

Students square off in regional FIRST Robotics Competition

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Thinking caps were necessary Thursday as Shawnee Mission West seniors Josh Colvin (left) and Charlie Allen prepared themselves for the regional FIRST Robotics Competition.

At first glance, the FIRST Robotics Competition that opened Thursday at the American Royal Complex appeared to be about making robots zoom around a track.

But really it was about cooperation, character and confidence.

Teams from dozens of area high schools practiced moving their robots and getting them to punch balls off a bridge over the track.

At the same time, the students learned how to work together, gained experience in presenting themselves professionally and grew to believe in their own abilities.

Teams began designing and building robots in January.

“I have seen a lot of growth since the first day,” said Paseo Academy team leader Paul Kehmeier, a science teacher who oversaw a team of eight girls and one boy, all freshmen.

“I hope they gain confidence to try new things they haven’t done before,” Kehmeier said. “I hope they gain skills, too.”

This is the 17th year for the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) international robotics competition. Organizers say the competition includes more than 37,000 students from every state and countries such as Mexico, Canada, China and Israel.

The Kansas City regional began with practice rounds Thursday at the complex’s Hale Arena and will continue through Saturday with the actual competition. The national competition is set for mid-April in Atlanta.

Pop music blared as Hale Arena took on the look of a sports tournament; some schools’ mascots made an appearance; students were interviewed on camera for a Sports Center-type show; and officials in referee shirts lined the track.

Lincoln College Prep junior David Adeola said the competition lets him meet people, gain self-confidence and experience engineering, a career he might pursue.

The details

- The robotics competition is 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. today at Hale Arena. It continues from 9:30 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Saturday, with an awards ceremony at 4 p.m. Admission is free.

ROBOTICS REGIONAL

More than 40 teams from area high schools are competing in the FIRST Robotics regional competition.

High schools fielding robots include Bonner Springs, J.C. Harmon, Piper, F.L. Schlagle, Lawrence, Olathe Northwest, Shawnee Mission North, Blue Valley North, Shawnee Mission West, Paola, Shawnee Mission East, Bishop Miege, Blue Valley, Blue Springs, Blue Springs South, Metro Academy, Excelsior Springs, Touch of Grace Ministries, Grandview, Harrisonville, Fort Osage, St. Mary’s, Van Horn, Truman, William Chrisman, Hickman Mills, Paseo Academy, DeLaSalle Education Center, Pembroke Hill, Winnetonka, Center, Northeast, Lincoln College Prep, Westport, Barstow, O’Hara, Central, Kearney, Lee’s Summit West, Lee’s Summit, Liberty, North Kansas City, Raymore-Peculiar, Raytown South, Raytown and Smithville.