

## After School All Stars Students Take 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

I woke up to the taps on my mom's car window; it was my teammates Nicholas Cohen and Juan Lopez. That's when I realized this is the beginning of our trip to St. Simons Island for our After School All Stars/First Lego League Competition. Six long hours later we reached Sea Palms Resort and completed our hotel registration.

Around 5:00 PM the games began. Josh Binderman and I were first up. We walked into the room faced the two judges to start our presentation. It was a rocky start because our computer couldn't pick up the Wi-Fi. We quickly worked it out and found a signal. We presented our Food Factor presentation to the judges. Afterward, the judges asked us several questions then dismissed us from the room. 6:00 PM finally rolled around, the Robot Olympics commenced. The lead judge went to each team critiquing, giving very helpful dos and don'ts. After hearing the helpful suggestions I observed my teammates Bryce Byrd, Rees Viersen, and Vincent Johnson diligently working together to make final tweaks. Dylan Feterston was focused at making some last minute programming changes. Shayan Lalianpour ran back and forth from the track to the part box delivering additional pieces for our robot. I overheard the judge tell Coach Thompson "for a team that got their equipment five and a half weeks late they sure are a piece of competition". He was so right; we were in it to win it!

Each team went to the track with their robot. A judge with a clipboard was at each table watching with a hawk's eye ensuring that all obstacles were completed. For every obstacle our robot accomplished we gained points. As our robot went through the track for the official competition I noticed it was reaching accomplishments some other teams were not. I just knew we were going to place with our skills; we just had to place, and we did. Sandy Springs Charter Middle School After School All Stars placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in the TSA's 1<sup>st</sup> Lego League competition.

Saturday at the crack of dawn, well actually it was 9:00 a.m., but it felt pretty early. There was a leadership skills and training. First each of us broke into groups and we went to different leadership skills classes that lasted for about an hour. The beauty of it was that we didn't go to the same classes so we each got an important piece of information to help us in life. After lunch

Sandy Spring Charter Middle School hosted a technical session. We discussed real- world engineering challenges by building Lego- based robots. We showed them the simplicity and the financial ease of designing and building a robot online.

Sunday was the last day and the day of the award ceremony. We were bringing the 3<sup>rd</sup> place trophy home to Sandy Spring Charter Middle School. TSA Leadership Conference was a great experience. This trip was very serendipitous, simply because I went expecting to compete and learn how to succeed in a world of technology. However; I walked away learning so much more. I have truly learned the beauty of teamwork and gracious professionalism. It isn't just about tolerating each other until you reach success, but it's more about being genuine, caring and supporting your team through the ups and downs, whether you agree or not, win lose or draw. There is no I in team.

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