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Oktoberfest

CONTENTS

3. Harvard Receives a Bomb Threat to Memorial Hall

by Julia Bouchut '29

4. Local Unicorns Encourage Dropping Out of School

by Venus Dastidar '30 & Zoë Macklowe '30

6. What the Lindsay Clancy Case Reveals About Perinatal Mental Health

by Anna Mogel '30

7. An Ode to the Pub

by Noah Basden '29

8. Smells Like School Spirit

by Seyi Amosun '29

9. Tourists, Toes, and Teachings

by Naomi Beinart '30

10. You Said They're How Much?

by Abby G. Ladwig '30

11. Sexuality and Religion Through Art

by Elliot Hunter Chung '29 & Wisdom Omolayo '29

12. Crack Open a Cold One

by Sophia Jo '29

14. Introducing the New Sport on Campus: Musical Theater

by Anna Gunko '30

15. Behind the Booze

by Anika Gupta '30 & Salma Gheith '30
Drinking on the Job

by Ellie Guo '29 & Sam Park '29

16. Who Should We Truly Fear?

by Hafeezat Ghaffar '29

17. Uninformed Disunity

by Wisdom Omolayo '29

18. Weekly Sports Preview: October 1–8

by Lucy Duncan '28

19. When Life Gives You a Nor'Easter

by Megan Legault '28

20. The Secrets Behind Harvard Women's Soccer's Success

by Cat Johnson '30

21. The Sisterhood of the Undefeated "H"

by Sucheta Srikanth '29

22. Who Gets to Shape the Future of Soccer?

by Rohan Tyagi '29

23. A Win is a Win

by Salma Gheith '30

24. Pumpkin Spice and Everything Nice

by Cameron Bernier '29

As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newsmagazine, the Harvard Independent provides in-depth, critical coverage of issues and events of interest to the Harvard College community. The Independent has no political affiliation, instead offering diverse commentary on news, arts, sports, and student life.

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NEWS

Harvard Receives a Bomb Threat to Memorial Hall

Campus thoughts on Monday's bomb threat and previous violent incidents on campus.

By JULIA BOUCHUT '29

At 8:44 a.m. on Sept. 28, the Harvard Alert system sent a University-wide message informing Harvard affiliates and parents about a bomb threat at Memorial Hall. The email warned students to shelter in place and avoid the targeted area.

The Harvard Alert system sent seven more updates over the next few hours, expanding the caution zone to the Science Center Plaza and Memorial Church. An all-clear was announced at 12:38 p.m.

During that time, the Harvard University Police Department worked with the Cambridge Police Department to vacate and search both Memorial Hall and Memorial Church, Steven Catalano, HUPD Public Information Officer, wrote. "Both buildings were reopened at 12:30 PM after being cleared by law enforcement," Catalano's email said. "HUPD has no reason to believe there is a continuing threat to the campus community."

Despite the shelter-in-place recommendation, many students remained unfazed. Adair Carlin '30

"Despite the shelter-in-place recommendation, many students remained unfazed."

was eating breakfast in Annenberg Hall with her teammates when she heard of the threat; her team didn't leave until staff asked them to. "I think me and my teammates kind of knew that it probably was just a threat and wasn't an actual concern," Carlin said to "Harvard Independent."

Past precedent also deterred immediate action. A few days earlier, Annenberg Hall had been evacuated at least twice because of false fire alarms. "I think a lot of people were just kind of used to it and not really thinking about it as a big deal, myself included," Carlin added.

Carlin then attended her 9 a.m. CS50 class in the Science Center—which sits mere feet away from her breakfast spot. 22 minutes later, Harvard designated the Science Center as a vulnerable location; Carlin's class did not track attendance that day—a trend followed by many morning lectures.

This safety precaution did not deter prevailing conceptions of strict class attendance rules. "It just didn't really feel like an option not to go to class, I guess, since it was right there and everything," Carlin explained. "It just felt like it'd be more hassle to have to go home."

Other classes nearby were canceled or moved online. This includes one of Harvard's highest-enrollment classes, EC10A, "Principles of Economics: Microeconomics," taught in Sanders Theater.

"We were walking towards Sever when a modern-day Paul Revere came in on his scooter and his phone, showing us an email that class had been canceled," GENED 1006, "Music From Earth," enrollee Justin Lei '29 said.

A few hours later, Lei unhurriedly walked to the Science Center for his 12 p.m. lecture. "I had enough faith in HUPD to do their job," he said. "Also, a large area surrounding Memorial Hall was fenced off by HUPD, so you basically could not be within any close proximity of Memorial Hall." Everyone was present in Lei's class.

Yassin Mohamedy '29, whose 10:30 a.m. Arabic AA class was moved to Zoom, felt more at ease after seeing HUPD's recommendation that classes in the Science Center could still run so long as students entered through the back. "The police said it's okay, which made it feel a lot more unserious than it probably was," Mohamedy explained.

Regardless, Mohamedy believed the University did not take the appropriate steps and should have moved all classes to Zoom. "I don't think kids should have to feel like they should go to class ... if there's a bomb threat," he said.

The bomb threat is the latest in a string of incidents that have occurred around Harvard's campus within the last year: a man on Mt. Auburn Street with a machete in September, a man opening fire on cars and pedestrians on Memorial Drive, an assault in Lowell House in May, and a man on a bicycle with a gun on Sherman Street last October. Nearby universities have also fallen victim to violence on campus, with a shooter at Brown University killing two students and a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor in December.

Amidst these threats of violence, students turn to HUPD for protection. "I wasn't on campus for the gun incident, in which case I think that would make me feel really scared," Carlin said. "But for something like the machete, it just seems like the kind of thing that the police would be able to handle, and I'm confident in them not letting that get out of hand."

For a dense urban environment like Boston, should students expect this violence? "When you

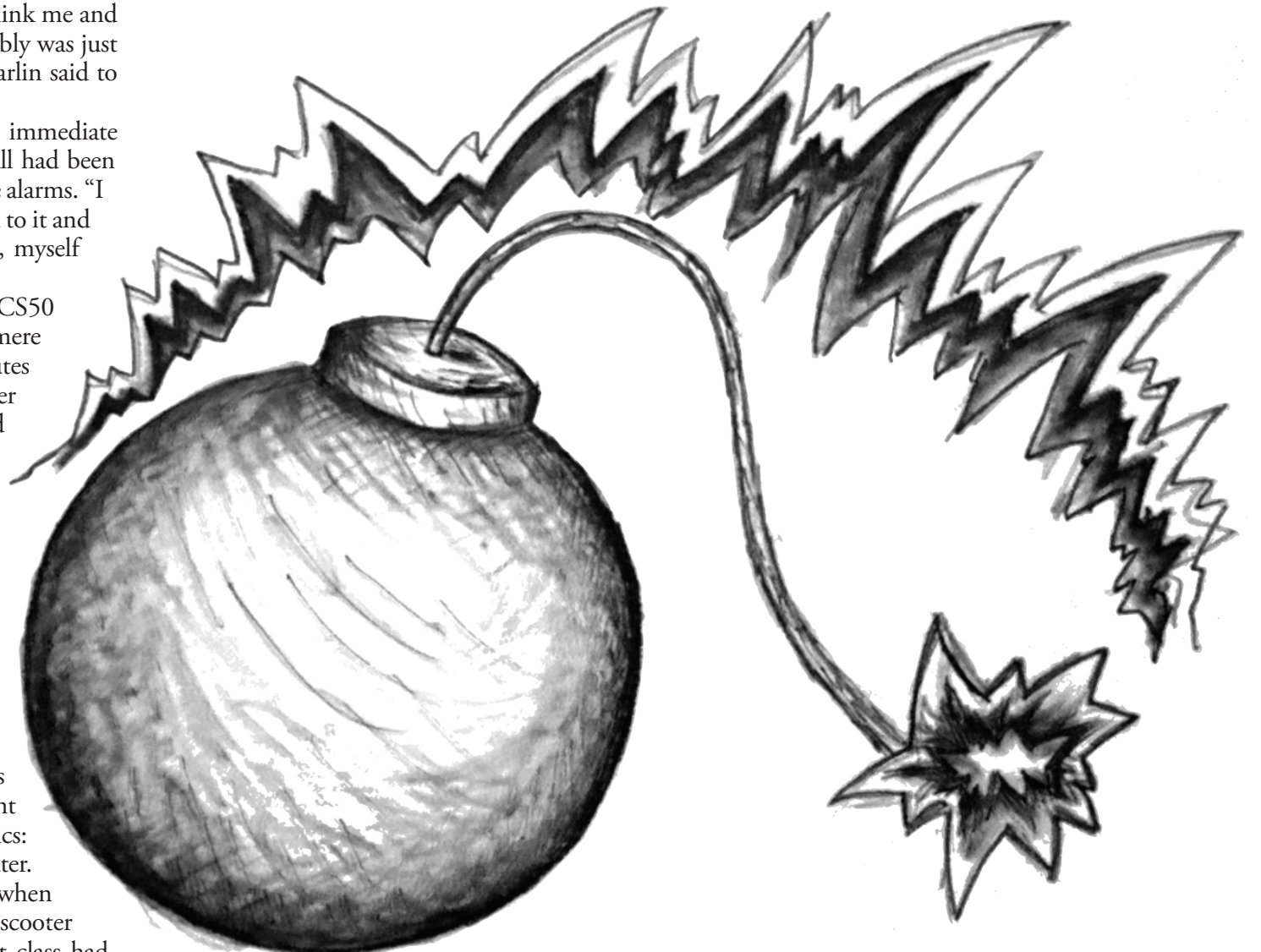
"This safety precaution did not deter prevailing conceptions of strict class attendance rules."

stop and think about the reality of somebody going out with an intent to harm people, it's pretty crazy to think that we just let that happen as an alert," Carlin explained. "But our priority is still academics, I suppose."

"I've become kind of desensitized to the whole gunman, knife-man, ... the whole danger on campus," Lei said. "That kind of says a lot about where we as a society are ... right now."

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GRAPHIC BY ADRIANA ST. CLAIR '29



Local Unicorns Encourage Dropping Out of School

To find the end of the rainbow, found start-ups, and abandon stuff in the Lampoon basement.

By VENUS DASTIDAR '30 & ZOË MACKLOWE '30

Harvard is filled with unicorns—not the traditional kind (bearing sparkly horns and colorful manes); instead, these individuals have founded privately held start-up companies with valuations of over \$1 billion.

Harvard ranks third among top U.S. universities or such peculiarities, boasting 76 start-up founders between 2017 and 2025. This number trails only Massachusetts Institute of Technology (89) and Stanford (113). Even coming in third (in more than one respect as of late...), the University's founder culture is still strong, as past precedent

“Harvard’s vast alum network—full of mentors and potential funding sources—helps aspiring entrepreneurs scale their ideas.”

shows. Let's take a walk down Harvard memory lane: Mark Zuckerberg dropped out after founding Facebook from his Harvard dorm room in 2004. Jennifer Hyman '02, a Harvard Business School

alumna, co-founded Rent the Runway, a clothing rental service that makes high fashion more accessible, in 2009. Harvard Professor Derrick Rossi helped start Moderna in 2010, the company that ultimately pioneered the COVID-19 vaccine and is currently worth \$78.76 billion.

On Harvard's campus today, startups are still rapidly developing. It is becoming common for students to take a leave of absence to join emerging companies or to start their own. Organizations like Harvard Innovation Labs and Harvard's Institute of Politics' Governance Lab help accelerate these businesses. In addition, Harvard's vast alum network—full of mentors and potential funding sources—helps aspiring entrepreneurs scale their ideas.

Ely Hahami – SpaceXAI

Prior Harvard Class of 2027 student, Ely Hahami, began a leave of absence this fall after three years pursuing a double concentration in Mathematics and Computer Science. Hahami entered the entrepreneurial world while interviewing for a position at xAI (Elon Musk's startup) before xAI was acquired by SpaceX, making it a subsidiary of the larger company working on X's Grok model.

Hahami explained he wasn't initially planning on taking leave when xAI reached out to him in January 2026. “I actually thought the job would be for post-grad,” he said. However, after he secured the position,

they told Hahami they needed him to start immediately—highlighting the fast-paced AI landscape and fierce competition with Anthropic. Then he had to choose: stay at Harvard, try to keep up with school while working, or drop out entirely.

After reflecting on his experience and dreams, Hahami came to a decision. He started conducting machine learning research with Professor Haim Sompolinsky in the fall of his first year. “I would, you know, keep on bringing up sort of insights that I learned from

“I could see a future where I go back; I could see one where I don't.”

- Hahami

him or sort of describe some of the papers we wrote and published,” Hahami recalled from his interview. “That was actually crucial (to getting the position) more than any other coursework.”

After watching the Grok 3 livestream in his dorm in Pforzheimer House, he realized the leaps artificial intelligence was making. “They have become extremely strong coders, can do basically all of my homework, even like my graduate-level coursework, and to sort of help build that and shape that would be very cool,” Hahami added about the growth of AI.

“And then xAI specifically, I appreciate because they have a sort of culture of, like, 1st thinking from 1st principles. This is sort of like a very, like, Elon Musk kind of philosophy, but, you know, thinking from 1st principles and sort of having the AI be truth-seeking,” he said.

Speaking on his previous summer internship at Google, he said, “... I think it's just like a difference in culture between, sort of, we (xAI) want AI that will sort of pursue the truth and be aligned to the user,” something he finds more prevalent at xAI than other frontier labs.

Hahami's excited about his new role, though he does miss his friends, the social aspects of college, and the learning he enjoyed in class. His friends and family were very supportive of him taking time off, and he feels that Harvard recognizes and embraces the importance of supporting students in doing that.

“I could see a future where I go back; I could see one where I don't.”

Elson Bankoff – PowerTown

Unlike Hahami, prior Class of 2027 student Elson Bankoff does not intend to return to Harvard after building PowerTown. This company makes small energy storage systems, with co-founder Elio Torres '26. “Even if this failed, I'm not gonna go back



because I would just do the next thing,” she said. Bankoff fits the “quintessential founder” stereotype, dropping out her sophomore year to pursue PowerTown.

Bankoff decided to drop out after needing to hire a PhD student to expand the organization. The company had to raise money to pay his salary, and Bankoff felt that going back to school was no longer much of an option once investors were involved.

Leaving school was naturally a period of great uncertainty. “I had to switch my living situation 4 times—leave all my shit in the basement of the Lampoon in duffel bags, and half say bye to people, not really know what the vibe was. [I’d] live alone in an apartment in the dead of winter, work out of it and bike to campus sometimes,” she recalled. “It was just weird.”

“But I’m happy now; everything’s great now.”

Bankoff enjoys the startup environment at Harvard, comparing her experience to the alleged culture at Stanford where these ventures are seen as less of a risk—a perception she disagrees with. “Starting a company is a creative force, and it’s a disciplined activity, and you owe things to people,” she explained. “You owe things to investors, you owe things to yourself, you owe things to whatever kind of mission you say you’re pursuing, you owe things to

“You owe things to investors, you owe things to yourself, you owe things to whatever kind of mission you say you’re pursuing, you owe things to your team, [because] you’re getting people to completely shake up their lives and move across the country for your vision.”

- Bankoff

your team, [because] you’re getting people to completely shake up their lives and move across the country for your vision.”

Bankoff is confident in the direction PowerTown is moving in and excited to continue building power infrastructure in the United States.

Hadi Abdul – Boov Card & Ouranos

Hadi Abdul ’30 is currently developing two startups: Boov Card and Ouranos, founded in July and August 2026, respectively. Boov Card is a restricted credit card for unhoused individuals—an alternative to stipend checks that can be used toward certain expenses, such as disaster relief and basic needs. Abdul recently got a pilot test contract

for \$50,000 of disaster relief funding through the Boov Card in North Carolina.

Ouranos is a space tech startup looking to predict and prevent spaceship crashes. Abdul has always been fascinated by physics and mathematics and took six months off high school to work at Capture Technologies in Scotland, where he worked on passive cooling systems used to cool data centers across Glasgow. Through conversations with his co-founder, Fayadh Kader, a freshman at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Abdul identified a gap in the space tech industry.

“A lot of the vehicles, or just spacecraft, that are in orbit... don’t have any system to predict before they go down,” Abdul

“All the technology is currently reactive and not predictive.’ With Ouranos, Abdul aims to close this gap.”

explained. “All the technology is currently reactive and not predictive.” With Ouranos, Abdul aims to close this gap.

