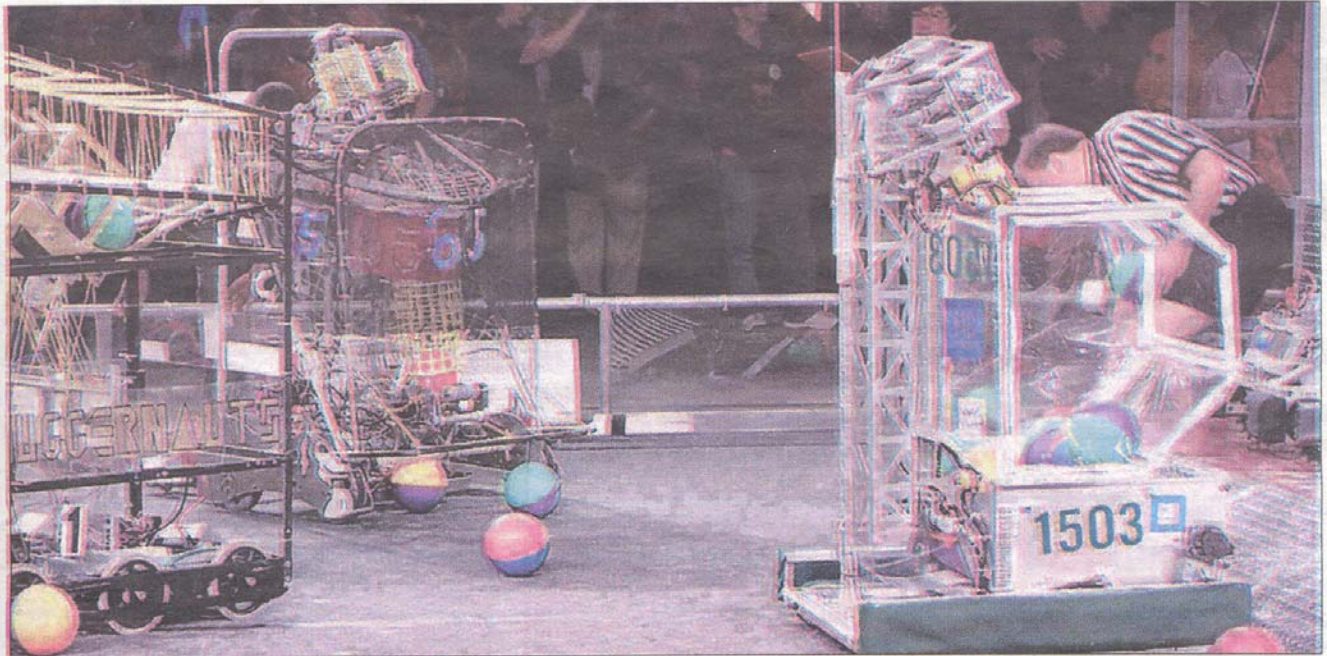


Canadian robots invade motor city



Westlane Secondary School's robot, number 1503, shoots hoop after hoop in the Great Lakes Regional in Detroit. The team placed first with a 30.5 game point average. No American team came close.

Westlane robotics team stuns Americans

CALAN BOYLE
Senior Staff Reporter

They called them the Canadian invasion.

On March 9 to 11, the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics team from Westlane Secondary School took their basketball playing robot to compete in Detroit for the Great Lakes Regionals, obliterating the competition.

"We're the first Canadians to win the competition. We were ranked first in the entire thing," said FIRST member Evelyn Palleschi.

The Great Lakes Regional competition is known as the toughest high school robotics event outside of the world championships, which the team will fly to Atlanta for on April 27.

The robot is roughly five feet tall and is programmed to make baskets on a makeshift three-on-

three basketball court. Players can score by launching balls into lower baskets worth one point and higher baskets worth three.

According to Palleschi, the team's on-court strategy was to get to their spot first, and launch 10 balls at the three-point goal before the other teams have a chance to get position.

During the first ten seconds of the game, everything is pre-programmed. Other teams watched how the Spartonics were programmed and adjusted their robots to block them or try and knock them out off course.

This maneuver failed in a large part thanks to one of the team member's ingenious idea to install wheel locks and "a gyro, a sensor that corrects positioning," said Palleschi.

"They called us the Canadian invasion," said team member Bryan Hui. "Everyone knew we were strong so they went after us."

The team had only six weeks to build and test the robot before the competition. None of their accomplishments would have been possible without the generous support of their sponsors and mentors from General Motors. Other sponsors included the District School Board of Niagara, the City of Niagara Falls, the Niagara Falls Tourism Board, Star Warning

Systems, and Lizard Tree.

"It's stressful knowing you have to get it out on time," remembered team member Lauren Homes. "Once you're in it you don't stop."

Holmes may have been making an understatement.

The FIRST crew worked from 3 p.m. until 9 or 10 p.m. every night after school on the project. Palleschi estimates that they put in at least 40 hours a week, as much as a regular full-time job.

"We all have to cooperate and get along," said Hui who added that not all FIRST members were builders or pilots, but that students slaved for hours behind the scenes working on marketing, media, fundraising and organization.

After shocking a host of American schools with their dominance at the Great Lakes competition, FIRST is now looking forward to Atlanta.

"We get to meet other experienced teams," said Hui.

With mounting travel and operational costs involved, organizers are looking for businesses in the community who might be interested in sponsoring the group. For more information on the Spartonics, you can visit www.spartonics.org or www.niagarafirst.org.