A few days before Yale’s football team headed to Ithaca, N.Y., for this season’s Ivy League opener, Tom McCarthy was studying Cornell film late in the afternoon and planning strategy to help his fellow defensive linemen deal with Cornell’s new quarterback, Jeff Matthews. McCarthy, Yale’s captain, was well aware that a leg injury would keep him from suiting up. That didn’t matter.

“He loves to play football. He was watching film for two hours before the Cornell game even though he knew he couldn’t play,” said defensive tackle Jake Stoller ’12. “He wanted to make sure we were in the best position to play well.”

McCarthy is not happy that medical issues have hurt his collegiate football career, but he wouldn’t be here today if not for an illness his freshman year. Now a 6-foot-6, 255-pound end, McCarthy was granted a medical hardship extension of his eligibility after a sudden weight loss kept him from playing during 2006. When he decided to postpone his graduation so he could play another season this fall, his teammates rewarded him with the captaincy.

After taking part in the coin toss at Schoellkopf Field in shorts and his No. 48 jersey, McCarthy paced the sidelines, urging his teammates on. He watched as Yale held the Big Red to just 22 rushing yards in winning 21-7.

McCarthy sat out the final two weeks of the 2010 preseason with an ailment, played the first half of the opening victory over Georgetown and was injured again. The Bulldog defense seemed to rise to the occasion when he returned to the lineup in Week 4 at Hanover, N.H., allowing Dartmouth’s offense only a dozen first downs and 13 points.

McCarthy, not too amped up for his return, registered nine tackles while playing 75 percent of the snaps.

“His motto is ‘Win,’ and his attitude is all about winning,” said classmate and fellow defensive lineman Joe Young. “He is always in the weight room getting extra workouts because he knows what it takes to be a great player.”

McCarthy was a second-team All-Ivy defensive tackle in 2009. His most memorable moment was a third-quarter goal-line stand against Harvard (first and goal at the 5, no points).

He enters today’s game with 54 career solo stops, 82 tackles overall and 10 sacks, though he has far less experience than most of his teammates.

McCarthy, from Chester, N.J., showed early athletic promise -- at 12, he pitched a perfect game with 16 strikeouts in the Florham Park Little League – but he didn’t begin his football career until he was 16. Until then he was a serious soccer player.

He took up football as a junior at Delbarton School at the urging of his older brother, Kevin ’08, whom he later would follow to New Haven.

“I played soccer from 4 years old until my sophomore year in high school,” Tom said. “My brother and I played sports growing up and played in hundreds of games, but we were never on the same team. In high school he encouraged me to play football so we could be on the same team once he went off to college.”

Older brothers, often physically dominating their siblings, can motivate the younger ones to excel in sports. The experience prepares some athletes for roles beyond their years, but the outcome isn’t always positive.”
“I never really played football growing up, but I was always around sports and the competitive atmosphere,” Tom said. “Sports fostered my competitive nature, and having a brother who is two years older only raised the stakes for competition. My competitive nature was instilled in me at a young age, and that’s carried through my college days as a football player.”

Rick Dugan, who coached McCarthy when he was a tall, skinny offensive lineman at Delbarton, remembers his competitive fire. “Tom was supremely driven in the weight room and in the classroom with incredible focus and set of values,” Dugan said. “Teaching him (literature class) and coaching him, it’s no surprise he is captain of the Yale football team. He is going to be a leader in all that he does in life.”

At Yale, Tom was helped by his brother’s presence. Kevin’s collegiate career was cut short by injury, but he seized the opportunity to assist the Yale coaching staff and help his younger brother develop into one of the league’s best defensive players.

Tom doesn’t see his relative lack of experience as a disadvantage, now or in the future. Actually, he thinks it is an advantage.

“It helps that I didn’t start playing football at a young age, especially with all the studies that are coming out on concussions and injuries,” he said. “Football has a short learning curve, so I don't think you really need to start playing football until you are in high school. When you start playing at a young age, you are at a much higher risk for injuries. Playing soccer my whole life helped me avoid injuries, and right now my body is holding up a lot better than some other kids who have been playing football their whole life.”

As a newcomer to Yale in 2006, McCarthy had a rough few weeks in preseason. After competing in a scrimmage against Princeton he was diagnosed with mononucleosis. He lost 26 pounds in four weeks, 30 pounds all told. His weight dropped to 205.

That freshman year only served as an incentive to come back. By his sophomore year his weight was up to 250. He earned a role in defensive line coach Duane Brooks’ rotation, even with a number of veteran players back. In 2008 he started every game. He was even more of a factor in 2009.

“Tommy came here as a scared, timid boy who has become a man,” said Brooks. “He is a good player because he made a decision. He could come here and be ‘a guy’ or ‘the guy.’ Two different things. The end of his sophomore year, he decided to be ‘the guy,’ and it’s worked for him.”

McCarthy had to be out of school and sit out practices last spring (under Yale’s eight-semester rule) in order to take advantage of his medical hardship. He stayed in New Haven and worked for Soundview Capital, run by Chris Getman ’64, a former Yale baseball player and caretaker of the official bulldog mascot, Handsome Dan. The tall intern filed paperwork, did some research and took Dan to events. Plenty of workout and film sessions were scheduled around office time.

“He is more of an on-field leader and is very regimented,” said Stoller. “He is very calm and can slow things down when it’s crazy. He sees the game slower, so he can slow it down for us.

“Not playing was eating him up. He worked his tail off to play, and he’s not a guy who will take no for an answer.”

Kevin and Tom McCarthy are part of an extremely close-knit family. Their parents, Kevin Sr. and Mary Ellen, have attended almost every one of their games. A typical McCarthy family game-day scene, at Delbarton’s field and even at Yale Bowl, has seen the two boys playing football and the camera-wielding parents roaming the sidelines.

Some of their family events turned into getaways and lifetime hobbies for the boys.
“Before sports starts started taking over a good portion of my life, my brother, father and I would go on fishing trips to Mexico and Guatemala,” Tom said. “The first fish I caught was a 200-pound striped marlin, and I was battling it for about an hour. My arms and body were killing me from fighting the fish for so long. I had to hand it to my brother, who had to hand it to my dad, so we actually had the fish on for two or three hours before we released it.”

McCarthy is focused on preparing himself for a shot at the NFL, starting the day after Yale’s season ends at Harvard. If he can lure a team to invite him to camp, he surely won’t get released as easily as his first fish.

Steve Conn is an associate athletics director and Yale’s Director of Sports Publicity.

Money Talks

By TOMMY HINE

For two years, Adam Money played beside one of the best defensive backs in Yale history. This year, he had to replace him.

Adam Money has filled Larry Abare’s cleats quite nicely.

“You’ve got to remember, when I came in here, I got to play behind and learn from not only Larry but Steve Santoro, both incredible football players,” said Money, a first-team All-Ivy selection at cornerback before the switch to strong safety this year. “They’re great guys to learn from, great guys to have as role models at safety.

“Larry is one of those special football players who makes everyone around him better. He brings intensity. He brings heart. You know he’s going to give 110 percent no matter what day of the week it is, no matter what the situation. Feeding off Larry’s intensity and his ability to play the game has really been an honor.”

As a junior cornerback, Money was fourth on the team with 43 overall tackles last season, including 27 solo stops. He led the team with three interceptions and also forced three fumbles and recovered a pair. Money returned one of his interceptions 77 yards against Brown, the fourth-longest return ever at Yale. At the end of the season, he won the Ryan LoProto Award as Yale’s top defensive back.

Then, in the spring, he learned of the switch from cornerback to strong safety in the Bulldogs’ defensive backfield.

“It wasn’t a surprise by any means,” said Money, a three-sport athlete and two-sport captain at Whiteland Community High in Indiana. “We had talked about it at spring practice. They came to me and said, ‘Hey, we think this might be better for the team.’ I like to think of myself as a team player. So when they asked me to make the switch and practice at safety, I just jumped in full-force and tried to learn the position.

“It wasn’t a huge transition. The coverages stay the same. You understand as a football player where the other guys are going to be on the field. It wasn’t a huge change, and I welcomed the challenge of a new position.”

