

Shooting for the skies



Emily Sosvangelis

The skeet and trap team finished second nationally in the American Skeet competition in San Antonio, Tex.

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The Yale skeet and trap team will finish the school year having completed one of its most successful seasons in over 30 years. In early April, the team competed at the ACUI Intercollegiate Clay Target Championships at the National Shooting Complex in San Antonio, Tex.

The team's A squad finished second in the nation in the American skeet team competition, while senior captain Bryan Monson '11 tied for first in the individual American trap event.

“The whole team has worked really hard over the past year,” Monson said. “It had been a longtime goal to finish in the top five, and everything came together on that day.”

The American skeet competition involves a squad of five people rotating around a semicircle aiming at various horizontally moving clay disk targets. Players, who fire with shotguns, get points for each target hit.

Despite still having low visibility on campus, the team has seen its scope grow both on campus and nationally in recent years.

“Yale has made a national presence,” Sosangelis said. “Our team is legitimate and professional.”

The ‘s A squad, consisting of Emily Sosangelis ’13, Ricky Johnson ’12, Robert Wyper ’13, Tom Gilliland ’13 and Monson each hit 90 out of 100 targets for a collective score of 472 points out of 500, good enough for second place nationally in Division 2 of the American skeet team results. It was the team’s best finish since it won a the American skeet national championship in 1977 with a legendary team anchored by U.S. Olympian Brad Simmons ’78.

Though the team’s standing was historic, Monson’s incredible performance in the American trap competition, in which he hit 99 out of 100 targets to tie for first nationally, launched him into the pantheon of great Yale shooters.

“I did not expect to have a top-place finish,” Monson said. “But when the last shots were fired I was tied with a shooter from Lindenwood University, the only varsity shotgun program in the nation.”

As a result of the tie, a shoot-off was necessary to determine the champion.

The American trap competition differs from American skeet in that the targets, frequently called birds, move at varying angles instead of at fixed positions, and shots are fired more frequently.

“I stayed focused by repeating the three basic steps to shotgun shooting over and over again in my head, ‘Keep your head on the gun, look at the bird, follow through,’” Monson said.

Monson hit 22 of 25 targets in the shoot-off but fell to the varsity athlete from Lindenwood, Brendan Appel, who hit 24 of 25.

Though Monson fell just short of a national championship, he was still happy with the result.

“There were roughly 400 competitors shooting trap that day, so I can’t complain about the outcome,” he said.

“It was the culmination of all his years on the team,” Sosangelis said. “Second in the country is pretty huge, especially because we don’t train for that level.”

Monson also fell just short of a Yale record, set two years ago by Jason Gilliland ’09, who shot a perfect 100 out of 100 but finished fourth in a five-way shoot-off.

“To my knowledge, [Monson’s and Gilliland’s] are the two best scores ever recorded by Yale shooters at the national championships,” said Tom Migdalski, head coach of the Yale skeet and trap team, director

of club sports at Yale, and director of the Yale Outdoor Education Center.

The Yale skeet and trap team is one of Yale's oldest club sports, with a history stretching back to the late 19th century. In 1971, Ed Midgalski, then-coach of the team and father of current head coach Tom Midgalski, established the Yale Outdoor Education Center in East Lyme, Conn., about 40 minutes from campus.

"Our program continues to have a strong reputation nationally," Midgalski said. "Every year we have a few good shooters apply to Yale, both for our academics and for our shooting program."

While new players join a growing successful Yale skeet and trap program, senior players leave the team hoping to have continued what has made Yale's program great.

"My hope is that Yale skeet and trap will become frequent visitors of the awards podium and that they will continue building a winning tradition," Monson said.