## Wednesday, September 28, 2011

### [Bag & Tag in brief and MAR demystified](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/09/bag-tag-in-brief-and-mar-demystified.html)

Good Afternoon Teams,

**This year ALL FRC Qualifying and Regional Events will be Bag & Tag.** (Teams attending Championship will still have to ship their robots to St Louis.) Don’t know what Bag & Tag means? On Stop Build Day - Feb 21st teams must stop work on the robot and seal it in a giant bag (using a giant tag) that will be included in the 2012 Kit of Parts. Teams then transport the robot to and from the event on their own. Details will be included in the 2012 FRC Administrative Manual coming soon. In the meantime, reading the Bag & Tag sections of the [**2011 FRC Administrative Manual Section 5 - Robot Transportation**](http://www3.usfirst.org/roboticsprograms/frc/competition-manual-and-related-documents)will give you a pretty good idea of what’s involved.

In some cases, FRC will grant Bag & Tag exemptions for teams facing transportation hardships. (For instance, if you have to cross an ocean or a continent to reach the nearest event.) Teams may apply for exemption by emailing frcteams@usfirst.org. Deadline 5PM EST 12/2/11.  Every exemption request should have the subject line: “Bag and Tag Exemption Request, Team XXXX”, with the team’s number in place of ‘XXXX’.  The body of the request should include a very detailed explanation of why the team would experience substantial hardship in bringing their robot to the event themselves.  The more detail a team is able to supply in their explanation, the more quickly *FIRST* HQ will be able to make their decision on the request.

These exemptions will be granted on a case-by-case basis, and only if the team would experience substantial hardship in attending the event for which an exemption was requested.    We recognize teams attending second and additional events may need to travel some distance to attend those events and we will do our best to accommodate those requests. Bag and Tag exemptions will not be granted to teams participating in *FIRST* in Michigan or Mid-Atlantic Robotics Qualifying Events or Championships, because of their local nature.

Register for your event first, then apply for exemption. Do not wait for exemption approval from *FIRST* HQ before registering for events.  Be aware that not all exemptions will be approved.  If an exemption request is declined, *FIRST* will work with the team to help them resolve the issue.

Teams will be informed by reply email of acceptance or rejection of their request.  Teams who ship their robots to events without prior permission risk not being allowed to participate in the event.

**Now, for those of you with questions about MAR.**  TheMid-Atlantic Robotics Region Qualifying structure is based on the FIRST in Michigan (FiM) pilot. Teams residing in New Jersey, Delaware or the Pennsylvania counties of Berks, Bradford, Bucks, Carbon, Chester, Columbia, Dauphin, Delaware, Lackawanna, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Montgomery, Montour, Northampton,

Northumberland, Philadelphia, Pike, Schuylkill, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Wayne, Wyoming, and York

 (and only teams residing in New Jersey, Delaware or the Pennsylvania counties listed above will be eligible to participate in the MAR Qualifying events. Like FiM teams, MAR teams may participate in Regional events outside the MAR system in addition to participating at MAR events. Only MAR teams may register for MAR Qualifying events or the MAR Region Championship.

Teams can verify their MAR & FiM status by looking in FRC TIMS on the Team Summary page -> Team Profile section -> Team Information row -> Summary column -> “Event Structure” status.  MAR & FiM status is also displayed on the Team Information summary page in TIMS.

101 days until Kickoff

See you then!

## Tuesday, September 27, 2011

### [Its official AND on our website](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/09/its-official-and-on-our-website.html)

Good Afternoon Teams,

It’s been a long hard road that brought us right down to the wire, but the FRC Event Schedule is now live on the usfirst.org website.  Registration Payment Terms will be posted in the morning and Event Registration opens Thursday, September 29th at noon Eastern time.  We had to bring a stunning number of details together and tie up innumerable loose ends so there are still a few TBDs in the schedule, but I want to thank everyone who worked so hard to make this season possible.  An email blast is about to go out to FRC teams.  Let the season begin!

102 days until Kickoff

See you then!

Posted by Bill at [4:14 PM](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/09/its-official-and-on-our-website.html) <http://www.blogger.com/comment.g?blogID=5222664694558307733&postID=4343970007854317435>

## Friday, September 23, 2011

### [The List & a New Region](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/09/list-new-region.html)

Good Afternoon Teams,

I’m back.  I was suitably impressed by the potential capability of the **new technology** I was shown and have high hopes for future FRC events.  Engineering will continue to look for new and exciting things to add to our ever evolving 5 year technology plan.  Unfortunately I can say no more. Except rest assured; our competition field will maintain a 27’x57’ footprint for the foreseeable future.

