



Area high school students put their homemade machines to the test at a robotics competition at Hofstra University yesterday.



Kristopher Kavanagh of Bay

Shore High School works on his robot.

# Putting creativity to work

- Hundreds of students compete in robot design
- Organizers say contest showcases future minds

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Painted faces, loud music, screaming fans and... robots. Like a scene from March Madness, hundreds of students from across Long Island filled Hofstra University's arena yesterday for the 11th annual For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology Robotics Competition.

The three-day competition revolved around a game of electronic soccer played by

robots designed and built by students from 48 high schools. Teams with names like Robodawgs, Cyber Cats and Mechanical Marauders tried to maneuver the machines into scoring the most goals as chanting onlookers, playful school mascots and determined coaches watched closely.

"It's incredible," said Santiago Perez, 17, a senior at Island Trees High School in Levittown. "You get to see a manifestation of all the hours and hard work you put in."

The national competition, started in 1992 by a nonprofit organization of the same name, seeks to foster an interest in science and technology among high school students.

This year, the competition sent each school a box of mate-

rials and asked students to construct a 130-pound robot. Students had six weeks to design, test and construct the gadgets.

Teams are judged based on various characteristics including the robustness of the robot, students' spirit and creativity, and their ability to work with others.

"It's not just about building a robot," said Joseph Sicinski, the organization's vice president of program development. He said the skills students learn here transfer into the real world.

For Perez, who struggled with classes in the early months of high school and then joined the robotics team, the activity has meant a chance at turning his academic career around. He is

now heading to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and plans to major in computer science.

"This team completely changed me as a student," Perez said.

As part of the fun, students can add unique features to each robot. For example, students from Southold High School chose to enhance their robot by including windshield wiper motors to help it kick the ball at varying speeds and a vacuum-like device that allowed the robot to grip the ball and control its shots.

"Every time I come here, I get excited thinking about the future," said Taisha Vargas, 16, a junior at Aviation High School in Long Island City.

John Kacner, a volunteer

judge and engineer, sees the competition as a showcase of future minds. "These are the people who will be solving problems like clean water and working on Army amputees," he said.

Fayth Vaughn-Shavuo, a former principal of Roosevelt High School, agrees. She started the school's robotics team six years ago as an addition to sports.

"Our kids need the message that it's OK to be smart," she said.

Winners from this weekend's tournaments, sponsored by the School Business Partnerships of Long Island, will be invited to the championship next month in Atlanta. Teams have to raise money to cover travel and lodging expenses.

## Students head to nationals

Some winners of the For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology Robotics Competition.

These teams will be invited to attend the national championship in Atlanta.

**Chairman's Awards:** Great Neck South High School.

**Regional Winners:** Bay Shore High School, Hauppauge High School, Sachem High School

**Engineering Inspiration Award:** Lindenhurst High School

These teams also won awards but were not invited to Atlanta.

**Regional finalists:** Miller Place High School, Southold High School, Westhampton Beach High School, Baldwin High School

**Rookie All Star and Highest Rookie Seed:** Connetquot High School

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