

Robotic March madness to debut at FIRST competition

February 25 2005

Approximately 40 robots built by teams of high school students throughout the United States will compete head-to-head at the inaugural FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Boilermaker Regional Robotics Competition on March 17-19 at the Purdue University Armory.

The event, which is free and open to the public, will run from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day. Nearly 1,000 teens will fill the stands along with family, friends and team mentors to cheer on their favorite robot. To compete in this year's challenge, the robots will score points by placing pyramid-shaped objects on top of or underneath 5-foot high goals, with bonus points awarded for scoring in a tic-tac-toe manner. Two teams of three robots will take the field for each match.

The robots face off in two-minute, action-packed matches to make their way into the final rounds of competition. Offensive and defensive strategies constantly change as teams review the scouting data collected on opponents throughout the competition.

The students work with engineers and teachers to design, build and test a robot in just six weeks.

Sponsored by the Purdue FIRST Programs, a student organization formed in 1999, the event will attract teams from as far away as Mountain Home, Ark.; Paola, Kan.; Ft. Thomas, Ky.; and Darien, Wisc.; as well as teams from Indianapolis and Chicago. Details about the 2005

challenge are available at the FIRST Web site.

In addition to competing for points in each match, teams will vie for other awards such as technical excellence, spirit and Web site design. These awards will be determined by a panel of judges composed of Purdue faculty and engineers from Boilermaker Regional sponsors such as NASA, Schlumberger, General Motors Corp., Rolls-Royce, Coca Cola and Kimberly Clark.

Patrick Wesonga, director of Purdue FIRST Programs, said the competition is a high-energy event that inspires everybody involved.

"The levels of creativity and ingenuity that the students demonstrate through FIRST never cease to amaze me," Wesonga said. "These robots, for which the students have devoted countless hours of work, are tangible evidence of how valuable FIRST is in inspiring a fascination of technology and engineering in children."

FIRST was founded by Dean Kamen, the inventor of the Segway human transporter, in 1989. Based in Manchester, N.H., FIRST designs innovative programs to motivate students to pursue studies in science, technology and engineering. Since its inception, FIRST has expanded internationally to Canada, Great Britain, Australia, Israel, Ecuador, Mexico and Brazil.

Source: Purdue University

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