

Statesman

Chap Robotics earns Engineering Inspiration award at FIRST World Championships

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It's gracious professionalism. It's instant friendship. It's a bond that is impossible to understand from the outside. For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology is an organization unlike any other I've encountered, but more so Team 2468 has not only taught me about engineering and technology, but more about myself and the kind of person that I want to be. I know nothing about wiring or drive trains. But, what I do know is that Team Appreciate embodies everything a student should strive to be, from intelligence, to friendship, to professional relationships.

Chap Robotics competed in the FIRST World Championships in St. Louis, Missouri, April 23-26, and the team made it to the semifinals and came home with the illusive Engineering Inspiration Award for their impressive strides in engineering and technology through FIRST. The team also had a Dean's List Finalist, Michael Keim, which is an honor bestowed upon only a select group of incredible FIRST participants.

The FRC challenge this season is called Ariel Assist. It requires robots to be able to maneuver around an arena, while shooting large balls into goals, or over trusses. Teams are grouped into alliances of three robots that combine their engineered skills to perform to the best of their ability. The contest is organized into a series of matches that funnel into a double-elimination tournament for a final alliance winner. The alliance winner from each division at championships then go to the incredible honor of competing on the Einstein field for the championship title.

Team 2468 made it to the semifinal round of their division, finishing with the pride of doing everything that they could to build a robot that all of Westlake could be proud of.

“This year, especially with the game being the way it is, we should really be proud,” 2468 member Garrison Hefter said. “We built a simple robot that is robust and does its job. We have driver skill that is essentially unmatched. We did the best we can, and we can compete with the best.”

More than just the wires and programming, FIRST embodies the ideas of friendship, professionalism and cooperation through competition.

“It’s a spirit just like the rest of FIRST of collaboration and competition existing together, which you don’t see anywhere else,” Hefter said. “We showed up for a match, and we were trying to get ready and start and a team hadn’t showed up yet. Less than 10 minutes later, we found out that it was a group of three seventh-grade kids with one mentor that had no idea what they were doing. To see these kids competing at the same level as the engineers at NASA is astounding. There’s no other competition in the world that you can find stories and events like FIRST.”

The spirit and experience of being at championships is something that is impossible to understand until one is there. It’s the largest celebration of science and technology that becomes a giant party surrounded by proud mentors and coaches that want nothing more than for all of the participants to succeed.

“Going to champs is by itself completely incredible,” Hefter said. “It’s completely different than any other competition in the world. It’s different than any sport or contest in the world. You can’t understand the scale or the scope of it until you’ve been there. Just having the opportunity to compete with the best 400 teams in the world is unbelievable. These are the people who I aspire to be like. I’ve watched these people over the years and I’m friends with so many of them. It’s a chance during the competition that’s going on to have fun.”

Team Appreciate fought an incredible battle at championships demonstrating the professionalism and competition that FIRST embraces. The loss was hard for the team, but the legacy left is one of excellence and hard work.

“I’ve never been to a competition and not driven,” driver Jake Cooper said. “So, I have a different prospective on what the competitions are like. Standing behind the glass while driving the robot lets me put my mind into what I’m doing and controlling the robot. I don’t have to think about what I’m doing with my hands and the controls. I see what needs to happen, and I listen to Coach. I can focus on the strategy and what needs to be done instead of controlling the robot. At first, I was frustrated, because we lost in the last five seconds. It was frustrating because it was so close, and we had such a good chance. Later, it was sad because I’ve been driving for three years, and I realized that it’s over for me.”

Personally, Team Appreciate has given me life skills that I can’t get anywhere else, but more than that, it has given all of the team members a chance to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, something we can truly be proud of and fight for. Team 2468 is the thread that ties so many kids of all walks of life together. We’re more than a team; we’re a family.