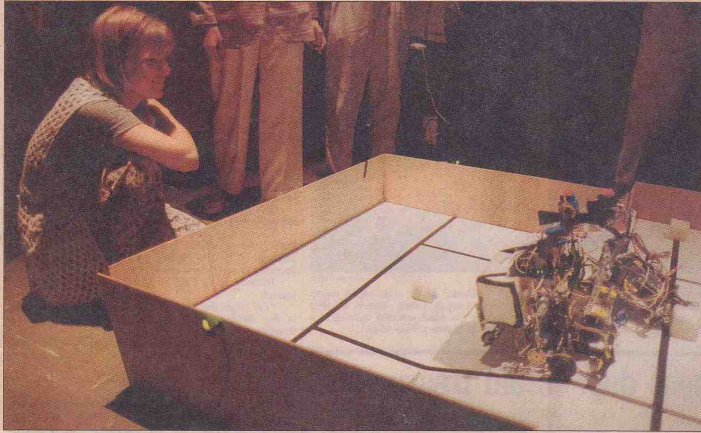


With work — and luck — they hoped to engineer a champ



Rebecca Quan watches as her team's robot competes in the basement of Hitchcock Hall at Ohio State University.

Chris Russell/Dispatch

By Francisco Duque
Dispatch Staff Reporter

Some students cheered and some let out cries of disappointment yesterday in the basement of Hitchcock Hall at Ohio State University — all over a race among robots.

Five teams of freshman engineering students gathered round a 9-foot by 4-foot track, their eyes fixed on the robots they had designed and built.

The robots — each no larger than a shoe box and with names like "Reservoir Dogs" and "Quicksilver" — were poised at one end of the track.

Unlike the remote control kind that whirl outside toy stores, these robots were more advanced machines, with electronic brains programmed by teams of students.

"We had the most fun working on the code (the program)," said Kathryn Pugis, 19. "It was really hard. We didn't know how to do anything at first."

In the competition, the robots faced foam cubes arranged between them and the finish line. The goal was to pick up and then deliver as many cubes as possible to a ledge at the end of the track within two minutes.

The competition had two stages, an individual run and head-to-head

races between pairs. The odd looking machines — with colored-coded wires sticking out, sensing devices roving on top and tiny lights blinking — moved about the track, sometimes not performing in the desired manner.

Some picked up blocks. Others buzzed, swirled, lurched forward and backward. Others sped across the track only to come to a sudden stop at the finish line.

Some students cheered for their robots. Others tried to justify some shortcomings.

"An epoxy problem," said one, when his team's robot refused to budge.

The competition was the pinnacle of Gateway, a year-long pilot program sponsored by the National Science Foundation.

John T. Demel, chairman of the engineering graphics department, said the program seeks to encourage not only engineering skills but also communication and teamwork.

"It is also about creating awareness of how engineering affects the environment and society," he said.

Ryan Burnsides of Circleville, Ohio, Gus Prezousis of Warren, Ohio, Keith Rooney of Ravenna, Ohio, and Brandon White of Snow, Ohio, built the winning robot.

Pugis' team did not fare well. It finished fifth. "Our robot peaked two weeks ago," she said.