



TECH HIGH ROBOTICS

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Tech High robotics team takes home another award

By Nicolas Grizzle



Members of the Tech High Robotics team show 2008 bot.
Kevin Walters

They're not going to the "Super Bowl" again this year, but Tech High's robotics team won another award.

The team placed in the middle of the pack in their two competitions, but won the Kleiner Perkins Caufield and Byers Entrepreneurship Award. As explained by team advisor Greg Weaver, it's basically for the team with a financial plan that improves each year.

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"In terms of game performance we didn't do as well as we wanted to, but the robot looks better, it looks more thought out, better engineered, higher quality. The kids did a really great job," said Weaver.

Last year's robotics team did not win a competition but was invited to the national finals in Atlanta after winning the regional Inspiration Engineering Award at a competition at UC Davis.

Though the team didn't see such awesome results, this year's bot was superior to last year's in design, says Weaver. The names are similar (last year's was "Gloria Machina" and this year's is "Glory Angel," named in honor of Tech High grad Sara Baker, who was in a car accident last year and has "Locked in Syndrome"), but the competitions were different so the bots are, too.

This design includes a forklift with strong "tusks" in the front. Weaver said other teams at the San Jose and Davis regional competitions remarked how "cool" and innovative their design was. "It was designed to go out and score points and make the other robots work against us," said Weaver. The team's previous designs were defensive, but this bot was all about offense.

That strategy would have worked better if mechanical problems had not brought it down early in the competition, though. Like a great sports team, the robotics team was subject to the injury bug. The motors on the forklift didn't lift properly and too much torque actually destroyed one of the bot's wheels.

"We would have benefited from having a couple days of driving it around" to work out the kinks, said Weaver. The robot was shipped to the competition right on deadline, and the team didn't get as much test time as they would have liked.

Next year may have a stricter schedule - not because the team doesn't work hard, but almost because they work too hard. In the beginning of the six-week build period, team members work 18-hour days on weekends until 10 at night sometimes, and that may burn them out a bit. Weaver hopes to install a stop time as well as a start time for build days.

The Phantom Robotics team will compete again next year, but it's not certain if they will do the two events. "Two events is tougher to raise money for," said Weaver, and the team relies heavily on donations from sponsors. San Jose's competition is also a bit stiffer because there are more tech-oriented schools in that area, raising the bar for RP's Tech High.