Now, as a strong safety this season, Money leads the team again with three interceptions in Yale’s first six games, and he was sixth on the team with 13 tackles.
“You have a lot more of the field to cover, and there are many more reads from the safety position,” he said. “At corner, you’re on an island, man-to-man for the most part. If the play goes the other way, unless you’re saving a touchdown, you’re usually not involved.”

A year ago, Money was very much involved in saving a touchdown at Columbia to help lift Yale to its 23-22 win. Money made a game-saving tackle late in the fourth quarter to stop a Lions' runner from scoring inside the five-yard line after a 75-yard gain. Then, on Columbia's next series - - and with time running out - - Money forced a fumble and recovered it to set up Yale's game-winning score. He finished with four tackles and was named the Walter Camp Yale Player of the Game and the Ivy League Defensive Player of the Week.

Money chuckles at the number of interceptions he has had as the team leader the past two seasons.

“I wish I could say there was something I was keying on or making happen,” he said. “Like the interception I had against Penn. The guy just threw a bad ball, and I just happened to be around. Having played football for so many years, and having played on the offensive side of the ball in high school as well as defense, you just get a feel for the game. You understand where people are sitting, what the quarterback is seeing, and you’re just trying to put yourself in position where you might be able to make a play.

“Once it happens, your body sort of goes into auto pilot. There’s always that split second after an interception when you think to yourself, ‘Oh, man. I have the ball now.’ You would like as a defensive back for it to happen more than it does, but then, when it does happen, there’s a jolt and you think, ‘What do I do now?’”

Now that Money has made the switch from cornerback to strong safety, it probably would be hard to get him to make the switch back. He really enjoys the freedom to roam the field.

“At the safety position, on any run play, no matter which side - - to the weak side or the strong side - - you have an opportunity to be involved and be involved right now,” he said. “It’s a mindset. I enjoy coming up and stopping the run as much as I like breaking up passes - - just being a football player. Safety allows me to be a little more involved with our defense, and I really enjoy that aspect of it.”

Money also enjoys his studies. He is majoring in the science history of medicine - - a cultural and social look at the progression of science and medicine through the years. After graduation this spring, Money hopes to attend medical school, and he has his eyes set on a career in orthopedic surgery.

“I’m still hoping, still saying my prayers,” he said. “It’s a heck of a process. Right now, I’m in the waiting game, finishing up some secondary applications while waiting to hear back from schools.”

Money’s partner in Yale’s defensive backfield is free safety Geoff Dunham, and the two give the Bulldogs one of the strongest defensive pairs in the league.

“Dunny and I are great friends,” Money said. “I always give him a hard time. He always gives me a hard time. We built a relationship early-on, and it really has matured into a life-long friendship. Out on the field, if one of us messes up, there’s never anger toward each other. We understand what the other one is seeing, what the other one is doing, and it’s very encouraging relationship on the field. Off the field, he’s one of my good friends.”

Money laughs when he thinks about the good times he and Dunham have had, even though separated by a year in class and age. Their respective parents have also become good friends, and the six of them will often dine out together the night before a game.
“We’re just normal guys having fun,” Money said. “He wants to be a research scientist. He spends a lot of time studying up on science, so I always joke about him being a nerd. I understand the work that it takes to do that, and I applaud him for sticking with it. He’s the one of the most-intelligent guys on the team. He takes the joking really well and gives it right back to me.”

Dunham is not the only life-long friend Money has made in his four years at Yale. He really likes the guys he suits up with every day.

“I love the attitude of this year’s team,” Money said. “Throughout the years, the guys have always been great. There have been some great friendships, some great camaraderie. Yale football is what it is because of the guys you play with.

“This year, the team attitude and the dedication to the team, wanting to win every game, willing to put the effort in to win those games, all make this team something special. Nobody ever gives up. It’s wonderful to be part of. I’m a competitive guy. I love to win.”

Money’s parents, Lee and Cindy, have come to every Yale game since his sophomore year, even though they live in Whiteland, Indiana.

“They’re real troopers coming from Indiana every weekend,” Money said. “I’ve got to give them credit where credit is due. They’re wonderful parents. I couldn’t ask for more loving and supportive parents. I’m not so worried about what I’m going to do after football. I’m worried about what my Dad is going to do without football. I’m sure I’ll be the same when I’m his age. He loves this game and being involved and being a football Dad.”

John Pagliaro
By Chelsea Janes ’12

As college football programs go, few boast a tradition as storied as Yale's. The ties between Elis past and present are strong, the Yale football family a tight-knit one. These ties are strengthened further by the passing of the Bulldog way from generation to generation, both from player to player and – in some particularly special cases – from father to son.

Senior linebacker John Pagliaro, son of former Yale running back John Pagliaro ’78, was groomed in the Yale football way. His father dominated Ivy League defenses under Carm Cozza in the 1970s, earning two Bushnell Cups as Ivy League MVP during Yale’s 1976 and 1977 championship seasons. John Jr. began playing football at the age of eight, and came to the Yale Bowl with his father on Saturdays throughout his youth. From very early on, it was clear that “Pags,” as his teammates call him, was destined to play on Saturdays himself – though whether or not it would be in New Haven was not initially clear.

“I always knew I wanted to play college football,” said the younger Pagliaro. “I didn’t know I would be coming to Yale until my senior year. I had big aspirations to make my own mark, but in the end I came here. The tradition is just amazing.”

Yale was certainly eager to have Pagliaro be a part of that tradition. As a three-year starter at the Gilman school in Lutherville, Md., the 6-foot-1 Eli was named one of the Super 22 Best Players in Maryland, Baltimore Examiner’s All-Metro first-team, MIAA All-League and honorable mention all-state. Like his father, Pagliaro was also a running back, rushing for more than 1,000 yards and 10 touchdowns in 2006.

Upon arriving at Yale, Pagliaro started making a legacy all his own, moving from the offensive backfield to the defensive one. As a defensive back, he worked his way up the depth chart, appearing against Cornell his freshman year and playing in all 10 games as a sophomore in 2008.
He had action in nine of 10 games last fall and every game this season. He has switched positions to outside linebacker at the request of the coaching staff.

“I’m very excited about my switch to linebacker this year,” Pagliaro said of the move, which was influenced by the switch to a 4-3 defense for the 2010 campaign – one of many changes that excite Pagliaro.

“This new coaching staff has really changed the culture and mentality of the team on and off the field,” Pagliaro said. “They bring a great energy to practice, and make this all fun.”

Pagliaro’s unique legacy stretches off the football field as well. A political science major, the Timothy Dwight resident is considering graduate school next fall.

“One of the biggest things I’ve learned here is time management between football and school work: to bring a hard work ethic not only to the field and weight room, but also the classroom,” Pagliaro said. “That said, it can be a tough transition to college. I try to take the younger guys under my wing so that their transition is much smoother and more enjoyable.”

Pagliaro’s teammates recognize his role both on and off the field.

"Pags has always been the guy who can ease the nerves of the team," senior linebacker Dan Walsh said. "He's a hard worker, but when guys are stressed out about practice, games and classes he's the best guy to take your mind off things. Pags is always laughing and enjoying himself … even at 7 a.m. practice."

Senior fullback Shane Bannon echoed Walsh's sentiments about Pagliaro's importance to his teammates:

"John is a fantastic teammate on and off the field. He takes a ton of pride in being a tough football player, and he would be the first one to be there, no matter what, for any of his friends," Bannon said.

It is through this loyalty, toughness and willingness to help future generations of Bulldogs that Pagliaro perpetuates the very tradition that attracted him to Yale football. A tradition that he says means everything:

“Every time I step on the field, I represent Yale football – past, present, and future,” he said. “What really makes the program stand out is that guys come from everywhere and become a part of this. Usually when you look at a college team, you see a bunch of people from one general area, but the fact that we bring completely different backgrounds together and create the bonds we do is something special.”

To be sure, Yale football has provided Pagliaro with some memorable moments, but the fact that he highlights the Bulldogs’ last-second win over Georgetown just weeks ago among his most memorable is indicative of the transition the program has undergone – and the new attitude Pagliaro, his teammates and the coaching staff have brought to the Yale Bowl, Class of 1954 Field. That attitude is not evidence of a move away from tradition, but rather a step in continuing it. When asked to highlight the single most memorable moment of his Yale football experience, Pagliaro turned not just to the future, but also to a game defined by its historic past:

“It will be beating Harvard this year,” Pagliaro said simply.

