defensive end who is still very involved as a student manager with the Bulldogs.
Attending this Wallingford prep school helped Davis adapt to living in a different part of the country, away from the comforts of home. Their demanding educational program also prepared him for the academic challenges ahead at Yale.

Davis has been a member of the Bulldogs varsity squad for four years and had his most active campaign last year as a junior, playing in nine contests. Davis has played regularly this year and made an important fumble recovery in the exciting opening season win at Georgetown.

Davis’ biggest fans are his family members. His father, Sylvester, travels from Texas to attend every game and always sits in the same seat, so his son can easily spot him in the Bowl. The long distance makes it more difficult for his mother, Adrienne, and sisters to see him play, but Davis appreciates it when they can travel to New Haven. “They’ve been my biggest supporters since I started playing flag football, so their being able to see me complete my football career is really special,” said Davis. In addition, Davis appreciates the support the team gets each Saturday from many New Haven residents, as well as from the “very enthusiastic” Yale Precision Marching Band.

Davis developed his competitive streak in a family where athletic genes run strong. His older sister, Brienne, was a talented track star at the University of Notre Dame and is someone he’s always admired. “I was always dueling with my sister for accolades, and I always tried to do what she did better than she did,” Davis said. “Seeing her work hard in high school to earn a track scholarship and having her hard work pay off made me want to work even harder to win.”

Davis is a confident person who is willing to try just about anything, including working at some very unique summer jobs. Back in high school, he worked as an Abercrombie and Fitch model, greeting hundreds of shoppers with a friendly “Hey, what’s up?” as they entered the popular clothing store. He loved his next job at Six Flags, where he had the chance to dress up as the Green Lantern, his favorite comic book character. Davis jokingly described himself as a “pretty big nerd” at the time and was glad to get the job. “The pay was way higher than any other job I could get back then, although I had to slog through being Scooby Doo to get there,” he said.

Davis also has a wide range of musical interests which can change from week to week. His current tastes vary from artists like rapper Mac Miller to the British folk rock band, Mumford and Sons.

A political science major, Davis has always been “obsessed with politics” and is in the process of applying to several different law schools. Ideally, his goal is to be enrolled in a JD/MBA program next fall.

In addition to his responsibilities in the classroom and on the field, the Ezra Stiles resident feels a commitment to give back to the community. He has been involved with Operation Opportunity, a non-profit group founded by Yale alumni Jesse Reising and Nick Rugoff, which helps veterans and the children of wounded military families with educational
planning and preparation. Davis was eager to help out during their first Warrior Scholar workshop, held at Yale in the summer of 2012. As he said, “I think it’s important to help people when and how you can. There have been so many times in my life that people reached out to help me, and I just think it would be selfish of me to not turn around and help someone else.”

Davis values the friendships he has made on the team with his fellow seniors and many of the younger players. “I don’t think you could find a group of guys that I have more respect and admiration for than the underclass players,” Davis said. As this 6-foot-3, 237-pound defensive end wraps up his college football career, he can be proud of what he has achieved at Yale. As he said, “I knew after my first visit that I really wanted to be a part of what was going on here. It’s one of the better choices I’ve ever made.”

_Fighting Through it_  
Mike Humby

Senior linebacker Brian Leffler is a fighter. During his college football career, he has suffered several serious injuries that could have defeated most athletes, both physically and mentally. However, the Saybrook College resident has shown great resilience, playing through the pain to make an impact on the field.

Leffler, from the small town of Skillman, N.J., starred at the Hun School in Princeton, where he was a teammate and good friend of current UConn receiver, Nick Williams. For his outstanding play on the gridiron, Leffler was named a two-time All-Prep selection by the _Newark Star Ledger_. After helping lead his team to an undefeated season in his junior year, Leffler received offers to play at high-ranking Division I institutions like West Virginia, Stanford and Syracuse. Despite their strong interest in him, Leffler was drawn to Yale because of the high academic standards. “My teachers, my coaches, and my parents, especially, really hammered home the importance of an education and what that could do for me for the rest of my life. As I got recruited by Yale, I began to understand what Yale would mean as a life decision, rather than as a college football decision,” Leffler said.

Unfortunately, just a few days into his first Yale training camp, Leffler dislocated his kneecap and underwent surgery and rehab, which prevented him from playing at all. After playing his sophomore year on the JV squad, Leffler earned his first varsity letter as a junior, making 13 solo and 18 total tackles. However, pain became an issue again last year, as Leffler played with a herniated disk that required another surgical repair in the off-season.

At the start of this season, the 6-foot, 225-pound senior said he felt “as healthy as I could be” and is ready to put his defensive skills to the test. He has played regularly and recorded 16 total tackles.
Ironically, Leffler had the best game of his career at last year’s Columbia game during an unusual October snowstorm. He made five tackles in blizzard-like conditions, which helped the team record a 16 - 13 win over the Lions. “I think the snow added an extra excitement factor. Everybody on the team was pumped up to play in conditions you’re not used to. I guess I did a good job of keeping my feet under me,” he said.

Through all his challenges, Leffler has had the support of his parents, John and Emi, who attend all of his games. His dad, who played Division III basketball at Ursinus, a small college in Pennsylvania, has been a strong influence on his son’s love of sports. He was also one of a handful of spectators at that memorable victory in the snow. “Their support means a lot. They have been with me for my athletic career since I was young, so being at all my games now really means a lot,” he said.

Leffler is majoring in history, a subject that has always interested him. He hopes to start a career related to either finance or consulting. He is unsure about his where he’ll find his first job, but knows that someday he wants to settle down and raise a family in his home state of New Jersey, an area he really enjoys.

Leffler has a rather unique hobby. Although he doesn’t have much time off after classes and football practice, back in rural New Jersey, he has always enjoyed keeping pets like reptiles, frogs, and lizards.

Dealing with adversity can either make or break a person. For Leffler, it has been a great learning experience and has taught him some valuable lessons that he can use the rest of his life. “Things aren’t always going to go as planned, in football or in life. Although injuries aren’t planned, I have learned important lessons from them. You have to be ready to deal with setbacks. My injuries have made me work even harder at football to get back to what I was,” Leffler said.

Leffler has shown both the physical strength and the mental fortitude needed to overcome his injuries. But it’s really his love of football that has driven him to keep fighting. His greatest accomplishment at Yale might just be how he has handled the struggles of the last few years. As he said, “I could have given up at this point, with what I’ve gone through. But football means so much to me, I never really thought about that. I decided to stick with it, even though I’ve faced some bumps in the road.”