“We’d be like an insurance company that helps assure whatever spacecraft is in the air that we can keep them up for longer,” he added.

Abdul would need to be all in on pursuing one of the two startups to justify a leave of absence. He hopes to have complete conviction on one idea; dropping out means he knows what he will be spending the rest of his life doing, in an ideal world.

“The best argument that people were making was that the college experience is going to be something that you miss out on, right?” he continued. “But also I think that, just like the American dream, the college experience is subjective. If my goal coming into college was to do what I’m doing right now, I think I’m following through with my college dream.”

When Abdul was deciding where to attend college, he was in between Harvard and Stanford. He ultimately chose Harvard because Stanford’s startup scene felt oversaturated. “Harvard has a much higher value in my eyes, or a much higher follow-through rate, than Stanford currently has.” He’s gained a lot of insight from interacting with upper-level students in the startup community and becoming involved with GovLabs.

While these three companies might not be unicorns yet, they offer us a peek

“He hopes to have complete conviction on one idea; dropping out means he knows what he will be spending the rest of his life doing, in an ideal world.”

into the incredible concepts coming to life every day on Harvard’s campus—from social impact to deep tech.

VENUS DASTIDAR ’30 (VDASTIDAR@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) TELLS EVERYONE SHE’S GOING INTO START-UPS BUT SPENDS MORE TIME NAPPING WITH HER UNICORN (PLUSHIE) THAN SHE DOES TRYING TO BE ONE.

ZOË MACKLOWE ’30 (ZMACKLOWE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS SO BUSY CHASING RAINBOWS AND WRITING INDY ARTICLES THAT SHE MIGHT DROP OUT OF SCHOOL TO GO NAP TOO.

GRAPHICS BY JAMES FOSS ’29

What the Lindsay Clancy Case Reveals About Perinatal Mental Health

Lindsay Clancy's story has raised questions about how postpartum psychosis conditions are diagnosed and treated before they become crises.

By ANNA MOGEL '30

COn Jan. 24, 2023, in Duxbury, Massachusetts, Lindsay Clancy allegedly killed her three children and then attempted suicide by jumping out of a second-story window. More than three years later, her case has drawn national attention to the severity of postpartum depression and questions of accountability in mental health.

"Maybe one of the reasons why we are still very much behind in terms of screening and treatment is in part because of this misclassification that there's not enough kind of specific category within the DSM for these conditions," Sharon Dekel, a perinatal researcher and clinical psychologist whose work focuses on maternal mental health, said to the "Harvard Independent."

In July, a jury considered three murder charges against Clancy. On Sept. 4, after six weeks of trial proceedings, the jury could not reach a verdict, resulting in a mistrial. Much of the trial focused on Clancy's mental health in the months preceding her children's deaths. Clancy's attorneys pursued an insanity defense and argued that because she struggled with postpartum psychosis and bipolar disorder, she lacked criminal responsibility for the deaths of her children. These arguments have since prompted a widespread conversation about how severe perinatal mental health conditions are recognized and treated.

This discussion is especially relevant in Massachusetts, where Clancy worked as a labor and delivery nurse at Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard affiliate. The medical care Clancy received for her mental health invites scrutiny into Boston's healthcare system and whether it offers adequate support for mothers struggling with perinatal mental health conditions.

"When we think about, like, high-risk pregnancies, we usually think about the physical health of people," Dekel explained. "Today we know that the number one reason for maternal mortality and morbidity, at least based on data in the U.S., is actually that the identified cause in the background is mental illness."

Perinatal mental health problems are mental health disorders occurring during pregnancy or up to two years after childbirth. Around 14% of people who give birth experience postpartum depression, while perinatal psychosis affects 1-2 mothers per 1000 births. Despite the prevalence of these conditions, many people do not receive intervention due to stigma, lack of training, and a limited mental health workforce. "There's still a lot of societal stigma of mental illness, and ... that might relate to the case, this idea of the concrete understanding [of] what it means to actually have symptoms," Dekel said.

Clancy was seen as a kind and nurturing mother by her family and friends. Still, her husband and mother-in-law acknowledged that motherhood had been mentally hard for her. Clancy sought help from postpartum mental health specialists and received care from psychiatrists, therapists, and nurse practitioners.

After Clancy had her third kid, Callan, her mental health issues grew in severity. She struggled to get Callan to sleep and was constantly worrying that he would get sick. During the trial, both the prosecution and attorneys read pages from her diary. "I'm so desperate to get a mental break from taking care of everyone that my mind is trying to find something physically wrong with me," Kevin Reddington, her attorney, read.

"Kill the children so you can kill yourself," Clancy's lawyers continued, referring to a commanding voice Clancy claimed she heard in her mind on the day of the alleged murder.

In September, four months before the killings, Clancy began to see a psychiatrist, Dr. Jennifer Tufts, who works at Aster, via telehealth. Tufts diagnosed Clancy with a generalized anxiety disorder and then prescribed her the antidepressant Zoloft for her anxiety. Their sessions were conducted online throughout late 2022 to 2023. During the trial, Tufts said that she almost exclusively relied on Clancy's own statements in evaluating her mental health, never spoke to Clancy's parents, and only spoke to her husband once. "It could be that some hours a person could function very well, but then you know, after different hours, a person could be really not doing well at all," Dekel explained. "We need to really make sure we're not just relying on what people tell us."

During Tufts' testimony, Reddington asked if Tufts had informed Clancy about the potential side effects of Zoloft, which included suicidal thoughts and actions. "That's specifically in children. So I don't think I mentioned that because it wasn't relevant," Tufts said.

Since the Zoloft did not seem to improve her symptoms, Tufts prescribed Clancy Ativan. After a few months of taking it, Clancy posted on a Facebook group chat that although Ativan was making her feel "normal" again, she feared she was becoming addicted to it.

In November, Clancy's condition worsened; she lost her appetite, was experiencing episodes of intense fear, and began suffering from insomnia. Tufts testified that she was aware that Clancy was feeling hopeless and that she had experienced intrusive thoughts that told her to end everything. In response, Tufts attempted to treat her symptoms, adding more medications to treat her anxiety and depression, according to Clancy's legal filings.

In November 2022, Lindsay's mother-in-law connected Lindsay's case to Massachusetts General Hospital's perinatal clinic. That December, Clancy's case was transferred to psychiatrist Rebecca Jolleta at South Shore Health in Weymouth. Jolleta created a plan to treat Clancy's anxiety. "I really don't like the way I feel on the Remeron, and I know that I can't stick with taking it," Clancy said. "I started having very intrusive thoughts that I never had before," she told Jolleta. Still, Jolleta urged her to continue on the plan for a couple of weeks.

During a cross-examination led by Reddington, he argued that Jolleta was also unfamiliar with the care Clancy received elsewhere. "Would it surprise you if I told you that she saw Dr. Tufts 14 times?" Reddington said to Jolleta. Jolleta testified that she never talked to Tufts or accessed Tufts' medical records.

In December 2022, Clancy joined a day program for postpartum depression at Women & Infants Hospital in Rhode Island, but she was discharged after one day. According to Clancy's legal filings, the clinical team believed her symptoms were likely "due to overmedication and misdiagnosis" and determined that the day program was not appropriate for her. Clancy has sued Tufts, Jolleta, and other healthcare providers, and alleges that they committed medical malpractice.

Clancy's experience illustrates some of the barriers that can make perinatal mental health conditions difficult to identify and treat. 75% of women impacted by maternal health conditions remain untreated; there are often long waiting lines at mother-infant clinics, which are sometimes located in remote service areas. "There's really no screening for postpartum PTSD, for example, and also they're basically based on self-reporting," Dekel explained.

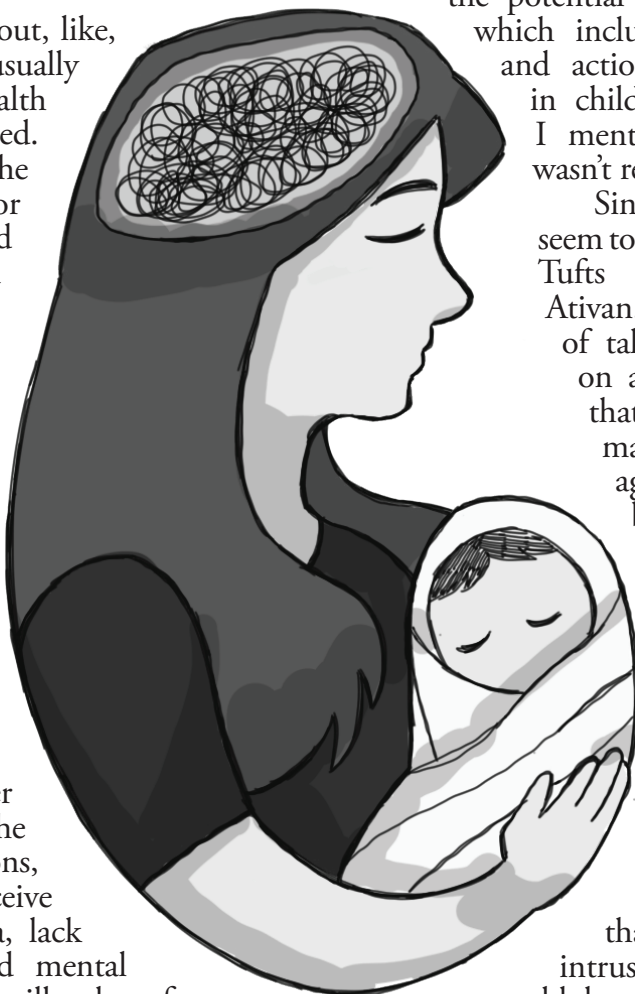
Questions about Clancy's diagnosis and medication regimen became central to the case. "Make sure that high-risk people are getting treatment as early as possible," Dekel said. Not only should the treatment be administered quickly, but it is also important to diagnose their mental illness accurately.

The case remains unresolved following the Sept. 4 mistrial. On Sept. 29, Clancy's attorney Reddington argued in court that prosecutors had failed to present enough evidence to prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that Clancy killed her children. He then asked the judge to find her not guilty and prevent a second trial. The prosecutors disputed the claim, arguing that the trial record contained substantial evidence to connect Clancy to the killings. The judge has yet to rule on Reddington's motion.

Patrick, Lindsay Clancy's husband, recently released a statement weeks after Clancy's arraignment. He stated that he had forgiven her and that everyone was distracted from the main takeaway of the case, which is that perinatal mental health matters. Clancy's case highlights the consequences of leaving maternal mental health struggles unaddressed. "The mental health of the mother is basically a reflection of our society," Dekel says.

ANNA MOGEL '30 (AMOGEL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS COMPING THE "HARVARD INDEPENDENT."

GRAPHIC BY TAYLOR BIERWERTH '30



FORUM

An Ode to the Pub

A semi-fictional tale of a very non-fictional reality.

By NOAH BASDEN '29

I once saw an old man in the pub. He had sad eyes: that's what I remember most about him. Sad, slightly glazed eyes that stared into the frothy foam of an undrunk Guinness, waiting to be met with kindness. I pulled up a chair to talk to him, but he didn't seem interested: "Waiting for a friend," he muttered gruffly, so I backed off. My friends arrived soon after; laughter distracted us,

"The next time I went to the pub, he was there."

and we all had a good time. I didn't pay much attention to the old man that night. It wasn't like I was going to see him again—right?

The next time I went to the pub, he was there. It was as if he hadn't moved an inch. Like a statue, he stayed fixed on his bar stool, again staring into his undrunk Guinness with those sad eyes of his. I pulled my stool closer and asked what I had asked the week before: "You alright, mate?" Half expecting the same dismissive answer as last week, I had one foot halfway to the ground when he turned to face me. This was new. He looked me in the eye and said, "No, mate, I'm not." For those who don't know much about British social interactions, this was highly unusual—someone saying how they really felt.

I asked if he was waiting for his friend again, though in my heart of hearts I knew the answer. No friend was coming to share a drink with him; he was just too ashamed to admit he was alone. In Sam Mendes's 2022 romantic

drama "Empire of Light," a scene not too far from what I was experiencing shows Stephen, a young Black man, listening to his much older coworker, Hilary, as she tells a story from her childhood. The moment ends with the words: "Shame is not

"Give me a surprisingly sticky pint glass, a random dog sitting beneath a stool, and an old man in search of conversation every day of the week, and I'd be content."

a healthy condition." That much was apparent to me as I sat face to face with Paul at the local pub on a random Tuesday night.

Inspecting his face now, I noticed his eyes weren't just glazed, as older people's eyes often seem, but filled with tears. "Tell me your story, and I'll tell you mine," I said. We talked, and he told me about his life. How he fell in love young, then promptly fell out of love, then fell in love again—you can see where I'm going. It's safe to say Paul was doing a lot of loving in his youth. We spoke about loss: his first wife and a son taken too early. A son who never got to know his father's love of football, beer, or himself. "Taken too soon," Paul kept repeating to himself, forgetting I was sitting next to him, his eyes drifting back to his Guinness. We didn't stay on that topic for long; it got silent, and we just sat for a while.

I broke the silence first: "Another round?"

"Go on then," he replied.

A pub isn't just a place where two random people from polar opposite worlds can meet, talk, laugh, and cry together; it is one of the only places where that can happen. A pub is not just a pub. A pub is so much more than a pub because it has to be. It's a cathedral for the faithless, a community center for the friendless, and on pub quiz nights, a library for those who are undereducated (or overeducated) in useless facts.

The world has become increasingly closed off. Everywhere you turn, you have to pay for entry or have a membership—there's none of that at the public house. Come equipped with a valid ID, or, for some underage drinkers, convincing enough facial hair, and the doors will open.

Few feelings are better than getting that customary, cheeky "pub?" text from a mate after a long week. Why? Because it was never about the booze, nor the stale crisps you order, knowing they may be stale, but you're at the pub, so you've got to do it anyway. It's never been about the little wince you make after seeing the price of one Guinness in a central London pub, or the Asahi glass that may or may not be coming home with you as a reminder of a night well spent. It's about the chat, jokes, japes, and tables you can press your ears against (and I

mean really press them on the wood) to hear the laughter of different generations of friends who have all met at the same pub to catch up and talk about their lives.

That's not to say I don't appreciate a good American bar, but there's no need for all the bells and whistles. Don't you get tired of neon signs and TVs drowning out any meaningful conversation with Liberty Mutual ads every three seconds? I certainly do. Give me a surprisingly sticky pint glass, a random dog sitting beneath a stool, and an old man in search of conversation every day of the week, and I'd be content.

I still see Paul quite often. He always beats me to the pub and is always in his usual spot, three stools from the bar's end, cradling his signature undrunk Guinness. When he sees me, he raises his glass and, before I can even ask, says, "I'm waiting for a friend," then nods at my usual spot—the empty stool next to his—and we get to talking like friends.

