

Waiialua robotics students score

Four islanders helped earn first place honors in a soccer tourney played by machines

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[Share](#) Waiialua High School robotics students teamed up with students from California and Michigan to win the Indiana Robotics Invitational yesterday in Indianapolis.

Their three-robot team won a World Cup-inspired soccer tournament played by the student-built, student-controlled machines.

"I think it really put Hawaii on the map as a state that's able to compete at a national and international level in the area of robotics, science, technology and mathematics," Waiialua coach Glenn Lee said. "It's probably one of the greatest accomplishments for our team in our 11-year history."

Earlier this year, Waiialua won robotics competitions in Hawaii, San Diego and Arizona, and competed in tournaments in Dallas and Atlanta.

Four Waiialua students worked with robotics students from Los Angeles and Bloomfield Hills, Mich. A total of 79 high schools were represented at the Indiana Invitational.

In the finals, the Hawaii-L.A.-Michigan team beat a team of students from Canada and Virginia in a best-of-five series, scoring 70 goals in the process.

"Winning with my team was awesome," said team construction co-leader Kortney Pao, a Waiialua senior. "I was pretty much in tears over the win."

Encouraging the students to engage in hands-on engineering training, the tournament required high school teams to design, build and operate a robot that could play soccer. Teams of three robots were formed.

The Waiialua team's 150-pound robot—named Poi Pounder X—was equipped with a leg for kicking and an arm for maneuvering across the field.

While Poi Pounder X was a strong scorer, Lee said, the California and Michigan robots played stout defense.

"We tried to come up with the best strategy with what our abilities are," said Lee, who has been leading the Waiialua robotics program since the 2000 season. "Our job was to score the goals."

The tournament, and others throughout the year, are organized by FIRST Robotics, founded by Segway inventor Dean Kamen. FIRST Robotics is an international educational program that encourages student engagement with science.

"This Indianapolis competition is literally the best of the best," said Corrie Heck, chief coordinator of the Hawaii Robotics Organizing Committee. "(The Waialua team) worked so hard in and out of the classroom, on and off season."

Tournament winners are automatically invited back to Indianapolis, and the Waialua robotics program—which has 31 students enrolled—is eager to defend its title.

In addition to bragging rights and a 2-foot-tall trophy, the Waialua students say the learning experience is a big part of the prize.

"I got involved with robotics because it was just a club that you could learn new things and gain so many different experiences," Pao said. "It's like a sport for the mind."

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