For the sake of tradition, Yale football players past and present hope he is right.

The Center Of It All

by Miyuki Hino ‘12
“He has always been my role model,” says Jake Koury ’11 about his older brother, Clark. So, when he began looking at colleges, he naturally gravitated to Columbia, where Clark was playing safety. However, after surprisingly little attention from the Columbia coaches, he decided to play for Yale. Three years and three Bulldog wins later, Koury has enjoyed the upper hand.

Football has been a Koury family tradition, beginning with Jake’s father, who played at Ohio University. Jake started playing football in fourth grade and has been playing center since his middle school years. The Koury brothers played together for two years at Dublin-Coffman High School, where Jake twice earned all-conference, all-area, and all-district honors. Koury, who captained both the football and wrestling teams as a senior, was named the conference’s top scholar-athlete for both sports.

After visiting numerous Ivy League schools, Koury’s decision came down to Penn and Yale. The reigning Ivy League champions at the time, Yale edged out Penn, and Koury left Dublin, Ohio, for New Haven.

“I’ve had the injury bug since I got here,” says Koury, who has a reputation for always being in the training room. He wears braces on both knees and tapes both ankles before stepping onto the field.

Koury returned from a sophomore year injury fit and ready for a breakout 2009. He won the starting center role under a new coaching staff, learning a new system with a largely inexperienced offensive line. Though the injury bug struck again midway through the season, costing him two games, Koury earned the Ted Turner Award for the team’s top offensive lineman.

Koury is famous amongst his teammates for a unique warm-up technique known as the Jake Koury jog. According to fellow offensive lineman John Pedersen ’11, “it makes him look like he’s working, but he’s not.” In Koury’s words, “it’s a jog, but it really isn’t a jog. I guess I'm a ‘do the least possible’ kind of guy.” He might think so, but his teammates clearly disagree.

“He's certainly not the biggest offensive lineman, but he's going to play to the whistle every play and won't stop fighting until he's won,” says wide receiver Jordan Forney ’11. Koury’s fierce, confident nature has earned him respect and a leadership position.

“He is the anchor for our entire offensive line. He is directing traffic and calling the assignments for the other four guys next to him. Without him, people are lost and the offense doesn't function,” affirms Reed Spiller ’12.

The first season under a new coaching staff is never easy, but one more year in Coach Williams’ system has done wonders for the Bulldog offense. Koury and quarterbacks Patrick Witt ’12 and Brook Hart ’11 have had a number of games together, and they have formed a strong, cohesive relationship. In fact, when a torn MCL forced Koury to the sidelines, Witt told Koury he felt naked without him on the field. The two have grown together in the system, and the entire team has benefitted from their progress.
Koury, hoping to be on the field for the last five games of 2010, is an economics major who spent last summer working at Barclays Capital. He has accepted an offer to return there after graduation—a career path that will reunite him, at last, with Clark.

By TOMMY HINE

He was ready.

For eight games spanning two seasons, he was ready.

Every week, at every practice, Brook Hart ran through the daily drills, knowing he would only slip on his helmet on Saturday if the player in front of him got hurt.

Last Saturday, Hart got the call. Yale's starting quarterback Patrick Witt separated his shoulder in a victory over Dartmouth, and Hart got the start against Fordham.

It was Hart’s first start since leading Yale to a 23-22 victory at Columbia on Oct. 31, 2009 and last Saturday, Hart was ready. He responded by completing 15 of 29 passes for 227 yards, including a 29-yarder to his good friend and fellow senior Jordan Forney for the game's only touchdown in Yale’s 7-6 win against the Rams.

“This year, I have been a little bit more calm, and I tried to transfer that onto the field,” said Hart, who completed passes longer than 10 yards to six different receivers. “I tried to stay low-key and even-keel. I think coach (Tom) Williams has done a great job getting everybody mentally prepared, whether you are a first-string guy or a third-string guy.”

Until then, it hadn’t been an easy year, and rarely has a player’s dedication been tested more than Hart’s this fall. After all, he was Yale’s starting quarterback for the last five games of his sophomore season. As a junior, Hart started four games and played in two others. Until last week, he had been relegated to a back-up role behind Witt, and Hart had been on the field for only one play this year, an incomplete pass in the loss to Albany. Hart handled his diminished role well.

“It’s been tough,” Hart admitted, “but I have to adjust to this role with the team, and I’ve just tried to do that.

“I’m the backup, so I do backup duties. If we need to signal plays in our no-huddle offense, I’ll do that. Otherwise, my role is to be another set of eyes out there for Pat to help him see what
I’m seeing, or to let him know if we’re seeing something different. I’m there strictly in a supportive role.”

Hart arrived at the Yale campus with impressive credentials three years ago. He had been a three-sport athlete at State College High in Pennsylvania’s football country, and he was voted all-league in all three sports. He set school records for single-season touchdowns (29) and yards (2,129), and he was an all-state selection in football and the team’s MVP.

Hart’s success at quarterback continued at Yale. As a sophomore, he set a single-season record for pass completion percentage (87 of 140 for 62.1 percent) and led the Bulldogs with 919 yards and seven touchdowns in the eight games he played. He threw for 292 yards against Brown that season, including a 78-yard touchdown, and he completed three touchdown passes against Georgetown. His junior year, Hart completed 71 of 118 passes for 750 yards and four TDs in the six games he played, including a 73-yard touchdown pass against Dartmouth, the longest Yale play from scrimmage last season.

By then, he was sharing the starting quarterback position with Witt, who was ranked among the top 20 pro-style high school quarterbacks in the nation before transferring to Yale from the University of Nebraska. By spring practice this year, Hart’s role had changed completely.

“Playing spring baseball probably hurt me a little bit in terms of being around in the spring and being able to compete, because the starting job was kind of up in the air since we both played last fall,” Hart said. “Baseball is something I really wanted to do. I really don’t have any regrets about that.

“I had a pretty good idea in the spring that the starting job would be Pat’s. This fall, I hopefully thought I would get a shot at it, but I knew coming in the reality of what was probably going to happen.”

Hart’s dedication despite the loss of playing time hasn’t gone unnoticed by other players and Yale coaches.

“Brook has been the consummate team player since returning to us from baseball,” head coach Tom Williams said. “He is much improved but still understands and accepts his role on our team. He has prepared diligently in his support role, and we are confident in his ability to lead us to victory should something happen to Pat.

“Football is a game of attrition, especially at the quarterback spot, and it’s comforting to know that you have a proven guy with a great attitude in reserve.”

There was a hint that Hart might start against Dartmouth two weeks ago when he took more practice snaps than usual with Yale’s first offense in the preceding week. As a junior last year, Hart threw for 390 yards, the sixth-highest total in Yale history, and three touchdowns in the Bulldogs’ 38-7 victory over Dartmouth.
The start against Dartmouth this year was kind of up in the air because Pat had a wrist injury coming out of the game against Albany,” Hart said. “They just tried to get me ready, not really because I had success against Dartmouth last year, but more in case Pat couldn’t go. By Wednesday or Thursday, he was looking pretty healthy, so at that point, I kind of had the feeling he would get the nod to start. I had to be ready just in case his wrist flared up again.”

It didn’t, and Yale beat Dartmouth behind Witt for its first 2-0 Ivy League start since 2007. Now, after Hart’s start against Fordham last weekend, the Bulldogs are 4-1 and off to their best start since they finished 9-0 three years ago.

“I think we have the players and the capability to win the Ivy League championship,” Hart said. “We’ve been through up and downs in some tough situations, and we’ve handled it pretty well. That’s definitely a characteristic of a championships team, and I’m impressed with what we’ve been doing so far.

“Anybody who is a competitor just wants to be part of a winning team and do anything possible to make sure that happens. Even in a backup role, it hasn’t been too hard for me to stay invested in it.”

Once the football season ends, Hart will turn his attention to baseball again. If baseball isn’t his first love, it’s a very close second. After graduating next spring, Hart would love to pursue baseball at the next level.

