



Photos by Robert O'Rourke

(Above) Billy Gehrhardt and Ken Tiufrom from Hauppauge High School carry their robot to the court at the Robotics competition at the Brentwood Campus of Suffolk Community College this weekend.  
 (Below) Ian Woloschin, Mr Pinter (back to camera), Chuck Dennis (team advisor), Dan Lopuch and Anthony Camizzi from Smithtown High School work on their robot in between matches.

# Rockin' robots win

*Smithtown and Hauppauge high school students show their stuff at annual Robotics competition*



BY KELLY CAMPBELL

A raucous crowd filled the bleachers at the Suffolk County Community College in Brentwood for the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics regional competition March 18 through 20.

Each year the competition challenges students, working with professional mentors, to design and build an original robot that solves a problem using a "kit of parts" and a standard set of rules. Once these young inventors create the robot, their teams participate in regional competitions that measure the effectiveness of each robot, the power of collaboration and the determination of students.

This year, robots built by 36 teams from Long Island, Upstate New York and Pennsylvania faced off in a battle game called First Frenzy: Raising the Bar, which takes place on a playing field with a mix of robot and human players. Robots and humans alike

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### Robotics

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earned points by throwing balls into goals, and extra points were given to the team that ended up with its robot hanging from the pull-up bar in the center of the field.

And while the competition is intense, the organizers stress the idea of intra-team work. The saying "Bring your most gracious professionalism" is stenciled everywhere, even on garbage cans. And the teams abide by this guideline.

Chuck Dennis, robotics instructor at Smithtown High School and adviser for the Smithtown Mechanical Bulls, which placed second in this year's regional final and is ranked 20th out of 36, agrees with the rule. "If someone's robot is busted out you don't just say, 'Good, they're out.' You give them a hand," Dennis said. "Our team received the rookie award for helping other teams two years ago because we helped so many teams with repairs. And that is worth more to me and the team than winning second place."

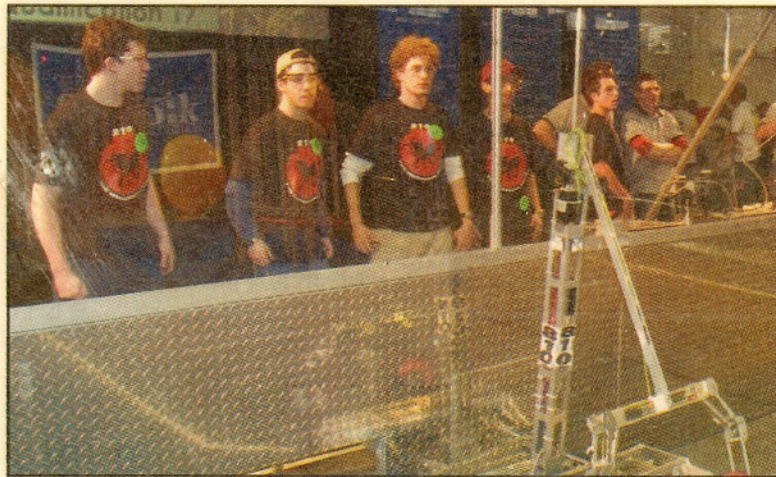
Ranked 17th out of the 36 teams, the Hauppauge High School Titans team made it to the semi-finals and won two awards — the Johnson & Johnson Sportsmanship Award for helping the Smithtown team with their drive train and for donating the practice field, and the Leadership in Control Award for use of the gyro and wheel encoders.

"The FIRST Robotics Competition is not just about the design and building of sophisticated robots. These students also develop maturity, professionalism, teamwork and mentoring skills that enrich their lives," said Fred Breithut, president of School-Business Partnerships of Long Island and coordinator of the Long Island FIRST Regional Robotics Competition. "Many of our students develop



Photos by Robert O'Rourke

Bryan Morales, John McDonald, Chris Sanders, Mike DiBiccari and Mei-Jin Chen from Hauppauge work on their robot.



Steve Bennet, Anthony Camizzi, Dan Lopuch and Ian Woloschin from Smithtown High School look on as their robot goes about its task in a head-to-head contest in Friday's action.

an affinity for their science and math courses, go on to study engineering, technology or science in college and also pursue employment opportunities with sponsoring companies."

But for now, it's just an exciting outlet for the students' imaginations and competitive spirits.

"It is very intense," Dennis said. "Going to battle and then going to the pits and rebuilding the robot. There's a lot of team spirit where everyone is dependent on each other."

And, Dennis said, although his team had "first place in the palm of our hands" the experience is the most important part.

"The trophy is one thing but everyone had a great time and that's the main thing. They went from last place to second and didn't get discouraged," Dennis said.

Esposito agreed.

The national organization was founded by inventor Dean Kamen, who says he first introduced the Segway Human Transporter two years ago "to inspire an appreciation of science and technology in young people, their schools and communities."

Currently in its sixteenth year, the FIRST Robotics Competition will expand its reach to over 23,000 students representing approximately 930 teams from almost every state in the U.S. and abroad.

And Smithtown will be back. They will be headed to Atlanta April 15 through 17 for the national competition.

"We're already preparing for Georgia," Dennis said. "I hardly got any sleep over the weekend figuring out what and how we're going to improve."

For more information about FIRST Robotics and how your school district's team did in past competitions, go to <http://www.usfirst.org/index.html>.