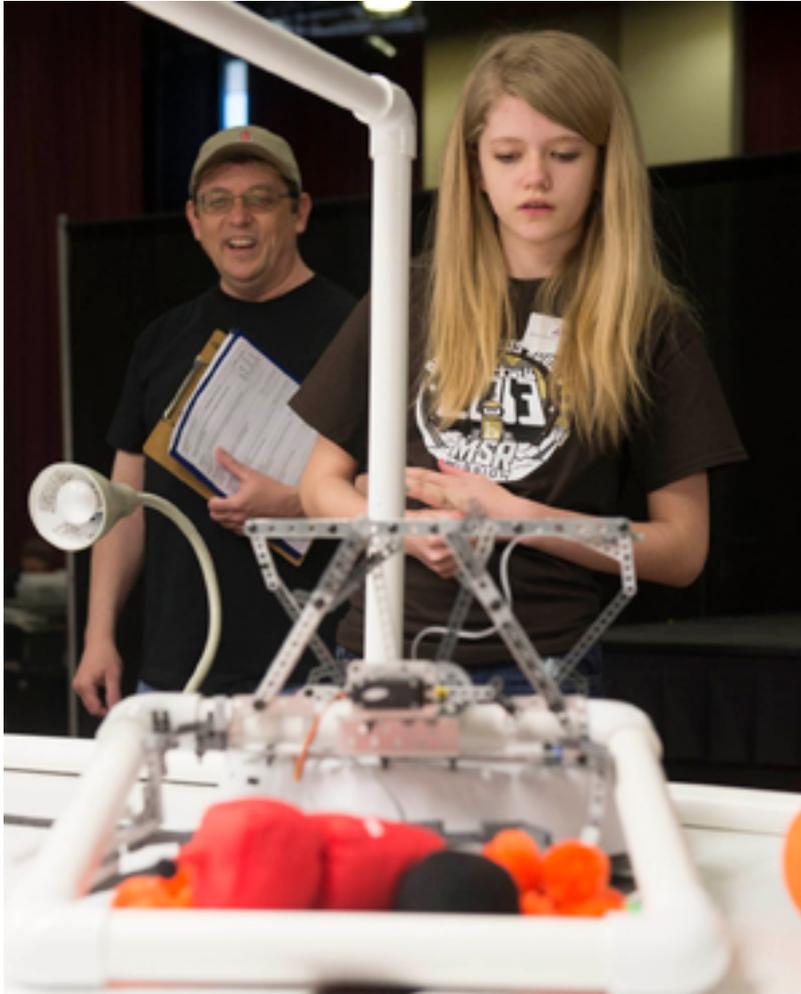


Belleville East High School wins 2013 Botball Tournament at SIUE



Belleville East High School won the seventh annual Greater St. Louis Botball Tournament on Saturday, April 20, at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. A record 36 teams competed before a steady crowd of more than 400 throughout the day in the Morris University Center Meridian Ballroom.

In Botball, the overall winner is determined as a sum of a team's score in seeding rounds, the double-elimination tournament and in documentation developed before the competition and presented at the competition. Each of these categories is equally weighted when determining overall score.

In the seeding rounds, Belleville East High School, Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois, Pana Junior High School and The Daniela Rus Team from Wabash Valley took first through fourth place, respectively. Belleville East had the highest scoring seeding round with 186 points.

Five teams had perfect documentation scores: Alton Middle School, Belleville East, Edwardsville High School, The Daniela Rus Team from Wabash Valley and The Maja

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Mataric Team from Wabash Valley.

The double-elimination tournament found Pana Junior High School, Edwardsville, Bond County Community #2 and Belleville East finishing first through fourth place, respectively. PJHS topped defending overall champion Edwardsville in the final of the double-elimination event.

Bond Community reached the final four and topped Belleville East before falling to Edwardsville. PJHS, a first-time Botball team, then walked away undefeated in the double-elimination tournament with its victory over EHS.

Overall point scoring put Belleville East in first place with 2.88 points out of 3.0. The Girl Scouts moved up a notch this year to take second overall with a total 2.72 points. Scoring 2.66 out of 3.0, Pana Junior High School took third. Fourth place went to Edwardsville with a score of 2.60. Complete details on the scores can be found at <http://www.botball.org/gsl/2013/tournament/results>.

Gary Mayer, Ph.D., an assistant professor of computer science in the SIUE School of Engineering, is one of the event organizers. "We had a great tournament this year, and the judges were especially pleased to see the assortment of technical skills and ideas brought by all of the teams," Mayer said.

Mayer noted that one of highlights of the tournament was Pana Junior High School's win over Edwardsville High School. "It was quite a thrill to see a junior high team, brand new to Botball, do so well by winning the double-elimination," Mayer said. "People frequently are surprised to learn that the kids as young as 6th grade compete head-to-head against high school teams. I always tell them that they can hold their own, and this demonstrates just that.

"Another team of note is the Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois. This was their second year, and they placed in the top three overall both times. The fact that the tournament isn't locked up by veteran teams is just great. It shows that all of the teams have a real chance when they get in there and apply themselves."

Mayer also finds the parents to be entertaining, too. "At the Botball tournament, no adults are allowed in the pit area," he said. "It's student team members only. That's the great thing about Botball—it's student-focused. The mentors did their part in the preceding weeks and now it's time for the kids to shine, and they do great! The students are all heads-down, focused on modifying their robots' hardware and software in getting ready for the next round. But the parents...we had to set up extra rope and post guards to keep them out of the Pit."

The theme of this year's tournament was the Mars Sample Return (MSR) Mission. The students built autonomous robots that traveled around a game board with four goals:

- Retrieve samples cached by the Mars Science Laboratory, Curiosity
- Gather, sort, and separate unusual and interesting samples detected from

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orbit

- Load the samples into return containers
- Assemble the return vehicle (rocket) and prep it for launch

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