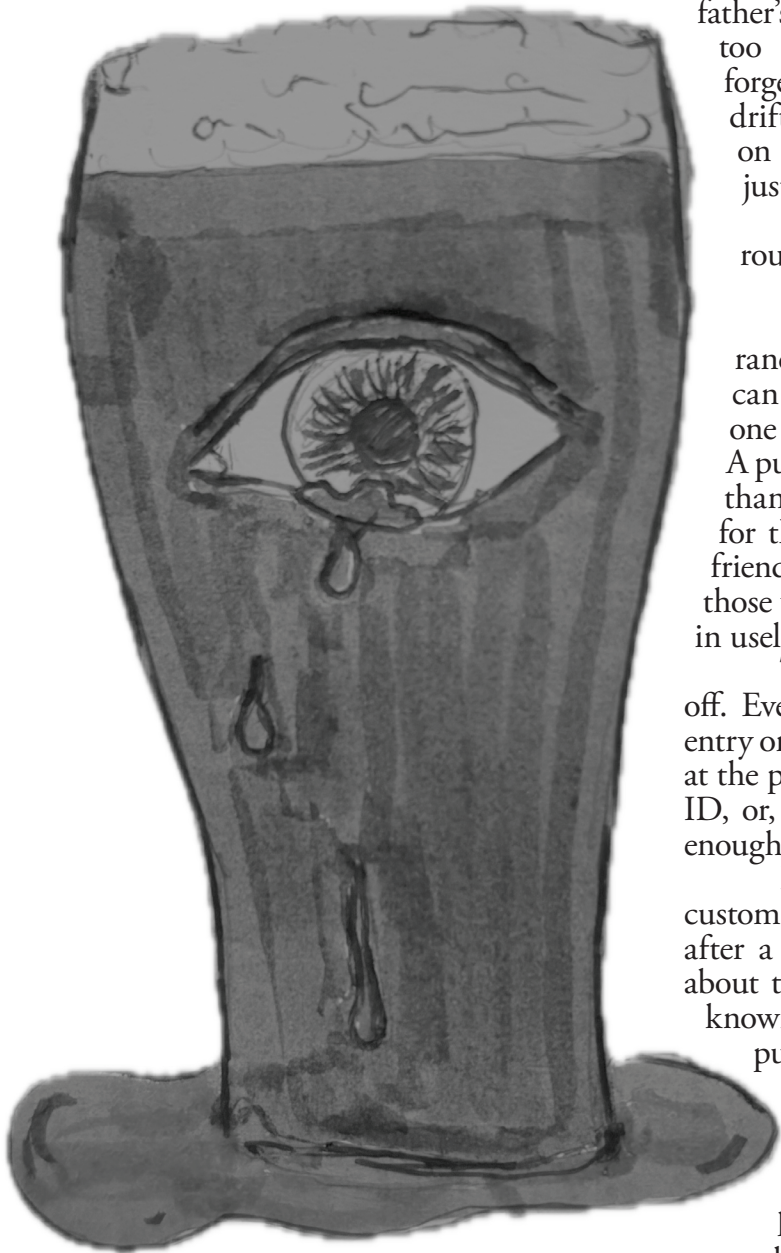
"I asked if he was waiting for his friend again, though in my heart of hearts I knew the answer."

Paul's not the only friend I've made at the pub, and he certainly won't be the last, but he's the one who stuck with me. Had I been that guy who sent the dreaded "sorry, mate, bogged down with work" text in response to that "pub?" I never would have met him. Don't ever be that guy.

So go! Go for the "pints, chit chat and good people" (to steal a line from a British TikTok meme). And if you see someone sitting alone, pull up a chair (if the moment is right, because you may not like the response you get if it isn't) and strike up a conversation. You never know what's in store for you at the pub, but you'll be glad you went.

NOAH BASDEN '29 (NHBASDEN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) MISSES HIS LOCAL.

GRAPHIC BY TESS HARRIS '30



Smells Like School Spirit

In an era of waning community, it is time to bring back school spirit.

By SEYI AMOSUN '29

Back home in Nashville, crisp fall air always signaled that football season was coming. But the game itself was never the important part. Tailgates, homecoming parades, and student section cheers became the backdrop to every conversation and hangout. Seas of high school students, families, and alumni alike, decked out in bright red and glittery gold, would descend upon 1724 Wilson Pike Circle for Friday Night Lights as the Ravenwood Raptors took on yet another unwitting opponent.

Baked into our football culture was indisputable school spirit. From kindergarten on, it was only natural to feel pride and belonging simply because of your home institution. My high school even had its own motto—G2BARR: Great to Be a Ravenwood Raptor.

The spirit of G2BARR was not just limited to football, either. As we excelled in athletics, arts, extracurriculars, and academics, we carried that same school pride into every endeavor.

“The Ivy League, with all its stereotypical imagery, sorely lacked the spirit I had grown so used to.”

Imagine my surprise upon arriving at Harvard, a school with (arguably) the biggest fame, name recognition, and branding of any institution in the world. The Ivy League, with all its stereotypical imagery, sorely lacked the spirit I had grown so used to.

The first Ivy League game of the football season during my first year, Harvard/Brown, lived up to its hype. Students trekked to Cambridge from Providence, flocked to the tents set up next to the stadium, spent

the day tailgating hard, and enjoyed a thrilling matchup. It is safe to say that was one of the most memorable days of freshman year. I expected the same level of production to carry into the rest of the season. However, successive games came and went without fanfare or anticipation. This struck me as odd—why did we not care?

The last game of the season, Harvard/Yale, was the lone exception to a season of disengagement. Our school organized a week of festivities, including free merch stands, food trucks, watch parties, buses to Connecticut, and plenty of student tickets to encourage as many as possible to engage with the most anticipated Saturday of the year.

It does make sense that the University invests so heavily in Harvard/Yale—the historic rivalry is as iconic as the Ivy League name itself. Furthermore, it gives us something to build community around. We are no longer divided by House, year, or any of the other characteristics that often leave our student body segmented and categorized; we are just the Crimson. After my first Harvard/Yale game, I noticed a big uptick in unity, even among people who had never met before. We shared our disdain toward the Bulldogs, frustration over the terrible luggage pickup system at Yale's Coxe Cage after the game, and elation at a fantastic (albeit very wet) tailgate.

Those feelings, however, seemed to go as quickly as they came. We all settled back into our usual patterns, groups, and habits once the shuttles dropped us back off at our respective domiciles across campus.

This year, I hoped for a similar level of hype for the next installment of Harvard/Brown. But for a game that nearly rivals Harvard/Yale in anticipation, the school's communication was sorely lacking. Though both weekends were away games, H-Y had hundreds of student tickets available, organized buses, and several messages from administrators about travel arrangements. This year: nothing. I scoured my email (even searching my trash) for an email I was sure would tell me where to buy a ticket for the game.

The effect of this was pretty remarkable. Last year's tailgate felt like the entire Brown undergraduate class had migrated for 36 hours to set up shop in Cambridge. I resolved to head down to Providence, but getting people to come felt like pulling teeth—though I eventually convinced one of my roommates to make the trek with me. Committed to enjoying the “mini” rivalry weekend, I hopped on the commuter rail and attended the game anyway, even though I had to buy a \$50 ticket on SeatGeek while standing in the throng of people rushing to enter Centreville Bank Stadium. After arriving, it was clear most Harvard students stayed behind: our student section looked barely 100 people strong.

In comparison, Brown students were committed (to the tailgate, at least). I spent the entire game in the opponent's student section, searching for the electric energy of

cheers and chants a football game brings. I cannot say their section was super packed either—but there was definitely a stronger showing.

Our campus has made recent efforts to improve belonging among a rather unconventional school culture, with changes like extended hours in community spaces. Yet, it feels as if the administration is overlooking an easily unifying initiative: investing in school spirit.

Searching for school spirit, I have opened a new tab more than a few times, navigated to Delta Air Lines, and perused weekend options for

“The fix is simple. Harvard needs to make it easier to have fun.”

a BOS-TYS round-trip ticket. The Southeastern Conference, better known as the SEC, is known for its commitment to good football, with season-long student ticket passes and school-wide tailgates every weekend from late August through mid-November (even into December playoffs!). I should not have to outsource spirit through a two-and-a-half-hour flight to Knoxville when we have a remarkable football team right on campus.

The fix is simple. Harvard needs to make it easier to have fun. Sure, we are all busy people, but we can clearly make time for what matters most. Every game could be as fun and highly attended as our famed rivalry match. And if the administration, which is tasked with fostering student life, can make these events matter, student engagement will follow.

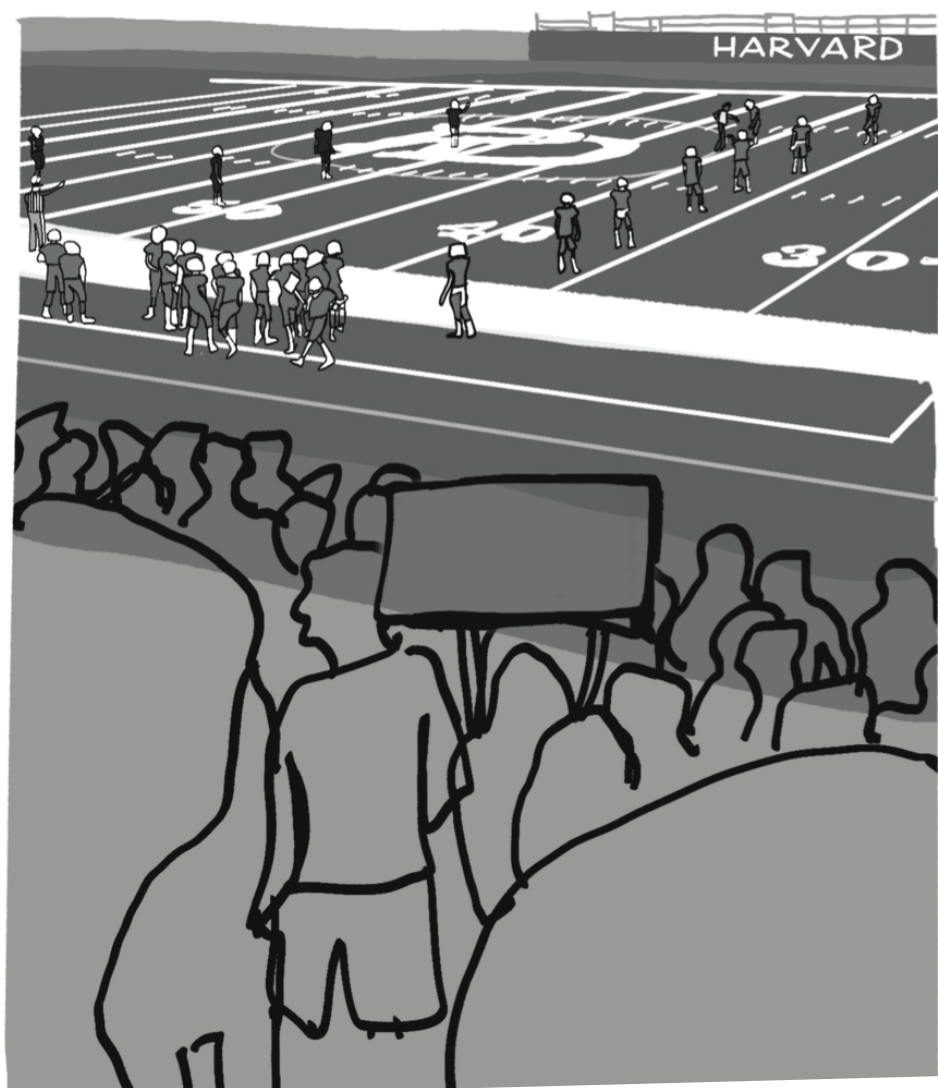
It is not just in our interest—it is in the administration's interest, too. Yield rates, or the percentage of admitted students who choose to enroll, are a key benchmark of how much people actually want to come here. A recent article in “New York Magazine” pointed to schools like Vanderbilt as increasingly attractive options for prospective students compared to Ivies. As a Nashville native, I understand where the hype is coming from. Vandy offers not just the education but the spirit that comes along with a bought-in student body. If Harvard wants to keep the appeal it has held for more than three centuries, we have got to improve upon our culture and spirit on campus. This is just one easy step in that direction.

We also do not have to limit it to sports. We have every reason to have pride in our identity as Harvard students. It does not take much to learn the lyrics to “Fair Harvard,” wear a crimson sweatshirt, and support our peers at every musical, cultural festival, sporting event, and student performance.

My hope for our school is that these moments of Harvard pride are less rare than in the past. We have got all of the resources we need to bring the stereotypical college experience to Harvard. Now, it is time to make that happen.

SEYI AMOSUN '29 (SAMOSUN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WISHES SHE COULD HAVE SEEN THE TEXAS-TENNESSEE GAME AT NEYLAND STADIUM.

GRAPHIC BY KARISHMA KODALI '29



Tourists, Toes, and Teachings

Why do strangers from around the world flock to touch the neon bronze of John Harvard's shoe?

By NAOMI BEINART '30

Most warning signs appear in neon; John Harvard's right foot is no exception. When you see the shiny, worn-down, urine-yellow shoe, your first instinct should not be to rub your hand all over it. Yet evidently, it is.

A gaggle of tourists, holding various devices, stops daily to pose in front of the statue. And almost always, someone extends a hand to the worn bronze. Whether they rub, circle, or tap, they all touch the shoe. And no one washes their hands.

But why? Most Harvard students would guess that it's for good luck. But I suspect something deeper is at work for these unsuspecting guests. It is mysterious that, regardless of hometown or first language, thousands of adults flock to a seated statue and smile for a photo. What about that neon shoe calls to them? I cannot answer that personally, so I went to ask a few myself.

Daphne from Houston was joined by her husband, John, and her friend from Taiwan. Despite the distance, they had all been to Harvard before. But why the shoe? "If you touch the foot, you get more intelligence," Daphne said, rather matter-of-factly. To her, the shoe symbolized

"If you touch the foot, you get more intelligence."

- Daphne

good luck. We continued with some small talk until I paused and asked if she had heard the rumor about the shoe. She had not. Well ... I readied myself to break the news to Daphne.

"The front or on the back?" John inquired, after hearing of the Harvard College tradition. The front, I answered.

"So, we touch the pee?" Daphne said. I nodded. And with that, the three of them burst into laughter.

The second group was less enthusiastic. I caught Fariba from Los Angeles as she walked away from the scene of the "crime." "If you touch the shoe, you can get into Harvard," she explained.

I did not get the chance to ask if she was a student before her male companion interjected.

"Did you touch it?" he asked me, worried.

"I have not touched it," I responded. As they turned to walk away, I heard him giggle.

My third interview fell into my lap. George and his wife approached me and asked about the Spanish flag waving over University Hall—a spot usually reserved for the American Stars and Stripes. I did not have a good answer at the time, but for those reading this now, it was because the Spanish prime minister was speaking at the Harvard Kennedy School's Institute of Politics. I did, however, have a question for George (and co.).

"Our tour guide told us it was a thing to do," he answered, shrugging.

George was a Spanish national on a tour from New York to Boston and decided to fill a gap in their schedule with a campus

tour. These first-timers traveled all the way from Europe to touch the shoe! Guilt settled in my stomach when I had to ask the fateful question: Did you know that students pee there? "Oh no!" George answered. He then pretended to wash his hands in an imaginary sink. We all laughed and

"Our tour guide told us it was a thing to do."

- George

said our goodbyes. As they walked away, I saw them holding hands.

And surely I couldn't get away from my "tour" of Harvard's tourists without running into a wannabe comedian. Nikki wanted to offer a fake name to the "Harvard Independent" and then laughed hysterically at the idea. There's nothing like watching someone be thoroughly amused by their own thoughts. But do not worry, the Indy would not deceive our readers like that.

A friend from Chicago visiting with Nikki interrupted, admitting they hoped to get good luck from their visit to this ivy-covered institution—something the foot was supposed to provide.

Nikki took the path of least resistance and Googled "What to do in Harvard." "Come here and rub his shoe for good luck," Nikki recalled. Like any good skeptic, Nikki wanted to get a second opinion. "Is it true?" she asked me.

I answered honestly: I have never rubbed the foot myself.

"Uh-oh," she responded. I was afraid the bad news would only get worse after she heard the next part of my sentence. Still, I was surprised by her response after telling her about the conspiracy. "I would believe it," Nikki chortled.

"It's kind of gross," her friend chimed in. "Honestly," Nikki responded. "It's kind of impressive."

The friend was less enthused. "Well, I'm gonna guess more males than females," she said, eyebrows raised.

Ultimately, they didn't regret rubbing the shoe, and when I asked Nikki for her name, she jokingly gave "Bob" as a pseudonym, which caused her to burst out laughing. The hysterics continued before she answered, "Nikki." I bid them adieu, and as I walked away, I swear she was still laughing.

So, what did I gather from these interviews? Tourists aren't as impressed with Harvard students as they are with John himself. And a little bit of pee doesn't seem to rattle these determined visitors. Maybe we can learn something from them. Maybe their lack of disgust shows us that superstition outweighs hygiene. Or that tradition triumphs over bacteria. Whatever it is, I'm going to take their lessons to heart with some hand sanitizer in my pocket.

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THE-GROUND JOURNALISM.

GRAPHIC BY LOLA SELBERG '30



You Said They're How Much?

An opinion on the Harvard COOP Golden Goose and FiveFourFive collaboration.

By ABBY G. LADWIG '30

In October 2016, about 700 Harvard University Dining Hall Services members began striking for fair wages and adequate health insurance—a dissent that has persisted even a decade later. Harvard is no stranger to the divide between workers and administration. Earlier this year, faculty layoffs and department funding cuts exacerbated existing tensions between staff and the bureaucracy. Yet, without improving blue-collar worker conditions that ensure the University's continued operation, the Harvard COOP announced a luxury brand deal with Golden Goose and FiveFourFive.

