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VEENA MCCOOLE | 2:39 AM, DEC 09, 2016
STAFF REPORTER



As early as 8:15 a.m., Yale's varsity athletic teams file into the Morse dining hall: sometimes a trickle of students, sometimes a flood. Burly athletes in grey sweatpants and navy waterproof jackets emblazoned with "Yale Football" line up to swipe in, followed by lacrosse players, softball players, swimmers and rowers, all sporting instantly recognizable varsity team apparel. Even athletes not in uniform stand out with their freshly washed hair, ergonomic Under Armour backpacks and excitable chatter. During breakfast and dinner, the large round tables at either end of the Morse dining hall are prime real estate for hungry athletes, who drape their uniforms, sports bags and navy coats over their chairs.

Being an athlete at Yale transcends the collective pursuit of and shared passion for a sport. Athletes enter a tight-knit world of immense support, camaraderie, academic guidance, personal mentorship and communal experience. The intensive and removed lifestyle of an athlete, paired with the primary academic focus of many Yale students,

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creates the well-known student-athlete divide that permeates all levels of campus.

In January, Yale announced a multiyear deal with Under Armour — worth \$16.5 million according to Bloomberg Businessweek — which became Yale Athletics' official outfitter starting in the 2016-17 season. This is the brand's 33rd Division I all-sports partnership and the first of its kind at an Ivy League institution. Under Armour will "design and supply footwear, apparel and accessories for training and game day uniforms for Yale's varsity sports," according to a Yale Athletics press release.

The lucrative deal brings the amount of gear owned by Yale athletes to a record high, although this varies sport to sport. Field hockey and lacrosse players Lily Smith '18 and Katie Smith '18 estimate that between their two sports, the athletic gear they own comprises about 30 percent of their wardrobes. Sailor Claire Rossi de Leon '19 estimated that she has been given around 30 items. Soccer players Lucas Kirby '19 and Tilman Bartelsmeyer '19 estimated they each owned 15 to 17 pieces, some of which came with extra sets. Two members of the heavyweight crew team, coxswain Tommy Fant '19 and Izak Epstein '19, estimated that each teammate has received 12 pieces of gear. Football walk-on Kamsi Nwangwu '19 totaled his gear at over 40 items.

SPORTING FORMALITIES

While Yale athletes have historically always worn recognizable varsity uniforms, many athletes interviewed said the recent Under Armour deal has formalized and regulated the practice of wearing team gear.

Gone are the days of a "medley" of hand-me-down gear from older teammates, Katie Smith said. "It feels cool to be sponsored, because compared to other Division I programs with sponsorship deals and cool endorsements, we felt a bit left out."

Gymnast Sarah Caldwell '19 said that last year, the gymnastics team never matched for their weight lifting sessions because they didn't have the clothing to do so. They were only given a tank top, spandex and a shirt to wear for lift. This year, they are required to wear matching Under Armour clothing, which she believes creates unity and looks more professional, especially when multiple teams are in the weight room at the same time.

Lily Smith said the Under Armour endorsement has made the Athletics Department stricter about uniforms. In the weight room last year, athletes had to wear Yale colors — blue, black, grey or white — at the minimum. Now, athletes must wear Under Armour in the weight room, regardless of whether the gear is Yale-specific or not.

"Before the requirements were more Yale-oriented, and now it's more

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Under Armour-oriented," Smith said. She added that she has seen athletes tape over the Nike logo of their T-shirts or wear clothing inside out to comply with the new regulations in the weight room or in the varsity gym.

According to squash player Emily Sherwood '19, the squash team was not provided Under Armour leggings suitable for lifting weights. While squash players could once wear their own leggings to stay warm in the weight room, they must now wear shorts regardless of the weather.

Although many teams face strict clothing requirements, heavyweight rower Alex Lindsay '19 insisted that a team's standards vary depending on its coaches.

"Our coaches are very lenient on gear," he said. "We're given a lot of freedom on the basis of trust, and being able to wear our own gear is part of that." He described the medley of high school and national teams represented in the clothing choices of his teammates during practice. "It brings diversity and personality into the training," he said. "When you're matching, it's boring."