“Yes, definitely,” said Hart, 3-3 as a left-handed starter last year with two complete games, one for a shutout. “If I get the chance, I’d really like to continue playing baseball at the next level. I think there’s a fairly good chance. If I come out and have a good spring this year, I think that it’s a pretty realistic goal for me.”

Baseball has already given Hart some memories, not all of them nice. In the nationally-televised 2001 Little League Mid-Atlantic Regional Championship, he was the starting pitcher against the infamous Danny Almonte from the Bronx, NY. Almonte’s team won, 2-0, to give the Bronx a berth in the Little League World Series in Williamsport. After the championship ended less than two weeks later, Little League officials discovered Almonte was over-age, and they declared him ineligible.

“That was pretty devastating at the time,” Hart said. “We were from State College, which was just down the road from Williamsport. We knew we were going to have a ton of people there, and the town was really excited to go there and support us.

“It was pretty tough to take at the time but now, it makes for a good story.”

Acting Like a Bulldog by Tom Kronenberger
Most college students return home to work familiar summer jobs or begin internships. The typical Yale football player spends a few weeks at home and then returns to campus to begin workouts for the upcoming season. Senior Marcus Wallace spent his first two summers that way before making a big change in 2010.

When most of his teammates were in their normal routine, Wallace was 4,000 miles East of New Haven in a classroom learning the nuances of the Czech language. Wallace, with three other teammates, spent five weeks studying in Prague through a Yale sponsored program at Jabok University. He took classes in both the native tongue and in film studies.

Wallace, a history major, found a great appreciation in his surroundings. Besides exploring Prague, he was able to take class trips to Austria and Slovakia.

“We visited Vienna and that was by far my favorite city,” Wallace said. “As a history major, it was awesome to get to see the seat of the Hapsburg Empire with all the grandeur that accompanied it in the museums and palaces.”

Through his film studies course, Wallace had the opportunity to attend the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.

“We were able to see a number of independent films up for awards, and some of us were able to see a new film directed by Adrian Grenier,” said Wallace. “After the film, we got the chance to meet him during a question and answer session.”

For those unfamiliar with Grenier, he is best known for his role as Vincent Chase on the popular show *Entourage*. This was not the only time during the trip that Wallace was able to experience cinema first-hand though. As part of a class project for his film studies course, Wallace worked with his teammates in the creation of a short film titled *Side Effect*. Senior TE Caleb Smith, a film studies major, directed the film, while senior OL Alex Golubiewski was the writer and junior LB Ben Ashcroft was the lead actor. Wallace’s contribution to the film provided a new experience.

“My role in the movie was sound recording, design, and editing. It started out as a fun class project and I had no experience with the video and editing equipment,” said Wallace. “We ended up putting in close to 40 hours in the editing studio, and in the end it became a very serious and time-consuming project, but I really enjoyed it.”

Wallace will have his hand in another movie directed by Smith this spring.

“They have already begun writers meetings for it and I hope to be in the same role again, but hopefully I can find an instructor here who will help me to improve upon my sound editing and recording skills.”

Even though Wallace was abroad this summer, he still found time to begin preparation for the 2010 football season.

“It was tough to work out a lot with class and trips, but a couple of teammates and I got a membership to a gym that was about a 10-minute walk from the dorms and were able to follow along with the summer lifting program there.”

His hard work has paid off. He is second on the depth chart at strong safety and a valuable asset to Yale’s special teams play. Tom Williams, Yale’s Joel E. Smilow ’54 Head Coach of Football, speaks highly of Wallace’s character and abilities.

“Marcus is a hard worker. He is not a real vocal person, but lets his actions do the talking. He has become a very good special team’s player for us because of his size and ability to run in space,” said Williams. “These attributes also allow him to cover a lot of ground at safety. The
coaching staff and I are confident he will do the right thing on the field, but if he doesn’t, he is fast enough to recover. At the end of the day, we are extremely glad he is on our team.”

On special teams, Wallace is a member of the punt return, kickoff, and kickoff return squads. No matter what role he finds himself in, Wallace takes great pride in his play.

“On special teams it is all about the one-on-one block I need to make or being able to defeat that one man to get to the ball. Coach Plummer lets us know our assignments, and it comes down to executing. I take pride in making the blocks I need to make to help the team.”

As a teammate and a friend, senior DL Joe Young has witnessed the passion Wallace has for the game.

“Marcus is an extremely hard worker and he tries to help the team in any way he can. He knows the importance of special teams and is an impact player when he is in the game,” said Young. “Marcus loves football. He enjoys the camaraderie, going to practice, and being around a great group of friends.”

Wallace spent his first two seasons as a member of the JV team, but was given a fresh start when Williams was hired.

“Sophomore year I was giving it my all, but I really didn’t get looked at much. When Coach Williams came in, everyone was on a level playing field.”

Due to this change and Wallace’s hard work, he was able to make an impact his junior season.

After battling back from injury at the start of the year, he made his way into the starting lineup and had his biggest game as a Bulldog. In the game against Columbia last October, Wallace had his first career interception on the Lions final drive to seal a 23-22 victory for Yale.

Before Yale, Wallace was a three-sport athlete at Germantown High School in Wisconsin and the top rated safety in the state by Scout.com. While it was always a dream of his to play college sports, he never thought it would be at Yale.

“Coming from Wisconsin, I never really thought about the Ivy League. Once my brother, Jack, began to receive interest I started looking into it and realized it could be an option. Jack and I have always been really close, and once he came here my decision became easier.”

Football runs in the Wallace family. His father, Mark, is a member of the Concordia Athletic Hall of Fame as a tight end and his brother Jack, who graduated last year, was a defensive end for the Bulldogs.

With both the football season and the fall semester half over, it is only natural that Wallace is beginning to look towards life after Yale.

“I am open to doing so much. Currently I am in the process of applying for Teach for America, which my brother is a part of now, and would be thrilled if I received a position with them. I have also considered applying for other AmeriCorps programs. Eventually though, I would probably like to attend business school and begin a professional career somewhere in the Midwest.”

Unlike the roles he plays in his teammate’s films, Wallace’s future is not scripted. However, he’s hoping he can write the end of the 2010 season.

Caleb Smith Miyuki Hino ‘12
Unlike the majority of his classmates, Caleb Smith ’11 is not busy with job interviews and grad school applications. Rather, he’s busy writing his senior thesis—a screenplay—and has his eyes set on a move to Hollywood after graduation in May. His is certainly an unusual career path for a Yale football player, but Smith has never hesitated to forge his own way.

“From the time I was a kid, I was always fiddling around with video cameras,” recalls Smith, a West Orange, N.J. native. Expressed through music and film, he has always held a certain enthusiasm for the creative process. However, even he never imagined that it would turn into a career.

In truth, Smith imagined himself taking a rather different route: politics. Homeschooled until high school, he developed a passion for politics through hours of watching the news and dinner table conversations. Ever since the 2000 presidential election, “I always envisioned myself doing something in politics,” Smith reflects.

One might think that parental influence had a hand in Smith’s enthusiasm for politics. In reality, his father is the pastor of a nondenominational Christian church. Although football has prevented him from attending church on Sundays, Smith has remained close to his faith. He joined Yale’s Athletes in Action group to stay connected and often plays guitar at their weekly gatherings.

Smith’s high school resume reflects his wide array of interest and talents. He garnered the Kodak Young Leaders Award, the 2007 Matt Lombardi Service Award and embarked on a mission trip to Mexico. The multi-talented Eli, who can play piano, guitar, drums and bass, was part of a band in high school as well. Here, he is a member of the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity band. “It’s definitely not the most serious musical endeavor of my life, but it’s one of the most fun,” jokes Smith.

Remarkably, Smith had never set foot on a football field before his junior year. He played baseball for his first two years of high school and basketball for all four, winning all-conference accolades as a junior and senior. He earned six varsity letters in three sports over his four years.

A late transition to football proved to be no obstacle for Smith. After only his second season, he earned all-county, all-conference, and all-area honors as the captain of his high school team. Nevertheless, Smith had virtually no intention of pursuing a college career until several Ivies came knocking. Yale was the first, and as Smith puts it, “it was kind of meant to be.”