Though the COOP is a private entity, its “community-first” agenda nonetheless echoes campus and affiliate sentiment. This partnership, announced amid administrative turmoil, seems to contradict the company's “every man” agenda. Moreover, campus affiliates ask whether the Harvard name should be associated with such an expensive price point while those who ensure its functionality remain in the fiscal margins.

“A little bit alienated” is how Kathleen Self '30 felt upon hearing of the collaboration. “The shoes are very cute—I see people wearing them, and I do like them, but how many Harvard students can reasonably justify dropping \$500-\$1000 on a pair of sneakers? Not me!”

If not everyone can reasonably purchase these items with Harvard branding, then the community it fosters is simply divided. “It's looking like they are prioritizing—maybe not money, but prioritizing this look about Harvard, rather than focusing on what's actually going on within Harvard,” Self added.

In the past year, Harvard has been repeatedly challenged to uphold quality social and educational life for students, faculty, and staff alike—union protests during Visitas brought this dilemma into the national spotlight. Regardless of campus affiliation, priorities for those who use the University name should not be which shoe material best showcases the Ivy League aesthetic, but ensuring everyone on this campus feels supported and has a sense of belonging.

For some, this collaboration should not invite disdain for the shoe brand itself. Duaa Hassan '30 cites Golden Goose as her everyday footwear. For such luxury consumers, the product is not problematic because of the brand, but rather because of its message. “This may definitely be a slap in the face for the HUDS workers who are currently struggling,” Hassan reasons. “I think it's important to recognize both the negative social implications of this collaboration while also recognizing the COOP as a business that is independent.”

Hassan offers an important consideration. The COOP indeed operates through profit and consumer demands. However, can Harvard ethically separate its name from the business?

I would argue no.

Harvard is a massively influential institution with measurable economic, political, and global impacts. In its mission, the College makes it clear that they hope to accommodate a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. As a student from Kentucky, I see this mission expanding year by year to include more students from backgrounds that traditionally would not be accommodated in the admissions process. To cultivate success across demographics, Harvard provides tools to help all

incoming students acclimate to a rigorous college environment. For example, the First-Year Retreat and Experience pre-orientation program offers financial planning resources and encourages connections with like-minded peers.

But with such initiatives across social and academic spaces, it becomes difficult for Harvard to separate its name from student inclusivity, which exacerbates the stark contrast with luxury brand partnerships.

This is not to say I cannot recognize the opportunity this partnership brings to campus. Creative expression is essential for the Harvard

“HUDS is affecting me every day, three times a day... We need to take care of the people who are taking care of us every day, before we take care of our public image to the small amount of students and people who can afford that brand.”

- Self '30

student body; collaborating with major brands can inspire Crimson pride. And is it fair to burden something likely intended as a positive opportunity with the University's burdens?

“I think it would be unfair to criticize this collaboration since the board of the COOP doesn't influence HUDS pay,” Hassan said.

Again, I think there are critical, longstanding impacts to consider.

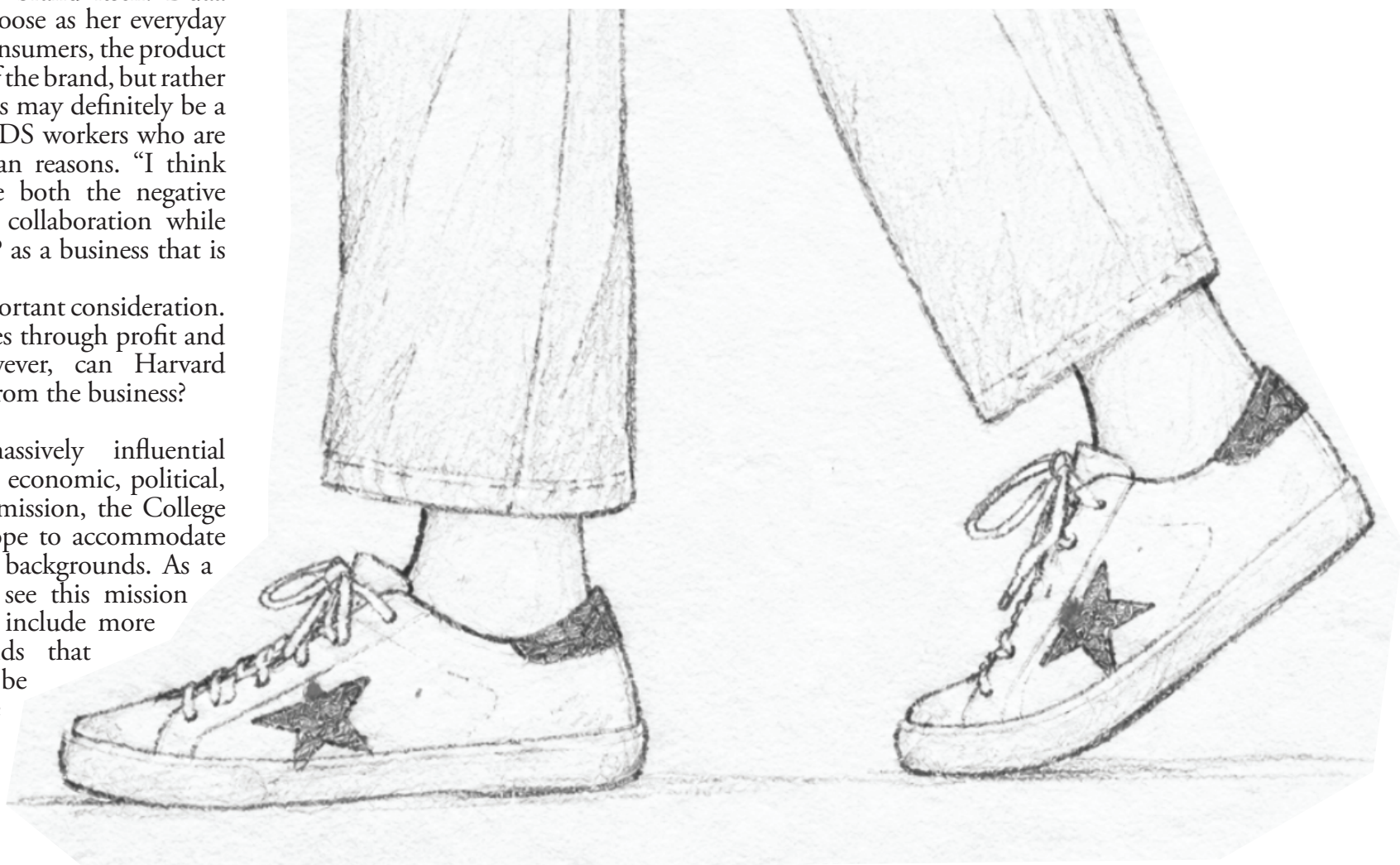
As Harvard affiliates, we encounter unhoused individuals even just outside of the COOP, and a variety of socioeconomic statuses are present throughout campus. Additionally, the College details that 55% of undergraduates receive need-based scholarships. With an ever-increasing number of students on financial aid, Harvard should balance what its name is associated with, even if partnering businesses are not the root of wage disparities.

“Why is that what we're putting our energy and money and time towards whenever there are issues among our workers?” Self expressed. The social implications of this type of collaboration, while not necessarily the COOP's concern, should be considered more broadly in the future, as these collaborations reflect primarily on the Harvard administration.

What started as a small institution for select scholars to learn the core principles of life should not be reduced to a luxury price tag that can be bought and marketed. Instead, we should wear the iconic “H” with pride, knowing our institution fights for its workers and all students, regardless of socioeconomic standing. As Self says, “HUDS is affecting me every day, three times a day... We need to take care of the people who are taking care of us every day, before we take care of our public image to the small amount of students and people who can afford that brand.”

ABBY LADWIG '30 (ABBYLADWIG@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HOPES TO PET MORE DOGS THIS WEEK.

GRAPHIC BY ELLA COHEN '29



ARTS

Sexuality and Religion Through Art

An analysis of two paintings from Harvard Art Museums, “Introduction to the History of Art.”

By ELLIOT HUNTER CHUNG '29 & WISDOM OMOLAYO '29

Tucked away on the third floor of the Harvard Art Museums, past Ancient Egyptian art and a gallery full of photographs, is an eclectic curation of works with no clear throughline. “Engravings,” you think as the intricate black-and-white works by Albrecht Dürer, Sebald Beham, and Hans Baldung Grien first ensnare your eyes. You glance at the wall behind you, though, and altarpieces, coins, and a tempera painting confront you. After taking a beat, you sense a theme: religious work. The altarpieces are, of course, altarpieces; the coins are from Constantine (the first Roman Emperor to embrace Christianity), the painting depicts the head of Christ, and the engravings you first saw show Adam and Eve. Quite proud of yourself, you breach the threshold of the second room of the exhibition, and try as you might, you cannot hold on to your thesis. The works here seem to be centered around horses... but also Incan portraits?

“Introduction to the History of Art” was curated by Professors Jeffrey Hamburger, Cécile Fromont, and Joseph Leo Koerner, who co-teach History of Art and Architecture 10. The common thread of this exhibition? Time, self and subjectivity, and the future of the past. You could pull on a thousand threads from the tapestry that makes up those topics, and still not scratch the surface. Still, pulling those threads is exactly what gives this curation its meaning. Therefore, like Sisyphus in the depths of Tartarus, we trudge on.

While the exhibition has around 40 works spread throughout, two particularly interesting pieces feature unique intersections of sexuality and religion.

The story we will tell begins where the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers first met—the Garden of Eden. In this very garden, the Bible says humanity was created. Adam was formed from the dust of the earth, and Eve from

“Our eyes have been permanently opened to our nakedness.”

Adam’s rib. As the story goes, Adam and Eve were given everything they needed but were forbidden to eat fruit from one specific tree. Tempted by a serpent, Eve ate the fruit and gave some to Adam. Immediately their eyes were opened, and they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. As punishment for their disobedience, God expelled them from the garden.

Albrecht Dürer perfectly captures the moment of this original sin—the Fall as it is called—in his engraving printed in black ink on white antique laid paper, titled “Adam and Eve.” In the work, Eve receives an apple from the serpent, which insinuates a freezing of the sin in time. More specifically, as the apple has yet to be eaten, the scene takes place before “The Fall.” However, our understanding of the temporality is complicated by the plants conveniently covering the genitals of both Adam and Eve. As mentioned earlier, Adam and Eve did not consider their nudity as shameful until after The Fall. This detail pulls us out of our immersion and forces us to consider why Dürer would include such an inaccuracy in his work.



This inaccuracy is perhaps Dürer’s intentional commentary on the human condition. Before “The Fall,” sexuality had no normative property. However, after the first bite of the apple, humanity was cast out of the garden, where we can never return. Therefore, even in the most naturalistic and accurate depiction of the time before the Fall, Dürer seems to remind us that we cannot go back. Our eyes have been permanently opened to our nakedness.

The tree from which Adam and Eve ate was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Upon receiving such knowledge, the first thing the pair did was to become ashamed of their exposed genitalia and fashion clothes to cover themselves. What does this say about the moral characteristics of our sexuality? It is clear that after the original sin, nakedness was wrong, but what about before? Was our sexuality always something to be hidden away, and the knowledge of good and evil showed us that, or was normativity only injected into our sexuality after the moment Eve’s teeth touched the flesh of the apple?

Another work from the exhibit that touches on similar themes is the “Madonna,” by Edvard Munch. In form, the lithographic print is a ‘Madonna and Child’—a depiction of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. However, it differs from most other Madonna and Child depictions, in which Mary is chaste and robed, displaying her purity. Further, the baby Jesus is typically the more central figure, as expected.

“This exploration offers no takeaway; no lesson to learn or answer to find. Instead, it leaves only more questions.”

This work is nearly the opposite of what we are used to seeing. Jesus is small and emaciated, tucked in the darkness of the corner. He crosses his arms, hugging himself, evoking feelings of childlike fear. His mother, by contrast, is in the foreground. She lies back, with her hands behind her head, fully naked. There is a hint of ecstatic eroticism, as Mary pitches her head back, stares



up at the ceiling, and parts her lips. Upon closer inspection, however, her eyes reveal themselves as hollow voids, as if she were dead. There are also sperm encircling her, which look like they originate from the baby and end towards her hips.

Once again, the morality of sexuality is called into question. In his work, Munch tears down the false, thin veil of a virgin birth and makes conception inextricable from life. It is as if he is forcing the viewer into deeper waters. From the comfortable, inexplicit idea of a child born from holiness and purity, one must wade into the animalistic, carnal, and deeply human reality. Together, the works are profoundly haunting, and yet somehow familiar.

This exploration offers no takeaway; no lesson to learn or answer to find. Instead, it leaves only more questions. Our interpretation of both works may not be what either artist intended, and other viewers may take away entirely different messages. However, as we started with, this is just one thread in a tapestry of millions that exist in this gallery. Professors Hamburger, Fromont, and Koerner have created a phenomenal curation, made even more special by its ephemerality. In four months, the installation will be replaced, and the threads burned with it, as this group of works will likely never be shown together again.

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“HARVARD INDEPENDENT.”

GRAPHICS BY EVELYN FERGUSON '29





Introducing the New Sport on Campus: Musical Theater

The backstage process behind Harvard's finest upcoming musical productions.

By ANNA GUNKO '30

This semester, Harvard's actors, directors, musicians, and everyone in between will spend thousands of hours preparing their shows for the campus community. The three musicals in the Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club lineup for the fall 2026 season include "Into the Woods," directed by Riley Jackson '27; "Ride the Cyclone," directed by Leonard Walletzky '29 and Jolana Kampfová '28; and "Dear Evan Hansen," directed by Ava Della Pietra '27. From the outside, viewers will only see perfected vocals, stunning sets, and immersive props. But what really goes into production? What hides behind the curtains?

Acting is one of the first things we think of when we think of theater—it is what we see on stage, after all. However, live performances rest on a crucial, unseen component: rehearsals.

Different shows necessitate distinct preparation. The first few weeks are focused on the basics: table reads, partner work, and choreography. As opening night approaches, shows enter "residency weeks," or rehearsals in the official performance space. Residency weeks include tech week, a period of intense review that leads up to show week. During this period, the production team can choose to spend more time on character development or go straight into blocking. Specific roles like stage managers handle scheduling, while the cast memorizes lines and brings the script to life. And finally, after an arduous yet collaborative few months, the curtain rises.

An Actor's Process

Nailing a character's personality and development is arguably one of the most important aspects of a show; without a strong cast, the script falls apart. Harvard's actors are no strangers to this tenet of their craft—but it is easier said than done.

Although he is a first-year, Jack McCarthy '30 received the titular role in "Dear Evan Hansen." Though rewarding, this principal part is incredibly demanding, especially in a musical like this. "Evan is a very difficult role because he's sort of an anti-hero, kind of unlikable, and then he's also extremely awkward and socially anxious. So developing fidgets or just, I guess, building the character [is my favorite part] because he is a character who's so different than me, and also needs to be so specific and intentional," McCarthy told the "Harvard Independent."

And Evan comes to life not only through his lines but also through his ballads. "[Evan] doesn't really leave the stage at all and sings a lot, very high, so it is definitely hard," McCarthy added. "It is very tenor vox, and I am more of a baritone that can sing those notes sometimes, so it'll definitely take a lot of training."

Consistent practice and careful attention to Evan's character development were thus critical. "I want to get the whole show memorized earlier rather than later, so that's not a stressor and they are so ingrained that they just, sort of, come out without me having to think about them," McCarthy said. "I also do a lot of things to keep my voice healthy, so hydration is really important. I steam with hot steam and do some other stuff too. So that's all stuff I am really into. I am super interested in vocal health."

Once tech week starts, the rehearsal pace ramps up. Lines must be memorized, voices prepared, and every aspect of one's role perfected.

"So far we've done mostly character workshops with the directors and music rehearsals to really get down the notes," Anabel Ruthledge '30, who plays Little Red Riding Hood in "Into the Woods," said to the "Harvard Independent." "Character workshop is so important because you are kind of breaking down what she wants in the show, but also before the show, you are coming up with your own backstory, like why does she act the way she does."



