

BEST Writeup

On October 29, 2016, 18 teams attended the Heartland BEST Robotics local competition to compete for a chance to go the regional competition in Fort Smith, Arkansas. The competition took place in Alva, with OKC Homeschool traveling more than two hours to attend.

OKC Homeschool 4-H Robotics Team consists of over 30 middle and high school students from across the metro. The students come from home, public, and private schools and are led by the team captain, Scotland Boyes, and a team of dedicated parents and coaches.

This year's competition game theme was *Bet the Farm*. Teams navigate a farm-like game field while feeding pigs, planting seeds, harvesting tomatoes, lettuce, and corn, and supplying water to hydroponic stands, where the produce grows. It was definitely a fun theme!

The day before game day is almost as busy as game day itself. On that day — Friday — our team arrived at the Alva Recreational Center, where the competition takes place. We quickly set up our booth to compete in the BEST Award. The OKC Homeschool booth looks like a small “room” showcasing the game theme and the team itself. We prepared for our booth presentation and our oral presentation later in the day. Each of these presentations were given by four of our students who prepared and practiced before presenting to the judges.

Friday is also a fun day for us to chat with other teams, encourage them, and observe the various booths on display. One of my favorite things to do on Friday is to visit each booth, some of which have souvenirs — like team buttons, beaded necklaces, or pieces of candy — which are free for everyone to take.

Early Saturday morning, all the teams return with their robot, ready for a full and fun day of competition. Music is playing, everyone is cheering, and you can immediately tell this is going to be a very fun day as soon as you walk into the gymnasium. Our drivers, spotters, and team families in the stands were all full of energy and excitement. In fact, one of my personal favorite parts about game day is the energy you see everywhere. Everyone is either dancing, waving pom-poms or using noisemakers, or playing some kind of homemade musical instrument!

After the opening ceremony, the competition is finally underway. The preliminaries, which decide which teams move on to the semi-finals, last for a

couple of hours. Everyone then breaks for lunch before the semi-finals begin, where the eight highest-scoring teams compete for a place in the finals.

Finally, once the semi-finals are finished, it is time for the four highest-scoring teams to compete for a trip to the regional competition in Fort Smith, Arkansas. There are only two available spots, so each team has to bring their A-game and do their absolute best. The finals are definitely the most exciting part of the day to watch, and that is saying something.

Once the finals are over, it is time for the award ceremony, where some of the following awards are handed out:

- **Overall Game Award:** For the team who scored the most points during the robotics competition.
- **The BEST Award:** For the team who scored the highest for the notebook, oral & booth presentation, booth design, and spirit and sportsmanship.
- **Most Robust Robot Award:** For the team with most reliable robot, which rarely/never had any issues or problems on the field.
- **Founders Award:** For the team with the most unique design.
- **Coach of the Year Award:** For the coach who has put significant time and effort into the competition and guided their team well; sometimes overcoming obstacles, and representing the local hub well at regional competition.

Each and every team works hard during the six weeks they are given to create their robot, and you can really see that on game day. They all deserve an award!

Once each award has been handed out, four teams end up advancing to the regional competition: The top two in the overall game award, and the top two teams in the BEST Award.

We had several exciting matches and made it through to the finals. With much anticipation, the whole team waited as results and awards were announced. Our team erupted when we were given the two highest trophies of the competition: first place in the robot game competition and first place in the BEST Award! In addition to these awards, we proudly cheered for our coach, Stuart Boyes, when he was given the Coach of the Year Award!

Even as we pack up our booth and our robot, you can still see the smiles on the students' faces. They are proud of their robot and what they have achieved

during the competition weekend, they have high hopes for the regional competition, and they will certainly be back next year.