“It was all so new to me,” Smith recounts of his first few days in New Haven. It was a daunting leap for an athlete only in his third year of football. Moreover, having arrived at Yale fully intending to major in political science, he quickly realized that the major might not live up to his expectations.

“I felt like everyone was doing political science, and a lot of the people didn’t even like it,” comments Smith. Disappointed, he looked for a different route and found it in film studies. He spent last summer in Prague, working on a film along with teammates Marcus Wallace ‘11,
Ben Ashcraft ‘12, and Alex Golubiewski ‘11. The screenplay, directed by Smith, is just one example of how he bridges the gap between his two worlds.

In fact, Smith is considering casting several football players in his senior thesis screenplay, which he plans on filming in the spring. Ashcraft, who surprised his teammates with his acting prowess, could be in line for another casting call. Smith is also eyeing Sean Williams ‘11 for a role.

A versatile screenwriter, Smith penned a college comedy-drama in Prague and is currently working on a crime thriller for his senior thesis. He describes his own taste as “eclectic”, naming legendary Martin Scorsese and Christopher Nolan of *Batman* fame as his role models.

“He really motivates me because he truly cares about what he's doing,” says teammate Andrew Pappas ‘11. “You don't usually see a guy so talented on the guitar and as an athlete simply because both take lots of time and commitment.”

The current class of senior tight ends has spent time under five different coaches: three tight end coaches and two different offensive line coaches. Although the constant shuffle hasn’t been easy, Smith believes that the frequent changes have contributed to the group’s sense of camaraderie. “There hasn’t been much continuity, but that’s why we all support each other,” he says.

This rotation saw him starting every game last year as the top blocking tight end, and Smith has grown comfortable in the flexible system. He is willing to contribute in any role he is asked to play, and he knows this quality will be vital for him as he starts up a career in Hollywood.

Fellow tight end Chris Blohm ’11 sees a bright future for Smith. “I’m lucky to be in a position group with him. He’s creative and a great story-teller. He has a way of captivating his audience.”

Becoming a director is hardly a simple interview process, but Smith is prepared to do whatever he can to get his foot in the door. He realizes he has been more reflective than usual thus far this season, with one eye looking forward to the next step. The road from New Haven to Hollywood may be the path less traveled, but it’s nothing new for him.

Jesse Reising

By Shannon Todesca

When Jesse Reising came to Yale to play division one football he never thought he would be leaving as a flying football player with a military dream. Becoming one of a few college football players to earn his pilot’s license was just one more step in Reising’s road to become a military officer.
Growing up Reising focused on being a three-sport athlete in high school and becoming a division one collegiate athlete. It wasn’t until he attended Yale that he developed his high regard and passion for the military.

“Once I got here I developed a broader view of what life is really all about and how special America is,” said Reising, “I think I started to mature in that regard and I have such a profound sense of respect and responsibility to those who came before me and gave so much, and I want to be a part of that. It’s extremely fulfilling to be a part of something so much bigger than yourself.”

Reising is more than just a college athlete. In addition to football and flight school, he attended Marine Corps Officer Candidate School, which will commission him as a second lieutenant after completion this summer. He volunteered with veteran service groups, and on top of all of that he balances a double major in economics and political science, maintaining a 3.75 GPA.

With all that Reising is involved in, it is in his fraternity, Delta Kappa Epsilon, that he finds most of his inspiration for his future goals.

“I already held the military in very high regard, and once I joined my fraternity here at Yale, those feelings really got reinforced,” said Reising.

Tim Handlon ’10, who is currently in the process of applying to Officer Candidate School with the Naval Special Warfare, organized a philanthropy program for the fraternity to raise money for care packages to be sent to U.S. Navy SEALs in Afghanistan last year. The fraternity held "Support the Troops” parties and otherwise raised money from sponsors in the community. Each year Delta Kappa Epsilon manages to raise several thousand dollars for the cause. Reising was all over that.

Reising continued to lend aid to the U.S. military by spending time in Washington, D.C., working for the House Committee for Veteran Affairs. That’s where he met the type of men he aspires to be like.

“One of my tasks was to coordinate activity with the different veteran service organizations, such as Disabled American Veterans, Warrior Project, etc.,” said Reising. “I was able to meet some really inspirational people, some really inspirational veterans.”

With renowned schools of law and medicine at Yale, the military is not an obvious choice for Yale graduates.

“One thing that really surprised me is when I was coming into Yale I thought the military would be a really abnormal career path, which it is, but it’s still very highly respected and I’ve got more positive responses than I’ve ever expected to,” said Reising.

Reising’s support extends beyond the wholesome brotherhood of his fraternity, his team and his peers at Yale. Although they are wary of the dangers of being a Marine, as any parent might be, Reising also says his parents are a part of his strong support system.

“They’re going to support me in whatever I do, one hundred percent, they always have and they always will, but they obviously have their reservations, which I completely understand, and that’s probably a good thing,” Reising said with a laugh.

While Reising is more than ready for at least four years in the Marine Corps, there still are some decisions to be made and flight school was a step in making some of those decisions.

“I was contemplating whether I would do infantry or be a pilot in the Marine Corps,” said Reising, “I got my pilot’s license and I really enjoy flying but I’m still kind of a boots-on-the-ground, get-your-hands dirty type of guy… so it’s still up in the air whether I’m going to go the infantry route or aviation.”
Reising, who describes flying as an incredible sense of freedom and independence, said that one of the best moments in flight school was his first solo flight, a big deal for any young pilot. He took his with only nine hours of flying under his belt.

“Once I got up in the air all the nervousness just wore off, you really just hone in to the task at hand and you’re really too focused to worry about any other feelings,” said Reising.

With a successful first solo flight under his belt it was time for Reising to follow a typical tradition for new pilots.

“Adhering to tradition, one of the things they do is cut off the tail of your shirt after your first solo flight. It’s supposed to represent the moment the instructor can cut you free from instruction,” said Reising, a candidate for the National Football Foundation’s William Campbell Award (top scholar-athlete).

While he still looks for instruction from his coaches on the football field, Reising is ready to cut his shirt tails once more and pursue his future in the Marine Corps.

Shannon Todesca, an intern in the Yale Athletics Department, is a junior at Quinnipiac University.

Joe Young

Joe Young loves to hit. Always has. Always will.

That is the biggest reason he plays on Yale’s defensive line.

“Any person who likes contact will enjoy playing defensive line,” said Young, a starter at defensive tackle the last two seasons. “You’re hitting somebody on every play, and there are a lot of chances to be involved on every play of the game. You have to do your job in order to be successful.”

Defensive line play is not for everybody.

“Liking the contact and being able to affect the game on every snap is what leads most people to play the defensive line,” Young said. “Every single play, you have to attack the offensive lineman in front of you and play off him, whether it’s a run or a pass. It’s definitely fun being involved on every play.”

Through Yale’s first six games this year, Young had 14 solo tackles, including a career-high four solos in the victory over Dartmouth. Last fall, Young was tied for second among the Bulldogs’ interior linemen with 24 total tackles, including 13 solo stops, and he was selected Honorable Mention All-Ivy.

“Size is a big part of it, but more than that, it’s the physicality,” said Young, 6-foot-3, 285 pounds. “A good defensive lineman needs to be able to control the line of scrimmage and get penetration into the offensive backfield. If you’re able to control the guy in front of you, not get blown off the ball and can disrupt things in the backfield, you’re doing your job. Speed and size
help you do that.”

Young works hard at keeping his weight up, not easy to do with the physical workouts he goes through every day. He never misses a meal in Yale’s dining hall.

“The main way to keep your weight up is just by eating,” Young said. “I am on the meal plan, so every time I go to the dining hall, I definitely eat a pretty good amount of food. With all the running and working out we do, eating a lot is definitely a priority in keeping on the weight. Usually, I’ll eat my three meals a day in the dining hall and then have a couple of smaller meals and some protein shakes in between.

“I don’t have a calorie goal every day, but the bigger I’ve gotten, the larger my appetite. I eat the same size portions every day, and it definitely keeps my weight up.”

While growing up in Shrewsbury, Mass., only 40 miles down the Mass Pike from Harvard, Young always thought he would play football in Boston. He was a two-time Division I All-Star at St. John’s High and won five varsity letters in football and baseball, but Harvard never recruited him. Yale did.