While I was out, an email blast was sent to team main and alternate contacts asking each team to take **a survey regarding your FRC team’s experience with FTC**.  This comes from the group who are building a 5-year strategic plan for all of *FIRST*.  Your team’s input will be very helpful, so if a representative for your team has not yet completed the survey, please encourage them to do so by Tuesday, Sept 27.

Not to confuse everyone, but **FRC has a survey** out to FRC teams at the same time asking about your team’s experience with FRC Awards.  For this survey I would like everyone’s individual input.  Please encourage everyone you know on an FRC team to[**take the survey**](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VQVBPH2) by Wednesday, Sept 28th.

As of this morning, there are **45 local kickoffs** [**listed on our website**](http://www.usfirst.org/roboticsprograms/frc/local-kickoff-information).  Registration for Kickoffs opens Friday, Oct 7th.  Have you decided where you want to go?

New Jersey, Delaware and the eastern half of Pennsylvania have joined forces to create **the Mid-Atlantic Robotics Region** and will be holding Qualifying Events leading up to a Region Championship in a new model based on lessons learned in the Michigan district pilot.  Welcome MAR!

TIMS is now scheduled to open for **Event Registration** on Thursday, September 29th.   As of this morning, 341 FRC teams have completed the [**pre-registration process in TIMS**](https://my.usfirst.org/frc/tims/site.lasso) and are ready for Registration.  Are you ready?

Here’s the **FRC event list** as it stands today.  Not every event has a signed contract from the venue so there are a few TBDs listed below.  When the commitment is firm for each, the details will be added to TIMS.

As we add more double field events each year, I want to remind you: FRC reserves the right to ‘balance’ teams at any of the double event competitions.  For instance:  if every rookie team interested in playing in Minnesota registers for the 10,000 Lakes and there are no rookies at North Star, or if all the teams interested in playing in Dallas register for Dallas West leaving only four teams registered at Dallas East.  We haven’t had to ‘balance’ double events in the past, and won’t if things work out on their own, but be aware, we still reserve the right to level the playing field if need be.

**Week One**
*March 1-March 3, 2012*
Alamo Regional,  San Antonio, TX
BAE Systems/Granite State Regional,  Manchester, NH
Greater Kansas City Regional, Kansas City, MO
Smoky Mountains Regional,  Knoxville, TN

*March 2-3, 2012*
Hatboro-Horsham MAR FRC Qualifying Event, Horsham, PA
Kettering University MI FRC Qualifying Event,   Flint, MI

**Date TBD**
Northville MI FRC Qualifying Event TBD, MI

**Week Two**
*March 5-7, 2012*
Israel Regional. Tel Aviv, Israel

*March 8-10, 2012*
Autodesk Oregon Regional, Portland, OR
Chesapeake Regional, Baltimore, MD
Finger Lakes Regional, Rochester, NY
Greater Toronto East Regional,   Toronto, ON Canada
Lake Superior Regional,   Duluth, MN
Orlando Regional, Orlando, FL
Pittsburgh Regional, Pittsburgh, PA
San Diego Regional, San Diego, CA
WPI Regional , Worcester, MA

*March 9-10, 2012*
Chestnut Hill MAR FRC Qualifying Event, Philadelphia, PA
Traverse City MI FRC Qualifying Event, Traverse City, MI
Waterford MI FRC Qualifying Event, Waterford, MI

*March 10-11, 2012*
Rutgers MAR FRC Qualifying Event, New Brunswick, NJ

**Week Three**
*March 15-17, 2012*
Bayou Regional, Westwego, LA
Boilermaker Regional, West Lafayette, IN
Los Angeles Regional, Long Beach, CA
Peachtree Regional, Duluth, GA
Festival de Robotique FRC a Montreal Regional, Montreal, QC Canada
Sacramento Regional, Sacramento, CA
Utah Regional sponsored by NASA & Platt, Salt Lake City, UT
Virginia Regional, Richmond, VA

*March 16-18, 2012*
New York City Regional, New York City, NY

*March 16-17, 2012*
Detroit MI FRC Qualifying Event, Detroit, MI
West Michigan MI FRC Qualifying Event, Allendale, MI

**Week Four**
*March 22-24, 2012*
Arizona Regional, Chandler, AZ
Boston Regional, Boston, MA
Buckeye Regional,. Cleveland, OH
Colorado Regional, Denver, CO
Hawaii Regional sponsored by BAE Systems, Honolulu Hawaii
Midwest Regional, Chicago, IL
Seattle Cascade Regional, Seattle, WA
Seattle Olympic Regional, Seattle, WA
Palmetto Regional, TBD, SC
St Louis Regional, St. Louis, MO
Waterloo Regional, Waterloo, ON Canada
Wisconsin Regional, Milwaukee, WI

