

Democrat and Chronicle

Students put robots through their paces

[Steve Orr](#) • Staff writer • February 22, 2010

PENFIELD — The robot from Pittsford zipped around handily and climbed well but couldn't shoot. The one from Wilson Magnet High School bopped around nicely enough. The one from Lockport, Niagara County, made a goal or two and ended up hanging in the air from a hook.

The fourth robot, whose origin is best left unspoken, didn't move an inch.

So it went Sunday afternoon in one of numerous friendly matches at a high-school robotics rally in Penfield.

This year's rally, a warm-up for a series of more formal competitions between teams of high school students, featured a 54-foot-long field on which student-made robots maneuvered for a chance to shoot soccer balls into goals.

The 19th annual international competition is sponsored by a New Hampshire nonprofit group called For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, or FIRST. Each year the competition attracts thousands of students, who

work with adult mentors, teachers and corporate financial backers.



Calvin Drake of the Penfield 1511 Rolling Thunder team checks the team's robot. (ANNETTE LEIN staff photographer)

At the other end of the spectrum was the Pittsford team, made up of students from both of that town's high schools. This is the first year it's had a FIRST team, and Sunday was the first opportunity the team had to see its robot on a full field.

"We still have a few programming bugs," said team member Andrew Schultz before the match began. Schultz, who may major in engineering in college, said he enjoyed the robot-building experience immensely. "I'm a senior and I'm kind of sorry we didn't have a team sooner."



Cameron Duncan, left, and William DiGiaccio of the Wilson Magnet X-Cats team react as they try to get their robot to kick a soccer ball into a goal at a robotics rally in Penfield on Sunday. (ANNETTE LEIN staff photographer)

The robots that practiced Sunday — picture a self-propelled vehicle slightly larger than a child's red wagon topped with loads of high-tech paraphernalia — have been created since Jan. 9, when the nature of this year's game was announced.

Jack Jones of Wilson Magnet's team said he's put in 100-plus hours since then, and will practice daily until a regional competition in March.

"I love it. It's one of the highlights of my high-school career," said Jones, a senior who intends to study engineering in college. The Rochester high school has been part of the FIRST competition since it started in 1992.