Another important lesson Leffler has learned is that his college days and his football career will eventually come to an end. For now, Leffler is just enjoying his last moments as a Bulldog and looking forward to his future. “Everyone always says it’s a great time and it doesn’t last forever, so enjoy it,” he said.
Chris Dooley and his brother have an understanding. Kevin Dooley will root for Chris to win every football game he plays except when Penn plays Yale.

This afternoon, like three other occasions in Chris’s career with the Bulldogs, Kevin will cheer loud and hard for the team in red helmets, not the team in blue shirts.

Kevin Dooley was a defensive and offensive lineman at Penn. Chris Dooley is a nose guard at Yale.

“The Penn game means a little extra to me,” Chris Dooley said with a chuckle. “My brother roots for me to do well, and he told me he’ll root for us in every contest except the Penn game. I understand. In that one game, he roots for me to do well, but he roots for Penn to win.”

The sibling rivalry isn’t the only rivalry in Chris Dooley’s football career. He also has a rivalry with Dwayne Wilmot, his defensive line coach at Yale. Dooley graduated from Chaminade High School in Mineola, NY. Wilmot graduated from Kellenberg Memorial High, a rival school in Uniondale, NY.

“It’s a running joke between the two of us,” Wilmot said. “We’ve been rivals literally since the inception of my school. We’re an offshoot of that school and have been natural rivals
throughout that time, and we go back and forth, kidding each other about it.”

Dooley had the last laugh this year when Chaminade beat Kellenberg, 35-7, in the annual game between the two Catholic schools.

“We played in the same league, and both schools were run by the same order on Long Island,” said Dooley, the son of Peter and Patricia Dooley of Massapequa, N.Y. “There sure was a rivalry between us. When my high school beat his this year, I definitely gave him a little piece of my mind.”

An economics major, Dooley worked last summer for UBS, the banking and financial services group. At the end of the summer, he was offered a job to work there again next summer, this time as a sales and training analyst on the synthetic equities desk.

“I’m excited about that,” Dooley said. “The team there was great last summer, and I learned a lot. It was unbelievable. I’m real excited to be going back.”

The team concept is something Dooley has learned at Yale, and the coaching staff rewarded him well. In spring practice this year, he was the only Yale player to win two awards when he was named the best defensive lineman in camp as well as the winner of the 1-Team award, given to an offensive and defensive player who best exemplifies leadership and a one-team mentality.

“Chris is an extremely hard-working guy with strong attention to detail,” Wilmot said. “He’s a real hard-nosed player.
He really goes above and beyond to not only make sure he is doing the right thing, but he has stepped up and become a real leader among the D-line group and really the whole defense when it comes to getting guys galvanized to always go in the right direction in terms of hard work and being physical at the point of attack.

“I’m extremely proud of his development from where he started when I first got with him to where he is now. In spite of the fact that he went to my rival high school, I’m extremely proud of the way he has developed and the way he will continue to develop, without a doubt, with his hard work and dedication to his craft.”

Dooley and his fellow seniors had to adapt once again to a new system when Tony Reno was named head coach this year.

“Our defense is pretty similar from last year to this year,” said Dooley, who switched from defensive tackle to nose guard his junior year. “Not a lot has changed. At the nose, playing a 3-4 defense, you’ll probably see a few more double teams. Essentially, we kind of play a combination of a 3-4 and a 4-3 defense. There haven’t been many changes in terms of technique this year.”

Dooley, 6-foot-2, 277 pounds, plays a virtually unheralded, unromantic position, except for the real football aficionado who loves watching the interior work of the offensive and defensive lines.

“A nose guard plays over the center and typically, will be a guy who will get a lot of double teams,” Wilmot said.
“Unfortunately, to the naked eye, to the common fan, he doesn’t get a lot of recognition for what he does in keeping linebackers free from blockers and really spearheading the defense in splitting the formation in half. He can make a team right-handed or left-handed just by making the decision of where the nose guard plays and if he’s effective in creating a new line of scrimmage and penetrating the offensive line.”

Through Yale’s first four games this fall, Dooley had been credited with nine solo tackles, eight assisted tackles, a sack and one forced fumble. He has started or played in every game since his freshman year.

“It’s hard for anyone coming from high school where you’re the star, and you probably don’t have to work as hard to be as good,” Dooley said. “Here, you realize very suddenly that everybody is bigger, faster, stronger than you, and you really have to develop more physically and put in even more time.

“Compared to what I was when I came here, I’m light years ahead now. A lot of that is due to some of the older guys I played under who helped me get to where I am now. Tom McCarthy, Jake Stoller, Joe Young, Pat Ruwe, Reed Spiller . . . all those guys were unbelievable. They showed me how to succeed here, how to make myself better, and that’s been a huge help to me.”

Halfway through this current Yale season, Dooley is pleased with the progress he’s seen this year. “We’re seeing some good things week by week, so we’re getting there, and that’s good,” he said. “We never stop playing, no matter what. I think that’s something that will definitely help us in tighter games. As we
continue to get better, that might be the difference between winning and losing. We understand our schemes better and play the type of football we need to play, the type of football that coach Reno and all the coaches have impressed upon us. And it’s nice to have (defensive coordinator) Rick Flanders here to keep the continuity from previous years.

“I have loved this coaching staff. They are doing great things, all the things we need to do to be successful. I really think they’re putting all the pieces in the right places and, in my opinion, the attitude they have instilled in this team is something that we really needed.”

His Strength is in the Numbers

By TOMMY HINE

Collin Bibb loves to lift.

When Yale strength and conditioning coach Emil Johnson opens the weight room, Bibb is one of the first to arrive. When it is time to lock the weight room at the end of a session, Bibb is one of the last to leave.

The results are self-evident. Bibb’s teammates voted him, pound-for-pound, the strongest player at Yale this year.

“Absolutely,” Johnson said. “Weight room and testing-wise, he honestly is probably one of the strongest, most powerful kids we’ve had in my eight years here. No doubt. He’s probably right there, pound-for-pound, with a kid like Mike McLeod when he was here.
“He’s that strong. He’s that explosive. You look at him, and he’s got probably less than four percent body fat. He’s just a ball of muscle.”

Johnson confirmed his assessment with Bibb’s numbers in the weight room.

“Collin only weighs about 195 pounds, and he dead lifts 484 pounds for two reps,” Johnson said. “So, he probably has a 500-pound dead lift. He cleans 363 pounds for one rep. And he benches 300 pounds for a set of five.”