The People Behind the Scenes

Though away from the spotlight, a show's operations and tech team are arguably just as essential as the principal cast. Theater demands collaboration and conversation, as far more people are on a team than one sees on stage. Each embraces a defined set of responsibilities, from lighting and sound to set design or makeup, to ensure a smooth show run (and that their actors' extensive preparation is not in vain).

Think of the stage manager as the puppeteer behind the entire production. Stage managers clarify group availability to create one central rehearsal schedule, don a headset on show day, and take hundreds of aspirin before the final curtain call.

"Stage managing is notoriously probably the hardest role in the production," Walletzky, co-director of "Ride the Cyclone," told the "Harvard

Independent." "You have to keep track of everybody's schedules ... and the second part is you have to run the show. Like you are the one backstage, responsible for calling all cues for saying when everything goes on."

The director shares much of the behind-the-scenes burden with the stage manager—and receives much of the credit. The director's name is front and center on promotional posters and playbills. "As a director, I think you touch almost kind of like every single part of the production," Walletzky said.

In musicals in particular, the director brings the paper script to vibrant life through a delicate balance of dialogue and vocals. And their role starts long before actors or a full technical team is formed. "Since summer, we've started building a turntable, which is the main part of our production," Walletzky said.

"For musicals, there are so many moving parts, so you want to get started as soon as possible. I think there is no time to waste," Kampfová added. "You're basically driving this train that is simultaneously a plane and a helicopter, and you want to get to its destination, but also at the same time have to build the tracks. There's just a lot of moving parts, and it's your job to make sure that they all fit together in a way that makes sense."

Despite this effort, Walletzky and Kampfová would not change the process; ultimately, they enjoy the hard work.

"You always get to talk to everybody and distill their amazing ideas, and finally, together through these conversations, you end up at a product," Walletzky added.

Theater is a team sport; even the most talented person cannot do it alone.

Alongside the stage manager and director is the producer. "I definitely think my favorite part of tech producing is watching all the different designers come together with their ideas. Every meeting we kind of do a recap of where everybody's at, what their ideas are, what their progress is," said Natalie Mosakowski '29, the technical producer of "Ride the Cyclone" and the assistant lighting designer for "Into the Woods."

Show Time!

This long, difficult process culminates in the show days.

"Into the Woods" will run from Oct. 28 to 31, "Dear Evan Hansen" from Oct. 28 to Nov. 1, and "Ride the Cyclone" from Nov. 5 to 8.

If you're wondering how to make time for theater amid coffee chats and Lamont, keep this in mind. Supporting live arts is central to life and society, especially as film competes with theater. Theater encourages connection and empathy in this increasingly digital world. Moreover, theater offers something film cannot: every performance is different. Actors improvise, mess up, trip over a prop, and still bring their script to life. It is a testament to perseverance and love for one's craft.

So come, laugh at the funny productions or cry during the tragic ones, and most importantly, come to support the actors and the crew!

Walletzky offers a concluding sentiment: "That this world that you create and that hopefully the audience will then enjoy and see for what it is."

ANNA GUNKO '30 (AGUNKO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS COMPING THE "HARVARD INDEPENDENT" AND IS A THEATER KID.

GRAPHIC BY ISRA KHAN '30

"You're basically driving this train that is simultaneously a plane and a helicopter, and you want to get to its destination, but also at the same time have to build the tracks."

- Kampfová '28

Behind the Booze

The personas your drink of choice evokes.

By ANIKA GUPTA '30 AND SALMA GHEITH '30

The drinks that we choose can say a lot about us. Do you like lemons? Cranberries? Sweet or sour? Often, what we choose to consume reflects who we are or are trying to be. Maybe you pick something fresh to feel like a “clean girl”; maybe you choose a bitter, serious drink to pretend that you are a cultured intellectual.

Lose the personality quizzes. We skipped the psychology and went straight to the source: the drinks that get college students (only 21 and older, of course!) through the semester, and the people they would be if they were human.

Vodka Cranberry

The Vodka Cran is always late. I mean, NEVER on time. She frequently forgets her keys. And her wallet. And her phone. But she is a great time. She can dance, talk to anyone, and she frequently gets hit on, but she is not as focused on men as you might think. The vodka cran definitely drives her friends crazy with some of her Type B tendencies. Her bills are

“Borg is 6-foot-5, 250 pounds, and coming at 60 mph on a scooter on his way to the Quad.”

often unpaid, and her apartment is always a mess—if you do not watch out, you will step on an earring. Surprisingly, she offers great relationship advice (even though her own love life is a mess) and a comforting hug when you need it most.

Jell-O Shots

Jell-O shots come in a pair. One blue and one red. They went to the same high school and now live in the same dorm. They secretly hate each other, but they share the same friend group and concentrations (Government and Economics, of course), and both really, REALLY hope the other does not get into the Harvard Undergraduate Consulting Group. You will see them post blurry digi pics on their Instagram stories with a Blood Orange song playing in the background. They both have stick-and-poke tattoos, but they think anything else is “trashy.” When Blue has a crush, Red will Snapchat them, but do not feel too bad, because Blue would do the same.



Borg

Borg is 6-foot-5, 250 pounds, and coming at 60 mph on a scooter on his way to the Quad. He plays a real sport, like basketball or fencing (sorry to the football players out there), and he has no regard for anyone’s personal space. You will see him around, and he will dap you up, but he will not remember your name. Miraculously, he is majoring in Chemical Engineering. Although he stares at his problem sets while eating a Quest bar and scrolling Reels in Lamont, there may be more to him than meets the eye (we do not know what, but let us hope!). When

“We ourselves may be under 21 and strictly follow the law in the great state of Massachusetts, but we hope those of you who do drink feel represented in this piece.”

you struggle to lift your suitcase on move-in day, he watches you with his mouth agape and says nothing.

Gin & Tonic

Gin & Tonic is Type A. Her hair is blown out, her nails have French tips, and all of her jewelry matches. She always carries wintergreen gum—she might not offer you a piece, but she would totally give you one if you asked. You will see her in Stat 110 on her iPad with her meticulously organized GoodNotes, but you will notice that she is usually split-screening with the “New York Times” games. She is shy on a dance floor and kind of awkward, but in a funny way. She splurged on Tabi flats, but she cannot seem to style them right.

Jägerbomb

The Jägerbomb secretly wishes he were one of the MIT frat brothers screaming, “IF YOU’RE NOT A BROTHER OR GETTING WITH A BROTHER, GET OUT!” He is from Greenwich, Connecticut, and he and his trust fund spend their summers on the Cape. Despite living an hour away, he pretends he is from the “City.” He acts like an athlete, but he twists his ankle trying to “shoot hoops” in the MAC. He wants to build a B2B SaaS startup, but he does not know what any of those letters mean; he is sure he will figure it out one day, though.

White Claw

White Claw is pretty much exactly who you would expect. Her nails are short, almond-shaped, and hot pink. Her hair is long, and her highlights are a little too blonde. Every night, she sleeps peacefully next to her 40-ounce Stanley in her Roller Rabbit pajamas. Her Google Calendar is meticulously color-coded in pastel hues, but she is not a huge fan of class, school, or anything not related to hot yoga and club pickleball. White Claw and Jägerbomb are in a situationship from hell and have broken up a few times for ridiculous reasons (most recently, he did not buy her a Jellycat for

National Girlfriend Day). She simply adores a Pure Barre class followed by Playa Bowls, especially if she is hungover, and her favorite café is Blue Bottle.

Beer

Unlike White Claw, Beer is not who you would expect. He is majoring in philosophy and is obsessed with Aesop soap. His shampoo is Le Labo, and his backpack is “Italian” leather. He loves Anthony Bourdain and miso butter. He will mansplain Sylvia Plath to you even though you are in the same gender studies seminar, and he is going to work at BlackRock after graduation, “just temporarily.” Beer says “BarTHAlona” and “IbiTHA” to make it seem like he is a native Spanish speaker after studying abroad. He claims that he is from San Francisco, but he is actually from Palo Alto, and his parents work in tech.

Buzzball

Buzzball is a genius, but she is a hot mess, and not in a chic way. She loves Noch’s, and she has an impressive collection of empty (and molding?) Celsius cans in her incredibly messy dorm. She skips every study session and most lectures, but still gets a perfect score on the midterm. She could create the next Facebook, but she is more preoccupied with talking to first-year girls at parties (despite being in the class of 2027). In fact, she is leading on both Blue and Red Jell-O Shots. You will see her falling asleep in Widener, hunched over her computer, a performative Blank Street order beside her, but somehow she is going to work for Jane Street.

We ourselves may be under 21 and strictly follow the law in the great state of Massachusetts, but we hope those of you who do drink feel represented in this piece. No worries if you do not partake—your drink choices do not determine who you are. Wannabe frat bros can drink a Miami Vice, and artsy girls can shotgun a Modelo. Do not let what is in your glass define you.

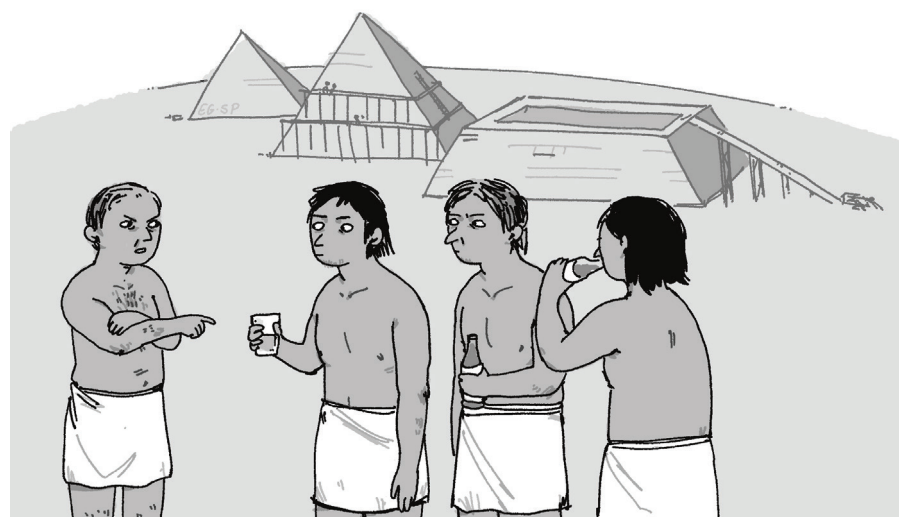
Bottoms up!

ANIKA GUPTA '30 (ANIKAGUPTA@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND SALMA GHEITH '30 (SALMAGHEITH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) CAN'T WAIT TO TRY ALL THESE DRINKS WHEN THEY TURN 21!

GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28

Drinking on the Job

By SAM PARK '29 & ELLIE GUO '29



“Why in Ra’s name aren’t you drinking beer?? We can’t afford to lose another one to cholera.”

Who Should We Truly Fear?

The beauty of a good horror movie.

By HAFEEZAT GHAFAR '29

The image of a person walking home late at night is universally haunting. Horror movies have popularized this fear through tense, dramatic scenes: the long cast shadows as they maneuver around a corner. The incessant clutching of the backpack. Moving jerkily, they look behind, scanning for any stalkers or threats. With only the moon as a witness, they go on to face the sort of violence every person fears.

Their screams mesh into echoes of pain as they do on any other night.

Horror has always been my favorite movie genre—full of squelching, blood-curdling, and fearsome frights. These movies go beyond immersion,

“Their screams mesh into echoes of pain as they do on any other night.”

often becoming a dynamic, all-encompassing experience alongside the main characters. Viewers can feel every stab, push, hit, and bang.

When I was a kid, my first horror movie was the 1988 supernatural film “Child’s Play.” Chucky, a doll possessed by the soul of a serial killer, is given to young Andy by his widowed mother. Although Chucky is meant to be Andy’s friend, the doll suffocates him with hidden villainy and manipulation, leaving Andy vulnerable even to authority figures.

I can still recall the menacing music, Chucky’s haunting movements, and the egregiousness of adult incompetence. I was baffled by the constant failure of adults to understand the significance of what was happening and how Andy almost died before his mother, the detectives, and the psychologists believed him.

Juxtaposing the corrupt Chucky doll against Andy’s childlike innocence was the film’s way of urging six-year-old me to be more critical of abnormal occurrences in my daily life and to learn to advocate for myself. Recognizing the failure of adult belief is vital to navigating the world as a child when pitch-black shadows stalk your sleep, winds mysteriously knock over vases, and younger siblings really do hit you. It is one thing to recognize wrongdoing, but another to rally people to act against it. Never mind the cruel antics of playground bullies; six-year-old me was equipped to deal with reincarnated evil in a petite form.

“Scream,” another childhood favorite of mine, came out in 1996, well before my generation. It follows Sidney Prescott, a teenage girl

who is targeted by the masked killer, Ghostface, on the anniversary of her mother’s death, just as she attempts to move on from the murder.

More than the experience of tragedy itself, the way society discusses and understands it has always intrigued me. Nothing compared to watching Sidney’s life fall apart while seeing a small town cannibalize itself in its chase for the killer. For me, Sidney represented the wildness and freedom of teenagehood (at least in the early minutes of the movie). She discussed the mundane reality of high school classes and relationships before tragedy struck.

Tragedy attracts attention, and through the media sensationalism depicted in “Scream,” I learned how incentives can outweigh genuine sympathy. At every moment of Sidney’s distress, the news media turned her life into a spectacle through cameras, reporters, and salacious tabloids.

I noticed something similar growing up in Colorado—the state where culturally significant mass shootings occurred, such as the 1999 Columbine High School massacre and the 2012 Aurora theater shooting. Through various extracurriculars, I would meet and compete against students who attended Columbine High School and walked the same halls as the victims and perpetrators. The memory of Columbine is still very much alive in Colorado.

While students and teachers approach these tragedies with sympathy and sensitivity, both traditional and social media often take a less empathetic approach. The continuous live coverage, dramatized narratives, and posthumous celebrity have transformed these mass shooting events into global media spectacles. This media formula has since become a staple of coverage of subsequent school shootings. Even as a child, I resented the public for capitalizing on freshly dead bodies. In the media, victimhood and entertainment become one and the same, dehumanizing the people (or characters) involved.

Though fictional horror and real-world tragedy are fundamentally different, both show how easily others’ suffering can become an object of public consumption. Despite all the calamity around her, Sidney gradually reclaims her agency, refusing to let Ghostface or the news dictate her life and choices. As a young girl entering her teenage years, I found myself composed and ready for the fearsome encounters the world would bring. We are always at the mercy of other people when they decide to radically alter our lives. “Final girls,” the archetypes of surviving female characters who confront and outlast the killer—offer a supportive hand—having survived too.

The Aurora Theater is still open today. Every time I went with my friends to watch a new blockbuster, I remembered the lives taken. One of the great sorrows of a world laden with misfortune is time’s casual amnesia. What time does for healing, it also does to the memories and shock of losing loved ones.

The horror community practices its own form of ancestor veneration. Though not a traditional classic, “Teeth” (2007) explores the mythical condition of vagina dentata (“toothed vagina”) through Dawn’s journey of awakening autonomy and developing her identity within womanhood. The film grapples with the myth as a way to depict violence against women in its horrific, almost comedic reality. Dawn, originally unassuming and submissive, reclaims her power by becoming the “monster” society fears in female survivors. In doing so, she critiques how cultures that avoid discussing violence create havens for predators, joining a legacy of women feared for their autonomy.

Despite Dawn’s condition, the viewer quickly realizes that the true abomination lies both in the passive moral guardians who leave young people

“When reality desensitizes us, horror reminds us how cruel the world can be.”

uneducated and in the antagonists who weaponize their power. As a young girl learning to manage the changes within my own body and the peering eyes of society, I found solace in “Teeth” and the stories of other women. Horror movies use fantastical elements to present themes that remain true to life. We are often told to see humanity in despicable people. “Teeth” warns against seeing despicable people as any more powerful than a human, allowing us to reclaim power from those who abuse it.

Growing up, I saw horror movies and their enthusiasts labeled as deviants who concern themselves with morbidity to satisfy a dark itch. Simultaneously, the world outside was rife with numbing death and violence. When reality desensitizes us, horror reminds us how cruel the world can be.

Fiction traditionally presents the unseen and unknown as what people fear most. As a 19-year-old in college, I have found that my fears have adapted to my age. I no longer fear lurking dolls or haunting spirits, but now fear tangible terrors over the state of the world: military conflict in the Middle East, mounting domestic economic troubles, environmental collapse, AI singularity. Everything at once screams for my attention. How do we combat evil that we know intimately and have constructed ourselves?