*March 23-24, 2012*
Lenape MAR FRC Qualifying Event, Tabernacle, NJ
Niles MI FRC Qualifying Event, Niles, MI
Possible MI FRC Qualifying Event, City TBD, MI

**Week Five**
*March 29-31, 2012*
Dallas East Regional sponsored by jcpenney, Dallas, TX
Dallas West Regional sponsored by jcpenney, Dallas, TX
Greater Toronto West Regional, Mississauga, ON Canada
Minnesota 10,000 Lakes Regional, Minneapolis, MN
Minnesota North Star Regional, Minneapolis, MN
Northeast Utilities FIRST Connecticut     Regional, Hartford, CT
Oklahoma Regional, Oklahoma City, OK
SBPLI Long Island Regional, Hempstead, NY
Silicon Valley Regional, San Jose, CA
South Florida Regional, Boca Raton, FL
Washington DC Regional, Washington, DC

*March 30-31, 2012*
Livonia MI FRC Qualifying Event, Livonia, MI
Mount Olive MAR FRC Qualifying Event, Flanders, NJ
Troy MI FRC Qualifying Event, Troy, MI

**Week Six**
*April 5-7, 2011*
Central Valley Regional, Madera, CA
Las Vegas Regional, Las Vegas, NV
Lone Star Regional, Houston, TX
North Carolina Regional, Raleigh. NC
Queen City Regional, Cincinnati, OH
Spokane Regional, Cheney, WA

**Week Seven**
*April 12-14, 2011*
Mid-Atlantic Robotics FRC Region Championship Event, Philadelphia, PA
Michigan FRC Region Championship Event, Ypsilanti, MI

***FIRST* Championship, April 26-28, 2012 St. Louis, MO**

106 days until Kickoff
See you then!

## Tuesday, September 20, 2011

### [Up up and away](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/09/up-up-and-away.html)

Good Afternoon Teams,

I’m blogging early this week because I’m getting on an airplane this evening in my never ending quest to bring the latest technology to FRC.  Frank, Kate and I are heading out to explore **new technology for 2015** and beyond.  If we come up with anything interesting, I probably won’t be able to tell you about it until the kit of part reveal in 2015.   Cross your fingers.  Things could get interesting.

**The GDC met this past weekend** and rocked the workshop.  It looks like we have the concept for the 2013 game.  Because of some monumental elements that you can’t see until January 5, 2013 we had a great deal of fun thinking up game names that you will never hear from me.  We have a ways to go before the game is ready, but that was the whole point of pushing so hard this year to get a year ahead.  The 2012 game is in the final stages and we now have almost a full year to test, tweak and tidy up loose ends on the 2013 game.  My thanks to the long suffering, hardworking, hysterically funny members of the GDC who got a little punchy after a full weekend locked in the basement workshop at headquarters.  I promise there will be more coffee ice cream at the October on site meeting.

Looking forward, now is as good a time as any to ask ourselves if the **existing FRC award structure** is supporting our mission and values.  To that end, I would like team member/mentor input.  Please encourage everyone you know in FRC to complete [**this survey**](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VQVBPH2) by Wednesday, September 28th at noon Eastern time.

Marketing is **looking for FRC team members** who have repurposed items in constructive, unique or amazing ways to feature in an upcoming national publication.  Please send **marketing@usfirst.org** a photo and brief description of your creation by this Wednesday, September 21st and if we choose to include your design we’ll be in touch for more details.

Does your team have new mentors this year, or do you know about an FRC team with rookie mentors?  Please let them know about the upcoming Senior Mentor call **“FRC Mentor Orientation 101”**.  Senior Mentor Mike Henry and expert Mike Siegel will answer questions about team organization, member recruitment and team registration this Thursday 9/22 at 7pm Eastern time. Call 1-866-951-1151 and use conference room number 7052714 that night to participate.

 The National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT) is now [**accepting applications**](http://www.aspirationsaward.org/) from young women in the US and Puerto Rico in grades 9-12 for the **NCWIT Award for Aspirations in Computing**, which recognizes young women at the high school level for their aspirations and achievements in technology and computing! .

109 days until Kickoff
See you then!