Dead lift measures lower-body strength and, in laymen’s terms, Bibb can dead lift about two and one-half times his body weight.

“On a clean, he can lift about 1.7 times his body weight,” Johnson said. “On the bench press, he lifts about one and one-half times his body weight, and that’s for a set of five. He also has a 36-inch vertical (jump), and he’s got a 10-foot broad jump.

“Collin has been here all four summers, including the summer before his freshman year, training with us and lifting and running. The summer is the biggest window for our guys to get stronger and to get faster and to get more explosive, all those things we’re working on. It goes to show you, if this kid has put in all four summers here, football really matters to him.”

Bibb credits Johnson and his strength and conditioning program for his improvement in the weight room.

“I just follow what coach Johnson tells me to do,” Bibb said. “He does a great job with that, adapting to what we are better at. I just do exactly what he tells me to do. That’s where I get my work ethic.

“I know the work in the weight room is important to getting better on the field. It translates out there to your skills. I know it’s important to be strong and well-conditioned, and I think Head Coach Reno and Coach Johnson both know that and instill that in all of us. Every one on the
team is a competitor. I think competition is one of the most important things in life. It brings out the best in everybody. In order to get here, you have to be very competitive. In order to succeed, you have to be very competitive. Everybody here naturally is like that.”

A starter at cornerback, Bibb was primarily a special teams player his sophomore and junior seasons until he worked his way into the Bulldogs’ defensive backfield late last year. He had four solo tackles in three different games last season, a career high until he made five solo stops in the loss at Cornell this year. He also had four solo tackles against Georgetown, and his leaping pass interception in the end zone with 33 seconds left sealed Yale’s win against Georgetown in the season-opener.

“I just did what my coaches told me to do,” Bibb said. “I made my read, and I caught the ball. It vindicated me for the personal foul penalty I got four plays before that. Oh yeah. Absolutely. No matter what happens, you have to stay on an even keel emotionally and just put it behind you.”

The game-saving interception at Georgetown was important enough in the eyes of Bibb’s teammates to elect him the team leader for the next game at Cornell.

“It’s an honor, an affirmation of the team’s trust in you,” said Bibb, son of Craig Bibb and Carissa O’Connor of San Antonio, Texas. “It’s just a great honor to go out there for the coin toss.”

Bibb also had four tackles in the loss to Colgate in this fall’s home opener.

“Collin is playing well,” Yale head coach Tony Reno said. “He’s a leader through his actions. He’s a guy who plays tough. When we’re looking at our defense, we want guys who play tough, physical football, and he’s one of those guys. He’s very talented. He’s a kid who can play either safety or corner, but we need a guy who is one of our best
defenders at the corner, and he’s that guy. We’re looking for big things from him the rest of the season.

“He works hard. He’s very conscientious of his body when it comes to training and eating right and making sure he’s optimal for performance. He’s really a great kid to coach.”

While a loss in two of Yale’s first three games this fall wasn’t the senior season Bibb had hoped for, he likes what he sees about this Bulldog team. He sees nothing but good fortunes in the days ahead.

“I’m really proud of the effort we’re giving,” Bibb said. “We work hard. I think we’re working harder than any team that I’ve been on here. We’ve got to clean up some details and just do it when it counts. Coach Reno and his staff have done a great job. It’s the best staff I’ve been around since I’ve been here. The future looks good for Yale football.”

Ready for Any Challenge By Mike Humby

Senior linebacker Dylan Drake definitely seems prepared for any challenge that comes his way, whether it is on the playing field, in the professional world, or in his personal life.

His willingness to take on a challenge has already led Drake to a high school national championship, an internship in professional baseball, and a demanding training and conditioning program to boost his competitive performance on the football field. It also helped him score his first collegiate touchdown on an 18-yard pass play last week.

Football was not part of Drake’s early life growing up in Plantation, Fla. Although he competed in both youth basketball and baseball, he didn’t have any prior experience on the gridiron until his first year at St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale. “I decided to play freshman football, and from there fell in love with the game, and it has been the only sport I have played since,” Drake said.

In his senior year, Drake was an offensive lineman for the Aquinas Raiders and was instrumental in helping his teammates win the 2008 National Championship. “Winning the ‘mythical’ national championship in high school was an unbelievable experience. We had a great team that was close, on and off the field,” Drake said. The team finished the season with a 15-0 record and a No. 1 ranking in
the final *USA Today* poll. His younger brother, Tyler Drake, who is currently a freshman football player at Penn, was on the JV team that year and was part of another title winning season for Aquinas in 2010.

Drake’s parents were always supportive of their two sons and recognized their athletic skills but also held them to very high academic standards. They insisted that the brothers take their classes seriously and finish all their homework assignments before they could go to football practice. As Drake explained, “My parents never let me put sports in front of school work.”

Winning that championship was the highlight of Drake’s early football career and motivated him to take on other challenges. He admits that George Smith, his high school coach at Aquinas, had a huge impact on developing his strong work ethic. “He was a strict coach who demanded a lot of us, and helped us reach our potential,” Drake said. In fact, in addition to Drake, over 20 players on the 2008 winning team have gone on to play at famous Division I programs at colleges such as Florida State, Auburn, Notre Dame, and Ohio State.

Drake spent his first two seasons at Yale on the JV team, and advanced to the varsity squad as a junior. Coming from the Sunshine State, the Davenport College resident had to make some adjustments to adapt to the northeast climate. “Playing and practicing in the cold weather late in the season was definitely a new experience for me. All the hits sting a little bit more in the cold,” said Drake, whose TD last week against Dartmouth came on a fake field goal and a pass over the middle.

As his senior year approached, the 6-foot-3, 224-pound player challenged himself to get in the best shape possible for the 2012 season. He used the summer to prepare for a smooth transition from defensive lineman to outside linebacker. In order to reach his goal of gaining more muscle and losing body fat, Drake followed a strict nutritional food plan, did intensive cardio training, and was careful about going to bed at the same time each night and getting at least eight hours of sleep. This was in addition to the regular off-season workouts run by Yale’s strength and conditioning coach, Emil Johnson. “My personal goals and expectations were to come into camp ready to compete and to be able to play every game as hard as I can,” Drake said. His approach seems to be working: his best game to date was the Bulldogs’ exciting season-opening, 24-21 win at Georgetown. Drake collected a season-high five tackles.