Fiction translates these fears and worries into great works that alchemize danger into fantastical depictions, offering deeper insight into the horror around us. Horror, as a genre, offers a way to view the world through lenses beyond the usual ones. It blends jump scares and chase scenes with social commentary, letting us confront societal ills with theatrical distance.

Bogyphobia is the fear of bogeymen or other supernatural beings. This phobia is most common in children who see the world through a lens of monsters, superpowers, and magical beings. After watching movies like “Child’s Play,” I would enter the dream realm, terrified of whom I would encounter. But I had already seen evil lose on screen. Children already know evil exists. Horror movies remind them that it can be beaten.

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GRAPHIC BY MAYA KODALI '30



Uninformed Disunity

Harvard's fall fashion trends say more about where we come from than we think.

By WISDOM OMOLAYO '29

By late September, things have become routine. We've settled into our new dorms, reacquainted ourselves with our term-time friends, and counted down the days as the add/drop period creeps toward its end; as these habits sink in, a couple of changes occur on campus. The 100-degree heat that Cambridge felt in our absence departs, and we get eased into a lull of grays, oranges, and auburn browns characteristic of a Northeast fall.

I've come to appreciate the term "sweater weather" as temperatures dwindle to a cool sub-70. Away go the jorts, tank tops, and baseball caps of the summers spent in New York, London, or San Diego. Instead, the jeans come out to play, and the Yard is adorned with spools of blue on every student's behind. White patterned sneakers, adidas Sambas, white socks, and a dark coat constitute the average Harvard student's October wardrobe.

Casual wear to class was one of the biggest changes I experienced when I arrived at Harvard as a first-year. Growing up in the United Kingdom, I wore a suit and tie as my school uniform for as long as I can remember. At boarding school, there was a time when I owned only one properly fitting T-shirt, as my days were filled with routine classes, formals, and sports activities, with little downtime that warranted everyday clothes.

I was thankful for this. I always felt that uniforms masked socioeconomic inequalities

"We don't love to stick out, be questioned, or be critiqued. And it shows in our clothing choices."

between students and removed the pressure of putting together a stellar outfit every day. The suit was navy, black, or gray. The dress shirt? White, pink, or powder blue, with a befitting tie to top it all off. Dressing was simple. Without this enforcement, I surely would have struggled to find five unique outfits every week.

Uniforms didn't come without downsides. Unpolished shoes? Sent back to your dorm to polish them. Flamboyant belt? Labeled non licet, Latin for "not permitted," to be replaced with a black or brown leather one. At a British boarding school, forced uniformity stripped clothing of its storytelling abilities. Which, yes, in some ways removed people's visual personality, but it also disguised who came from money and who didn't. At Harvard, with no enforced uniform, clothes are free to talk.

The Harvard undergraduate population has representatives from every U.S. state and countless countries. And though our fall apparel is largely uniform, the clothes that make us fit together also expose our differences.

The North Face in particular has become a staple for many. Its black Nuptse puffer is thoroughly loved and routinely drapes across the seatbacks of Science Center Hall B for EC1010A. Their backpacks are nearly as common in the Yard as international tourists.

But The North Face isn't made for college students. The American outerwear company's name reflects its purpose—it's designed for

Zara and Hollister have long been reliable sources for students to find their go-to pieces. However, more niche online sellers, like Aimé Leon Dore and Kith, have proliferated, using social media marketing and limited-stock drops to build a following. Beyond these, many students have started dropping jeans altogether. Yes, it's true: the sea of blue is often littered with dress pants, corduroys, or chinos from Loro Piana or J.Press.

Look more closely, and our clothing is less unified than it may seem at first. Take cowboy boots, a staple of the American South, developed as practical footwear for cattle rearing and farm work. You can spot boots on some of the Texans who call campus home; yet you would be hard-pressed to find many who do farm work day to day. Boots were made for the work of those who wear them, just like The North Face was made for the mountain that almost none of us

plan on climbing. One is a statement on where you're from. The other declares who you'd like to be.

Athleisure isn't foreign to campus either. College-branded Nike Tech Fleece and sweatpants are an easy choice for warmth and comfort as we head into the colder fall months. More notably, the athlete backpack sends a message to onlookers, especially when combined with a HiBoy (electric scooter)—a fashion statement we all know very well. Whether athletes represent another class of students is a question best entertained in another article. But their clothing speaks loudly and clearly.

In LS1A, two students sit comfortably, not too upright, nor too slouched, in casual outfits you couldn't tell apart at first glance. But take a closer look, and you will see a story of generational challenges, contrasting lived experiences, and vastly different life choices shaped by these disparate environments. I often find myself in conversations about how our backgrounds shape the Harvard experience and what we take away from it. I've found that in our clothing and appearance, we make a broader, subtler statement to start a dialogue that only some are fluent in reading.

And yet, they sit side by side in Lamont, studying for the upcoming Gen Ed quiz. Both in sneakers and knit sweaters, the differences still show through. The masks we wear fit worse than we think.

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GRAPHIC BY SARAHLUNA SASSINE '29



climbers facing the harsh terrain of a mountain's cliff face. Why do we, as students in the urban Northeast, equip ourselves with outerwear that exceeds our needs? We dress for the person we'd like to be, rather than for what we need. Clothing helps us convey an illusion and wear a mask for those around us.

But why would we choose to dress similarly? Fashion is largely characterized by a set of rules. Some things we shouldn't put together, and some things catch the eye in ways we want and don't. Poorly fitting jeans. Patterns that look like stains. Purple and yellow? Simply atrocious.

Still, fashion is also about taking risks. Doing something novel and unconventional that pays off in the final display. But Harvard students, known for being the fastest to abandon prior world-changing dreams in favor of high-paying corporate jobs, are naturally risk-averse. We don't love to stick out, be questioned, or be critiqued. And it shows in our clothing choices.

Characteristics of our student body show up at every level, from the most pre-professional club culture to how we respond to campus politics. This includes the clothes in our wardrobes. The same golden handcuffs that will one day keep us in high-paying jobs already prevent us from taking creative risks with what we wear. Instead of expressing ourselves and displaying our backgrounds, we wear the mask of an identity that isn't our own.

Harvard has great jeans. Or genes. I think. The uniform isn't as uniform as it seems at first. If you stare at the jeans and really fix your eyes upon their textures, you'll realize they aren't all the same. Indeed, there's a raging sea of blues. But not of one shade. Let's walk through it. The people's choice? A regular pair of blue jeans. With a hoodie or a white tee, it gives '00s vibes, like digital cameras and your favorite R&B album.

Next up, the light blue denim. The new kid on the block. Best paired with white tennis shoes, sometimes Reeboks, Lacostes, or even a colorful pair of Sambas. Others go for a navy pair, which works well with black sneakers and a waffle sweater or rugby polo (a personal favorite of mine).

As for brands, Harvard students source their jeans from all over. Fast-fashion retailers like

SPORTS

Weekly Sports Preview: October 1-8

Your weekly what-to-watch for Harvard Athletics.

By LUCY DUNCAN '28

A month into the fall athletics season, fans have gotten a sense of how their favorite Harvard sports teams are performing. As conference play ramps up, the stakes are rising for the Crimson. Team leadership is solidifying, and first-years are making their mark. This week brings marquee matches and Ivy League home openers for several Harvard teams.

Field Hockey (6–1)

This weekend sees a two-game slate for the Crimson, who are currently ranked first in Ivy League conference play and in the top ten nationally. After victories over Dartmouth and Princeton in September, Harvard has maintained its momentum from last year's semifinal run. Their Friday game at the University of Pennsylvania, scheduled for 2 p.m., will be one of their easier tests in their bid for a second consecutive Ivy League title.

On Sunday at 12 p.m., Harvard, ranked eighth nationally, will then face No. 6 Wake Forest at home in a prominent nonconference matchup dubbed “Berylson Bash.” This will be only the fourth time these teams have met, with the Crimson losing twice in the early 2000s before winning in their 2024 meeting. Fans can expect a tight match between two of the nation's top teams, complete with food trucks, giveaways, and anthem buddies.

Women's Volleyball (10–0)

Despite modest preseason predictions, women's volleyball has rapidly climbed to the top of Ivy League rankings. The tenth consecutive victory extended the Crimson's best start in program history ahead of two conference road tests this weekend. On Friday at 2 p.m., the Crimson will play Yale, second in the Ivy League rankings, in New Haven.

“Despite modest preseason predictions, women's volleyball has rapidly climbed to the top of Ivy League rankings.”

On Saturday at 5 p.m., they will then travel to Providence to play Brown. While rankings suggest an easier conference win for the Crimson, the short turnaround from Friday's game will test Harvard's performance under fatigue. Players like Sofia Rossi '29, ranked No. 1 in the nation for aces per set (1.00), and Ryleigh Patterson '27, second in the Ivy League in blocks per set, will be key assets this weekend. Statement victories over these challengers would put Harvard on a comfortable path toward breaking the 13-game winning-streak record set in 1997.

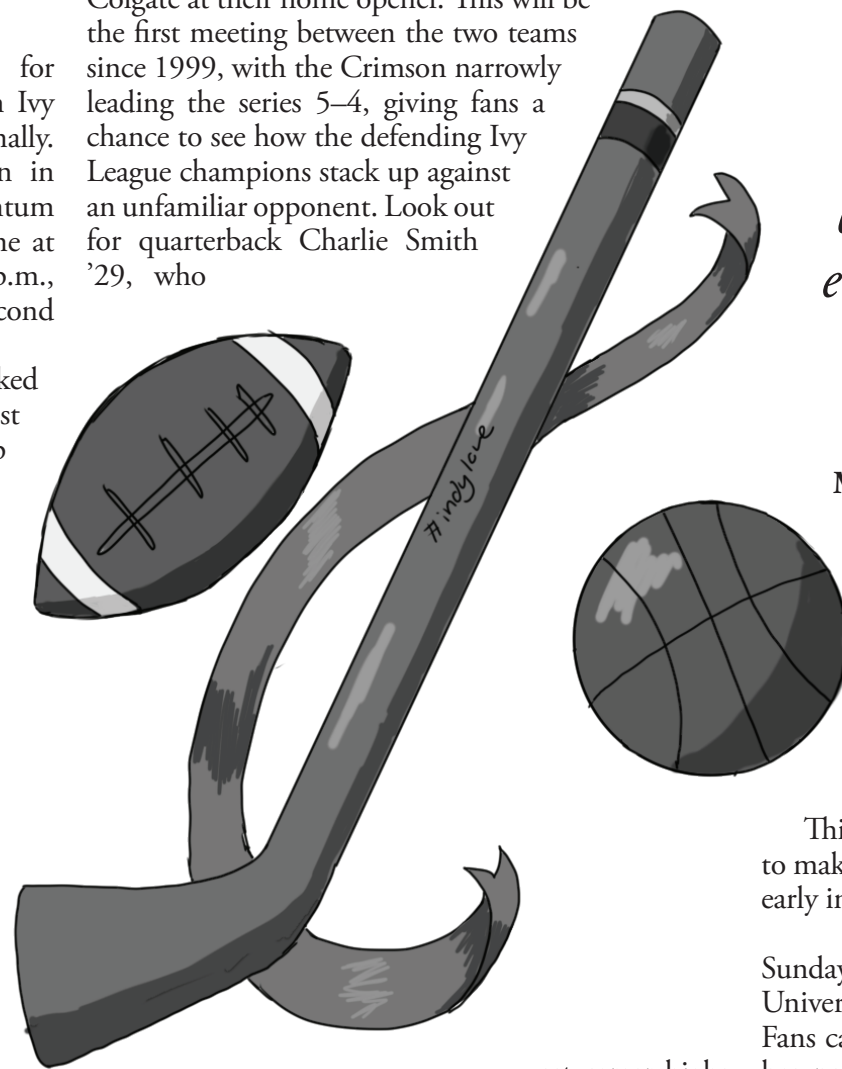
Women's Tennis

This weekend, women's tennis will host Boston University, Boston College, and Stony Brook at the Harvard Fall Classic—the first of two home tournaments slated for this fall. After the high-stakes Intercollegiate Tennis Association All-American

Championships, highlighted by Stephanie Yakoff '27's run to the round of 16 in the singles main draw, this tournament will let fans see how the Crimson's new lineup stacks up ahead of regional qualifiers next week.

Football (2–0)

After extending their undefeated season start with a victory at Brown, the Crimson will host Colgate at their home opener. This will be the first meeting between the two teams since 1999, with the Crimson narrowly leading the series 5–4, giving fans a chance to see how the defending Ivy League champions stack up against an unfamiliar opponent. Look out for quarterback Charlie Smith '29, who



set career highs in completions (30) and passing touchdowns (2) against Brown, and defensive back Xaden Benson '28, one of eight athletes in program history to record three interceptions in a single game. In addition to watching the Crimson's young leadership develop, fans can expect a special halftime fireworks show.

Men's Soccer (1–5–1)

Men's soccer continues their Ivy League run with a home game against Columbia this Saturday at 4 p.m. After a tough loss against conference leaders Cornell, this game against the No. 5 team will likely be an easier test for the Crimson. Harvard leads this series 46–27, though their most recent matchup resulted in a 3–1 loss. As Columbia's Ivy League opener and Harvard's home conference opener, this game will give Harvard a chance to make a statement early in conference play.

On Tuesday at 6 p.m., the Crimson will then travel across the Charles for their rescheduled match against Northeastern. The Crimson narrowly lead the series for this flagship local rivalry, with their last two meetings ending in 0–0 draws. This will be a lower-stakes opportunity for the Crimson to gain their footing and experiment with tactics between Ivy League matches. Watch captains and forwards Andreas Savva '27 and Dylan Tellado '27, who led the team in points last season, and goalkeeper Jason Broome '29, who tallied four saves against Cornell.

Women's Soccer (7–2–1)

The Crimson will host Cornell this Saturday at 1 p.m. for their first conference home game of the season. Last year's top five goal scorers return,

including two-time captain Anna Rayhill '27. The Crimson had a dominant start to conference play by defeating the preseason favorites for the Ivy League title, Princeton. Watch first-year Brooke Huleatt '30, whose goal and two assists against Princeton made her the Crimson's leading point scorer this season.

“Fans can expect a morning game against a team that has never beaten Harvard, giving emerging talent a chance to shine.”

Men's Water Polo (3–9)

Harvard is kicking off Northeast Water Polo Conference play this Saturday at 12 p.m. with a road game at Princeton. After one win and one loss against Princeton during regular-season play, the Crimson will face the Tigers for a third time in the 2025 season at the NWPC championship, with Princeton ultimately claiming its fifth consecutive conference title.

This Ivy League rivalry gives Harvard the chance to make a statement against the defending champions early in the season.

The Crimson will then head to New York on Sunday for a road doubleheader, facing Long Island University at 9 a.m. before heading to Iona at 2 p.m. Fans can expect a morning game against a team that has never beaten Harvard, giving emerging talent a chance to shine. The quick turnaround before their second game of the day will be a critical opportunity for the Crimson to showcase their depth and endurance.

With several Harvard teams breaking program records and dominating conference play, now is a great time for even the most casual fans to tune into Crimson athletics. Whether across the river, at the MAC, or streamed from the comfort of your dorm, take some time to cheer for Harvard athletes this week!

LUCY DUNCAN '28 (LDUNCAN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES SPORTS FOR THE “HARVARD INDEPENDENT.”

GRAPHIC BY NUALA MERNIN '29

When Life Gives You a Nor'easter

Overcoming the unexpected circumstances of sports and life.

By MEGAN LEGAULT '28

When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade.

When life threw defensive back Xaden Benson '28 a lemon (aka a Nor'easter) this past Friday, he caught three interceptions that helped secure Harvard's 14-10 victory over Brown. A performance I would certainly call making lemonade.

While some braved the torrential down-pour and crowded Amtrak trains to Providence this past weekend—borg in hand—to support the dudes wearing the Crimson jerseys, others braved something arguably much worse: the mystery virus that has suddenly and violently taken campus by storm.

You see, just a few days earlier I had ecstatically told my dear friend and conductor of the Harvard Band, Jack Wilder '28, how I was going to:

- a) Attend the Harvard-Brown game.
- b) Spotlight our awesome band and fabulous cheerleaders in my colorful commentary.
- c) And, most importantly, reveal the perfectly catchy title I had for my article!

