In a showdown with University of Wisconsin’s men’s bow hunter team, Southeastern Illinois College came up large to defeat the #3 team in the nation to win the 2013 men’s bow hunter division national championship. Earlier, Southeastern defeated Penn State to advance to the championship round against Wisconsin.

“It was a sweet victory for the Falcons,” said head archery coach Archie Blair. “Last year, Wisconsin eliminated our men’s bow hunter team in the first round. We had to think about that for an entire year, but it served to be the very motivation that our veterans needed to win gold this year.” The 3D US Intercollegiate Archery Championships were held earlier this month at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

SIC’s bow hunter team consisted of Aaron Head from Harrisburg, Trevor Nelson from Carmi, and Jordan Walker from Carrier Mills. By leading all universities and colleges after the first day of competition on a 20-target 3D range, Southeastern drew a bye in the first round of team competition, allowing eight other teams to fight their way to the second round.

“It was nail-biting,” said Blair. “I found myself saying, ‘Are you kidding me. Now we have to go up against Penn State and possibly our nemesis, Wisconsin?’” But all turned out well for Blair and his team when the final arrow was shot. And to add to the team victory, SIC claimed the two-day aggregate scoring title by placing Head, Nelson, and Walker in first, second, and fourth positions, respectively, following competition on a grueling two-day, 40-target 3D range.

Blair noted that SIC competes against such Division I schools as Michigan State University, Purdue, Penn State, University of Wisconsin, Missouri State University, University of Missouri, Wayne State University, Liberty University, Bethel University, and University of the Cumberlands.

The governing body of collegiate archery, the US Collegiate Archery Association (USCAA), does not distinguish between small and large institutions, and SIC shooting and form coach Roger Snodgrass of M&R Bowstrings likes it that way.

“It really doesn’t matter who our students shoot against, whether it’s a local archery club or a major university competing for gold at the US Intercollegiate 3D Archery Championships. We simply have the best shooters in the country,” expressed Snodgrass. He went on to say that this year’s group of young men and women archers proved they were the best in the nation by winning four national titles.

One of those titles went to SIC’s rookie compound bow team of Eric Janssen from Kankakee, Ill.; Tyler Butts from St. Peter, Ill.; and Allen Kuhnert from Taylorville, Ill. Avenging an earlier loss to Bethel University at the USCAA South Regional 3D Championships at University of the Cumberlands, Southeastern’s men’s compound division team eliminated Bethel by one point in the first round of the national tournament and then went on to capture the national title outright by defeating a seasoned University of the Cumberlands squad.

“Simply remarkable,” claims SIC’s 3D shooting coach Darin DeNeal, a two-time All-American USCAA archer himself. “These three young men came to my house on Monday evenings for months to prepare for what they knew they could accomplish on the big stage. However, Coach Blair and I had our reservations. We knew they could be competitive, but we had no idea how competitive. The most important thing was that they believed in themselves and walked away champions,” added DeNeal. Janssen, Butts, and Kuhnert finished eighth, tenth, and fourteenth, respectively, in the nation in individual scoring.
The third national title came in the way of the mixed team bow hunter division. Southeastern’s Aaron Head and first-year archer Hannah Dudley from Stonefort represented the college’s top male and female shooters. In the final round, the duo from SIC dominated, finishing with a decisive victory over the mixed team from University of the Cumberlands.

Dudley also finished fourth in the nation in the women's bow hunter division. The SIC women’s team, which consisted of Dudley, Amber Hays from Kinmundy, Ill. and Shawna Brown from Harrisburg, captured third place overall. Brown finished in thirteenth place in individual standings, while Hays placed fourteenth.

Aaron Head won top archer in the nation with a final score of 402/400 in the men’s bow hunter division. With the national title also came a $500 scholarship.

“Aaron is simply a remarkable shooter and fine young man,” Blair said. “He won USCAA’s South Regional and North Regional tournaments handily and went into Mizzou looking for the sweep. Strangely enough, it was his own teammate Trevor Nelson who gave him his stiffest competition at nationals, taking the lead back and forth through the first ten targets of the second day.”

Nelson finished as national runner-up when the dust settled, and Jordan Walker finished in fourth, demonstrating Southeastern’s strength in that division. Josh Bailey, a freshman, finished in ninth place. Bailey is from Carrier Mills and will anchor the college’s 2014 bow hunter squad.

Southeastern’s four titles were the most received by any school at this year’s national championships. Including last year’s women’s bow hunter division national title, the school’s number of archery championships now stands at five.

SIC president, Dr. Jonah Rice, is thrilled by the team’s accomplishments. “SIC boasts many national titles in our history, and to add four more at one time to our winning tradition is phenomenal. We are so proud of our new yet intensely competitive archery squad. Defeating such powerhouse universities in head-to-head matches like this is testament to our quality students and coaches. Kudos to the team for representing SIC and our region so well. No other community college in the Midwest is doing what we’re doing in this arena of outdoor sports competition,” said Rice.
Members of SIC’s National Championship Archery Team include, kneeling l-r, Aaron Head, Harrisburg; Jordan Walker, Carrier Mills; Trevor Nelson, Carmi; and Hannah Dudley, Stonefort. Standing, r-l, Josh Bailey, Carrier Mills; Tyler Butts, St. Peter, Ill.; Kasey Herrin, Marion, Ky.; Allen Kuhnert, Taylorville, Ill.; Dylan Davis, Harrisburg; Eric Janssen, Kankakee, Ill.; Clayton Hall, Grayville, Ill.; Julian Rodriguez, Carrier Mills; Kira McCalip, Rantoul, Ill.; Amber Hays, Kinmundy, Ill.; and Shawna Brown, Harrisburg.