For the heavyweight crew team, the Under Armour deal has provided gear once unavailable to them, as the team is not part of the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

"Coming from not having anything last year and seeing all the other athletes wearing gear, we always wished we had that stuff," former rower Bojan Dosljak '19 said.

The heavyweight crew team does not use the weight room. They instead practice on rowing machines in the basement of Payne Whitney Gymnasium. Lily Smith agreed that different coaches choose to allot the Under Armour gear budgets they receive in different ways. The field hockey coach prioritized purchasing high-quality gear that can be reused year after year, such as rain and travel gear. The downside, Smith explained, is that she and her teammates don't get to bring the gear home since they don't own it.

Caldwell pointed to logistical challenges that have arisen from the centralization of the Under Armour deal. Last year, Caldwell said some of her teammates who wanted additional Yale Gymnastics gear placed an order through Nike for generic items — for which they received a small discount — and brought the clothing to Campus Customs to be labeled with their team. This was a discretionary purchase made by those who could afford to pay for extra apparel. Caldwell said the gymnastics team receives fewer pieces of clothing than other teams because of its small size and minimal alumni base. The team tried to make a similar bulk purchase of generic goods through Under Armour to label "Yale Gymnastics," but they were forbidden.

"Under Armour did not let us do a separate order beyond what they provided us," she said. "If some people wanted to have more items, such as freshman who had nothing to begin with, Under Armour did not let us purchase anything else."

Sherwood said it was a shame that the team is no longer able to wear any gear from Harrow, a former sponsor of Yale squash. "We had to hand our Harrow stuff in and our coach keeps it in boxes," she said.

UNDER PROVISION

For sports requiring more specific gear, gaps in this all-sports deal have emerged since Under Armour does not produce certain specialty equipment such as field hockey sticks and field hockey shoes suitable for turf. For example, the Smith twins said it is difficult to find white mid-calf socks for women required for lacrosse, so many team members have been wearing Adidas socks and folding them down to conceal the logo.

Under Armour does not make field hockey sticks either, and the Smiths said that their teammates use either JDH or Adidas brand hockey sticks. Since Adidas is a direct competitor of Under Armour, however, those with Adidas sticks were asked to use markers or tape to cover one of Adidas' three signature stripes in an effort to reduce or eliminate the recognizability of the brand. Similarly, Under Armour does not make unisuits that rowers race in. As racing season has not begun, Lindsay is unsure of what the team will do about racing attire.

And the new Under Armour deal is so heavily regulated that sometimes the athletes are worse off. Caldwell explained that for gymnastics competitions, she and her teammates used to have up to 10 leotards they could wear to compete. "Now we have to wear leotards by Under Armour or an Under Armour-sponsored company, so we have far fewer leotards to pick from," she said. In addition, the team is required to wear Under Armour leotards in their official photographs, the shipping arrival date of which is still unknown, thus delaying team photographs until later, Caldwell added.

Yale athletes are aware of the consequences of breaching this significant sponsorship deal. "We can't wear other type of athletic apparel on court," Sherwood said. "If I have Lululemon leggings, I can't wear those because if anyone comes in who is not connected to Yale Squash and reports it, we could lose our deal with Under Armour." Lily Smith added that she has heard of Under Armour representatives walking around campus and games, ready to enforce a \$25,000 fine on Yale if athletes are not appropriately dressed in Under Armour gear. Katie Smith said that her lacrosse coach can get angry if she and her teammates are not dressed properly in Under Armour uniform. When asked to verify the fine, Yale Athletics Director Thomas Beckett said there are "many mutually agreed upon confidential details associated

with this partnership.”

Despite the Under Armour deal, the playing field for athletic teams is far from even.

Sherwood said squash teams at other schools have more apparel than the Yale squash team, and part of the reason the squash team does not wear gear often is because they do not have much to begin with. Given that victorious teams often enjoy a spurt of increased funding, she believes it is unfair that Yale’s squash team — last year’s men’s national champions — have less gear than the teams they frequently beat.

A joint departmental statement sent by the Yale Athletics department in lieu of an interview said the amount of clothing and gear a student receives “depends directly on what is needed for a particular sport: what gear is required, what season they are in and that sort of thing.”

