

# A.I. take-over at KCVI and Frontenac:, Students take on international robotics competition

Posted Jan 12, 2012 By Hollie Pratt-Campbell

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EMC News - Dozens of students from KCVI and Frontenac Secondary School headed back to school early from winter break Jan. 7, when they gathered in the KC auditorium to view a live-streamed announcement from NASA regarding the regulations for this year's international FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics championship.

Each year, teams from across North America are given six weeks to design and build robots that can perform a particular task. On Saturday, students learned that this year they must craft a robot that is able to cross a narrow bridge and sink a basketball.

KCVI Grade 12 student Elizabeth Rouget has been on the robotics team for the past three years.

"I'm very excited," she said following the announcement. "It's the beginning of a tough six weeks, but these are always lots of fun. We really come together as a team."

The KCVI team, which is this year made up of about 40 students, has been very successful in past robotics competitions. Last year, they made it all the way to the world championships in St. Louis. However, Rouget points out that an entirely unique robot must be built from scratch for each competition.

"There's huge differences in the games every year," she says. "I think that (this year) the balancing will be a big challenge because your robot is 120 lbs, so to get it on a completely even keel like that will be interesting."

In terms of getting the ball in the net, Rouget notes that thinking outside the box could prove to be key.

"(In the video they showed) there was a catapult and sort of shooting mechanism and rollers to get the ball across. But it didn't specify that you have to shoot the ball. I think you can also just place it inside. I don't think there's a limit to what kids can think of."

This will be Frontenac's second year participating in the competition.

"It's super cool and I'm very excited," says team member Arsham Gazor. "We can't wait to get started."

He notes that "it was pretty cool last year as well. We didn't make it past the regionals but we're definitely hoping to do so this year."

The team began brainstorming directly following Saturday's announcement.

"We'll just all decide on one basic goal," he says. "Last year, for instance, we did a defence robot and our goal was always to stop the other team's robot from being able to move into our zone and score."

Gazor explains that the main lesson learned during the team's rookie year was the importance of commitment.

"We didn't really know too much about it (in regards to the time constraints)," he recalls. "It's a really big commitment...so this year we'll be putting that extra time in and working that much harder because we know that's what we need to do for it."

KCVI teacher Kevin Wood supervises his school's robotics team, along with Rachel Bearse. He explains that the primary goal of competition is to promote an interest in science, technology and engineering among teenagers.

"The idea is to make it compete with entertainment and sports in terms of its esteem and popularity," he says.

In addition, Wood says that there are many other non-scientific skills developed over the course of the competition, as students are also responsible for tasks like fundraising and publicity.

"What I really like to see are the leadership and public speaking skills they develop," he says. "They're going out to do presentations to the public, talking to judges and doing award presentations and things like that."

Wood remarks that social skills and teamwork are also important behaviours students develop in this kind of competition.

"We have a lot of students from different aspects of the school that wouldn't normally get together, and so they're meeting each other and working as a team together," he says. "We almost become a big family."

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Hollie Pratt-Campbell, Kingston EMC KCVI students Taylor Bird, Kylie McDonnell-Wade, Megan Mattes, Joshua DaCosta and Elizabeth Rouget with last year's winning robot KC3.

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