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# TechNews

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## Real steel: students fight for victory at JSDC

By Allen Baker  
TECHNEWS WRITER

The roaring of spectators. The crash of angled steel on Lexan plates. The mixing aromas of sizzling pizza and smoking lithium-polymer batteries. The sharp hiss of pressurized pneumatics.

This is the twenty-fifth annual Jerry Sanders Design Competition. Hosted by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and sponsored by Advanced Micro Devices, this contest draws robotics teams from schools all over the Midwest. Among the colleges that regularly attend are both the Chicago and Urbana-Champaign campuses of the University of Illinois, Valparaiso University, and, of course, Illinois Institute of Technology. Just one of many attractions at UIUC's Engineering Open House, the Competition has occurred yearly since 1987, making it one of the oldest robotics competitions in America.

This is where a group of twenty-five IIT students chose to spend the past weekend. Instead of catching up on sleep, studying for impending midterm exams, or toiling away on the local Minecraft server, they instead opted to hole themselves up in an aging basketball court and work unceasingly from dawn until dusk to wring out the last kinks from their precious robots. They did not do it for the chance to skip classes, the generous monetary prizes, or even for the traditional dinner at China-town Buffet. They did it to bring honor and glory to their school.

But they also do it for thrills. One who attends JSDC shall witness engineering in its purest form, unbound from sterile laboratories and droning professors. Rather than gazing on from a distant seat in a lecture hall, participants are flung into roiling pits where problems strike robots like thunderbolts and solutions are hashed out with generous

amounts of hot glue and zip-ties. Entire source code files are rewritten on the fly and every inch of electrical wiring probed with multimeters.

For IIT's valiant robotics team, Illinois Tech Robotics, these days of chaos are nothing new. Since first joining the competition many years ago, ITR has excelled on the battlefield with its innovative machines. The oldest surviving specimen is the R.M.S. Dick Roslund, which has claimed victory in the arena twice in the past three years.

