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To Inspire and Beyond: Local FIRST Robotics Team Wins World Championship

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Cover Photo by Nithya Sharma



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To Inspire and Beyond: Local FIRST Robotics Team Wins World Championship

By Sydney Van Dreason | Photos by Nithya Sharma and Team Java The Hutt



We've all heard the rumors that one day robots will take over the world. Certainly, technology is advancing beyond our wildest dreams, and we are innovating and discovering new things every day.

One organization that believes strongly in the future of technology and science is For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST), a non-profit robotics community that strives to prepare youth for future leadership roles in STEM through inclusive, team-based robotics programs. These programs are designed for children ages four through 18 (PreK-12th grade) and operate under six core values: discovery, innovation, impact, inclusion, teamwork and fun.

Founded in 1989 by inventor Dean Kamen, FIRST has teams in over 100 countries around the world and has had participation

from almost 700,000 students in schools or in structured afterschool programs.

FIRST is divided into four main competitions based on age: Lego League Junior (FLLJ), Lego League (FLL), Tech Challenge (FTC) and Robotics Competition (FRC).

Java The Hutt, part of the I Will Mentorship Foundation, is a SWFL-based FTC robotics team that recently made history at the World Championship competition in April 2022. With their alliance partners, Team Delta Force from Arad, Romania and Team Up-A-Creek Robotics from Longmont, Colo., Team Java The Hutt won the Freight Frenzy game with their robot and became World Champions.

"Despite being at Worlds for the first time, Java The Hutt helped its alliance rise to become the tournament champions, winning the best of the three playoff matches," Nithya Sharma, Co-Mentor

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of the team, said. "In addition, Java The Hutt was also named as a finalist for the Innovate Award, which recognizes teams that have the most innovative and creative robot design solutions to any specific components in the FIRST Tech Challenge game."

Prior to attending the World Championship, Team Java The Hutt competed in three regional meets leading up to the Gulf Coast Robotics League Championship, where they won the topmost award, the Inspire Award. They also ranked in the top spot for their robot. At the State Championship in March 2022, the team competed against 49 other teams and won the overall first place Inspire Award, which qualified them for the World Championship, and set two state records with their alliance partners.

This is the first time Team Java The Hutt has attended the World Championship.

"It was very surreal feeling attending Worlds as we were able to see all of the top teams from around the world at one event," Cayden Keene, junior at Fort Myers High School, said. "Many of these teams we have looked up to and aspired to be like. So to be able to meet them in person and compete with them was mind-blowing."

Cayden is one of the six current members of Team Java The Hutt. The team has students from three different Lee County schools: Fort Myers High School, Bonita Springs High School and Dunbar High School.

Cayden is the lead mechanical designer for the team, and he is also part of the build team with Robbie Stewart, a sophomore at Bonita Springs High School.

"My favorite part about Worlds was seeing all of the best teams compete in one building and knowing not only the best FTC teams but the best FRC and FLL teams were there too," Robbie said. "It was so enjoyable getting to know members of the top teams around the world, and it made my trip very memorable."

Kyle Keene is a junior at Fort Myers High School and is the lead graphic designer, helping to create the engineering portfolio for the team. Quin Konicek is a sophomore at Bonita Springs High School and is the public relations and marketing lead for the team. Advaith Menon is a sophomore at Dunbar High School and is the documentation lead and web designer for the team.

Dhruba Sharma is a freshman at Fort Myers High School and is the lead programmer for the team.



"Attending Worlds certainly had an impact on my experience with robotics," Dhruba said. "I learned how unique some of the robot designs were and that there is always room for improvement. It was also very inspiring to see world-class teams, and this experience will motivate us for seasons to come."

Along with the six team members, Team Java The Hutt invited two team members from one of their mentee teams out of Naples to join them at the World Competition.

Before the World Championships was even on their radar, Team Java the Hutt worked relentlessly during the season to spread FIRST in the SWFL community. In total, they conducted over 40 individual outreach activities, including participating in media presentations (TV, magazine and radio), hosting STEM summer camps, coaching other local teams and spreading STEM education in the community.

"We have taught classes on programming, Computer Aided Design (CAD) and 3D printing to students in our community," Advaith said. "We have conducted robot demonstrations at various locations in our community. Additionally, we often showcase our robot and let the kids drive it around, which gets them more interested in STEM and robotics."

Team Java The Hutt is part of the I Will Mentorship Foundation, which seeks to bring E-STEM programs to those who live in communities that are underfunded and de-prioritized.

"Working under the I Will Mentorship Foundation, Java The Hutt is focused on spreading awareness of robotics and helping more students to be involved in STEM and robotics programs," Nithya said.

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Since the founding of Team Java The Hutts four years ago, the main goal has always been to spread awareness of robotics and to encourage more students to be involved with FIRST robotics programs.

"Doing robotics can certainly be a challenge; however, there are many people who are always willing to help you," Quin said. "Robotics competitions, and FIRST specifically, is all about challenging yourself to learn new skills, and in the end, working through that challenge will be well worth it."

For more information on Team Java The Hutts and their impact in SWFL, you can visit www.javatethehutts.org or email javatethehutts14725@gmail.com. To learn more about the FIRST organization, visit www.firstinspires.org.

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