

# ***Robotics team makes it to Ontario district championship***

**M. McKinnon**

An outpouring of support - corporate, commercial, and personal - got the Atikokan Voyageur robotics team to the Ontario district championships in Mississauga last weekend, where they turned in another strong performance.

The full team was able to make the trip: Keira Cameron, Nathan Rusnak, and Eiji Moller, with teacher Graeme Bond and mentor Mike Cameron. Two members of Team 1114 from St. Catherines, Jack Warner and Jack Hunter, joined the Vs for the weekend competition.

"They are a hall of fame team, and helped us out at Ryerson," said Bond.

Team 114, Simbotics, won the Ryerson event, made the finals of this provincial championship, and qualified to compete this coming weekend at the First Robotics international championship in Detroit.

"We were the smallest team, by far, at the event, and really needed the extra team members," said Bond. "And the two Jacks were just terrific."

He was again impressed with the camaraderie among all of the players, and the cooperative vibe that characterized the whole event. At First Robotics, it's known as coopertition - 'displaying unqualified kindness and respect in the face of fierce

competition'.

"Everybody wants to see your team at its best when the competition starts, so there is a real ethic about helping out - at least until the contest begins."

The two Jacks helped the Voyageurs upgrade their robot during the event, advised them on game strategy, and served as drive coach (Jack Hunter) and human player (Jack Warner) when play was on.

The Voyageurs' robot proved to be especially excellent at playing defense, so the team decided to play to their strength. That meant sacrificing some points on the

**See 'Robotics', page 3**

# Has First Robotics experience stoked a new appetite among AHS students?

From page 1

Voyageur team score, but improving the score of their three-team alliance in each match.

The way the event is set up, three teams are randomly allied for each match, so their three robots take to the course (which is as big as a tennis court) against three robots from the opposing alliance. Each alliance scores points in a variety of ways, mostly by handling and moving cubes. The most sophisticated robots can score big by 'climbing the scale'. Team points are what decides the match winner, but the organizers also track the scoring of each team's robot so that it also gets a score for each match.

The Voyageur robot was a strong defender because of its excellent mobility and its good lifting capabilities. When an alliance captain asked the team to concentrate on defense, they did so.

"We wanted to build a reputation that would help us get picked for the finals," said Bond.

Each team plays a dozen three-minute games; the Voyageurs' alliances won four of their twelve games during the qualifying round. The top eight teams then get to pick two alliance partners each for the playoff round. The Voyageur robot's strong defense is what helped it get chosen for one of the playoff alliances at Ryerson.

"We were disappointed when we didn't get picked," said Bond. "Especially because we knew we had a better robot than a few that were picked."

He did allow, though, that the overall quality of the robots, and the teams operating them, was far stronger than at the Ryerson or Durham events the team attended earlier. It was, after all, the district championship, and it showed.

The event was a last hurrah for two team members - Muller and Rusnak graduate this year - but Cameron is definitely looking forward to competing again. And Bond has talked to several students who have expressed interest and can now see much more clearly what the event is all about. So he would like to see another Voyageur team next year.

It will probably come down to money. It costs

at least \$1,000 to build a robot, and \$3,500 per event registration plus travel costs, probably the biggest single expense. Most teams in the south have a dozen or more sponsors, and they aren't facing anything like the travel costs AHS does.

This year, the school won \$8,000 in grants from the Argosy Foundation to get the program started; right now, Bond believes all it qualifies for next year is a \$2,000 grant. Xerox and Microsoft also help all teams.

The trip to the provincials this year was made possible by the support of six sponsors - OPG, Chris Viinikka CPA (Kenora), Colliers International, Niobe Lake Lodge, Atikokan Fire Rescue, and Atikokan Foodland - along with a number of personal contributions from family and friends, and some special support from the school and the school board.

"My sister lives in the Toronto area, and when one of her friend's kids mentioned he was going to the district championships in Mississauga, she mentioned me - and he knew all about the little team from way up north in Atikokan. We are getting our name out there."

## V birders land an overhand smash

M. McKinnon

The Atikokan High School badminton team simply overwhelmed the competition at the NorWOSSA championships in Sioux Lookout Wednesday.

The Voyageurs had 27 players qualify for the area championships (far more than any other school), and nineteen of them advanced to the NWOSSA championships this week in Thunder Bay. NorWOSSA gets 32 places at the regional championship, and 19 of them will be filled by players in Voyageur colours.

All told, AHS birders won six gold, three silver, and one bronze medals.

See 'Badminton', page 9

**Ranta**