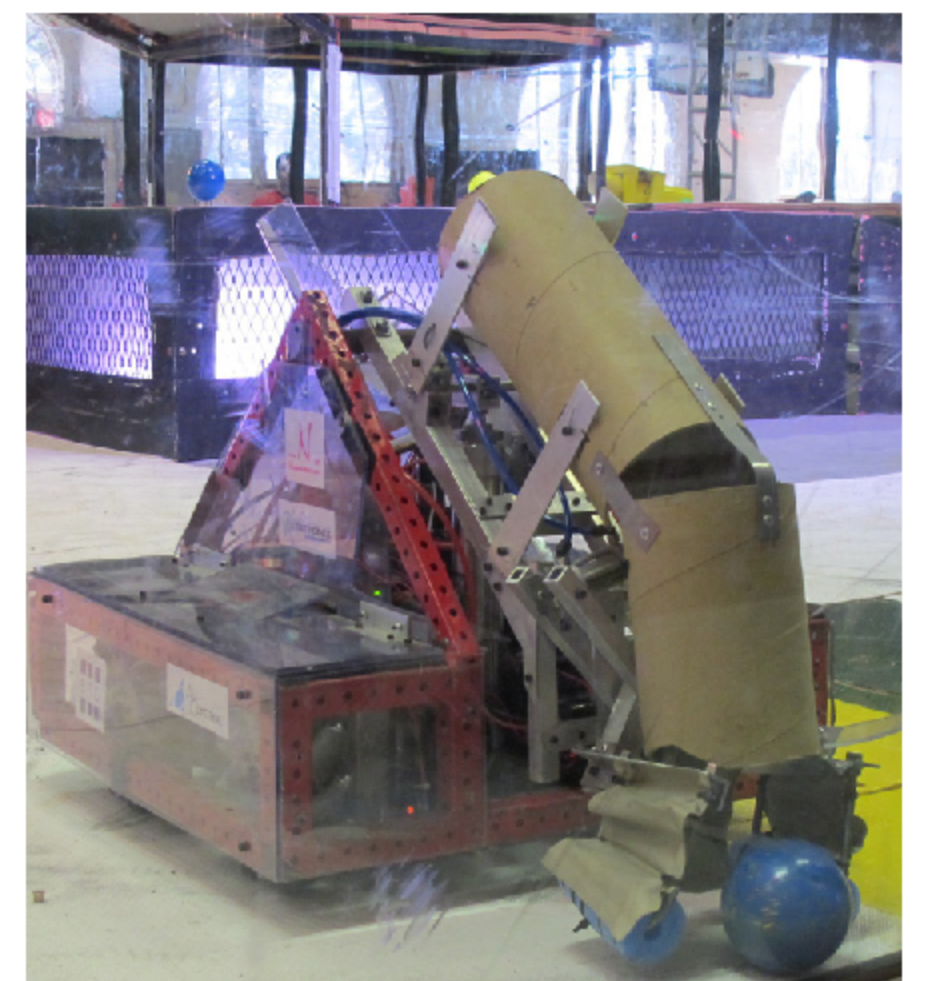
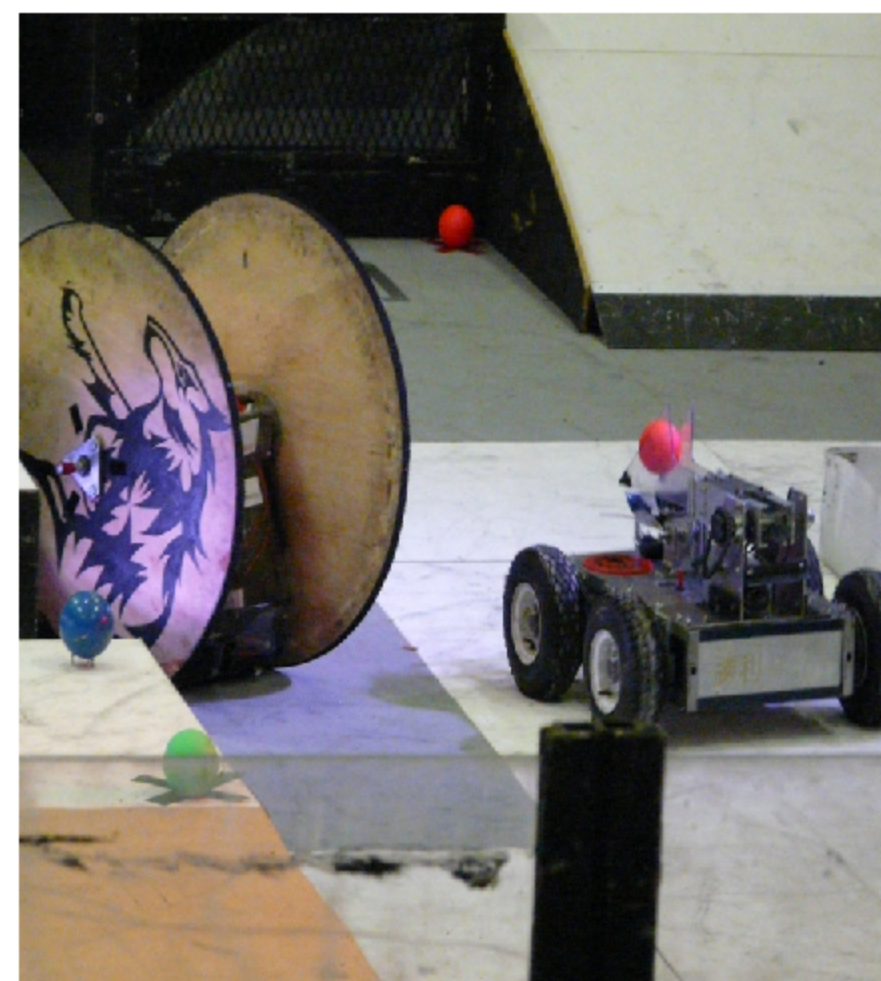
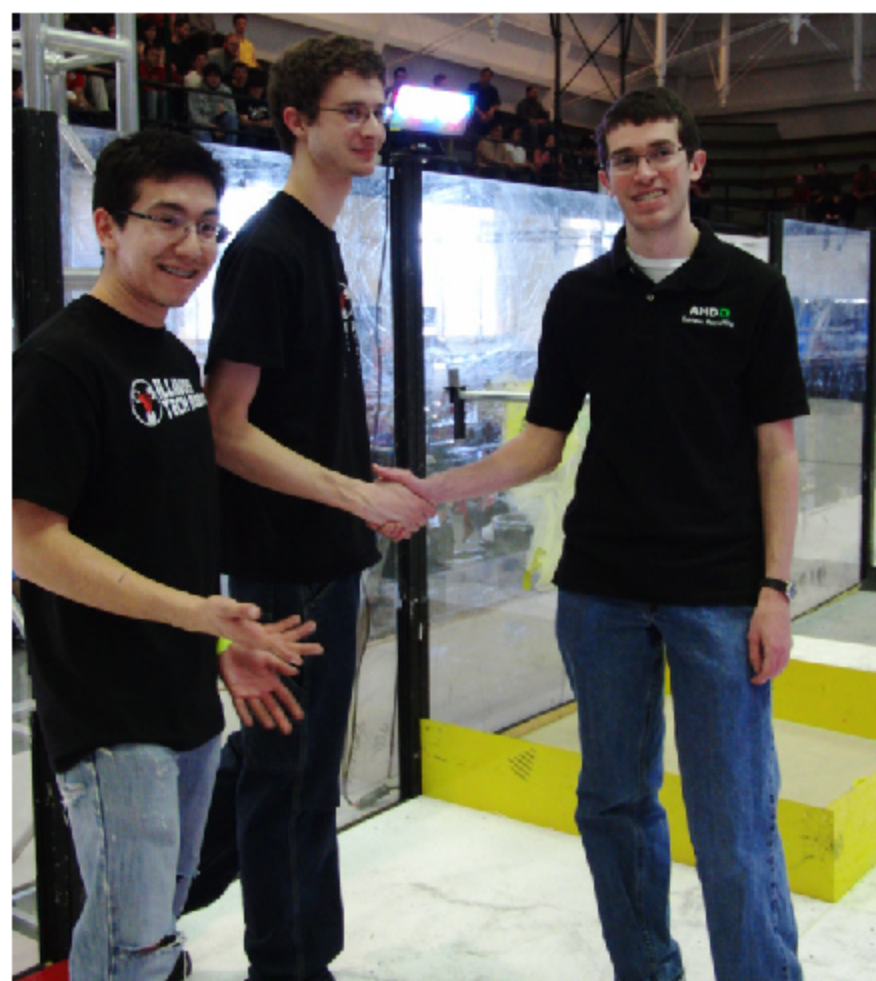
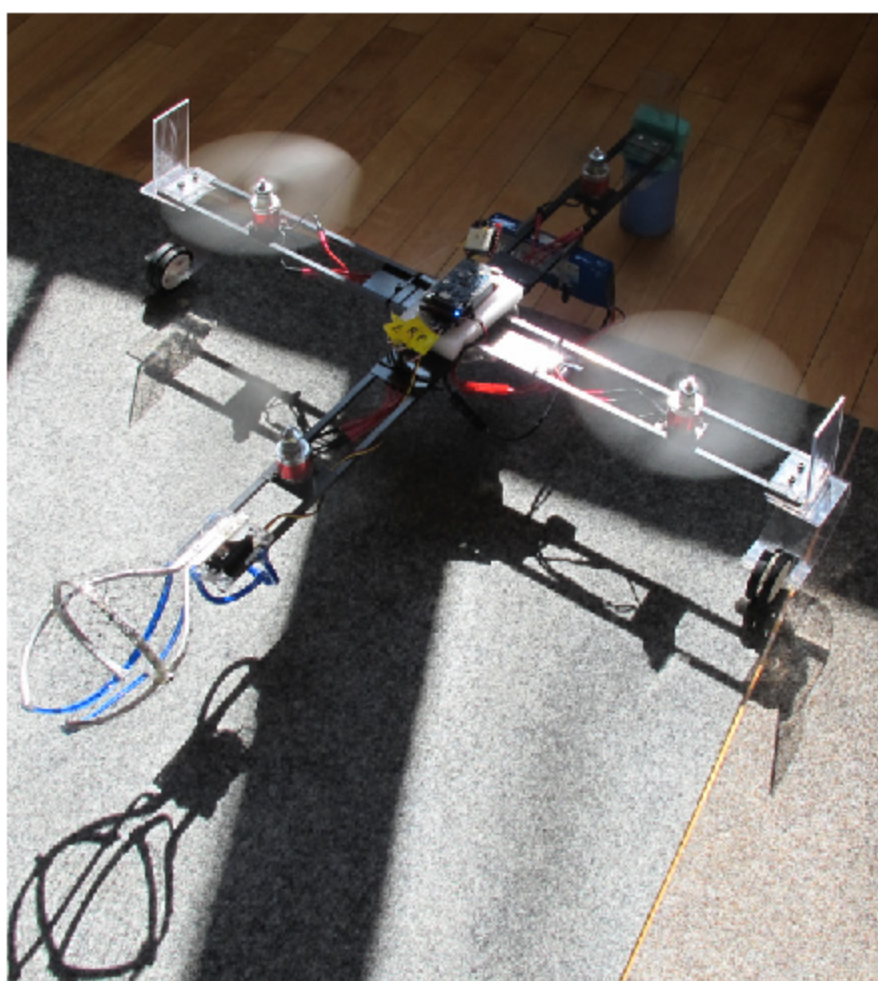
Its stellar performance can be attributed to its mechanum wheels, which allow it to strafe and spin on the spot, and effective manipulators designed to capture and score game pieces with astonishing speed and accuracy. The other members of ITR's lineup for this year's competition included Fenrir, a fearsome two-wheeled beast, Penguin, the only aerial robot in the entire competition, and Reaper, the

newest addition to the fleet.

Spectators can always count on ITR to deliver a fantastic show, and this year was no exception. All four robots gave their best in the numerous matches throughout the two days.

Roslund tore through all qualifying matches to gain a place in the final match, where it earned fourth place after an especially furious match. During the demolition round that always follows the distribution of prizes, Fenrir spun and smashed into competitors with the force of a thousand suns.

Enticed by the exciting events that "IIT's best kept secret," gets to bear witness to? Do the fires of engineering burn within? Illinois Tech Robotics is always looking for bright and eager minds to bring fresh ideas to the table so they can chew them up and spit them back out. Email them at [robotics@iit.edu](mailto:robotics@iit.edu) or visit [www.illinoistechrobotics.org](http://www.illinoistechrobotics.org) for more information.



Photos by Kori Bowns, Ting Wong, & Emilie Woog