“I probably should have spent Friday's game in my dorm, catching up on work and sleep. But, nope! I did not care—I. Had. A. Game. To. Catch.”

Well—spoiler alert: I spoke too soon.

A humble 24 hours later, I succumbed not only to a 100-degree fever but also a sore throat that I can only compare to what I imagine it would be like to swallow hydrochloric acid. Given these super fun circumstances, there was simply so much a girl could do.

Writing off a \$12 ticket off SeatGeek, I wrote the catchy article title down in my notes app for safekeeping—*better luck next year!*

Between coming down with an infection and Friday night's kickoff, forecasts of a “gener-

ational” Nor'easter began to circulate (slightly overhyped, but alas, we digress). The weather was unfortunate for classmates in attendance—and certainly for the passing accuracy of Brown's football team—but I must make the selfish confession that less-than-ideal weather conditions made missing the game a much easier pill to swallow.

By game day, I was both steadily on the mend and resolved to swerve the FOMO of missing the event in person. I made big plans. My big plans? Glad you asked! I went to my friend's dorm in the Leverett Towers, watched the game, and DoorDashed copious amounts of Taco Bell. What I failed to account for in these big plans was the fact that, during my three-day recovery from the delights of the “frat flu,” I somehow managed to fall behind in not one, not two, but all five of my classes. Crazy, but rather unsurprising, how fast this can happen—especially in the time of Amanda Claybaugh.

What should I have done next? I probably should have spent Friday's game in my dorm, catching up on work and sleep. But, nope! I did not care—I. Had. A. Game. To. Catch.

Determined to finish my work before 7 p.m., I unlocked an unlikely source of motivation. My inner monologue took the shape of—and this takes a lot of courage to admit—those inspirational sports edits that are almost certainly made by a 14-year-old. Regardless, my mind fixated on the thought that if our football team was about to play through a godforsaken Nor'easter, I could certainly get some assignments turned in before 11:59 p.m. without missing a single play. After all, I would probably recognize some players on the ESPN broadcast because they are in the very classes in which I had fallen behind.

I'm not writing this article to extend the sports analogy my DayQuil-clouded judgment came up with as toxic study motivation. Although, getting all of my assignments completed on time did feel somewhat comparable to taking a knee to wind down the clock in the style of newly named QB1 Charlie Smith '29.

No, the moral of the story here is that things like the weather conditions of a football game or the topic of an article change unexpectedly. For athletes and for people in general, adaptability is a valuable skill. We can plan all we want, but let us be really honest with ourselves: when does life ever go to plan?

Harvard students love to plan. I run out of fingers on both hands counting all the people I

know who have some form of Google Sheet with their entire four years laid out in advance. Some of them even take great pleasure in habitually returning to this document when they want to

“To give up on a long-term goal because you did not get the grade or the internship you wanted is comparable to football players waking up on Friday and saying, ‘Oh! Looks like it's going to rain today. Welp, guess I can't play anymore.’”

procrastinate on the work they have in the present (you know who you are). To me, this behavior certainly says something about our fixation on the future.

I may be outing myself as Type B here, but I utterly hate the concept of a five-year plan. Having long-term goals—that is one thing. Even if I survive off those. However, convincing ourselves that only a certain set of conditions can yield our desired outcome is something completely different—something that likely sets us up for failure more than it does success.

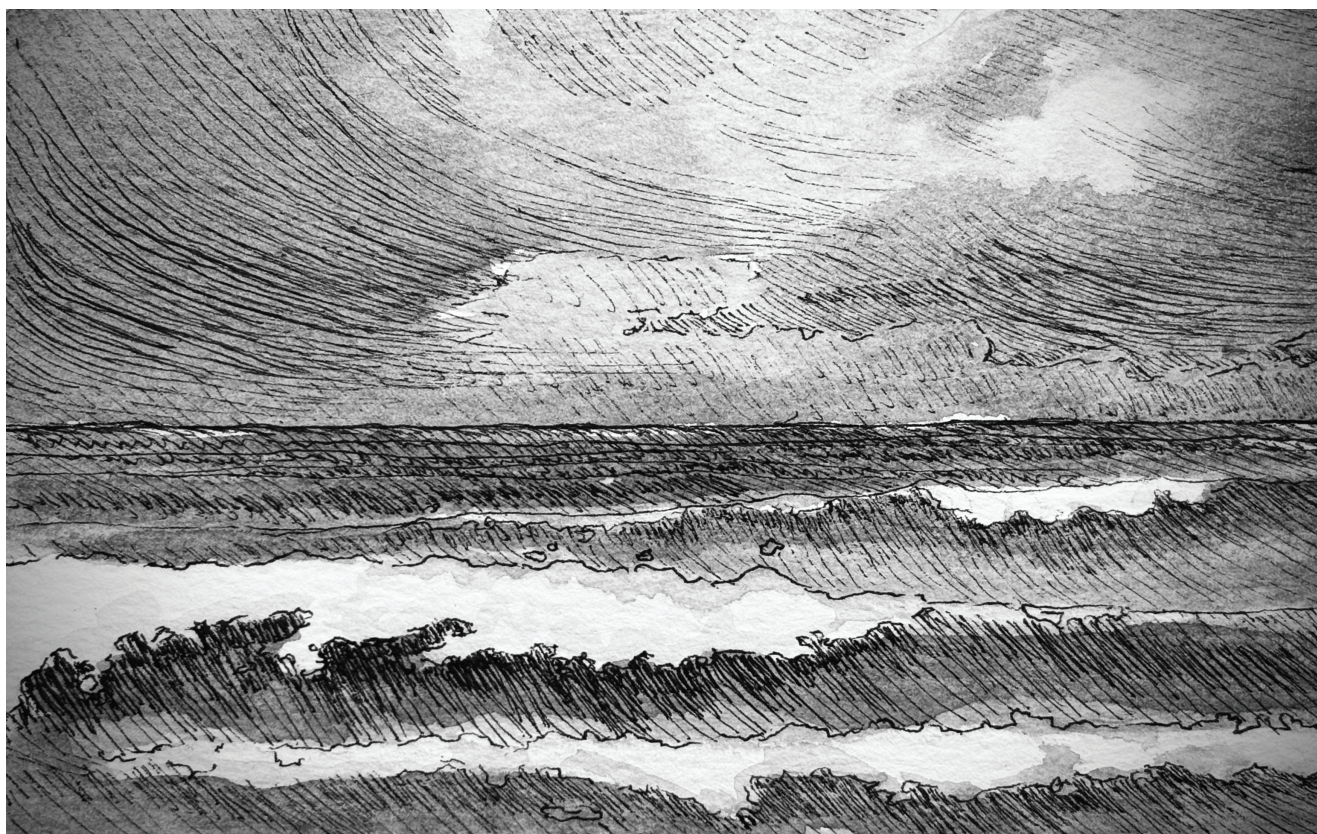
To give up on a long-term goal because you did not get the grade or the internship you wanted is comparable to football players waking up on Friday and saying, “Oh! Looks like it's going to rain today. Welp, guess I can't play anymore.” Most of us know, without a doubt, that a decision like that would be slammed on Sidechat. So why can't we see the flaws in our own logic when we sacrifice our goals just because things did not go according to plan?

I tend to avoid mixing sports analogies and heartfelt life advice; I find the combination generally isn't a crowd-pleaser. However, I do think there is a lot to learn from how athletes not only overcome but win in the unexpected circumstances that arise in sports.

Although, sadly, I cannot say I pulled off a defensive hat-trick during a Nor'easter this past weekend, I guess ordering Taco Bell and writing an article about it was my way of making lemonade.

MEGAN LEGAULT '28 (MLEGAULT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO DO THEIR PART IN PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF “FRAT FLU.”

GRAPHIC BY CALEB BOYCE '29



The Secrets Behind Harvard Women's Soccer's Success

With strong contributions from both new and veteran players, Harvard Women's Soccer is advancing to a historic season.

By CAT JOHNSON '30

Despite starting the season with back-to-back losses, Harvard Women's Soccer has been on a roll lately. Undefeated in its last eight games, including a historic victory over No. 6 Alabama, the team continues to stun.

After going 5–6–3 last season, the team seems to have put in the work to turn things around. Part of that turnaround was embracing the talent of their incoming class—and they are talented. Only 10 games into their college careers, many of the first-years are already racking up points. Two of Harvard's four leading goal-scorers, Brooke Huleatt '30 and Molly Vana '30, are rookies. The class of 2030 has collectively scored 12 of the team's total 29 goals so far. Huleatt's prowess doesn't stop at scoring. Topping the team leaderboard with seven assists, she also shows

an impressive ability to create scoring opportunities for her teammates. On the bench, Lauren Muniz '28 scored the tying goal on an assist from sophomore Kennedy Belfon '29. Despite allowing a third goal at the start of the second half, Huleatt and Kristinsdóttir both scored later to push Harvard into the lead.

Alabama quickly responded to make it 5–4, but Harvard's defense put on an impressive show to maintain the lead. Defender Jasmine Leshnick '27 placed the final nail in Alabama's coffin with Harvard's sixth goal. The victory over Alabama was a full-team effort that brought together veterans and underclassmen, as well as players who started on the bench and on the field, to do the job. This game clearly showed the team's increased depth.

important, that can't become so strong without having these deep, trusting relationships off the field."

Many of the team's seniors feel that this year's team has a uniquely close bond compared to years prior. "I've always gotten along with all my teams, but there's just such a different energy about this one," said Susie Long '27 of Sacramento, California. "We all really enjoy being around each other, and it makes practices and games so much easier and so much more fun."

Van Den Einde agreed: "I think this is one of the closest teams I've ever been a part of, and I think that contributes to our success."

Beyond fostering the team's close bond, the seniors have also created a culture of belief, which was critical after the team started the season with two

"They came in with a lot of quality on the field. It's a really good class soccer-wise, but also just personality-wise."

- Kristinsdóttir '27



While the class of 2030 has certainly played their part, it is important not to underestimate the incredible impact of the team's leadership on the turnaround. Kristinsdóttir clarified that the team's standards center on supporting each other, rather than perfect play. "It has nothing to do with soccer," Kristinsdóttir explained. "Everybody can be a good teammate."

The women's soccer team is especially intentional about fostering camaraderie. To create a more supportive environment, the seniors have made a large effort to do away with the rigid hierarchies common in college sports. "I feel like that's a big thing in college culture; people don't really listen to you unless you're older. So it doesn't matter how much experience you have; it has to be experience on the team to be valued," Kristinsdóttir said. "But I feel like my class has eliminated that as much as we can this year. We're very open. People can come and talk to each and every one of us."

Van Den Einde echoed this sentiment, saying the team's seniors focused on upholding the standard of support both on and off the field. "Whether it be helping with their classes or on the field if they are a little down off of the play. Just stay positive and encouraging them, so they can keep moving on and focus on the next play. I think we're very good about that, and just picking each other up after mistakes," she said.

The team's closeness extends far beyond mutual support and respect; they genuinely love being together. "Even when we've had days off, you more than likely see a majority of us hanging out. Maybe we're watching a movie or getting food together. We just enjoy each other's presence," Van Den Einde explained. "I think while the on-the-field stuff is so

"I think while the on-the-field stuff is so important, that can't become so strong without having these deep, trusting relationships off the field."

- Van Den Einde '27

losses. "We know we can do better. And we're going to do better," Long added. That mindset shift led to their first win of the season: a 4-0 victory over Fairfield.

The game was the first glimpse of the team's talent, with goals from Leshnick, Huleatt, Vana, and Camila Reinaldo '30, as well as shutouts from Busby and Bidun.

While listening to the scouting report on Alabama, some of the seniors sensed an air of nervousness. "We told everyone to come into one of the seniors' rooms, and we just had a little meeting of our own," Kristinsdóttir explained. They decided to focus on believing in each other and on the fact that, regardless of what the rankings said, they could win. "We knew we were the underdogs, and we're just embracing that," Kristinsdóttir said. "We just kept believing. The whole time we believed they were beatable."

"We knew going into that game that it was winnable, and we had the right skills and answers to [match] what they were going to show us," Van Den Einde agreed.

As they continue the season, the team believes their skills and commitment to each other will push them toward greatness. Last weekend's 4-3 win against Princeton marked the beginning of Ivy League play. The Crimson will face off against the six other Ivy League schools in the coming months leading into league playoffs.

"We all just want to work so hard for each other, and there's also just such a competitive environment because truly there's no weak link on the team," Long said.

CAT JOHNSON '30 (CATJOHNSON@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS COMPING THE "HARVARD INDEPENDENT" AND FOUND OUT THAT MEN PLAYED SOCCER WHILE WATCHING THE WORLD CUP.

GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28

an impressive ability to create scoring opportunities for her teammates.

The newest members of Harvard Women's Soccer have not only been assets offensively. Goalkeeper Olivia Busby '30, a first-year hailing from Ontario, Canada, splits time in goal with sophomore Nicole Bidun '29 of Brooklyn, New York. The two underclassmen have shown impressive proficiency in goalkeeping, with save percentages of .708 and .696, respectively. Busby and Bidun were also vital in Harvard's win against Alabama, with Bidun racking up three saves in the first 11 minutes.

Beyond their on-field contributions, first-years are contributing significantly to the team's culture. "They came in with a lot of quality on the field. It's a really good class soccer-wise, but also just personality-wise," senior captain Ólöf Kristinsdóttir '27 of Reykjavík, Iceland, said in an interview with the "Harvard Independent."

"They've been really receptive and open to feedback from the coaches and from us as veterans on the team, and I think that really helps and speaks to our culture as well," added Anya Van Den Einde '27, a midfielder from San Diego, California.

Adding new talent to a team's roster can create rifts between young and veteran members. Fearing replacement, established players can feel threatened by the rookies and respond, even if unconsciously, with hostility. For Harvard Women's Soccer, however, adding fresh talent has lit a fire under every player to strengthen their game. "With the freshman class being so good, everybody needs to step up too," Kristinsdóttir said.

Turning back to the team's riveting win against Alabama, Harvard allowed two goals in the first half but pushed back immediately to tie before halftime. Captain Anna Rayhill '27 scored 19 seconds after Alabama's second goal. Entering the game from the

The Sisterhood of the Undeclared “H”

“When I got to campus ... I gained, like, fifteen sisters.”

By SUCHETA SRIKANTH '29

The fall season has begun with a dominant Harvard women's volleyball team. With a 10–0 record, the team is charting its longest winning run since 2014. By comparison, at the start of Ivy League play last year, Harvard was just 1–7. Currently, Harvard is one of seven teams left undefeated in women's volleyball across the NCAA, notably the only non-Power Four school to do so. It is safe to say things have changed.

Outside hitter Kayla Nwabueze '30 knocks on wood often, though I am not sure she even notices anymore. In her first year, less than a month into the regular season, she has already been named Ivy League Rookie of the Week and is part of a major change for the volleyball team. She could not be happier, though she is still taking superstitious precautions not to jinx it.

Nwabueze knew she wanted to come to

“Focused on supporting her teammates, Guo attributes the team's success to their closeness and to the understanding that everything they do off the court affects their performance.”

Harvard as soon as she attended the volleyball camp during her recruitment process. The team and coaches were a perfect fit and helped her develop her competitive spirit early in her collegiate career. “Knowing that every day I could be 1% better, pushing myself to be 1% better, having other people around me motivating me to keep pushing myself ... always being on my side, having my back, [that's my favorite part],” she said in an interview with the “Harvard Independent.”

Coming in this year as a first-year, Nwabueze was goal-oriented and remains so. “I want this program to change. I want us to go further than we have in the past, because I know that we've always been close to getting into the tournament, and then never did ... [we] as freshmen can come and hopefully change that,” she revealed. Although she was initially caught off guard by the level of play she faced at the collegiate level, she has risen to the challenge. “Everything will follow,” she admitted, as she adapted to college life.

Sofia Rossi '29, another outside hitter, echoed Nwabueze's grit and optimism, confirming that a positive attitude may not be the product of novice determination. Rossi is no stranger to the ups and downs of a season at this level of play, and still, she craves the adrenaline rush of a good block or a kill. “It's like no other feeling,” she told the “Harvard Independent.”

