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Robotics

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Woodie Flowers award for all the time and effort that he puts into [robotics]," agreed Assistant Coach Ben Flaiz, also a middle school technology teacher.

Hughes, who coached the district's past seven robotics teams, was called up in front of the crowd on Friday to claim his trophy, an event that left him nearly at a loss for words. He called the honor "indescribable."

The robotics tournament was held March 24 and 25 at Hofstra University. Over the course of six weeks beforehand, each team had to design a robot using a parts kit and a standard set of rules, building it to play a particular game.

Two alliances, composed of three teams each, work to shoot tiny foam balls into hoops, similar to a basketball game. The robots also can push the balls into ground-level hoops, but that makes them more likely to be rammed by an opposing machine. Each match lasts two minutes and ten seconds.

"It's very exciting," said Ryan Smith, a senior at Miller Place. "Every year there's tons of fans and the energy is just so amazing."

Thirty-eight school districts participated in this year's regionals, including Comsewogue, Mount Sinai, Port Jefferson, Hauppauge and Middle Country. Others were from elsewhere on Long Island, Connecticut, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

In the semifinals, it was bumper bots between the Hauppauge Eagles and the Mount Sinai Stangbot, as well over 300 spectators watched with excitement in the

Hofstra University Arena.

In one round, the Stangbot rammed Hauppauge's device, preventing it from scoring. But it was Hauppauge that carried the day in the end.

"It feels great," Eagle Ben Clifford said. "We worked so hard to build the robot and to win; it's just awesome."

"We were a little bummed out," said Jeff Tyler, Mount Sinai's team leader. "We wanted to make it to the finals and go to Georgia — but that's not really what it's about, and we had a good time."

Mount Sinai took home the Motorola Quality Award, celebrating their machine's robustness in concept and fabrication. The team deserved the award because they put a lot of time, effort and energy into building their robot, according to mentor Cliff Tyler.

FIRST, an acronym representing For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, was founded 18 years ago by Dean Kamen, who had a goal of inspiring an appreciation of science and technology in young people, their communities and schools.

Participants say that it's working.

"It gives the kids a great opportunity to see science and technology outside the classroom," Middle Country Coach Cory Fitzgerald said.

"It was an exciting experience just learning about the robotics here and just working with everybody, especially Miller Place," said Evan Towsey of the Comsewogue team, which participated in the event for the first time this year. Just as Plainview mentors Miller Place, Miller Place mentors Mount Sinai in the FIRST world. The Comsewogue team hopes to participate again next year, possibly plan-

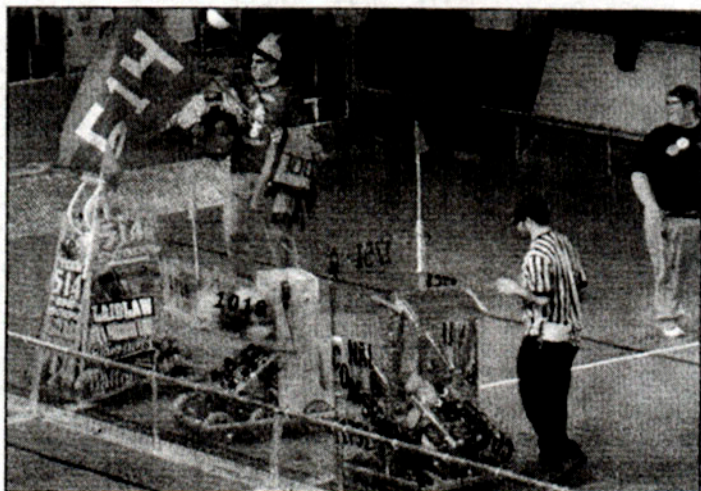


Photo by Kyle Reitan

The Miller Place, Westhampton and Comsewogue bots line up in the Hofstra Arena.

ning and constructing the robot earlier in advance, according to Towsey.

Port Jefferson Coach Denis Connolly had the same idea of planning ahead. "I think we're going to make our robot a little sturdier, and try to get our robot done a little earlier," Connolly said.

Flaiz said he would like to improve the Miller Place robot's turning abilities and programming next year.

FIRST emphasizes teamwork, and participants agree that cooperation is key in competition.

"Without teamwork, you will automatically come in last place," said Middle Country junior Cory Scala.

Jim Bedford, a Miller Place High

School teacher who cheered on his school's team at the event, said, "They learned a lot about team spirit, working together in order to achieve a positive goal." He added that teamwork "teaches students how to work together to achieve goals and objectives in a technical kind of environment."

Atlanta is home to the FIRST National Competition, set for April 27 through 29 and Miller Place, Bay Shore, Hauppauge, and Southold are eligible to go. Each team needs to raise \$5000 order to participate in the Nationals. Two Miller Place team members said Tuesday they expect to make the trip.