“Growing up, I always wanted to play at Harvard,” Young said. “Some people who played at my high school before me went to Harvard. I talked to a couple of them, and they seemed to have a good experience. Even though I lived so close, I didn’t have any real connection to Harvard, but it was a popular school where I lived. They didn’t really recruit me, so obviously things didn’t work out there.”

With Harvard showing little interest, Young was leaning toward playing football at Brown or Holy Cross. “I was ready to go to one of those schools,” he said. Then, one of his high school coaches talked to him about Yale and former head coach Jack Siedlecki.

“One of my high school coaches coached with coach Siedlecki at WPI early in his career,” Young said. “He recommended I go to Yale and play there for coach Siedlecki. Early in my senior year, I went to the Yale-Penn game in 2006, and I met with coach (Rick) Flanders. I loved the campus from the moment I walked in, and I loved the coaches. I decided I wanted to be part of Yale football, and things worked out from there. I had the feeling that something special was going on at Yale, and I wanted to be part of it.”

In Young’s freshman year, Yale finished 9-1, losing only to Harvard in the last game of the season. This year, Young really likes Yale’s chances to win an Ivy League championship.

“I like this team,” he said. “I really like our resiliency. Every single game we’ve played this year has pretty much come down to the wire. We’ve had to overcome a lot of adversity in each game, whereas in years past, maybe we didn’t handle adversity as well.

“I think the group of guys on the team this year, especially with the leadership of the senior class, has made us much more able to overcome adversity when things go wrong on the field. Not only are the seniors very close, and the whole team is extremely close.”
Young is especially proud of the defensive line. “I think we have a really good group of people,” he said. “I would use the word depth. We have a lot of depth, especially because we have six guys on the interior line who all play. Four guys are in the main rotation, and we don’t have much drop off when another defensive lineman comes in. We can get some rest without worrying about losing anything on the field. The other three guys have been doing a great job this year and are all really good players.”

“The rotation of defensive linemen depends on how well the group on the field is playing. Usually, if you give up a couple of first downs, the next group will go in to see if they can make a stop. The coaches will go with the hot hand. If one group is getting a lot of three-and-outs, they’ll usually keep playing.”

After graduating next spring, Young hopes to land a job in sports medicine. To help achieve that goal, his short-term future includes medical school.

When he finally leaves the New Haven campus, he will take with him some wonderful memories.

“I’m a pretty low-key guy but reliable,” Young said. “I’ve been vocal when I need to be. There are obviously some guys on the team who are more vocal than me, but I definitely speak up when the opportunity presents itself. I’m not the flashiest player on the field, but I take pride in taking care of my responsibility and focusing on my job. While I might not make too many spectacular plays, my teammates can rely on me to play solid defense and do what the coaches ask.

“Obviously, playing football at Yale is a very large time commitment. I’m around my friends all the time, and that’s what makes it great. The friendships I made while playing Yale football will last well into the future.”

Alex Barnes

By Ron Vaccaro ’04

It’s July 28, 2010, and Bulldog kicker/punter Alex Barnes ’11 is supposed to be in his “Film, Video and American History” class as part of Yale’s summer session. Instead, he’s in New York City at the studios of The View, waiting to get his picture taken with President Obama. (He had to write a two-page paper on The Outlaw Josie Wales to make up for his absence from class that day, a trade-off that was well worth it.)

Through a former classmate at Yale, Barnes got a job as driver for a day in Obama’s motorcade. Though he didn’t drive the President himself, Barnes chauffeured the White House press group through blocked-off streets in Manhattan in one of the 15-passenger vans motorcades are (in)famous for.
“Driving on closed streets in the middle of New York City, that’s one of the most unheard of things ever,” Barnes said. “Nothing ever stops in New York City… people were lining the streets. That was just an unbelievable, awesome thing I got to do. Coming from St. Louis, you never dream of meeting the President.”

Ten months earlier Barnes, who never dreamed of playing football growing up, accomplished something else that could be described as “unbelievable” and “awesome” in Manhattan.

Yale was playing at Columbia and Barnes was making his first start as the Bulldog placekicker. The Bulldogs were trailing 6-0 with six seconds left in the first half and had a 4th and 15 on the Columbia 31-yard line. That was the scene as Barnes lined up for his first collegiate attempt, a 47-yarder. No chip shot for any kicker, be it in the Ivy League or the NFL.

So, what was going through Barnes’ mind when he lined up for the kick?

“Nothing was going through my mind, and that’s how it usually is,” Barnes said. Contrary to what one might expect, Barnes, like most kickers, does not look at the uprights when charting the course of the kick.

“When you line up, you try to find an exact point, whether it’s a certain seat in the stands or a tree or a person,” Barnes said. “You want to find exactly where the center is.”

He vividly recalls his focal point from this 47-yarder.

“A tree branch,” Barnes said. “The lift where our film crew is was right there in the middle, and through one of the spires was a branch that just stuck out and that was my middle point. So that is what I was staring at.”

Barnes had the importance of picking a central spot reinforced a few summers ago when he had the opportunity to kick with Neil Rackers, an accomplished NFL kicker originally from the St. Louis area. Rackers was in town to hold a kicking camp at Barnes’ high school (Christian Brothers) the summer after he graduated.

“Rackers said you should never see the post as a kicker,” Barnes said. “You should see 15-20 yards past the post… That’s where you’re kicking to.”

Snap… Spot… Boot… (47 yards)…Good.

“After I kicked it, I remember just turning to Scuds (Richie Scudellari ’10, the holder) and just giving him a hug,” Barnes said. “I was elated – astounded, really – that I’d just made a 47-yarder. Still, nothing was really going through my mind. I feel like I kind of blacked out for a second right after I kicked it and saw it was going in, it was just a really cool feeling.”

Those were his immediate emotions. Now almost a year later, he still speaks of that moment with an air of elation.

“Making that 47-yarder for my first kick ever in college was the best feeling in my life,” Barnes said. “That was hands down the best moment I’ve ever had in sports.”

Barnes speaks of a rather prolific sports career. He was an accomplished baseball and soccer player growing up. The self-described diehard St. Louis Cardinals fan (who also worked in the Commissioner’s Office at Major League Baseball this summer) has his peers to thank for his path to football.

“I never imagined myself playing football growing up,” Barnes said. “I had a lot of friends who played pee wee football and everything, but I was always into baseball and soccer. Then as we got older, with my friends playing football, if I wanted to hang out with them, we had to be on the same schedule, so I went out for football and loved it.”

While his soccer skills made kicking a somewhat natural choice, it was not the only position he played when he first set foot on the gridiron competitively in high school.
“One of my best friends was playing defensive end, so I played defensive end,” Barnes said.

A few weeks later, he was moved to linebacker, where even as a freshman he played five varsity snaps. Sophomore year, he spent some time at fullback before being told to concentrate solely on kicking. But then as a senior, he was back on the defensive starting corps, this time at safety. Barnes earned all-state recognition at that position. How many college kickers can say that?

But to date, no moment compares to that kick. And as big as the 47-yarder was for him personally, it may have been even bigger for the team. Yale would go on to stage a dramatic second half comeback as quarterback Patrick Witt ’12 connected on touchdown passes to John Sheffield ’10 and A.J. Haase ’10 and Alex Thomas ’12 ran for a score to lead Yale to a 23-22 win. One needn’t take Yale calculus to know those three points at the end of the first half were huge.

“That win changed the season for a lot of people,” Barnes said. “That game set the tone for this year. Knowing that if we’re down, we can come back, knowing that we have the right guys.”

Tom Mante ’10, who kicked an Ivy League record 54-yard field goal vs. Cornell last season, believes Barnes is well-positioned to help the Bulldogs to a successful season this fall.

“Alex has grown tremendously as both a punter and a kicker over the past four years,” Mante said. “He has always done the little things needed to be successful. He has always had a very calm demeanor, which helps him remain relaxed, yet focused, in big game situations. He’s a great team player, and will be able to do whatever the team needs of him.”

Ron Vaccaro ’04 is in his sixth season as the Voice of Yale Football on News/Talk 960 WELI-AM and 960WELI.com.

