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More than a g'day for Laker robotics

LASER team visits Australia for international contest, brings home awards



Photo Provided The Camdenton 4-H *FIRST*® Tech Challenge 5908 LASER team was honored to have been selected by the Missouri FTC committee to represent Missouri and the United States at the Asia-Pacific FTC international tournament in Sydney, Australia this month.

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Seven members of the Laker Afterschool Science Engineering and Robotics (LASER) have made the long journey to be one of six teams from the U.S. to compete internationally in the land down under.

The Camdenton 4-H *FIRST*® Tech Challenge 5908 LASER team was honored to have been selected by the Missouri FTC committee to represent Missouri and the United States at the Asia-Pacific FTC international tournament in Sydney, Australia this month.

The journey began in April when the team was notified that they were selected to represent FIRST® robotics at an international level. The team worked hard to raise funds and worked all of May and challenge that lay ahead.

“We are so proud of this group of students, parents and coaches that gave up their summer to prepare to compete and to raise money so this group of talented students could have this once in a lifetime opportunity,” stated Afterschool Services Director Sherry Comer.

Comer also noted that the team could not have made this trip if it were not for the generous support of the school, the community and numerous business and private donations.

The team arrived in Sydney one day early and immediately headed to Macquarie University to help support the *FIRST*® LEGO® League tournament that was taking place. LASER visited all of the teams and cheered them on during the FLL division’s finals. The team enjoyed meeting other students from all around the world. In foreign countries *FIRST*® LEGO® League allows students up to the age of 16 to compete, whereas in Camdenton 4th-6th graders compete at the FLL level.

On July 12, the FTC tournament began with the first day being practice rounds and the team gave their presentation to a panel of judges. In the presentation the team must share what they have done to increase STEM awareness and promote FIRST® at a local, state, national and international level. In addition, they must concisely describe how they designed, fabricated and programmed their robot. The team engineering notebook is also presented and reviewed at this time.

Day two and three found the LASER team competing against and being aligned with 31 other teams from eight countries. Josh Harmon, LASER drive team member noted that one of the most challenging issues of the tournament was trying to communicate with non-English speaking teams from China, Japan and Taiwan.

“It made it difficult to plan and strategize when you can’t speak a team’s native language. We figured out how to make it work and it actually was fun to try to come up with new ways to communicate!”

The LASER robot made solid performances throughout the tournament, but the LASER team ranking was middle of the pack due to alliance pairings. The team held their breath as alliance selections were made by the top eight teams to go into the quarter finals. The team felt like they had a chance to be picked if teams had scouted and collected the right data. After a very tense round of alliance picks, LASER was picked by the number one team 4251 Cougar Robotics from Denver, Colo. and the number two team 5110 Wingus Dingus from New Zealand.

After quarter finals and semifinals the stage was set for a show down with a very strong opposing alliance consisting of the 6137 RoBowties, 2753 Overdrive and 7350 Watt's NXT. The final game was decided in two matches with the LASER team helping the Cougars to take the tournament!

In addition to being on the winning alliance for the tournament LASER was also awarded the coveted Motivate Award. The Motivate Award celebrates the team that exemplifies the essence of the FTC challenge competition through teambuilding, team spirit, and exhibited enthusiasm. Teams must embrace the culture of **FIRST**® and clearly demonstrates what it means to be a team. This is a team that makes a collective effort to make **FIRST**® known throughout their school and community and sparks others to embrace the culture of FIRST®.

After the tournament the team spent five days touring and experiencing the culture of Australia. Highlights of the trip included visiting Manly and Bondi beaches, visiting the world famous Opera House, Darling Harbor, the Sydney Eye Tower and doing the sky walk. In addition, the students spent time at a sanctuary where they were able to pet koalas and kangaroos. The visit also included an amazing trip to the Blue Mountains where the students hiked to a waterfall and cave overhang. In addition, the team met Aborigines and learned about their history. Team members were treated to a show where tribal members danced and played didgeridoos.