

Illinois Tech Robotics, IIT host FIRST Tech Challenge Championship

Kori Bowns

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Illinois Tech Robotics (ITR) has been supporting the endeavors of youth Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education through partnerships with FIRST Robotics for more than a decade. FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) is an international youth robotics organization that offers robotics competitions for students grades 1-12. This past weekend on February 21, 2015, ITR played a large role in hosting the Illinois FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) State Championship at IIT.

The FIRST Tech Challenge was founded in 2005 with 130 teams participating in 6 regional tournaments; today, there are over 4500 teams around the world that compete in over 200 qualifying events that culminate in a world championship held in April in Saint Louis, MO. Students on FTC teams are

generally between the ages of 12 and 18. Each year, they receive a different challenge that the robot they build must complete. The game is played on a 12 foot square field, and this year, teams' robots must move wiffle balls of different sizes into different goals on the field in order to score points.

The 32 teams of students who arrived at Hermann Hall on Saturday morning were among the best FTC teams in the state of Illinois; in order to advance to the FTC State Championship, teams had to rank in the top 30% of all teams in the state at qualifying events that were held earlier this school year.

Vital to the success of the event were the over 100 volunteers who gave their time on Saturday, more than 20 of whom were IIT students. Volunteers assisted with inspecting teams' robots to ensure they follow all rules, checking in teams as they arrive to the event, refereeing matches, tallying scores, maintaining field electronics, and announcing play-by-play of the action on the field.