John Pedersen     By Miyuki Hino ‘12

At a Yale hockey game last winter, John Pedersen ’11 stretched all of his 6-foot-7 frame, leapt and snagged a promotional t-shirt that had been thrown into the crowd. Then, he turned and handed it to a thrilled little boy standing beside him.

That little boy, Jeff, was matched with Pedersen as a part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. Sharing a love for sports, the two frequented Ingalls every weekend to cheer on the Bulldogs. Pedersen, an offensive lineman for the Elis, is no stranger to the natural friendships that develop with teammates. In his case, though, passion for sport served another purpose: a platform for Pedersen’s lengthy history of volunteer work.

Pedersen began volunteering in high school, where he spent one summer volunteering with So Others May Eat (S.O.M.E.) near his home in Great Falls, Va. He also participated in community service projects as a member of the National Honor Society.

At Langley High School he garnered varsity letters in football and basketball as a junior and senior. He earned scholar-athlete recognition for a GPA above 3.5 for each of his four years.
Since then, he has continued this balancing act, with volunteer work, school and football all on his plate.

Pedersen is a big part of Special Olympics Yale, the only football player in the group. Last year, they conducted a hockey camp at a nearby school, and held a mini-Olympics later in the spring. On top of that, Pedersen found time to be Jeff’s mentor, whether they were hanging out in his apartment or going to Ingalls. It is a tribute to Pedersen’s commitment to volunteer work that he managed to fit 6 a.m. lifts and a seven-year old boy into his schedule.

“I do my best to do what is asked of me,” Pedersen says humbly about his role on the football team. He may be modest (“I'm really bad at talking about myself,” he confesses several times), but that doesn’t fool roommate and fellow O-liner Jake Koury ’11. “He’s a monster,” Koury insists, “easily the biggest guy on the team.” However, that wasn’t always the case.

Hard work in the weight room has marked Pedersen’s steady progress throughout his four years. Coming in at 265 pounds, Pedersen still remembers his first winter lift here. “I couldn’t walk downstairs after,” he recalls. Since then, he has grown physically—and into a bigger role on the team.

Two years ago, he saw regular action with the field-goal unit and as a backup on the offensive line. That 2008 season included an infamously cold game at Harvard. “That’s what football is, playing in the most extreme environments,” Pedersen says fondly, though the leg hairs he singed standing by a heater might not be the most pleasant of memories.

Another winter of workouts got him to 280 pounds and a starting role on the offensive line. Graduation and coaching changes had resulted in a largely inexperienced line and an entirely new system, and the unfamiliarity proved difficult to overcome. The offensive line came under fire, and Pedersen and his teammates took note.

“Our defense has always been the best,” he notes. “We (offensive line) definitely have something to prove.”

Gaining weight has been no easy task for Pedersen. “The discipline required to eat healthy and consistently is comparable to weight training,” he says. Missing a meal could mean a two or three-pound weight loss the next day, so Pedersen added protein shakes and bars to three big meals each day.

Pedersen is ready to lead by example and silence the critics. His physical style of play has benefitted from his now 300-pound frame, and a better understanding of the offense has helped as well.

Pedersen makes his presence felt off the field as well. Teammate Evan Ellis ’12 says, “John smiles a lot. He’s one of the guys you can look to when you are down. He can brighten your day.” This sentiment is one that is shared by teammates and community members alike.
Through a finance program organized by the Yale football program, Pedersen spent some time this summer visiting the trading floors of five different investment banks. The Eli lineman is an economics major and looks to return there after graduation. For now, though, his eyes are set firmly on an Ivy League title.

**Shane Bannon**  
*By Tommy Hine*

Shane Bannon thought the trot through the tunnel at Yale Bowl was the thrill of his life.

Then, he walked into the weight room at Yale.

“Testing day in the weight room is so intense,” Bannon said. “It’s unlike anything I’ve ever done. You walk in there, and everyone is screaming and yelling and hollering. It’s incredible. It’s pretty exhilarating. The coaches are all fired up. Everyone is trying to move as much weight as possible.”

On one memorable testing day in March of Bannon’s sophomore year, he lifted more weight in the power clean than any player ever had at Yale.

“I lifted 175 kilos, which is like 385 pounds,” Bannon said. “It was pretty cool to do that with all my teammates around.”

The old record of 172 kilos, the metric equivalent of 378.4 pounds, was set by fullback John Sheffield, who graduated last year.

Bannon held the new record he set for a year and a half until Colin Kruger, a 268-pound junior offensive lineman, tied his record this August. Their record still stands, and it can’t be broken or tied again until the next testing day in March.

“Colin is the strongest guy on the team,” Bannon said. “It’s the team record of all-time, for everybody, no matter what position they played at Yale.

“It's incredible. My record was good for a year and a half before it even got tied.”

A bruising 266-pound fullback with a reputation for punishing blocks, Bannon would have had a chance to break his own record this past March if he had not undergone shoulder surgery two months earlier.

“I tore my labrum and rotator cuff in my left shoulder in the middle of last season and kept playing,” Bannon said. “It got pretty bad, so I had to get surgery at the end of January.

“It feels real good right now. I wasn’t that much of a weight lifter at Pomperaug High School. I still weigh about the same as I did when I arrived here but in four years, I’ve changed bad weight to good weight by working real hard. I came in here benching 220 pounds. I benched 360
before I hurt my shoulder. I’ve probably changed the most in the weight room than anyone in our class.”

Bannon’s record-breaking day in the weight room may not have surpassed the trot down the tunnel on his first trip into Yale Bowl, but it came very close. Both were memorable thrills.

“It’s a lot different, but they’re both pretty special,” Bannon said. “They’re both great traditions at Yale.”

For a home-grown athlete who grew up in Southbury, it has been a rewarding four years.

“I couldn’t be happier with my decision,” Bannon said. “Being a Connecticut kid and being able to play at Yale is like a dream. I went to a bunch of Yale games as a kid, and it’s been awesome. I could never ask for a better experience. The guys are great. I’ve made my friends for life here. I couldn’t be happier about it. Every class that goes out of here is even closer than the last. It’s pretty awesome to see.”

Perhaps other players with unrealistic expectations and larger egos would have been frustrated with the lack of playing time as an underclassman. Bannon never once complained.

As a freshman, he played junior varsity football as a backup fullback and running back. As a sophomore, Bannon was again the backup at fullback, and he played on special teams and scored his first college touchdown on a pass reception against Georgetown. As a junior, he was the back-up to Sheffield, the leading receiver on the team. Bannon’s duties were mostly as a blocker. Still, he scored a touchdown at Princeton, and he had a 21-yard catch and run play against Harvard.

“When I was in a game, 70 percent of the time I was blocking and 30 percent of the time I was going out for passes,” Bannon said. “Now that Sheff is gone, I’ll be doing a lot more of that. I’m excited about it. I hope to make a bigger impact. I averaged 20 to 25 plays a game last year. I hope to do a lot more this year, maybe 40 plays or more, probably half running and half receiving, depending on our blocking schemes. I’m really excited, because I feel like I’ve finally reached my potential, and I can do a lot more out there than in years past.”

For three years, Bannon waited patiently, knowing that a larger role would eventually come his way.

“I don’t think I was ever really frustrated,” he said. “My freshman year, I had no problem playing JV. To be honest, a lot of guys get to college, and they think they’re going to play right away, but it’s a completely different world. It’s a lot faster. There are more mental demands.

“I didn’t think I deserved to play my freshman year, so I never had any problem with it. My sophomore year, I was still getting into my role here, still learning a lot of different things, still learning more routes at fullback. I’ve never been upset or frustrated with my playing time here. I’ve gotten as much as I’ve deserved. Last year, John Sheffield had an amazing season and
spending time with him was a great honor in itself.”

Now, it’s Bannon's turn, and it was well worth the three-year wait. His improvement in that time hasn’t gone unnoticed.

“Shane has next-level potential,” Tom Williams, Yale’s Joel E. Smilow ’54 Head Coach of Football, said. “He is a big man who can really run and move his feet at 260 pounds. He has leadership ability, as do all the kids on our team. He has an outgoing personality and is really fun to be around. He is a hard worker in the weight room, and he has the versatility to play fullback and tight end for us. We are expecting a big year from him.”

