


FIRST Robotics
200 Bedford Street
Manchester, NH 03101




To whom it may concern,

I have done *FIRST* for over 10 years. I participated in Jr. FLL in elementary school, then continued to have a great FLL career, then joined an FTC team when I was in 8th grade, and was given the honor of joining a great team during the Relic Recovery season who showed me the best of FTC. With 7 Sigma, I got to experience the entire design, build, program, and business process involved in being an FTC student. I got to participate in qualifiers, 2 different state championships, the (last) East super-regional tournament, and the world championship in Detroit. Unfortunately, that team was made mostly of seniors who graduated, and the team dissolved. I started a team at my school for the following Rover Ruckus season, and we got to participate in the Ohio state championship as a rookie team, which was awesome. Unfortunately, our season ended at States, but my family still traveled to world's in Detroit as spectators and conference presenters.

I adore FIRST. I have “drunk the kool-aid”, and love everything FIRST stands for. However, I have witnessed the epidemic rise of cheating. I saw cheating in FLL, and I saw it in FTC. My FIRST Lego League career started with Nature’s Fury in 2013, and while I account not seeing the cheating to being a naive 4th grader, but as I matured, I began to see the cheating, and it seemed to get worse all the way through my career to Animal Allies in 2016, when I graduated to FTC. In my first year in FTC, I was in over my head, and had no idea what I was looking at, but as I returned for my second year, the cheating became painfully evident.

Before I continue, I feel the need to explain what I count as cheating. This letter has little to do with the commonly checked cheating measures -- wifi interference, breaking the game, hacking/rootkiting the Robot Controller, including coffee beans in the robot, etcetera -- this letter is focused around the 2nd FLL core value (from my time): “We do the work to find solutions with guidance from our coaches and mentors”. Between FLL and FTC, I have seen an astronomical amount of coaches, mentors, and parents doing the work, and often it is *painfully* obvious. I could name several FLL teams that I interacted with over the year who could not answer simple questions about their robots, and I could say the same about FTC. Walking through the FTC pits during my 2 trips to the *world championships*, I have seen way too many parents’ and mentors’ hands deep in the robots or flying on the keyboard, even of teams who have won or have come extremely close to winning.



I play by the rules. I make an effort to keep myself and my team legitimate. While it is frustrating to be at a tournament with my team, and to watch a team entirely made of 8th graders destroying our score, only to watch their mentors tightening the bolts in the pits. However, I am not writing to because I am frustrated I am losing to cheating teams. I am writing to you because I see this as a serious problem that contradicts all that FIRST stands for. In my opinion, mentors who heavily influence the course of the team are hurting the kids on the team. Students on a team where the mentor takes too much on are not learning about building, programming, business, marketing, public relations, or whatever their role on the team is.

I am writing you in the present situation because I know where this year will go. Unfortunately, we have little choice in the tournament format. FIRST's strategy for handling accurate reporting is nothing more than trust. Ohio FIRST has appended that with their "fair play initiative" which is a band of teams who have committed themselves to honesty, and will be filming and uploading their matches and scores for the public to see. I was happy to hear during one of the coaches calls that we will be required to demonstrate our robot's potential to judges during the judging calls, which will massively cut down on the general cheating and inflating scores, but will not stop it. While I hope and wish the FIRST community is honest and truly follows the core values, I can see the reality that the 10% who are not could very easily ruin it for the rest of us.

If I could say something to the mentors who take too much on, I would like to let them know that even though their teams are winning every match or tournament they participate in, no one is gaining anything from it. The mentors probably don't need the practice, the students aren't picking up on the invaluable skills learned from FIRST, and cheaters are taking the place that would be rightfully held by another team.

In conclusion, I see coaches being way too involved in the creation process of the robots. I know none of them do it to hurt their teams, but that is the effect. There is nothing wrong with coaches doing things deemed too dangerous for the students (such as welding), but the students should still be watching and participating as much as possible, because if they aren't, they aren't getting a thing out of FIRST.

Thank you,

Jack Crane

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