OFF THE FIELD

While Yale’s varsity teams are not required to wear anything specific outside of practice, Caldwell noted that the Under Armour deal has stimulated an increase in the amount of gear worn off the field. Most athletes interviewed agreed that the Under Armour backpacks are the most commonly worn and instantly recognizable piece of gear among athletes. Squash player Lucy Beecroft ’20 said she wore Yale squash gear at the beginning of the school year because the novelty of new gear had not yet worn off.

Lindsay emphasized that the high quality of the gear that athletes receive was a large influencing factor. “We’re given a lot of nice gear,” he said. “When I wear a Yale Crew top, only a small part of why I wear it is because it’s crew, it’s mainly because it’s a nice jacket and it’s cold outside.”

With a new, high-quality wardrobe of athletic gear, Dosljak said he felt like a rower both in the boat and in his classes. “For a lot of athletes here, their sport has been part of their identity for a long time, and gear brings you a greater sense of identity.”

Epstein said that while many of his teammates choose to sport crew apparel, he opts for normal clothing. Dosljak said he tends to wear sporty-looking clothes on a daily basis, so there is little difference in terms of how he dresses to classes each day.

The Smith twins said convenience is the main reason they choose to wear either their field hockey or lacrosse gear, although they said they tried to wear other clothes during their freshman year. “I went from four to five days a week wearing real clothes during freshman year to four to five days a week wearing gear [my junior] year,” Katie Smith said. Lily Smith also pointed out that male athletes are often held to a different

standard than female athletes, who face an increased expectation to wear nonathletic clothing.

Sherwood, who estimates that the squash team received about 10 pieces of gear, said she only wears Yale Squash apparel when required. "I feel like it's obnoxious to wear our uniform 24/7," she said. "It puts people off, and people need to realize it's going to create a divide through the assumption that they are only ever with their team."

On the rare occasion Sherwood wears squash clothing to classes, she finds that the majority of conversations revolve around her sport. "My name is on the roster online," she said. "After a while, wearing your sport's clothing can have a negative impact on people's minds about you."

"I try not to let it affect me, because at the end of the day I'm a student as a priority, then an athlete," Lindsay said.

The Yale Athletics statement said it is "decidedly not the role of Yale to foster community by what athletes wear, and we do not think that what students wear is critical in the way they relate with one another."

The statement acknowledged that dressing in similar ways has an effect on the rest of the student body, but compared the role of team gear in varsity sports to other uniformed groups on campus. "Seeing a group of Whiffenpoofs in white tie makes a statement," Yale Athletics said. "Seeing a number of society or sorority members dressed for an evening out together makes a definite statement. Clothes do make a statement."

THE FRESHMAN PERSPECTIVE

Despite the administration's comments, many students say that uniforms shape the way athletes are perceived, particularly by Yale's newest members.

Susan Chen '20 said some of her friends thought that athletes had a closer bond with each other since they spend most of their time together. "That naturally means they were also somehow closed off from other students, and to some of my friends, they even seemed difficult to approach," she said. Rower Lindsay agreed that freshmen who are looking to make friends may not necessarily target their peers who are varsity athletes. But Chen believed differently and got the impression that her athletic friends stressed out about teammates in the beginning. "My freshmen friends would be worried if they would be able to fit in and get along with the rest of the team."

Natalia Gormley '20 noticed that some of her varsity athlete friends struggle to make it to social gatherings or accept offers to go out for coffee.

"Friends of mine who play varsity sports are only just meeting many of the members of our class of 2020 residential college that I have known and been friends with for months," Gormley said. "I see more limitations to the social life of an athlete than liberties or inherent benefits."

Lindsay, an international student from the United Kingdom, emphasized the additional benefit of team membership for foreign students. "You turn up at Yale and you don't know many people, but you immediately have a friend group to hang out with," he said. Lindsay also acknowledged that it can be off-putting for students to speak to athletes wearing gear. "You can see that [the athlete] is already in a very close social group, and trying to break into that can be intimidating."

