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PHOTO CREDITS: ROB PERSON

CLUB CALL

# YALE SKEET AND TRAP CLUB

**CLAY TARGET SPORTS HAVE BEEN PART OF YALE UNIVERSITY LIFE SINCE THE LATE 19TH CENTURY.**



CLUBHOUSE

There is rich history, with a New York Times newspaper account reporting the first trap match between Yale and its early rival, Harvard, taking place back in 1888. This was a formative time in the history of clay target shooting, with the first clay targets only emerging on the shooting scene a couple years prior, and some 30 years

**FORMER TEAM CAPTAIN DANIEL MARTINEZ.**

before the invention of the game of Skeet. Other collegiate teams joined in the regional trap competitions through the years and at the turn of the 20th century, the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton became active in what evolved into the annual Intercollegiate Trap Shoot. This competition continued into the first part of the new century with Dartmouth College entering the contest, bringing the number of institutions competing to five. A New York Times article from 1922 reported that the Yale Gun Club had won its 13th consecutive Intercollegiate Trap Shoot – clearly illustrating an Ivy League dynasty that dominated its opponents for several years.

Trap shooting continued at the school but there is an absence of records for the club during the Great Depression and pre-WWII eras, with the information dearth ending with the documented birth of the Yale Skeet Club in January 1940. This reincarnation of Yale's shooting contingent, with its original annual dues of \$5, is the direct forerunner to the modern Yale Skeet and Trap Team, which recently marked its 70th anniversary. The founding members of the Skeet Club secured permission to construct shooting fields on the grounds of the Yale Golf Club and after much planning and hard work dedicated their new ranges in May of 1940, holding matches with Princeton, the New Haven Gun Club and the United States Military Academy that year. After only a few seasons though,



OLD BLACK AND WHITE CLUB PHOTO WITH ED MIGDALSKI (INSET).

complaints from golfers forced the shooting team off the golf grounds, which started a three decade span of practicing and competing at various local clubs in lieu of a permanent team facility.

Today's Yale Skeet and Trap Club is alive and well – due in no small part to the foresight, dedication and hard work of the late Ed Migdalski, father of current Yale Skeet and Trap head coach Tom Migdalski. The elder Migdalski, a researcher and specimen collector for Yale's Peabody Museum and the Bingham Oceanographic Laboratory, was instrumental in developing the national concept of college club sports and elevating the so called "minor sports" to the status they hold today. He founded the Yale Club Sports program in the late 1950s and took over as shooting team head coach in the early 1960s.

The Yale team had gone without a permanent home ground for years and Ed Migdalski's tireless work and fundraising efforts came to fruition when in 1971 the Yale Outdoor Education Center in East Lyme, Connecticut, was opened, providing the Yale Skeet and Trap team terra firma for their own dedicated shooting center. The 1,500 acre wooded grounds feature a trap field, two skeet fields (both American and International), along with a 5-stand field and a stately old renovated cow barn that still serves as a team clubhouse today. Located on a mile long lake about 45 minutes from New Haven, the OEC is also home to a stocked trout pond (used by the Yale Fishing Club), hiking trails and rental cabins.

The Yale team participated in the first Intercollegiate Clay Target Championship held in 1968 under the guidance of Ed Migdalski and has participated in that contest every year since. They compete against other east coast teams in numerous regional events each

season as well, including the East Coast Collegiate Regional Clay Target Championship and the New England Collegiate Clay Target Championship, where they have historically done well. Theirs is a higher education/shooting success story. Their season highlight is the annual ACUI National Collegiate Clay Target Championships, usually held in April in San Antonio, where around 40 collegiate teams slug it out for National bragging rights.

Strong leadership is key to a successful collegiate team and Yale is a standout in that regard. Current head coach Tom Migdalski is also director of Club Sports at the University and Director of the Yale Outdoor Education Center. He is a successful outdoor photographer and author, having written for numerous periodicals and authored a clay target shooting book called *The Complete Book of Shotgunning Games*. Migdalski is a recipient of the NRA's Outstanding Service to Collegiate Shooting Sports award and is an NRA-Certified Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun Instructor, and NRA-Certified Level II Shotgun Coach. He is joined on the field by assistant coach Rob Person, a Ph.D. candidate in political science at Yale,

**TOM MIGDALSKI COACHING FORMER TEAM MEMBER TOM GILLIGAND AT NATIONALS IN TEXAS.**



NRA-Certified Level I Shotgun Coach and competitive shooter in his own right. Person has been involved with the team since 2004 and is also responsible for building the nicely designed and easily navigated Yale Skeet and Trap web site.

Together, Migdalski and Person coach a team of up to 15 males and females, who are admitted to the team through a highly competitive application process. Positions on the team are highly coveted, with only a few positions opening up yearly. Rules are strict, dictating that team members must attend 75% of practices and make a two year commitment to the team. Shooters have the option of using their own shotguns or team guns but since Yale University rules strictly prohibit firearms on its campus, students who choose to use their own shotguns must surrender them for storage with the rest of the team guns. Safety protocol is strictly spelled out and enforced according to the team bylaws.

The Yale team recently made history by winning the first ever Clay Cup at the 2010 New England Collegiate Shotgun Championship at the Minute Man Sportsman's Club in Burlington, Massachusetts. This newly forged competition was the brainchild of NRA Certified Level II shotgun instructor Hank Garvey and was inspired by the longstanding Bean Cup hockey tournament played out each season between Boston area colleges. Featuring a large perpetual silver cup award paid for by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the 2010 Clays Cup pitted college teams from Yale, Harvard, Harvard Law, Tufts, Brown, University of Vermont, Northeastern and MIT in a 100 bird ATA style trap contest, with an optional 50 bird



**ASSISTANT COACH ROB PERSON WITH FORMER TEAM MEMBER RAQUEL KELLERT.**

skeet event. The cup has space for 16 years worth of winners, at which point they will add another base to it to accommodate more years. The winning team will display the trophy for one year, at which time it goes up for grabs at the next Clays Cup. "The cup is awarded to the best 5 person team. I wanted to make sure it was a team/school award and not an individual award because we wanted the best school to win so they have bragging rights for one year. Everyone will be gunning for them next year" says Garvey.

Yale does not allow athletic scholarships of any kind so the bulk of the team expenses are paid for by the shooters themselves, with some much needed help coming by way of tax deductible donations from alumni and other generous supporters. As any shooter knows, clay target shooting is not cheap and Yale welcomes all donations and lists their top funding priorities as: travel expenses to the Nationals, renovation of clubhouse and wobble trap machine purchase.

Collegiate shooting teams are a valuable segment of the shooting community fabric and help bring the next generation of shooters into the fold. Do yourself a favor and check out Yale Skeet and Trap's web site at [www.yale.edu/skeet](http://www.yale.edu/skeet) for a glimpse of this time-honored Ivy League institution's efforts to promote shotgun sports in higher education. ■