



TEAM MEAN MACHINE

SPORTS AND ATHLETICS
Written by Camas writer Sue Dockstader

COMBINING FIERCE COMPETITION AND TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE WITH GRACIOUS PROFESSIONALISM!



It's unusual for high schools to field combined teams in national competitions, but Team Mean Machine is made up of about 40 talented students from Camas, Hockinson, Discovery and Washougal high schools. Ranked first in the Pacific Northwest for the past two years, this robotics team has battled its way to the world championships in Texas for the past eight years.

Started by head mentor Bruce Whitfield over 10 years ago, this year-round team is part of the FIRST

(For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) organization, which aims to inspire students to be science and technology leaders. Industry professionals and team alumni mentor the students as they operate cutting-edge machinery like 3D printers and CNC routers while developing coding and design

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skills, in preparation for building a computerized robot each January.

Surrounded by donated, rebuilt and repurposed equipment in the former Camas high school shop, John Lange (president), Owen Wilks (captain), Zoe Gondek and Josh Martsof explained the process of preparing for the annual championships:

“Once we receive the challenge for the upcoming competition season, we have six weeks to start brainstorming ideas, designing, fabricating, programming and testing the robot we build.”

“Initially, we make wooden prototypes, then transfer those designs into CAD software to make the final parts.”

“We use advanced composite materials because the robot must be strong, but light – a max of 120 pounds.”

“Challenges include combinations of tasks such as picking up and throwing a ball, stacking boxes or driving over an uneven surface.”

Robotics competitions require collaboration between team members and

with opposing schools, as teams are pitched against each other in a three-on-three format. Scouts assess the strengths and weaknesses of competing teams, so alliances can be formed in the playoff brackets.

There are many scholarship and internship opportunities for FIRST students, including with program supporter Boeing Portland, which usually recruits a couple of summer interns from the team each year. However, the mentors emphasized that all students learn valuable technical skills, not just those headed for college. Local companies often contact the group looking to hire kids with specific skills, like being trained to operate the CNC machine.

The goal of the team is to focus on developing real manufacturing skills for today’s technology while encouraging innovation. Students may join the team not knowing the difference between a Philips and a flathead screwdriver, but their technical and personal confidence builds with their mastery of every tool and greater understanding of the design process.



A final thought from team president John, “With the skills we learn on Team Mean Machine, every kid in our sport has a chance to go pro.”

To find out more: <https://team2471.org.t>



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