Drake has taken on other challenges to prepare for his future in the sports industry. During the summer of 2011, the political science major interned in the Major League Baseball Commissioner’s office. Drake worked many games at both Yankee Stadium and Citi Field, and was able to attend the 2011 All Star Game while working security and game-day operations. He described his internship as “an awesome, incredible experience, from both a career development standpoint and from being a life-long baseball fan.” While working during the MLB draft, Drake also got the chance to meet a few legendary Hall of Fame players, including Hank Aaron and Frank Robinson. He hopes this unforgettable experience will help propel him into his desired profession.

Like most student-athletes, Drake has limited free time but enjoys watching sports on TV, playing golf, and swimming. He also likes to read and especially enjoys biographies of famous coaches. Another interesting fact most people would not know about Drake is that he took piano lessons for 10
years. Although his current busy schedule doesn’t allow him much time to play, he hopes he can pick up this talent again in the future.

Gary and Jennifer Drake must be very proud of both their sons. They have traveled each year to the Bulldogs’ annual contest against Harvard, and this year they hope to make the long trip from Florida to attend the majority of Dylan’s games. The Drake family will surely be watching intently during the Oct. 20 game against Penn, when Dylan and Tyler face off against each other.

As he looks forward to his graduation in May and the challenges that may lie ahead, Drake has many fond memories of his four years at Yale. On the top of his list is the thrill of playing home games in the Yale Bowl. “The Yale Bowl is one of the most historic stadiums in the world. So much history has been made on this field. It has been an honor to play on the same field as so many Yale legends, and it is by far the thing I will miss most about Yale,” Drake said.

When asked if he could offer any advice for his younger brother, as well as freshman on the Yale team, Drake said, “My advice would be to find something that motivates you and to set goals, both on and off the field, that are achievable, but that also force you to push yourself to the limit. Self-discipline and motivation are very important, especially at a place like Yale.”

Following his own advice, Dylan Drake will definitely be ready to accept any new challenges life has to offer.

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A Special Leader

Senior defensive back John Powers has adapted to many roles on the football field, both on the high school and college levels. But one thing that has remained constant is his image as an effective and selfless leader, one who was voted by his team members as the most likely Yale player to be elected President of the United States.

Powers doesn’t always receive the attention he deserves, but is highly respected by all his teammates. As fellow defensive player Allen Davis explains, “John’s quiet leadership is probably the most “Presidential” trait he possesses. Since freshman year, he has always been a calm, reasoned voice in the locker room, who doesn’t get too high or too low, but instead keeps people on an even keel.”

Powers proved his leadership potential at the Hopkins School in New Haven, where he received many accolades for both football and baseball and was named a high school scholar-athlete by the National Football Foundation. He served as star quarterback for the Hilltoppers and led them to successive New England Class C Championships in 2006 and 2007. In his junior year, he was selected to the New Haven Register All-Area Team in recognition of his amazing individual season: 2,050 passing yards, 1,250 rushing yards, and 50 touchdowns responsible for. Power looks back on his Hopkins years as “an awesome experience” when he had the chance to play with “close knit but competitive teammates.” Although he considered attending several colleges, Powers, who grew up in Hamden, made the decision to attend Yale so he could experience the best of both worlds. Not only could he study and play competitive football at an Ivy League university, but he could do so in his own comfortable surroundings.
“I realized I could feel as though I was far away at college in my own backyard,” he said. “Not only was it a great combination of academics and athletics, but it was a nice blend of the familiar and foreign, the restaurants and shops that I had visited as a kid and the unexplored world of Yale.”

In addition to serving as the starting quarterback at Hopkins, Powers proved his versatility by playing various other positions, including punter, safety and kick returner.

“I think getting a feel for a lot of different positions under my coach, Tom Parr, taught me a lot of football concepts, which have helped me play at the collegiate level,” he said. “It was fun to be on the field as much as possible, knowing I had many responsibilities on both offense and defense.”

His experience as both a signal-caller and a role player prepared him to join the Yale varsity squad as a freshman, where he has made consistent strides over the last four years. Powers was voted “Rookie of the Year” in 2009 for his outstanding special teams play. Being chosen for this award was a great honor, which Powers attributes to the inspiration and example he received from many of the veteran players during his first year. Last year, the Dwight College resident played in all 10 games of the 2011 season and notched 22 tackles. As a result, he was named the Yale Specialist of the Year.

The 2012 season could have been a break out year for Powers. He started in three of the first four games and collected 26 total tackles. Unfortunately, Powers sustained an arm injury in the game against Dartmouth which has kept him out of game action, but has not dampened his spirits.

Powers comes from a very athletic and involved family. His father, Bill, was a linebacker at Fairfield University. He and Powers’ mother, Angela, attend all his games, even during his current injury. His older brother played football at Georgetown and currently lives in Philadelphia, but is a frequent fan of the Bulldogs. As Powers said, “We are a pretty close family and I’ve been really blessed to have their support, both on and off the field, for my whole life.”

One of Powers’ special memories was during his first college game against Georgetown in 2009 when he made the contest’s first tackle on special teams and saw his family cheering him on from the stands. “It was a sweet moment, having my family there and being able to contribute right away,” he said.

He chose to study history at Yale, influenced by his father’s many years as an educator. “My dad was a high school history teacher for a long time, so I grew up around history, going to his classes on school holidays and hearing about his lesson plans and students,’ he said. Powers enjoyed his college history classes, mainly because they were taught by engaging professors in smaller sized classes.

As his time at Yale starts to wind down, Powers is definitely planning for his future. This past summer, he completed an internship at JP Morgan in New York City. Although he had little experience in the financial industry, Powers quickly took to his job as an analyst on the growing markets desk. He was pleased to receive a job offer at the end of the summer and is looking forward to starting his career there after graduation.

Like most student athletes, Powers keeps to a strict schedule that doesn’t allow him much free time. He does, however enjoy cooking, something he picked up after taking a culinary class during his senior year at Hopkins. While living in New York this summer, he shared a small apartment with teammates Kurt Stottlemeyer and John Runk and put his cooking skills to good use. He will also be helping out at home with preparations for the Powers family Thanksgiving meal.

Since his injury, Powers has received great support from his teammates and is optimistic that, with the approval of his doctors, he will return to the field and have a strong finish to his senior season. This quiet leader offers this simple but meaningful advice to the younger athletes on the team. “Cherish the opportunity to play a great game at a great university with great young men. Be consistent, on and off the field.”
Building To Success    By Mike Humby

Whether he’s building homes for Habitat for Humanity or helping to build a winning season for the Bulldogs, Nick Daffin wants to have a positive impact in his final year at Yale.

