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## Robots Are Coming To Ole Miss

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## Robots Are Coming To Ole Miss

### Center for Mathematics and Science Education Hosts Robotics Challenge

MARCH 1, 2013 BY ANDREW MARK ABERNATHY

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Addison Roush (left) and Wesley Brown, both sophomores at Lafayette High School, work on their robot in preparation for this weekend's inaugural FIRST Tech Challenge Robotics Tournament. The tournament is hosted by the UM Center for Mathematics and Science Education at the university's Jackson Avenue Center. UM photo by Andrew Abernathy.

OXFORD, Miss. – More than 20 robots and their student designers are on their way to the University of Mississippi this week as part of the inaugural FIRST Tech Challenge Robotics Tournament.

Hosted by the **UM Center for Mathematics and Science Education**, the event will take place Saturday (March 2) at the university's Jackson Avenue Center, with opening ceremonies beginning at 10 a.m. Two winning teams will move on to compete in the **FTC World Championship** in St. Louis this April against 126 teams from around the world.

"This whole competition starts as an afterschool program for students," said Mannie Lowe, the center's program manager and coordinator of the event. "When each team began in September, they started from square one. They got to imagine their robot and see it come together and now see how it performs against others."

The tournament pits student teams from across Mississippi against one other in a game called Ring It Up! During the game, students pilot their robots to pick up rings from dispensers and place them in a grid to score points. All robots must be designed within set dimensions and use a Lego Mindstorm NXT robot "brain" to maneuver the device.

An average team includes 10 students ranging from seventh to 12th grade. Students work alongside mentors to design and build robots using mathematics and science concepts. Teams compete on the regional level before coming to the state competition.

But this year's event marks more than just the first state-level robotics tournament in Mississippi, explained Lowe, who previously coordinated the state FTC tournament in Georgia. Saturday's tournament shows a dramatic increase in awareness for the program across the state. The number of registered Mississippi teams has risen from four to 23 in just one year.

Lafayette County High School science teacher Taylor Langford has mentored his team freshmen and sophomore science students for the first time.

"There was a lot of trial and error at first," Langford said. "We've been meeting once a week to get our design functional. It can take a lot of practice to get all the components working together, but I'm pleased with what we've accomplished."

The Lafayette High robot is 18 inches long and 12 inches wide and uses an adjustable arm to pick up rings. The team plans to reveal its name at the tournament.

The FTC tournament is supported by the For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, or FIRST, organization based in Manchester, N.H. Founded by inventor Dean Kamen, the nonprofit's mission is to inspire an interest in mathematics and science in young people. This season, an estimated 2,500 FTC robotics teams will compete in events in the United States, Canada, Mexico, China, Russia and the Netherlands.

For more information about the tournament and the organization, visit <http://www.usfirst.org>.

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