So, too, is Shane Bannon.

“It’s going very well this year,” he said. “I’m the starting fullback and starting H-back right now, so it’s pretty exciting. I’m finally going out and catching a lot more passes. I feel a lot more versatile than in years past. I line up at tight end some times and also at wide receiver, so that takes me out of the backfield, depending on the play and depending on who’s in the game.

“Our offensive corps is clicking great right now, like it never has since I’ve been here. Last year, we were all learning something new, and it was crazy. It was tough. Now, we have 11 or 12 starters back, including guys who were injured. Everyone has the same goal. We all want to win an Ivy League championship. We know we can if we play our best.”

While they try to win Yale's first league championship in four years, Bannon will have a lot of fans watching. He couldn’t have bigger fans than his parents, Bob and Lisa. The last two years, they attended every varsity game he played, home and away.

“It’s great to have that support,” Bannon said. “I also have two sisters and a brother, and they all come to the games, too. It’s been an incredible environment to grow up in. It’s nice to have family that close.”

Sean Williams  By TOMMY HINE

Sean Williams’ stay at the U.S. Naval Academy had been very successful but very brief three years ago.

As a freshman, he was ranked first in his company in that Plebe Summer of 2007. On the football field, he was third on the depth chart at outside linebacker, second on special teams.

But his football career at the nation’s breeding grounds for future admirals lasted less than 2½ weeks. Something just didn’t feel right at the time.
“I was doing really well, but for some reason, it felt like it just wasn’t the right timing,” Williams said. “At that time, it wasn’t really the right fit for me. I felt like I needed a change. I had my mind in other places. It just didn’t feel it was the right time for me to be there.”

So, in the time it took to make one phone call to New Haven and take a one-way flight from Baltimore, Williams transformed himself from a Midshipman to a Yalie.

“It took less than an afternoon, maybe about an hour or two for the plane ride or however long it was,” Williams laughed. “It was pretty quick, and it happened right away.”

When he arrived at the Yale campus, he had nothing but the shoes on his feet, the pants on his hips and the shirt on his back.

“I only had a few clothes,” Williams said. “We weren’t allowed to bring many civilian clothes to Navy.

“I had one set of clothes, one pair of shoes, no sheets. I didn’t have anything when I showed up at Yale. All I had was a flannel shirt and some khaki shorts. I didn’t have much.”

Williams immediately attended a couple football meetings, went through freshman orientation and the next day, he was on the practice field with the Bulldogs.

“It wasn’t too bad, because I just had two or three weeks of football at Navy,” Williams said. “I was ready to go.”

But his supply of clothes was a problem. Williams didn’t have any, other than what he wore when he stepped off the plane.

Senior running back Shane Bannon came to the rescue.

“He was really nice, probably one of the nicest guys when I first got here,” Williams said. “He gave me a bunch of shirts that he had and a couple shorts. Shane got me through the first couple weeks with clothes. We laugh about it now.”

Ironically, Williams is considering doing military work after he graduates in the spring, despite the disappointing start at Navy three years ago.

“I’m thinking now about a career after school, and the military is one that comes up a lot,” Williams said. “I may be returning to do some work in the military.”

Tony Reno, a Yale assistant coach at the time, recruited Williams at Jesuit High in Portland, Oregon. Reno was the man Williams called when he decided to transfer to Yale.

“My relationship with him was pretty solid,” Williams said. “He was a guy I could trust. He was the first guy I called at Yale.”
Because Williams was dropping down to a Division I-AA school by transferring, he did not have to sit out a year at Yale. He played in eight games at defensive end as a freshman, all 10 games as a sophomore and was named honorable mention All-Ivy as a junior. He had a career-high five tackles against Cornell last season, including four solo stops. With the loss to graduation of Paul Rice ’10, Tim Handlon ’10 and Travis Henry ’10, along with Yale’s move to a 4-3 defense from a 3-4 defense, Williams has been switched to linebacker this year.

“Sean is a really good player for us,” said Tom Williams, Yale’s Joel E. Smilow ’54 Head Coach of Football. “He combines quickness, size, speed and violence, all of which we covet. He is also a high-effort guy. He is the type of guy on which we want to build our program. He is a pleasure to be around and to coach.”

With a full season of football ahead of him, one of Williams’ main concerns is maintaining his playing weight at 230 pounds. Pre-season practice was often held in hot, humid weather, and Williams’ biggest problem was keeping his weight up, not down. He ate constantly, often consuming two dinners less than an hour apart.

“I’ve got my second dinner here on the desk right next to me,” said Williams, in the process of devouring two sandwiches only 30 minutes after finishing dinner. “I’ve got to be able to keep my weight up. We’re doing a lot of work out there on the field -- two hours of practice, probably another hour and a half of film, and another hour and a half of lifting.

“I’m at 230 pounds right now. The heaviest I got this summer was 237. I lost six or seven pounds in camp, so I had to work to get it back up there. I want to go into the season at 230, 235. I still feel pretty quick at that weight.”

Heading into the season opener, Williams likes what he sees with the latest edition of a Yale team.

“All the veterans that we have bring a lot of experience,” he said. “It seems like we’re getting better every day. The new guys coming in bring a whole bunch of new tools to the table and help our veteran guys get better, too.

“The competition at practice between guys just fuels our team. From the performance I’ve seen and the hits I’ve taken from some guys, I think we’ll definitely be competing for the Ivy League title. Even in the heat, we didn’t take any days off. We don’t stop at all. That’s one of the big things coach Williams stresses, and I love it because I kind of have the same mind-set. I love just getting in there and grinding it out.”

For the third time in his football career, Williams will be playing on the same team as his younger brother, Scott, a sophomore defensive back.

“Having him at Yale is just awesome,” Sean said. “I love it. We first played together in little league football back home. We also played together in high school, and that was a blast. Scott was on our team when we won our first (of two) state championships. It was fun to celebrate with him then. Playing with him again here is awesome, even beyond football --
just seeing a familiar face every day. Whenever I get homesick, I always go talk to him and say, ‘Let’s hang out.’ He’s one of my best friends.”

Unfortunately, the distance between Oregon and New Haven prevents the Williams family from seeing their sons play every Saturday. Last year, Williams’ father, Larry, flew east for one Yale game. His mother, Laura, also made the cross-country trip once, along with his grandmother, Dorella.

“I’m hoping they’ll all be here for the Harvard game,” Williams said. “Back home, my Mom has to look after two of my younger brothers (Eric and Louis), and my Dad’s job (director of athletics at the University of Portland) is an every-day thing.”

Eric is a high school junior, Louis is in seventh grade, and an older sister, Kristin, attends Cleveland State Law School.

Back in Portland, the world of sports, football in particular, is always a topic of conversation. Larry Williams played offensive tackle and guard at Notre Dame before an eight-year NFL career with the Browns, Patriots, Saints and Chargers. Laura Williams, in the same class of ’85 at Notre Dame, was a national champion in singles tennis.

“My dad and mom have always made a point of having family dinners every night with the kids, and I’ve really enjoyed it,” Williams said. “A lot of the conversation is about sports, but we get some politics in there, too. It’s a pretty good time. Dinner conversations were always a lot of fun.”

Never once, though, was there pressure on Sean and Scott to attend Notre Dame, even though their Mom and Dad did.

“My dad kind of left the decision up to me,” Sean said. “He said, ‘We’ll pick your high school. You pick your college.’ There was some guidance. He had some guiding words but for the most part, he was pretty hands-off. It was the same with football, too.”

Every Sunday, after the Yale team reviews the film of the game played the day before, Sean Williams emails a copy to his Dad back home.

“He watches the video and critiques it a little bit, offering advice here and then,” Williams said. “I’ll call him a lot after practice with questions, and he’ll help me with that, too.

“He’s always been there supporting me, helping me every day. He always said, ‘Don’t identify yourself just by what you do on the football field. Make a name for yourself, too.’”

Tommy Hine was a Hartford Courant sports writer for 43 years and now, in semi-retirement, is a freelance writer for the U.S. Olympic Committee, the Associated Press and Yale Athletics.