

AMMS students place second in regional robotics tournament

ZEKE WRIGHT *Bennington Banner*

Posted:

BenningtonBanner.com

Monday May 13, 2013

ARLINGTON -- Local students appear to know how to build a good robot after a team from Arlington placed second overall in this year's Botball regional tournament in Lowell, Mass.

The only Vermont school out of 23 to participate in the New England competition on May 4, students on the Arlington Middle School Robotics team went undefeated in six double-elimination rounds to win first place in the competition portion of the tournament hosted by NASA and the University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Robotics club advisor Karen Schroeder, a science teacher at Arlington Memorial, said she was proud of her students.

"They are a young team but they faced each challenge and did a great job representing their school," Schroeder said in a written release. The team from Arlington also won the KISS Award (Keep it Simple, Students) for their robot's efficient design and strategy.

This year's theme, "The Mars Sample Return Mission," challenged students to build and program two autonomous robots to collect and prepare samples on Mars for their return to Earth.

The "samples" at the competition included organic and inorganic materials, a "botguy," and a red cube.

In addition to the competition portion, the tournament also factors in documentation and a presentation to the judges on tournament day.

In written comments from two members of the team, students said they encountered some obstacles building their two robots, named Kitty and Kirby, but overcame those challenges during the 10-week build.

Eighth-grader Jena Staab said the team originally had a different goal for their Kirby robot, but scrapped that idea and refocused on a different task in the competition.

At the beginning, Staab said each student built their own claw and arm and plows to compare. "We picked the best parts of each of them and put them into one robot. Some kids only build parts, others built and programmed, but we all worked really together," she wrote.

Seventh-grader Sofie Pedemonti said the Kitty robot had two motors to power its wheels. "Having just two wheels made turning Kitty really fast," she said. "One of the student's parents built the course table for us so we were able to constantly test the robot any time we made a change."

Mack molding and Quadra-Tek sponsored the team's efforts while Bennington College Professor Andrew Cencini worked with students on their programming skills. The team was formed last year, and was one of only a handful at the tournament comprised entirely of middle schoolers.

Described as a "standards-based educational robotics program," the Botball program features 17 tournaments this year across the country, and a few internationally, for middle school and high school students.