Ahead of games, she spoke about the preparation that helps her feel and play her best. One team strategy is to use drills tailored to the specific skills each position player needs to improve. “They write out the practice plan on a whiteboard, and there are three colors they use: blue, green, and red. So blue is kind of your basic routine ... band work, dynamics, pepper.” As for green, she continued, it is “the area for improvement. You want to make mistakes because that's how you're gonna get better, essentially ...

there's minimal pressure when you're in the green zone.” The red zone, by contrast, is more intense. Rossi made it clear: once you break those “bad” habits in the green zone, you move into faster-paced, game-like scenarios.

Although results have changed, the drill structure has not changed from previous years. This raises the question: where have the newfound conviction and chemistry come from?

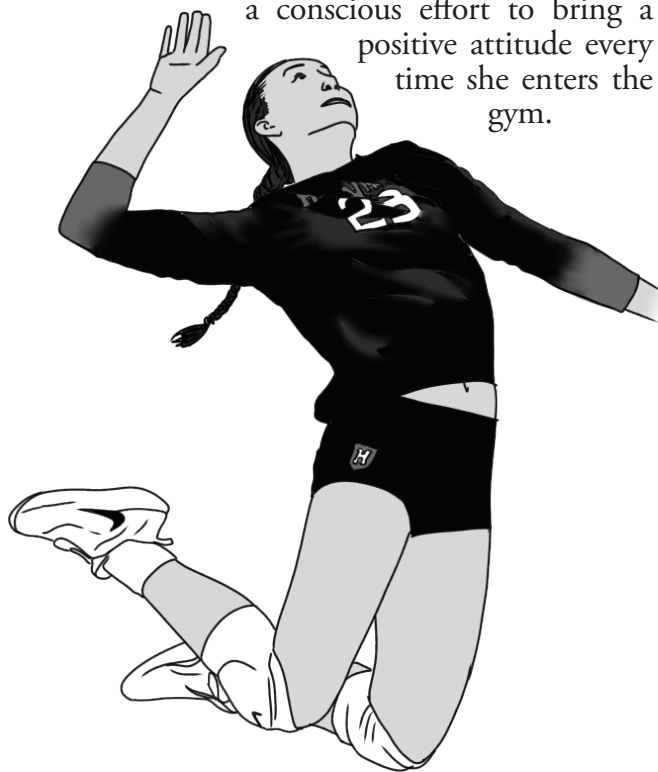
Rossi came into this year hoping to build confidence in her training, and the season's results so far are only reinforcing that. “[It's the] people that are here, that go to practice, that go to the games, that are cheering, whether they're on the court or off the court ... we want that Ivy League ring, and ... everything is sort of clicking,” she said. Her confidence in her play coincides with the team finding a more cohesive rhythm on and off the court.

Outside hitter Alicia Guo '28 told a similar story of team unity and mental toughness. “That's what I really like about the sport. It's ... both very physically demanding and mentally demanding, and I can never get bored of that; and also, the



feeling of hitting a ball is great as well,” Guo said with a laugh.

Focused on supporting her teammates, Guo attributes the team's success to their closeness and to the understanding that everything they do off the court affects their performance. She makes a conscious effort to bring a positive attitude every time she enters the gym.



According to her, everyone on the team makes an effort to give their all, and the coaches help to inspire that energy. “We got two new coaches, which is a big deal for us. I think both of them are very technical and they give us very pointed feedback very often, which is a little bit different than I think we had before,” Guo revealed.

Rossi also spoke highly of the coaches, and the mentalities they strive to instill in their players. “They emphasized grit this year,” she said. “Greatness resides in toughness,” so even though practices are hard ... their emphasizing this has really helped us and allowed us to grow in these games.”

Across the board, the three players could not be prouder of the team and how far they have come already. They spoke about each other's

genuine attitudes, commitment to success and well-being, and ability to go the extra mile instead of stopping short.

And each player had one thing in common—spirit animals!

All three of them also recalled their team bonding trips before the preseason to a senior's home. Nwabueze, assigned the spirit animal of the

“Across the board, the three players could not be prouder of the team and how far they have come already.”

gazelle from “Zootopia,” confirmed the animal assignments were all niche and strange, which added to the fun. “One of our senior animals [is] a giraffe ... in its ambient sack,” she said.

Rossi laughed as I brought up the odd assignment, pleased with her identity as the “Rainbow Fish” (from the 1992 picture book by Marcus Pfister of the same name), which seemed much more normal by comparison. She did not understand the excitement around the absurd spirit-animal assignments until she became a sophomore and joined the group of namers.

Universally, the choice seems vibe-based and arbitrary for first-years, though their instinct for choosing a silly name seems to develop as they graduate to upperclassmen status.

As for Guo, she has more obvious context for her animal: a bonding trip to the San Diego Zoo during the summer before her first year, which led teammates to compare her energy to the Asian snow leopard. Guo confirmed that even a former assistant coach, who graduated in 2019, participated in this tradition, meaning it has lasted at least 10 years.

As these spirited players continue with tremendous effort, they urge students to come see any games they can make it to! As they shoot for a ring, it is more important than ever for fans to be there cheering the team on—“pack the MAC,” as they say. With fans on their side and an undying trust between the players, the women's team will dig deep in hopes of continuing their remarkable 2026 start.

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“HARVARD INDEPENDENT” AND
WILL SEE YOU IN THE STANDS!**

GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28

Who Gets to Shape the Future of Soccer?

As Gianni Infantino seeks a fourth term, his push to grow FIFA is colliding with Europe's demands for accountability.

By ROHAN TYAGI '29

In late September 2026, FIFA President Gianni Infantino said, “This is not about generating positive headlines; it is about doing what is right for the game. And I have never been more determined and committed in doing that.”

This statement follows FIFA's July proposal to create a \$20 billion company to manage the World Cup and other FIFA competitions. Under the proposal, private investors could purchase up to a 20% stake in FIFA's commercial rights, including the World Cup. FIFA said the proposal would generate nearly \$4.2 billion for global soccer development.

The proposal immediately drew backlash from the Union of European Football Associations, a continental soccer organization representing 55 national associations. UEFA argued that FIFA was treating the World Cup as an investment product and criticized the project for not consulting soccer stakeholders and member associations during its development.

Three days later, on July 31, FIFA withdrew its plan. Infantino said the project had “created divisions of a nature that, regardless of the level of support, are no longer in the interest of the objective set out in the first place.”

The episode was brief, but it brought a long-standing disagreement within international soccer into the public eye.

The Backdrop

FIFA governs the global game and represents 211 national associations. UEFA governs European soccer, including the Champions League and the continent's national-team competitions. The two organizations compete for influence over some of the same players, clubs, and commercial markets. It thus makes sense that

“The episode was brief, but it brought a long-standing disagreement within international soccer into the public eye.”

tensions escalated with Infantino's proposal to extract additional commercial value from FIFA's competitions.

Since assuming the FIFA presidency in 2016, Infantino has pushed the organization toward larger competitions, greater commercial revenue, and a broader role in global soccer outside of Europe. UEFA, whose league and clubs still generate most of the sport's commercial value, is challenging both the scale of FIFA's expansion and how Infantino is pursuing it.

Infantino is no stranger to European soccer: before joining FIFA, he worked at UEFA from 2000 to 2016, rising through the ranks to become general secretary. After FIFA's previous president, Sepp Blatter, resigned amid a corruption crisis, Infantino was elected as Blatter's replacement. In his campaign, Infantino pledged governance reform; he has since introduced measures including

presidential term limits and greater financial oversight at FIFA.

The organization has vastly expanded during Infantino's presidency. FIFA expects revenue for the 2023–26 cycle to exceed \$15 billion, more than double the organization's revenue during the previous cycle. This growth has allowed FIFA to increase the money it distributes to its member associations. For instance, during the 2026 World Cup, FIFA allocated \$871 million to the 48 participating teams, a 20% increase over the previously approved \$727 million.

This approach has extended to FIFA's development programs. Infantino argues for leveraging World Cup profits to provide resources to countries whose soccer systems do not benefit from the wealth of Europe's competitions and clubs—which also helps explain why the organization has continued pursuing larger international competitions.

FIFA's mission of expansion seemed to be realized in 2026, when the World Cup featured 48 teams, up from 32 in 2022. FIFA has also introduced a 32-team Club World Cup in 2025, replacing a seven-team event with a month-long tournament in the United States. FIFA argued that the Club World Cup gives teams from Africa, Asia, and South America more opportunities to compete against Europe's wealthiest teams.

However, European soccer leagues and FIFPRO Europe, which represents players across 34 national player unions in Europe, have raised concerns that additional matches could overwhelm an already crowded calendar.

The Proposal

The organization's proposed Forward Enterprise would have consolidated the commercial rights and event operations of competitions including the World Cup and Club World Cup. Under the proposal, the company would remain under FIFA's control while allowing private investors to purchase a minority stake.

FIFA said the structure would allow its 211 member associations to participate more directly in the commercial opportunities created by the sport's global growth. It argued that additional investment could increase funding for soccer development.

UEFA objected to the proposal on both substantive and procedural grounds. UEFA's 55 associations unanimously rejected the plan and threatened to withdraw from FIFA competitions if it went forward. The governing body argued that national teams and the public had built the World Cup and that it should not become an asset for private investors. FIFA withdrew the proposal before its member organizations could vote.

Still, the decision created a new governance problem for Infantino. European officials argued that if a plan of this scale could be developed without full consultation of FIFA's continental confederations, the governance concerns extended beyond the plan itself. In response, in September, Infantino proposed an independent external review of FIFA's governance for major strategic initiatives. The review would examine how the organization should consult fellow stakeholders and

member associations before making major decisions.

Some European federations argue that the pro-proposal does not go far enough. The German, Dutch, Swedish and Welsh associations have called for deeper governance changes, while German Football Association president Bernd Neuendorf described Infantino's plan as an attempt to strengthen his position ahead of the 2027 election.

Looking Ahead

Further debates center on FIFA's December 2024 decision to award the 2034 World Cup to Saudi Arabia, which will become the first nation to host the 48-team format on its own. UEFA, the Confederation of African Football, and the Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol were ruled ineligible to host the World Cup in 2034, as each has a nation hosting in 2030. Critics have

“The debate ultimately raises a larger question: who gets to shape the business and governance of the world's most popular sport?”

described the bidding process as a calculated manipulation of FIFA's rotation rules designed to clear a path for Saudi Arabia's bid to host the tournament, as the Asian and North American federations remained the only ones eligible to host.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have criticized FIFA's assessment of Saudi Arabia's human rights record, particularly its treatment of migrant workers and approach to labor protections. The former also argued that the assessment failed to adequately address documented risks involving forced labor, wage theft, and dangerous working conditions.

FIFA has defended its bidding process and human rights requirements.

FIFA must now turn its attention to how it should govern its international growth. Infantino has spent the last decade building a larger FIFA. His decisions could shape the sport's expansion, competitions, and rules for the next generation of soccer fans and players. The debate ultimately raises a larger question: who gets to shape the business and governance of the world's most popular sport?

The governance debate comes as Infantino seeks a fourth term as FIFA president. He announced his candidacy during the FIFA congress in April and May, and FIFA said in July that 200 of its 211 members had pledged their support. The election is scheduled for March 2027.

ROHAN TYAGI '29 (ROHANTYAGI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WILL BE CHECKING IN ON FIFA'S NEXT COMMERCIAL PROPOSAL.

GRAPHIC BY MIA STEWART '29



A Win is a Win

At the cost of commitment.

By SALMA GHEITH '30

Imagine yourself as an athlete on the starting line. Perhaps you're envisioning a track star or a gymnast mid-competition. Put yourself in that athlete's shoes.

You stand in an arena of coaches, family, and competitors. There's a buzz in the air and ... human feces on the track? This may sound implausible for any athlete to face, but the HYROX competition in Beijing proved otherwise.

HYROX is a standardized hybrid indoor athletic competition that combines running with intermittent workout stations. Participants run 1 kilometer, complete one workout station, and repeat this sequence eight times. On Sept. 12, 2026, Joanna Wietrzyk won the HYROX competition in Beijing, but not before suffering a bout of bowel incontinence. Although the crappy incident happened around station four of the HYROX sequence, she pressed on, completing four more stations ... on shared equipment. Thousands of athletes followed closely behind, using the same contaminated sleds, rowers, sandbags, and track. Some runners were reportedly slipping on the contaminated course. Wietrzyk later posted a selfie of herself receiving an IV drip post-race, captioned "Go hard or go home" and "A win is a win."

After her victory, the incident sparked mixed reactions. Some called Wietrzyk "brave" and "inspirational" for pushing through and finishing the race, while others think HYROX made a grave mistake in letting her continue, saying it posed a biohazard risk to other competitors. Within a week, after facing intense backlash, Wietrzyk apologized and forfeited her win. HYROX co-founder Moritz Fuerste also admitted that organizers should have stopped her.

The incident is an extreme and almost comical version of a mistake many of us make daily: treating a choice that offloads costs onto others as a virtue because it looks like resilience. Showing up sick. Pulling an all-nighter in a shared room. Driving tired. Doing it anyway.

The truth is, we have laid the groundwork for mistakes like this to be taken as inspirational

instant American icon. In the 1997 NBA Finals, Michael Jordan scored 38 points while visibly ill from the flu. In 2013, Kobe Bryant tore his Achilles tendon mid-game against the Warriors, then stayed on the floor to shoot and sink both free throws before walking off. Today, fitness influencers like David Goggins sell the "no days off" mentality, where personal suffering is, to an extent, the point. HYROX is built on this "aesthetic" of pain and endurance, so "go hard or go home" was not a random caption; it embodied the mentality that the sport and its culture foster.

But look closely at that highlight reel: the price every hero pays is their own body. While this is certainly subject to separate critique, it represents a

stark difference between the HYROX incident and the rest of these events. The best example is almost too perfect: Paula Radcliffe at the 2005 London Marathon stopped at the roadside to relieve herself mid-race, kept going, and won. People joked about it for years, but few critiqued it as selfish, because on an open road, the cost was hers alone. Although several outlets have compared the two incidents, they differ in one key way: Wietrzyk's race happened in an enclosed arena with shared equipment. Both involved the same emergency and the same refusal to quit, but they reflected completely different ethics.

Some would argue that sports are solely about winning. Competition has one goal: reaching the finish line and taking home the trophy. It may not have been Wietrzyk's job to stop herself; maybe someone else should have intervened. Athletes are simply playing by the

Several objections undermine this logic. HYROX likely had no rule against mid-race defecation because no one could have imagined needing one. "It wasn't technically banned" is not a great defense for reframing biohazards as heroism. Wietrzyk's own forfeit suggests she agreed.

A laser-focused approach to winning alone may undermine itself. A win can mean a lot under the right conditions. It can be argued that this was not the case in the HYROX incident. But while other athletes slipped on a contaminated course and used contaminated equipment, Wietrzyk's choice likely contributed to hesitation or prevented other athletes from performing at their best, undermining the value of her win.

Grit is admirable when you are the only person absorbing its cost. Wietrzyk's demonstration of the idealized trait came at the cost of the entire arena's sanitation and safety. Most of us will never soil a rowing machine in front of a crowd, but Harvard runs on its own vision of "a win is a win."

You show up sick to section because missing it feels weak, and your classmates catch your cold before midterms. You rewrite the group project at 3 a.m. because you "care about the grade," and the group loses its input. You brag about four hours of sleep, and your "discipline" pressures everyone around you to make the same sacrifice. None of this makes you a great competitor. It makes you selfish.

Many students believe education is meant to prove they can shine above everyone else. With this mindset, they miss out on the advantages collaboration provides. Considering those around you does not make you a failure or a worse competitor. No one will judge you if you are absent due to illness. No one will judge you for needing to take a break. They will judge you when your "grit" becomes their burden.

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GRAPHIC BY NUALA MERNIN '29

"HYROX likely had no rule against mid-race defecation because no one could have imagined needing one."

"Most of us will never soil a rowing machine in front of a crowd, but Harvard runs on its own vision of 'a win is a win.'"

rules; officials' role is to enforce safety. Wietrzyk technically did not break a rule, and HYROX let her continue. Is it right to say she is in the wrong?

Elite sports often require obsession. From Kobe Bryant to Eileen Gu, athletes have affirmed and promoted the idea that obsession is the only way to be a champion. You cannot ask someone at their physical limit, mid-race, to run a cost-benefit analysis of how their actions might affect everyone else.

feats of discipline and drive—a highlight reel of athletes pushing through pain and triumphing. We celebrate them for this "grit."

In the 1996 Olympics, Kerri Strug vaulted on an injured ankle and became an

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