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Illinois Tech Robotics competes at JSDC

Kori Bowns

BUSINESS MANAGER

While it might not be an uncommon thing at IIT to pull all-nighters working on a final architecture project or studying for an exam, few students would choose to stay up all night working on something when there isn't a final grade looming over their head. However, the Illinois Tech Robotics team proved themselves dedicated to bringing prestige to their school as they worked from sunset to sunrise over the past week prepping their robotic creations for competition.

This past weekend, Illinois Tech Robotics (ITR) made their way to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to compete in the 26th annual Jerry Sanders Creative Design Competition (JSDC). JSDC is a two-day competition sponsored by AMD that ITR competes in each year. JSDC is one of the oldest robotics competitions in America, and routinely draws competitors from schools across the Midwest. This year, the 26 robots competing represented both the Chicago and Urbana-Champaign campuses of the University of Illinois, College of DuPage, Valparaiso University, Northern Illinois University, and, of course, Illinois Institute of Technology.

The game challenge varies each year, and this year, teams had to build robots that could pick up and manipulate flexible disc cones. In each match, four robots competed against each other, each robot responsible for cones of a certain color on the field. In order to score points, robots had to be able to pick up cones of their color from various locations on the field, and then hang the cone around a peg. When a robot did so, it became in control of a "zone" on the field surface below the peg. For every 10 seconds a robot controlled a zone, it would receive 1, 3, or 5 points, depending on the location of the zone.

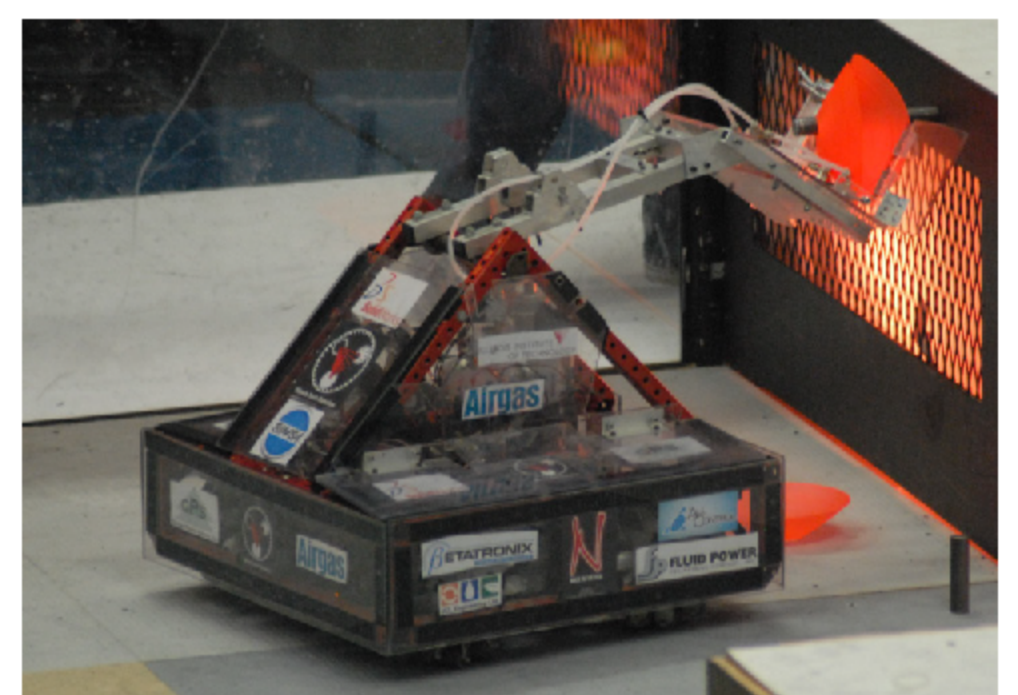
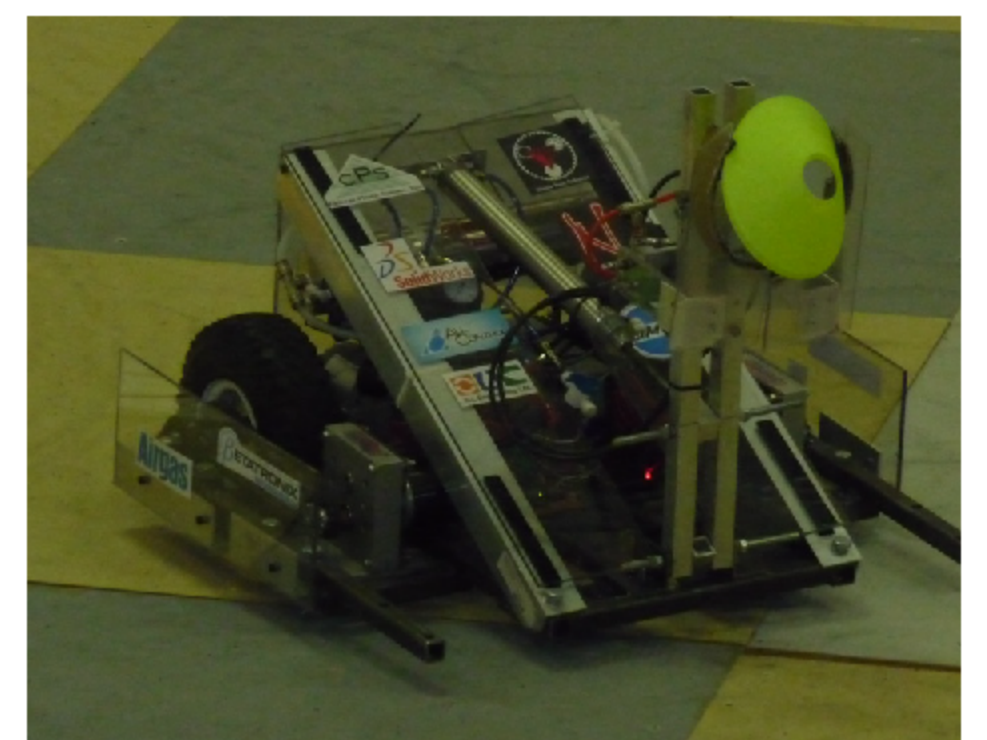
On Thursday afternoon, 25 students and five robots departed IIT and were hauled down to Kenney Gymnasium on UIUC's campus. This year's entries from ITR included a few tried and true robots and some newer ro-