Nick is slated to play back-up nose guard and defensive end this year, but is not seeking personal accolades. Instead, he is focused on how he can be ready to jump in and help his team when his number is called. “When I get a chance to be in the game, I want to give us the best chance to win,” Daffin said.

The 6-foot-2, 253-pound senior is used to winning. An athletic standout at Elder High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, he served as captain of both his baseball and football teams. In his senior year, Nick helped the Panthers finish as state runner-ups in football, with a 13-2 record.

Although he showed great talent in both sports, Nick’s goal was to play college football, and he was recruited by Harvard as well. “You want to be a part of the Yale-Harvard game. I thought that, between the two, Yale felt more like home. The people were friendlier. Playing home games in the Yale Bowl is just an incredible opportunity,” Daffin said.

Already the recipient of several high school football honors and a finalist for the Anthony Munoz Award, Nick had to make some adjustments getting used to the speed and demands that the college game requires. “There is a lot more mentally to it. I think the time commitment is very difficult. In high school, you can be involved in a lot of things, but in college you don’t have as much time.”

During the season, college players practice four days a week and try to catch up on their studies on days off. As a freshman, Nick had the support of some of the older players on the team, who helped him make an easy transition to the high standards. Their leadership taught him how to balance his academic and athletic lives, including watching game tapes and attending team meetings.

Based on the advice he received from his peers, Daffin now looks for ways to help the newer players build their confidence and make a smooth transition. “I want to fill my role and help some of the younger guys fit in with the team and help them adjust,” Nick said.

Nick began his Yale career on the Bulldog JV squad, which he found to be very beneficial in improving his football skills. “I came in as a freshman and wasn’t ready to play at this level. It helped me adjust and gave me more opportunities to play.”

Over his collegiate playing career, Daffin has been part of many memorable games, such as the contest at Dartmouth during his sophomore campaign, during which the Bulldogs came from behind on a game-winning field goal. He also remembers last year’s game against Columbia, which the two teams played during an untimely October snowstorm.

A major highlight of his years at Yale was last year’s final home game against Harvard. Despite the result, Daffin will never forget the significance of that game. “My whole family was there for the weekend and I got to play one last time with those older guys who I had gotten very close to. I really enjoyed that”, he said.

Despite living a significant distance from New Haven, Nick, the youngest of four children, said his parents, Jim and Pam Daffin, have been able to attend most of his games, something that he really appreciates. “My parents are great. They drive up for almost all the games. They love it, and they love spending time with the parents of the other football players. My siblings have been able to come up sometimes, which is great, too,” Nick said.
During his time away from the football field, Nick enjoys working with a Yale group called the Prisoner Education Project. Through this program, he and other students tutor people living in a halfway house who are studying to earn their GED’s. In addition, when the football season ends, he will be joining other Yale students working for Habitat for Humanity on a number of home construction and repair projects in the New Haven community.

One unique skill Nick has is cutting hair, which he does for many of his Bulldog teammates. When the football season is over, the Stiles College resident is also looking forward to returning to WYBC, the Yale radio station, to serve as an announcer for the baseball team. After learning that one of his friends did broadcasts for Yale basketball games, Nick, a self-proclaimed sports fanatic, expressed an interest in helping out and was soon part of the broadcast team at Yale baseball games.

An economics major, Daffin is not sure about the exact career path he will choose after graduation, but hopes to one day work in a real estate investment trust.

When asked about what motivates him to succeed, both on the field and in the classroom, Nick said, “My parents. They want me to do well. They’ve done a lot for me, and I just want to take advantage of the opportunities they’ve given to me. I want to make my family proud.”

Under the direction of new head coach Tony Reno, Daffin is optimistic that the Bulldogs can come together and have a solid season. “I am really excited. I think Coach Reno has done a really good job preparing us. This is my first time playing for him, and it’s been great so far. I think the team is very much together and I’m just excited to see how we will do this year,” said Nick, who made three tackles in the 24-21 win at Georgetown on Sept. 15.

With a true sense of team pride and a very positive attitude, Nick Daffin is fully prepared to make his mark on the Bulldogs’ 2012 campaign.

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In the summer between eighth and ninth grades, Philippe Panico played 36 holes of golf every day because he wanted to get better. However, he didn't just become a slightly better golfer - his determination and work ethic brought his handicap from an 18 to a five, an amazing improvement. That summer, Panico proved to himself and those around him that he had the determination to persevere in his passion for sports.

Born in São Paulo, Brazil, to a Brazilian dad and American mom, Panico grew up playing sports. He lived on a farm, with plenty of green space, so he was already golfing by the time he turned five. He also played soccer, water skied, and rode horses. With such an active childhood, he developed a love for sports as well as a competitive spirit.

When he was nine, Panico moved to Boston with his mom and siblings, while his dad stayed in Brazil temporarily. With his dad so far away, he developed a close relationship with his grandfather, who had played football at Amherst College. The two of them would often spend time throwing a football around in between Phillippe’s soccer games.

When it came time to choose between the two sports in high school, Panico chose football, even though as a freshmen, he was tiny – 4-foot-11 and 125 pounds. Still, he had a pretty good arm, so he was the back-up quarterback.
Being so small, Panico wasn't dreaming of playing football in college. Instead, he had decided that golf, his spring sport, would be his primary focus. However, in his sophomore year at Buckingham, Browne & Nichols, he began to realize he might have a future in kicking.

It was the team aspect of football that helped keep his interest in the game. In addition, he liked the pressure - the fact that his team was counting on him - and he loved succeeding for them.

"Phillippe is dedicated to coming in and helping the team and making sure he's ready to go on Saturdays to put points up on the board for us. He'll do anything he can to help the team," said Kyle Cazzetta, a sophomore punter.

He was just as much of a team player in high school. Playing quarterback, cornerback, and kicking, Panico was constantly contributing. However, he didn't start kicking in high school until he was a sophomore.

"At first, I really wasn't very special," he said.

Then, the summer before his junior year at BB&N, Panico dedicated himself to improving his kicking, just like he had for his golf game three summers before. Again, he performed an almost unprecedented improvement: his longest kick went from being in the 30-yard range to more than 50 yards. It was then that he began to dream of playing college football.

"I put in some work with a kicking coach and trained a lot and came back my junior year and surprised myself with my progression," Panico said. "The progression continued as I worked hard at my kicking, and got bigger and stronger."

