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For Immediate Release

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MEDIA RELEASE

Schools Earn Invitation to FIRST Robotics World Championship

(Columbus, GA)-Joint efforts of Columbus High School, Hardaway High School, and Spencer High School earn an invitation to the World Championships for FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics in April 2012. It is the largest science and technology competition in the world for high school students. 30 students from the three local high schools took on the challenge to work together to build a robot that could play basketball against other teams.

Over sixty-thousand students from thousands of schools across the world wait until early January to see the unveiling of the new robotic game during the FIRST Kickoff event. The student teams have 6 weeks to design, build, and implement a fully functional robot capable of playing a game against other robots. The student members of the rookie team called the "Columbus Alliance" started their season by traveling to the campus of Georgia Tech to watch the live telecast of the kickoff event. They learned that they would be designing and building a robot that could play basketball. Six weeks may seem like a long time, but it is very short when a group of young people with limited experiences have to put together a technical solution in the form of a 100 pound robot that can play basketball.

Teachers from all three high schools with parents and volunteer engineers acted as mentors for the team. The goal was to set up this group of students for success. Most of the students started from scratch in terms of ability to use design software and even use basic tools.

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The regional event closest to Columbus is the Peachtree Regional in Duluth, Georgia. Eighteen rookie teams came to this competition and a total of 63 teams attended the event. The school teams represent some of the best science and technology schools from across the southeast. The odds were against the Columbus Alliance team. Students from Columbus and Hardaway had to arrange for transportation 3-5 times per week to get to Spencer High School where the team worked in one of the automotive bays. The team had a high percentage of freshman students as well, which is good for the future of the program and also challenging in terms of experience.

Students decided collectively to try to build a robot that had a high degree of functionality. This increased level of complexity made time and inexperience even greater obstacles. The end product was a robot that could shoot a basketball the length of the court, but the hardware and software were never tested together. The first time the driving team would practice would be at the competition. Despite the pressure, the team was able to get 50% of the robot to be functional during the competitions. In the end, the robot was one of the top 20 robots in the competition and made the finals before being eliminated against the number two robot team.

A big part of the FIRST competitions is how well the teams share what they have learned and how they impact the community. Team members worked with younger students who competed in a Lego robotics competition called FIRST Lego League (FLL). Columbus Alliance team members produced a coloring book for younger students about a group of students and their robot building efforts. Plans were initiated to work with the local chapter of AUVSI (Autonomous Unmanned Vehicles Systems International) to set up more schools in the local area who participate in FLL robotics. The end result would be younger students being able to move into high school and join the Columbus Alliance team. The judges at the Peachtree Regional were impressed enough to award this team one of 4 invitations to the World Championship event in St. Louis to be held on April 25-27, 2012. The team will now compete against teams from across the country and the world in both the robotics and outreach part of the competition.

For more information, access <http://columbusrobotics.wikispaces.com/>, or contact Luther Richardson at Richardson.Luther.W@muscogee.k12.ga.us, 706-748-2534.