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Bensalem robotics team heading to international competition

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The Fightin' Robotic Owls are flying at warp speed into the international spotlight with their robot named Tim.

In just their second year of competition, the members of the Bensalem High School robotics team have qualified for the FIRST Robotics World Championship that begins Wednesday at the Edward Jones Dome in St. Louis, Missouri.

“It has been an experience getting here,” junior and robotics team member Harsh Bhathal said.

FIRST stands for “For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology” and was created by Segway inventor Dean Kamen. The initial FIRST competition was staged 24 years ago to create an engineering type activity that combines the rigors of science and technology with the excitement of a sporting event. More than 3,100 high school-aged teams from around the world have been participating in this year’s competition, according to organizers.

The Bensalem kids started, just like all their competitors, by spending about six weeks constructing their robot using parts provided by the FIRST competition under the watchful eye of their eight coaches. They programmed Tim to perform various feats to help the team earn points during FIRST Stronghold battles with and against other robots.

During the matches, two alliances of three robots each go on a quest to score points while breaching their opponents’ fortifications, weakening their tower with boulders, and capturing the opposing tower in the last 20 seconds of the battle, organizers said on the robotics championship website.

Bhathal is one of the BHS robot's drivers who operates the machine's controls during the matches.

"It is actually really hard," he said. "You know there are robots that can do better than ours. But it is all about our strategy. We destroy defenses in the middle."

There are about 25 students on the Fightin' Robotic Owls team. They qualified for one of the 600 team slots the international championship by placing second on April 16 in a district match at Lehigh University.

"We didn't think we were going to get this far," said Kady Dennis, a sophomore who serves as captain of the robot's fabrication team.

She is looking forward to the three-day competition. "I think it is going to be great," she said.

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