In the spring of his junior year, Panico improved his ACT scores so much that one day his coach called him into his office to tell him that Columbia was recruiting him. Shocked, since he had never even talked to the coaches there, Panico realized he had a special opportunity. He knew he wanted to attend an Ivy League school, but preferred Yale.

"There was something different about Yale and I felt it immediately. My dad and I took the first tour during my junior spring and met with coach [Rick] Flanders, and I was incredibly impressed with everything I saw."

He performed well that summer at the Yale football camp and by the end of July, knew he would be coming to Yale.

"Though bigger schools showed interest during my senior season, I had already found the perfect place for me," he said.

Then, in his senior season, tragedy struck the BB&N football team. One of his teammates, Zack McLeod, had to be airlifted off the field during a pre-season scrimmage because of a serious brain injury. His brain was so swollen, doctors had to surgically remove part of his skull, and he now has limited mobility and can no longer communicate through speaking.

This impacted Panico greatly - so much so that he now wears number 16 in honor of his friend. He says that when he looks down and sees that number 16 on his jersey during games, it gets him excited. It also brings him back to one of his greatest football memories: the BB&N team rallying around its tragedy to go undefeated his senior season. Panico contributed greatly, including a 58-yard field goal, a Massachusetts record, while connecting on 35 of his 36 PATs.

Panico’s success carried over to Yale, at least at first. His first field goal for the Bulldogs was a 19-yarder with no time left that lifted Yale to a 23-20 win over Dartmouth. However, in the next two games, he missed all of his field goal attempts. He chalks that up to a lack of mental strength.

"At this level, the mental side of kicking is far more important than the physical side of it," he said. "All of the physical aspects of it have been addressed through training and lifting to put yourself in the best position come game day. Even certain aspects that can cause a miss, such as bad steps, are more of mental mistakes than anything else."

Now in his senior season Panico finally feels comfortable, mentally, on the field. Mental strength and work ethic are two things he is always trying to improve upon. It seems he is succeeding. He has been the starting kicker for the Bulldogs for three years. And he says his success and progression are largely due to his mentality.
"I feel that today I am significantly more mentally strong than in my first couple of years here at Yale. A part of it is experience, and natural growth, but I really feel that the strongest aspect of my mental game regarding kicking is that I know my teammates have faith in me. I feel confident knowing that I have made kicks in the past and my teammates believe in me. That helps me to not fear the big moment."

As a self-defined perfectionist, he enjoys doing the same motions over and over again, trying to make each movement better. He likes going to practice every day.

"I love that if I ever feel stressed or just need to take some time to myself that I can go to the driving range or football field and work on sports that I love so much," he said. "I always feel that much better after practicing because not only am I getting better but there is also something that feels so incredibly good about hitting or kicking a ball as far and straight as possible, over and over and over."

Panico's discipline also contributes to his work ethic.

"When he makes mistakes, he comes out at practice and fixes them and gets it done," Cazetta said.

Panico agreed, saying, "I cannot end on a miss and am always open to coaching if I truly believe that it will help me get better."

As a lifetime athlete with a competitive mindset, it seems natural that Panico's career interest is in the sports industry. This past summer, he interned at ESPN. He loved being surrounded by people who felt his same passion for sports. As a Brazilian and Portuguese-speaker, he wants to try to find a way to work around the upcoming 2014 World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janiero.

But, for now, he is the kicker for the Yale football team. And he will only have so many more days to find the calm in his routine. It is a routine so precise that he has it memorized to when he breathes.

"Before every kick I put my right foot down on the spot I want Derek Russell to hold the ball, put my mouth guard in, take a deep breath, look up and pick a spot high and behind the middle of the goalposts," he said. "I take three steps back starting and ending with my right foot, deep breath, two to my left and get in a crouch. Just before I crouch I shake my shoulders a little bit and it serves to help me loosen up and settle into the kick. Once I have shaken off bad thoughts and settled in, I am ready to kick the ball. A small head nod to Derek and the play begins."

Important Package
By TOMMY HINE

Roy Collins’ shoulder, elbow and knee pads hide a good part of his large 266-pound frame.

That's not all they hide.

Hidden beneath Collins’ jersey, tucked in a secure spot away from opposing defensive linemen, is a small, computerized package that keeps him alive.

Collins is a full-blown Type 1 diabetic, and the life-saving insulin pump and tube attached to his body are always at his side, day or night, at practice or on game day.
Collins’ blood-glucose, insulin and carbohydrate levels all have to be precisely correct, and the digital readings on the pump that injects insulin into his body are constantly monitored.

“It took practice,” said Collins, a senior offensive right tackle. “It’s been a long four years trying to get it right. I think I have game days down to a science at this point. I don’t have too many issues. I wear the pump on my person in spots where I won’t get hit. I continually check the numbers. When the offense comes off the field before a punt or after a score, I’ll check with the trainers to verify my numbers.”

An autoimmune disease, diabetes prevents Collins’ body from producing insulin, the hormone needed to convert sugar, starches and other foods into energy. While his teammates sip water on the sidelines between plays, Collins keeps an array of additives handy in case his blood-sugar level drops, and his body requires an instant sugar dose.

“I have Powerade,” he said. “I have tablets and other things if I’m really in a bind. For the most part, I’ll just take shots of Powerade if I’m low.”

Collins’ computerized insulin pump is about the size of a cell phone, and a needle or thin tube is inserted under the skin, usually in the abdominal area. The pump delivers the insulin as required to Collins’ body through the tube, thus the need to carefully position the pump on his body to protect it from defending tacklers.

Collins, from Carbondale, Ill., learned he was diabetic when he was 13. The diagnosis didn’t discourage him from playing football, nor did his doctors and parents, Sheila and Roy, try to stop him. It hasn’t, though, been easy, not with an insulin pump always taped to his side.

“It is definitely tough playing football with a pump on,” said Collins, who prepped at Choate Rosemary Hall School in Wallingford. “I’ve found some creative ways to wear it so that it’s not under a lot of danger of being hit. No one has ever discouraged me from playing football, but the challenges of maintaining the right blood-sugar level are definitely real, especially when the entire team counts on me to be able to play.

“After a few years of practice, I definitely am in tune with my body, but every day brings new and different challenges I have to manage, along with the training staff. I feel that my teammates understand my situation and in practice or games when I’m unable to go, someone is ready to take my place. I always do my best to minimize those situations as best I can.”

Six experienced linemen from last season returned to the Yale offense this fall, but Collins is the only senior in the group.