Sherwood said a friend of hers who was a nonathlete found Camp Yale difficult because she didn't have social plans and often heard about mixers between athletic teams to which she was not invited. But this fundamental divergence in social life on the first few days of college can have lasting repercussions. Sherwood said she felt some were not interested in her friendship because they assumed she would choose her team over them. "There was a stigma that teams would do everything together like a cult. It is necessary for athletes to have friends that are not on teams."

The athletics administration highlighted that Yale's residential life allows students to see one another beyond statements such as the uniforms that varsity athletes wear. "Seeing a group may have a particular effect; however, when you see your freshman suitemate in that group it helps to personalize how you feel towards them. That suitemate is someone that you attended froco meetings with, lived with for a year ... That personal relationship is deeper than the surface."

CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

The implications of athletic clothing can sometimes extend into the classroom — for better or for worse. Several athletes interviewed recollected anecdotes of fellow teammates or athletes being negatively perceived by professors or TFs. "I've heard of [TFs] calling you out and putting you on the spot if you're wearing Yale football [gear]," Yale football quarterback Tre Moore '19 said. "It's like they want you to prove yourself in the classroom."

Katie Smith recalled that a friend of hers on the men's ice hockey team said that as the only athlete in his section, he is treated like an idiot. Dosljak said the bulk of classes he attends are lectures, so there is minimal student-professor interaction. On the other hand, Moore said sometimes the athletic distinction is a positive one, such as when professors and TFs congratulate athletes on a game.

"I know a lot of athletes who make their TAs aware that they compete

on a varsity team so they receive extra help,” Lindsay said. “I think that’s a good thing because sometimes they need that help.”

Caldwell, a biomedical engineering major, said the majority of her friends in her major are nonathletes, as biomedical engineering is not a common major in the athletic community. “It’s beneficial to have nonathletic friends, especially if you cannot attend a review session at 4 p.m. because you have practice,” she said.

Lily Smith acknowledged a stereotype of athletes being less intelligent than other people.

After a semester at Yale, freshman Beecroft is aware of the occasional biases that pervade classrooms with athletes, although she has not experienced it herself. “At the end of the day, we have to work just as hard on academics,” she said.

“If you’re not wearing athletic gear, you’re assumedly more academically gifted or devoted to academics,” Moore said. “Therefore [as an athlete] you want to prove yourself and that you can keep up and articulate yourself.”

The academic tradition that exists within the athletic community is another factor — one that runs deeper than clothing and outward appearances — that unites varsity teams. Beyond having similar schedules, athletes’ convening in similar classes and majors is perhaps the academic manifestation of their team mentality. Katie Smith said she has never been in a class without athletes and has never shopped a class by herself. “During our freshman year, our team got a list of classes with great professors that were low time commitments and would make our lives easier in terms of balancing athletics and academics,” she said.

Lily Smith said that political science, economics and psychology are common majors for athletes, so athletes tend to go to class with their teammates.

Lindsay said the amount of advice he received from older teammates was positive and helpful. “Many people come to Yale and are overwhelmed by the very high academic standard, so getting advice from the older years about how to cope with that [helps],” he said.

DIVIDED AND UNIFIED

Moore aptly described wearing Yale athletic gear as both divisive — in the context of the rest of the Yale community — and unifying among fellow athletes. He described an instance when he walked past someone dressed in what he was able to identify as “basketball sweats” on his way to Payne Whitney Gymnasium and knew to wish her good luck before her game. “But sometimes you don’t want that kind of

attention on you in a classroom just because you're an athlete, in which case you dress normally," he said.

At Yale, Beecroft is positively sure she would prefer being an athlete rather than not. She doesn't think her wearing varsity apparel affected how she made friends at the start of the school year, although she acknowledged she cannot be sure. "I can understand if I was in the position of a nonathletic freshman that I wouldn't want to intrude on people's already-formed friendships so you gravitate towards those without established groups," she said. "But obviously as an athlete I wish it wasn't like that."

Chen said most of the athletes she has met are very easygoing and down-to-earth people. "But there are some people here that every time I see them they are in athletic clothes," she mused. "Sometimes I wonder what they are like without the sports gear."

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