

Alliance selection changes

Colin - As soon as I heard about the change to the alliance selection format this year, I [took down all of my videos about FRC](#). As you know, I've long been frustrated with FIRST not getting mentors off of the field (I was a drive coach as a student and for the life of me couldn't understand why I was competing against adults), but I was willing to accept FIRST keeping the status quo there. But recently, extra adult positions have been added to the field, and I find the alliance selection change to be an active step in the wrong direction, a completely inexcusable change to the program. I can no longer use my YouTube platform to publicly support FIRST. After much thought, I have decided to keep mentoring the amazing students on my team, but I won't be volunteering this year, and I've canceled plans for two more videos about FRC topics, one that was to be filmed at the 2025 NC district championship.

The alliance selection is a time for student leaders to get a true spotlight, to represent their team, and especially for students who haven't been able to get in front of a large group of people before, that experience makes a lasting impression. I was on the field for alliance selection multiple times as a student, and I've seen many students on the team I've mentored get the same privilege. If you put a mentor out there next to them, it strips them of their autonomy. At best, the mentor doesn't say anything and there's a difference in presence that dilutes the moment; at worst, I expect we'll see overcompetitive adults overruling students who aren't even on their team.

It sounds like this change was motivated by a desire to avoid "bad" experiences, but this argument really doesn't stand up. First off, failures are the most powerful learning tool you could possibly have. Failures are important, and coddling students now won't help them in their future endeavors. Second, FRC bills itself as a "Sport for the Mind", but in no other sport or activity does the coach step in to take control in a bad situation. If a quarterback throws a bad pass, does the coach run in from the sidelines to take the ball? In a more performative analogy, if you're a high schooler in a school production and you forget your lines, does the teacher run out onto stage in your costume to replace you? Students need a sense of ownership over their teams, a sense of responsibility, and a sense that their actions are significant. I want my students to climb very high and very far above the safety net we provide as mentors. When they look over that precipice to the net far below, they understand what they do is important, and that they got themselves there.

For the sake of every student in this program, both those who get the privilege of representing their teams on the field, as well as their teammates who see their on-field peers as role models, please reconsider this change. The ambassadors from each team on the field during alliance selection should not include an adult.

FIRST should be finding new ways to add non-technical experiences that build students up rather than taking away the amazing life-building experiences that FRC offers.

Thank you,

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