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# Manchester Central alliance wins FIRST title

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MANCHESTER — Erin Smith is a diminutive, nice girl who hopes to become a veterinarian.

But in the world of high school competitive robotics, which was on display during the three-day Granite State Regional FIRST Robotics Competition at Verizon Wireless Arena this weekend, the sight of her and her green-clad teammates inspired fear and awe among other competitors.

She is the captain of Chaos, a team of high school robotics engineers from Manchester Central High School that led a three-team alliance to victory in Saturday's finals.

“This is really great,” Smith, a senior who will study veterinary sciences next year at the University of Findlay in Ohio, said after her alliance came back during a best-of-three final to take the title. The other alliance members were from Gilford High School and from South Portland, Maine.

FIRST — For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology — was founded by New Hampshire inventor Dean Kamen and began in Manchester in 1991 as a way to encourage student interest in science and technology. For the past 10 years, the FIRST Robotics competition has pitted teams of high school students against one another in a contest to create a robot that moves better and scores more points than the others.

The event, sponsored by BAE Systems, Nashua, attracted 50 teams. Most were from New Hampshire, but teams from as far away as Mexico made the trip to participate.

► [Photo gallery: FIRST 2012](#)

This year's game was called Rebound Rumble, a challenge to design a robot run by remote control that would sink small basketballs into three levels of hoops. Students could also score by getting one or



CHAOS team mentor Andy Grady, team captain Erin Smith and teammate Garrett Sinotte celebrate after their alliance won the Granite State Regionals. CHAOS is a team from Manchester Central High School. (JAY REITER/Union Leader)



more robots to balance on a teetering platform.

The basketball game was designed to make the contest “as accessible as possible to people who wouldn't know the difference between a speed controller and a pneumatic cylinder,” said Frank Merrick, deputy director of FIRST.

Saturday's final game featured plenty of drama. An alliance led by last year's champion, Mechanical Mayhem from Milford, took the first of three games in a 49-26 blowout.

The Chaos alliance came back strong in the second game, winning, 43-21, after successfully balancing two robots on a platform together — that's worth 20 points — at the last second to put the game out of reach. In the second game, though, one of the Mechanical Mayhem alliance teams' robots was damaged. The team didn't pick a substitute in time, and the alliance had to play the final game with just two robots. The Chaos alliance overwhelmed them, 56-12.

“We seem to be good at coming back. I wasn't too worried,” Smith said.

The teams had six weeks before the competition to build their robots, within limitations of size and width, Merrick said. The alliance structure — three teams working together against three other teams after top-seeded teams “draft” the remaining teams — was designed to foster cooperation, he said.

“There is no winning without a partner,” Merrick said. “We're not trying to build robots. We're really trying to build these kids.”

Winners can move on to the FIRST National Competition in April in St. Louis to face teams from 40 other regional competitions held this winter and spring. The Gilford team will try to raise the \$25,000 or so needed to make the trip, said lead mentor Mike Andrews.

“I'm so excited. I'm out of breath because I have so much adrenaline pumping through me,” said Gilford senior Bryson Eddy, who said he was thrilled when the Chaos team, which earned the tournament's top seed, asked him to join their alliance.

But Smith's Chaos team, which includes sophomores Reed Macey and Garrett Sinotte and more than a dozen other students who helped build the team's robot, likely will not make the trip to the Midwest.

Their obstacle isn't ability or their robot's prowess. It's money. They don't have it. It's not just the registration fee, which is thousands of dollars, holding them back. The team would also have to come up with money for transportation, hotel rooms and food, Sinotte said.

“It's OK,” Macey said. “We knew going into it that we probably wouldn't be able to go (to St. Louis).”

“We're very proud of ourselves for what we have done,” Sinotte said.

The team plans to compete in another regional competition in Boston in two weeks, then it's back to normal school life, they said.