

## ...and in 2nd place, Skeet and Trap: Aww, skeet, skeet

By **Hanjing Cao** - **Last updated:** Friday, October 9, 2009 - [Save & Share](#) - [Leave a Comment](#)

Many Yale students have never heard of skeet and trap, much less of a team here dedicated to the sport. And, yet the skeet and trap team is actually one of the most competitive at Yale, ranked seventh at the national tournament, the Intercollegiate Clay Targets Championship (ICTC), last year. This year, the team should place in top five at nationals but faces challenges due to lack of practice and a decline in funding.

Skeet and trap are two separate events, although both involve shooting birds—otherwise known as clay targets—with a shotgun. A skeet field is set up in a semicircle, with eight stations from which to shoot. There are two houses with traps that launch the targets, located at each end of the semicircle. A trap field has five shooting stations on a straight line, and the trap machine oscillates, so that the targets launch at different angles away from the shooter. The rules for skeet and trap vary slightly from country to country, but at the ICTC, there are four events: American skeet, international skeet, American trap, and international trap. Each event has four rounds of 25 shots, so a score of 100 means the competitor hit every target. The culmination of the individual shooters' scores determines the team score and rank.

Yale's skeet and trap team focuses mostly on the team result rather than individual scores. "We pride ourselves as a team with a solid foundation, and we hope to do well in the combined event," said Captain Jason Gilliland, SY '10.

In order to reach its full potential, the Yale team must focus on speed and accuracy. During a skeet or trap event, the athlete must shoot within three seconds, before he or she loses grasp of the target. Thus, the shooter has to maintain complete concentration in order to react quickly. Because Yale competes only a few times per year, the shooters often lack the practice to maintain that ideal total focus. At ICTC last year, the team's shooting did not meet expectations. "We just weren't prepared for the mental stress of shooting in such a high stakes competition," said Captain Austen Kassinger, DC '10. To prevent this setback, the team plans to compete more frequently and hold more regular practices.

However, setting up more competitions and holding more practices is difficult because of inadequate funding and high expenses. "We are usually able to get most of what we need through fundraising with alumni gifts, but the gifts have been lower in the last year or so because of the recession," said Coach Tom Migdalski, "and it's a fairly cost intensive sport." At each practice, the team uses shotgun shells and clay birds, which the athletes can only use once. The costs are immense, since about 15 people use 100 shells and 100 targets per practice. Additionally, the skeet and trap facilities are located almost an hour away from New Haven, which means the team must spend even more money on gas every week to carpool to the practice grounds. While holding more practices would increase the team's chances at nationals, it is monetarily infeasible to do so.

Setting up competitions is almost as complicated as securing more funding. In the Northeast, there are only three schools with a skeet and trap program: University of Connecticut, University of Vermont, and Westpoint Military Academy. The team would have to fly to compete anywhere else, which would mean a huge increase in cost. "Currently, we are considering going to Virginia to George Mason University to shoot with four to five teams there. We're trying to figure out funding for that," said Gilliland. Shooting at George Mason is a feasible option, since Virginia is not too far and the team would be able to compete with a number of schools in one trip, but flying any further to compete with just one school would be fiscally unwise.

The crunch in funding also threatens the team's prospects at nationals. Students have always had to contribute to the costs of the trip themselves, and the amount depended on alumni donations. "Alumni funding hasn't been as generous as in the past. The national competition is incredibly expensive, and we have to ask for people to contribute. We're hoping to keep the costs as low as possible," said Kassinger. If the costs are too high, there is a slight possibility that the team would not be able to bring everyone, which could hurt the team at ICTC.

Although funding and the consequential cut in practices are difficult problems, the team should still be able to place in the top five at nationals. The members of the team commit themselves fully and are even willing to practice in extreme weather conditions, and this year's team is particularly strong. "Recently, we've happened to get a string of highly qualified shooters. They've come in with significant experience," said Coach Migdalski. The Yale skeet and trap team has the skill and experience, coupled with a dedicated coach and members, to do extremely well this year—if they can scrounge up the dough.