

F.I.R.S.T. Robotics: Navistar's Support for the Engineers of Tomorrow



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Cheering fans with painted faces. Mascots dancing in the aisles. Teams huddling on the sidelines discussing strategy. And a heart-thumping energy in the room that screams something exciting is about to happen...

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No, this isn't a professional sporting event or a March Madness college basketball tournament. It's the [FIRST Robotics Midwest Regional Competition](#). Each spring, hundreds of high schoolers – and their robots – take over UIC Pavilion in Chicago to compete in a new challenge. This year's game, called Destination: Deep Space, required the robots to move balls into rockets and cargo ships, and then return safely to their team's habitat. The two-and-a-half-minute matches flew by as student-controlled robots frantically moved around the field trying to score points for their teams.

For several years, Navistar has been a sponsor of both the competition and several Chicago-area teams, and I always look forward to attending this event. While the competitions are exciting – and nothing brings out the super-fan in me like seeing an underdog team win a match – what I enjoy most about the day is talking to the students themselves.

These kids are smart. They are building amazingly capable robots at 16 years old. They casually talk about motherboards and power sources and solve complicated technical problems, sometimes in the middle of an intense competition. But, what strikes me the most is that these students aren't just smart when it comes to engineering. They are skilled communicators who can explain to a non-engineer (like me) how the robot picks up a ball. They are team players who have figured out how to work as a group to build something remarkable.

They are marketers, pitching themselves and their teams to potential sponsors. And, they are kind and conscientious toward their competitors – a trait FIRST has deemed “gracious professionalism” – with one team this year even going as far as loaning a spare robot to an international team who had issues getting their robot through U.S. Customs, so they could still compete.

With every interaction with these students, I become even prouder of Navistar’s support of this great program. The tie-in to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education is a natural fit with a company that makes highly technical commercial vehicles, like Navistar. But, the skills these students are learning go far beyond engineering, and students are emerging from the program as well-rounded individuals ready for the careers of tomorrow – where they will be building and inventing things that haven’t even been dreamed of yet. And, it is our hope at Navistar that many of them will someday be building our trucks, buses and engines.

So, congratulations to our Navistar-sponsored teams for a great season – we are so proud of you!