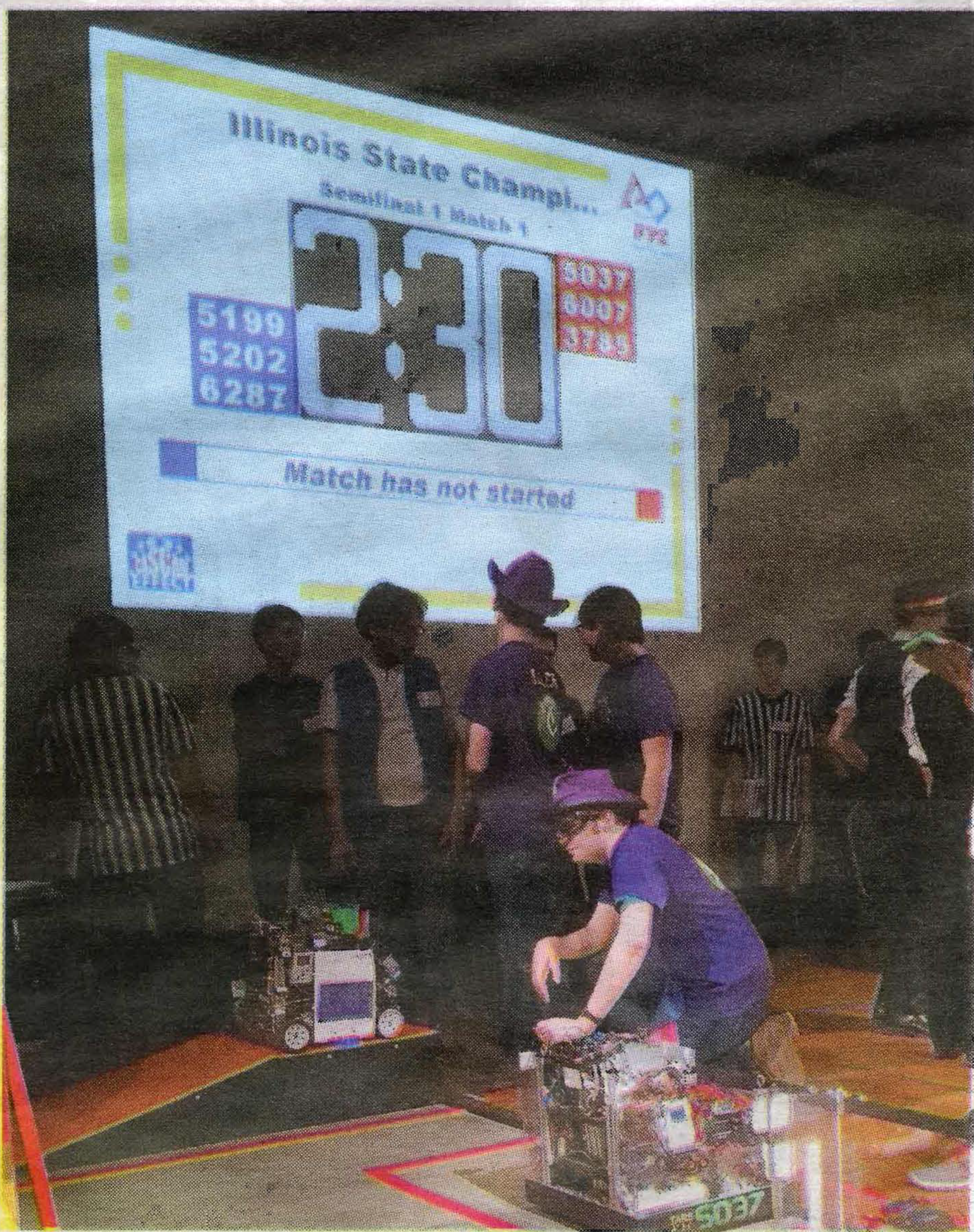
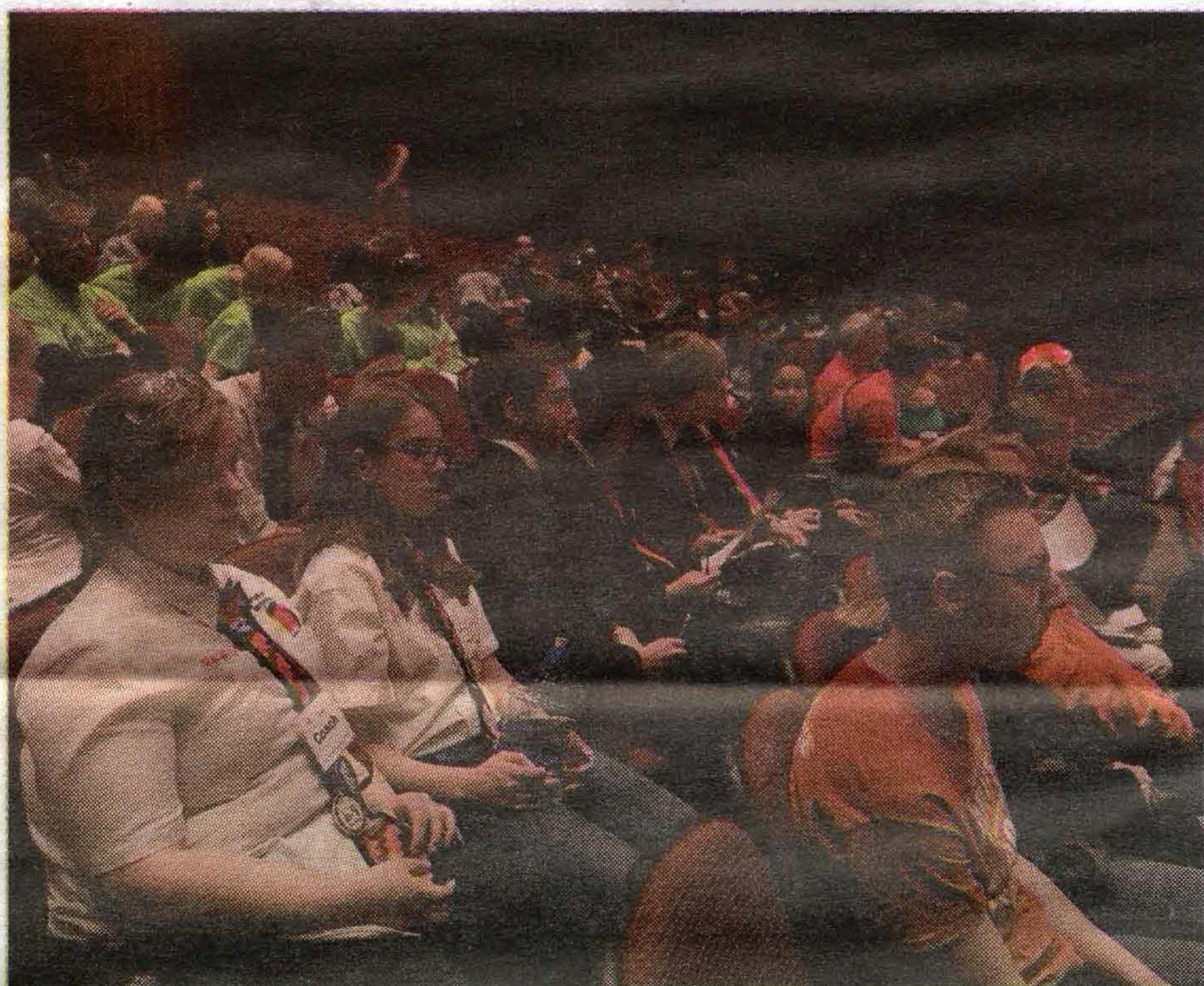
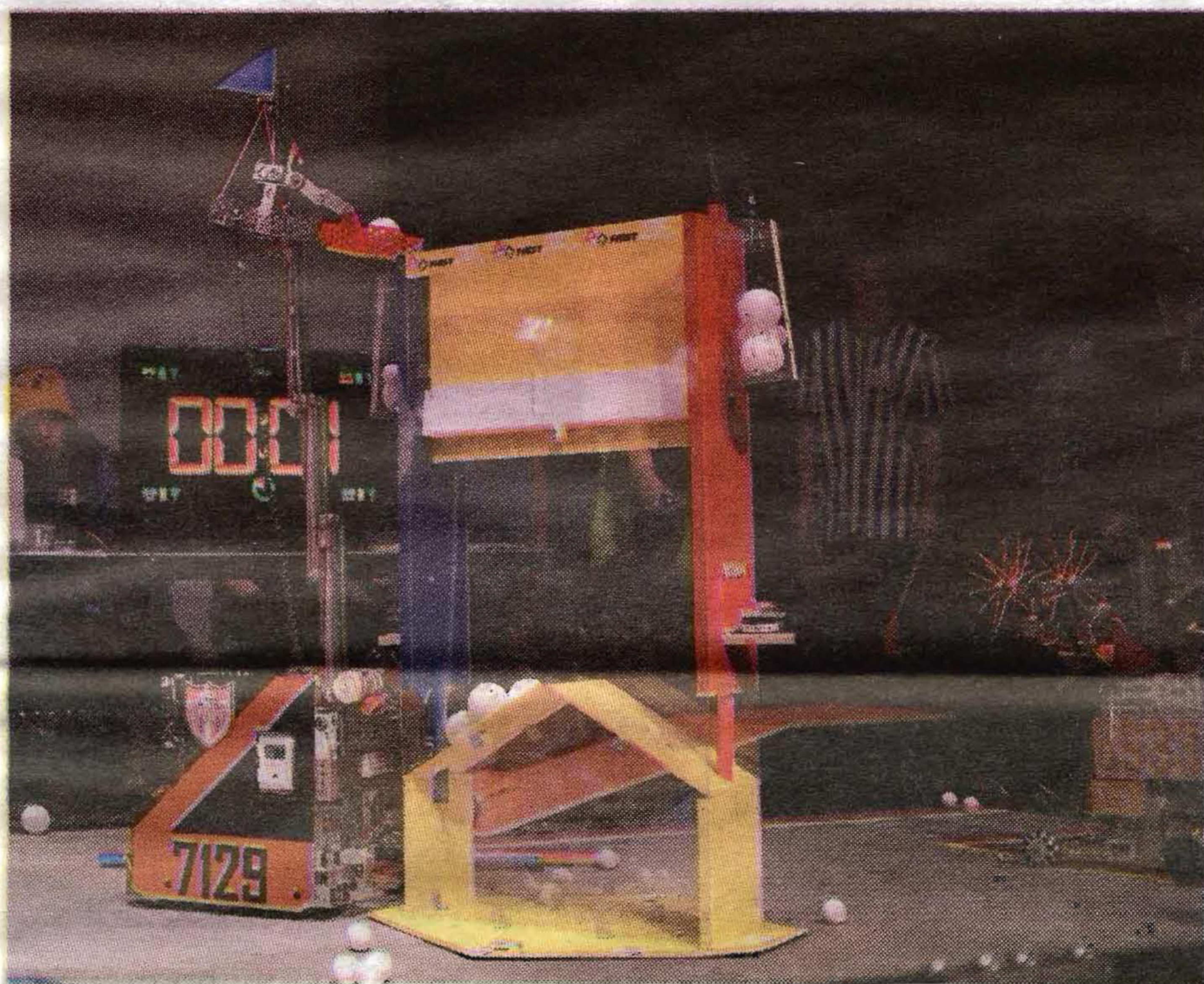
The event began with an opening ceremony to welcome teams and spectators and to pump up the crowd. Shortly following were several hours of round-robin qualification matches. In these matches, teams were paired up randomly with another team at the event, and played against another randomly-assigned alliance of two teams. After these matches concluded, teams were ranked according to the number of matches they won, and then the top 4 teams chose their partners to continue on to playoff matches before a champion was crowned.

While matches are taking place, a team of judges representing many facets of the professional world also observes teams and interviews them between their matches. Teams are eligible for a variety of awards ranging from best robot design to most effective community outreach to most team spirit. The most prized award in the FIRST Tech Challenge is awarded to a team that performs well on the field and across all judging categories. The top eight

teams at the Illinois FTC State Championship will be advancing to a regional event in Iowa in March, and the top teams there advance to the world championship.

Illinois Tech Robotics students coordinated logistics and volunteers for the event. Sponsors for the event included Illinois Institute of Technology, IIT Online, and Motorola Solutions. Media coverage at the event included the Chicago Tribune and WGN-TV news. FIRST events held at IIT through Illinois Tech Robotics annually bring hundreds of high school students interested in STEM to the university's campus.

Those interested in volunteering their time with FIRST or otherwise getting involved with Illinois Tech Robotics can contact the organization at robotics.iit@gmail.com, join the organization on HawkLink, or join weekly meetings held Friday evenings at 7 p.m. in their robotics lab in 3424 S. State Street.



Photos by Kori Bowns and Angela Kuqo