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"With all thy getting get understanding"

Fact and Comment

By Steve Forbes, *Editor-in-Chief*



BRAINSTORM

THE OLYMPICS underscored the extraordinary feats people can achieve athletically, but there is another kind of competition that will ultimately do far more for our kids and our country—the U.S. First Robotics Competition. The brainchild of Dean Kamen, an extraordinary inventor-entrepreneur, U.S. First's goal is to make science as exciting for young people as are sports.

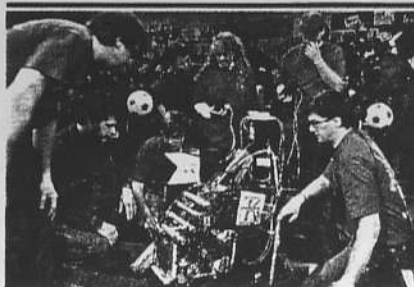
In this annual robotics contest, high school kids team up with engineers and teachers to build a robot that will then compete with other robots in various sports-like feats. Ninety-three teams, sponsored by corporations such as Motorola, Honeywell, Xerox, Nynex and Johnson & Johnson, participated this year, up from 29 teams when the competition started in 1992.

A team receives a kit of 120 parts, then designs and builds a robot. The creation may weigh no more than 120 pounds

and, when dormant, must fold up to fit inside a 36-inch cube. Putting the device together and testing its agility against other robots gets kids' competitive adrenaline going. The youngsters invariably come away with more enthusiasm for and appreciation of science.

Kamen, whose Edison-like energy and imagination is making him something of a cult figure among scientific circles, hopes to have some 2,000 teams competing by the turn of the century. The 1996 contest will be televised on ESPN in September.

Kamen dreams that someday kids will be as familiar with the names of Nobel Prize winners as they are now with sporting giants. That won't happen, but, thanks to Kamen, countless thousands of young Americans will be constructively turned on to an area that is beginning to have an extraordinary surge of creativity.



Dean Kamen (second from left) and students: Visionaries of the future.