“This team and this senior class, especially, have gone through a lot,” said Collins, a pre-med biology major. “This is our third coaching staff in four years. The majority of my senior class was recruited by coach Jack Siedlecki’s regime. Then, we had coach Tom Williams for awhile and now, coach Tony Reno. We’ve lost a lot of guys, but the guys who are still here are definitely a real tight unit. We’ve overcome nothing but adversity, but wins like the one at Georgetown prove what we’re made of and how tough we can be.
“I enjoy being on this team a lot, and this year is a little different. There is a little more old-school this season than previously. The rules are a little stricter, everything is a little tougher, practices are a little longer. There’s a different dynamic than there was before. Everything is a little different, but we’ve all adjusted accordingly, and it’s only made it better.”

Collins started one game at Dartmouth in his sophomore year when he was switched from tight end to the offensive line. Last season, he started nine games at offensive right tackle.

“It’s all come to fruition, the experience of being out there,” Collins said. “I play a pretty solid game. At Georgetown, I was in the middle of the grades we receive after every game. I was right there in the middle of the starters.

“I’m the only senior, but everyone else, even the “underclassmen,” have all played as much as I have. It’s really great. We all have a feel for each other. We make calls. We know how to react to one another. The familiarity only makes us stronger as a unit. I feel like this is the first time since I’ve been here at Yale that we’ve had a unit this cohesive, especially in our two-deep on the depth chart. Not all of the guys have started before, but we have guys who have played legitimate varsity snaps who could start for us now. We know that if anyone needs a blow, someone else can step in.”

Yale’s offensive linemen wear their numbers on their uniforms, but not their class years or their ages.

“Everyone’s the same,” Collins said. “I trust the juniors and sophomores as if they were at the same level and the same age. We’ve all played about the same amount. The class year doesn’t really matter. I lean on those guys. They lean on me. Being a senior brings with it a little more leadership responsibility on my part, and they rely on me to help teach them in our team meetings. On the field, there is no difference. We all depend on each other and share the responsibility.

“Sometimes, my blood-sugar numbers tell me I need a break. I have full confidence in the guys behind me. They can do the job because they’ve all been there before.”

Collins’ hard work at a largely unheralded position hasn’t gone unnoticed by Tony Reno, Yale’s first-year head coach.

“Coming into the season, Roy had the physical tools that we are looking for in an offensive lineman in this offense, especially a guy who is as athletic as he is,” Reno said. “We were hoping he would develop, and he has. One of the biggest things that Roy has done is to develop himself not only as a player but also as a leader. He plays so hard. He plays through the whistle, and that’s one of the little things we need to do in our running and passing.

“He’s a guy who plays extremely hard. He normally doesn’t say anything. He just keeps pushing, and when he does say something, the guys listen to him.”
It takes a special person to do what Collins and other offensive linemen do every day. Their play is often unnoticed. Their names are almost never in the headlines.

“The guys on the offensive line are a special breed,” Reno said. “It’s a very tight group. I think they’re that way because (associate head coach) Joe Conlin does a great job with them and teaches them to realize you’re as good as the guy next to you. To put the time and effort in to be a good offensive lineman, you need to have a lot of discipline and self-motivation, and Roy Collins has got that stuff. You don’t see it in the stat line, but our philosophy is that there’s not one individual, but it’s a team of guys, and offensive linemen are a vital piece of that.”

Tackling His Future

By Mike Humby

For most students, taking a basic science class can be an intimidating and overwhelming challenge. But for 6-foot-3, 210-pound senior linebacker Ryan Falbo, science has been his lifelong interest and a passion which has defined his four years at Yale.

After long hours of dedicated study and lab research, Falbo will graduate in May with a degree in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology. His dream is to enter medical school and pursue a career as an orthopedic surgeon. But it hasn’t always been an easy road.

Attaining such an ambitious goal has placed great demands on the Morse College resident, especially during his senior year. Falbo has to be on top of his game to balance football practice and team meetings, along with his work in the lab and some very advanced science courses. “It is particularly difficult to juggle the demands of a pre-med course load during season with classes such as organic chemistry and calculus. Since most of my time is devoted to football especially on the weekend, I find that I have to be very productive with the time I have during the week to do the assignments. It takes a lot of skill and time management to finish all the lab courses and classes needed for pre-med,” Falbo said.

Falbo earned many awards for his athletic prowess as a star football player at Moon Township Area High School outside Pittsburgh. He was also an honor student, whose interest in science was stirred up by his AP biology teacher, who encouraged him to continue his studies on the college level.

That advice affected Ryan’s college choices. Recruited to play football by both the Ivy League and Patriot League, he turned down offers from several schools, including the University of Pennsylvania and William & Mary, because they didn’t meet his three very specific criteria: he wanted to attend a college with a solid academic reputation, a winning athletics tradition, and an excellent pre-med program. Yale fit the bill.

“I chose to come to Yale because I knew I wanted to play competitive college football and still receive a top-tier education as well. When I visited Yale, I really enjoyed the campus and the possibility of playing in the prestigious Yale Bowl on Saturdays,” Falbo said.

He plans to take a “gap year” before entering medical school to continue his research and complete the application process. He is currently working on his senior research project through the Yale Medical School, studying how certain genes react in the presence of specific hormones seen during pregnancy. “I’m doing research in endocrinology, but I’m unsure what or where I want to do my research during my gap year,” Falbo said. He has not
yet decided whether he will remain at Yale or return home to Pennsylvania during that year.

Falbo’s interest in orthopedic medicine was reinforced by his relationship with Dr. Stephen Thomas, an orthopedic surgeon in the Pittsburgh area. He served as his mentor and showed Falbo what the profession has to offer. His love of science has been nurtured by Yale Biology Professor Joe Wolenski, with whom Falbo studied this summer. “His passion for teaching the subject really influenced me in the class and overall in my advances as a biology major at Yale.” Another influential person in Falbo’s life is his high school quarterback coach, Ron Skosnik, who helped him develop as a football player. They both remain in close contact, and Skosnik has been able to attend some of the Yale games to watch Ryan play.

Ryan also has a great appreciation for his parents, John and Lisa, and sister Kaitlyn, a current student at Robert Morris University and a member of the Air National Guard. The Falbo family has been able to travel from Pennsylvania to watch most of his games and are proud to support their son, as they did during his very successful high school career.