bots that had been created this year. Notable among ITR's entries is Fenrir, a two-wheeled gravity-drive robot, who moves by using its motors to shift the frame and center of gravity of the robot forwards to propel it, somewhat like a Segway. Another of ITR's fearsome competitors was Goliath, a heavy robot that aims not only to score points, but to keep other teams from scoring points through aggressive defense.

On the first day of competition, Illinois Tech Robotics faced many challenges and struggled to compete in any of their scheduled matches. Coding difficulties and manipulator problems plagued all of the robots, but luckily, the majority of the other JSDC competitors had the same problems and were likewise unable to participate in matches or score any points. After the day of mediocre matches, the ITR team stayed late at the competition venue to work out any kinks, grabbed their traditional dinner at Champaign's Chinatown Buffet, then rushed back to their hotel rooms to continue work, many members staying up late into the night.

By Saturday morning, things were beginning to look up for the ITR team; all of their robots were moving and the majority of them had functioning manipulators. Other schools had no idea what to expect from the Illinois Tech students, as they had few chances to observe their work in the first day of matches. ITR fought hard through their remaining general matches before elimination matches began, showing that they had the skill and the heart to be contenders in the competition.

After two grueling days of round robin competition and elimination matches, the finalist robots were determined. While the first place competitor was a creation from the UIC Engineering Design Team, ITR's Goliath and Fenrir fought valiantly and advanced to the quarter final matches. At the end of the day, even though ITR didn't take home any medals, the team showed their skills in both engineering design and teamwork, taking home a lot of lessons and ideas to be implemented in coming competitions.



Photos by Ryan Kamphuis & Karina Powell