

# our towns

## ROBOTICS COMPETITION

# Test of mettle and metal

40 school teams  
to vie in LI regional  
of technical skills

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It sounds a bit like a NASA project: Assemble a team, build an electronic, remote-controlled robot and program it to move up a ramp and shoot 7-inch foam balls into 33-inch holes in a vertical backboard from a distance of 25 feet. The robot's design must conform to certain specifications, including height and weight.

Just like NASA — except the team members aren't seasoned scientists and engineers, but high school students.

Nearly 40 teams from Long Island, New York and Connecticut high schools — 29 from Nassau and Suffolk counties — will travel to Hofstra University on Friday and Saturday to compete in the eighth Long Island regional event of the FIRST Robotics Competition. The event will take place in Hofstra Arena, a facility usually reserved for athletics.

The FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) competition may not look like a sporting event, but it shares many of the same characteristics, rewarding individual endurance and intelligence, teamwork and competitive spirit. There will be scouts in the audience, music blaring over speakers and excitement in the air. But when one team's robot goes down, competitors likely will rush to the rescue with extra parts and tools.

### Kindly competition

"It's called 'gracious professionalism,'" said Scott Schuler, an employee of FESTO Corp., an international supplier of automation technology, and a mentor for Hauppauge High School. The Hauppauge Eagles won the coveted Chairman's Award at last year's Long Island regional and took second place last week in the New England regional in Hartford.

One team lost its robot during shipping to last year's na-



Members of Baldwin High's Team Chaos, senior Mikko Tesalona, senior Greg Stoddard and junior Janki Patel change the battery in last year's robot during practice for this year.

tional competition in Atlanta, Schuler said. Hauppauge and other schools scoured up spare parts and helped the team build one from scratch so it could compete.

Such stories abound when students talk about the program. Teams help one another with programming problems and swap ideas on Web sites.

Students at both Hauppauge and Baldwin, winner of

last year's All-Star Rookie Award, agree that the best part of the competition is the way players come together to make it work.

"Everyone plays an integral part," said Eliza Lamin, a senior and captain of the Baldwin Chaos. Only 20 of 40 students on Baldwin's team do actual design and construction, she said, but tasks such as Web design, marketing, fundraising and

publicity are just as important.

To keep the game competitive, each team gets the same kit with parts that must be used to build the robot, and there's a limit of six weeks for construction. Each team can spend \$3,500 on supplemental parts.

Chris Sanders, a senior at Hauppauge, has been in-

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