During his time on the gridiron, Falbo has experienced many memorable games. His first Yale-Harvard home game as a freshman was something he really enjoyed. “It’s truly awesome to see the support we get from alumni, our family and friends for that game and to have near 50,000 fans come to watch us play. To experience that in the Yale Bowl the first time was a very memorable moment for me. It was the first time I was able to be a part of the tradition that goes back so far in history,” Ryan said.

Falbo is a fan of all his hometown sports teams: the Penguins, the Steelers, and the Pirates. “The fan base in Pittsburgh is really strong in support of their teams, so I try to follow them as much as possible,” Falbo said. In what little spare time he has after studying and playing football, Ryan also enjoys watching movies, reading scientific magazines, or just spending quality time with his close friends.

This dedicated player and pre-med student has already had an immediate impact on the young season, collecting nine tackles in a season-opening win against Georgetown, along with 10 last Saturday against Cornell. For Ryan, the most rewarding part about being on the Yale team is the family atmosphere it creates. “The past four years have changed me as a person. Learning to manage my time in order to accomplish the goals I have set, both athletically and academically, has helped me develop a maturity I probably wouldn’t have gotten elsewhere.”

Consistent Leader

By TOMMY HINE

Rare is the player who starts all 30 games over the last three years of his Yale football career.

Will McHale will be one of those rare players.

With only the Princeton and Harvard games remaining in his career with the Bulldogs, McHale will have started every game since the first game of his sophomore season when he puts on his cleats one final time next Saturday in Cambridge.
“That is definitely something I am proud of,” said McHale, senior linebacker from Old Greenwich, Conn. “I’ve been real lucky to stay healthy. I’ve worked through some injuries, but to start every game for three straight years, knock on wood, is something I’m most proud of.”

Still, McHale hopes his playing days don’t end when the sun sets on his remarkable career in New Haven. He admits he would love to continue playing football as a pro.

“It’s not something that I’ve really thought too much about, but obviously, every kid when he starts playing football dreams of playing professionally,” said McHale, a second team All-Ivy selection at linebacker last year. “It’s definitely a dream of mine.

“First, I’m focusing on winning as many games as I can here, and being the best player I can be here, and let things take care of themselves after that.”

McHale couldn’t help but notice the number of pro scouts at Yale practices this fall, and he has received the standard e-mails and questionnaires from a number of pro teams.

“There’s definitely some interest,” said McHale, 6-foot-1 and 236 pounds. “Given the opportunity, I’d absolutely pursue it. I’d play anywhere. I’ve played linebacker my whole life, but I’d be up for playing fullback, basically any position on defense and obviously, special teams, too. I’ve enjoyed playing on special teams here all four years.”

It hasn’t been the smoothest four years, not for seniors like McHale who have played for two different head coaches.

“There have definitely been some difficulties, and some challenges posed with the new coaching staffs,” said McHale, named to the Ivy League honor roll Sept. 17 for his play in the 24-21 victory at Georgetown in this year’s season opener. “I think when you take the right attitude and right approach to it, really buying in, putting all your chips on the table, you can work through those challenges. There’s definitely been a learning curve with a new defense this season and learning a new system and playing with a new position coach, but I think I’ve done a pretty good job of dealing with that and trying to play within our defensive system.”

One of the few constants in McHale’s four years at Yale has been the presence of Rick Flanders, the Bulldogs’ defensive coordinator, 16-year Yale coach and the current linebackers coach. Nobody knows McHale better than Flanders.

“Will has been a joy to coach this year and to watch develop these past four years into a good player who prepares each week to help us win games,” Flanders said. “He is a student of the game and controls the whole defense. He is a quarterback on defense. Because of his versatility, we can use him to affect a game in many ways - - as a blitzer, to disguise fronts, and in coverage in both zone and man-to-man. That is the true test of a good player. He makes the others around him better because other teams must game-plan how to account for Will.

“He has been a very productive player for four years, but he is an even better person and teammate, and that’s why I’ll miss him.”
After Yale’s first seven games this fall, McHale was tied with freshman defensive back Cole Champion as the team leader with 53 tackles, 32 of them solo. McHale also had one sack, 4.5 tackles for losses, and he forced one fumble.

“I think I’ve become more vocal as a leader as I’ve gotten older,” said McHale, eighth among Ivy League defensive players last season with 7.9 tackles per game. “My first years here, I was definitely more of a lead-by-example guy. I’ve tried to become more vocal, especially this year with so many young guys. I’ve tried to be the sparkplug when things aren’t going our way.”

None of this should be surprising. After all, McHale was born into a sports-loving family that has been involved in football and baseball for more than a century. His grandfather, John McHale Sr., played football and baseball at Notre Dame, played professional baseball for the Detroit Tigers and was general manager of the Tigers, Atlanta Braves and Montreal Expos. His father John, married to Sally McHale, played linebacker at Notre Dame and is currently the Executive Vice President of Major League Baseball.

Still, despite his father’s and grandfather’s college football careers at Notre Dame, McHale felt very little pressure to become a third-generation player with the Irish.

“There really was not very much pressure,” said McHale, a two-time state champion with Greenwich High School. “My Dad was always supportive of the Ivy League, and he said if he had to do it again, he’d probably consider the Ivy League more seriously, too.”

Once McHale’s Ivy League career is done, and his possible pro career is behind him, McHale has a wide-open but uncertain future ahead of him. There are no concrete plans.

“Like most 21 year old kids, I’m not totally certain about career plans, but I’m interested in the world of finance,” McHale said. “I spent this past summer working in the Yale investment office, the group that manages the university’s endowment. So, I’m interested in the world of investing and the world of finance more broadly, but I’m not exactly sure where in that industry I’d end up. I know it’s definitely something that interests me.”

Before that happens, McHale has two games to play for Yale and then, hopefully, an opportunity to play football as a professional. When he leaves Yale, he leaves with memories -- the memory of a 30-game streak as a starter and the memory of victories over Dartmouth last year and Penn this fall, both of them highlights of his college career.

“Last year, our 30-0 victory over Dartmouth was the only time we’ve shut anyone out since I’ve been here,” McHale said. “To hold their running back (Nick Schwieger), the returning Bushnell Cup winner, to 39 yards on the ground was pretty special. And Penn this year was a huge win for us -- having not beaten them and then to win that game by the margin we did.

“You know, I really like the resiliency of this team. We sort of have an attitude where we can come every day and work and continue to focus on getting better. That’s been our mantra through this season -- improve every single day and let the outcome take care of itself -- just focus on being better today than you were yesterday.”