## Friday, September 16, 2011

### Announcing the Beta Test Teams

Good Afternoon Teams,

We’ve chosen the **2012 Beta Test teams**.  Everyone who applied has been contacted, so I’m happy to announce the following teams will be helping us review the software libraries and build new code to share with all teams.  My thanks to everyone who offered to help with this project.  All FRC teams will be able to [**communicate with the Beta Test teams on the forums.**](http://forums.usfirst.org/forumdisplay.php?f=1525)

**Testing C/C++:**
108    SIGMAC@T
166    Chop Shop
234    Cyber Blue
294    Beach Cities Robotics
303    Panther Robotics
537    Charger Robotics
604    Quixilver
772    Sabre Bytes
781    Kinetic Knights
973    GRR
987    The High Rollers
1334    Red Devils
1511    Rolling Thunder
1519    Mechanical Mayhem
1671    Buchanan Bird Brains
1714    More Robotics
1758    Technomancers
1816    The Green Machine
2358    Bearbotics
2809    Kbotics
2903    NeoBots
3457    MacBotics
3481    Bronc Botz
3771    Da Yooper Troopers
3824    RoHawktics

**Testing Java:**
11    MORT
20    The Rocketeers
125    NUTRONS
175    Buzz Robotics
178    2nd Law Enforcers
228    Gus Robotics
341    Miss Daisy
610    The Coyotes
694    Stuypulse
1002    CircuitRunners
1014    Dublin Robotics
1160    Firebird Robotics
1279    ColdFusion
2177    The Robettes
2477    Rascal Robotics
2648    Infinite Loop
2846    FireBears
2967    Iron Devils
2977    Sir Lancer Bots
3309    Friarbots
3341    The Manhattan Project
3630    Stampede
3660    The Lightsabers
3780    Robot Unicorn Attack
3807    Blazerbots

**Testing LabVIEW:**
33    Killer Bees
45    TechnoKats
53    Area 53
75    RoboRaiders
357    Royal Assault
624    CRyptonite
836    RoboBees
1023    Bedford Express
1208    The MeTool Brigade
1718    The Fighting Pi
1764    Liberty Robotics
1847    Wyandotte H.S. Robodogs
1912    Team Combustion
2168    Aluminu Falcons
2169    KING TeC
2403    Team Plasma
2435    Soldiers of Technology
2530    Inconcievable
2579    The Robodogs
3158    TECBOT
3242    WILDCATS
3339    BumbleB
3558    FBR'botz
3572    Wavelength
3619    Blackhawks

113 days until Kickoff
See you then!

## Thursday, September 15, 2011

### [Good News](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/09/good-news.html)

Good Afternoon Teams,

Since **TIMS opened one week ago today**, 301 teams have logged in and updated their team profile.  69 of those teams are 2012 rookies and 195 are now ready for event registration.

I’m happy to announce, **registration fees will hold steady this year**.  Registration for FRC Veteran teams who participated in 2011, 2010 or 2009 will be $5,000 and registration for Rookies and FRC teams that did not participate in 2011, 2010 or 2009 will be $6,500. Participation in each additional 2012 Regional Event will be $4,000. My thanks to everyone in the office, in the field and on the staff of our many suppliers and contractors who worked hard this year to hold costs down and keep these fees steady.  I’ll announce registration fees for the district qualification events as soon as the final decision is made.

I can’t share the final competition schedule yet, but I can tell you the **two newest Regional events** will be in Miami, FL and Fresno, CA.  In addition, Dallas, TX is hoping to host their first ever double field event which will bring the projected total number of FRC Regional Events to 54 this year (we still don’t have final contracts from some of the locations so that number is still tentative.)

The **GDC will be onsite this weekend** to work on the 2013 game.  The FRC staff on the first floor are busy today setting up field elements and cleaning up in preparation.  Yes, we do clean our room before the GDC arrives.  Wouldn’t you?

We’re conducting interviews for the replacement Field Maintenance person this week and not a moment too soon.  We’re building two additional **competition fields** this year bringing the total number of fields on the road to 19 (if you include the one packaged and staged for emergency deployment if something should happen to one of the other fields as it travels between events).

**Volunteer Coordinators** held their first conference call for the 2012 season yesterday.  Yes, it takes almost 6 months to put on a Regional Event and these key volunteers are already working to make sure there are volunteers trained and at the ready for your first event.

Finally, I’ve been told there will be **an ad for *FIRST*** in the ‘Top Charities’ section of USA Today this week.  I haven’t seen it.  Have you?

114 days until Kickoff
See you then!

## Thursday, September 8, 2011

### TIMS is now open

The Team Information Management System (TIMS) opened at 12:00 p.m. EST today.  <https://my.usfirst.org/frc/tims/site.lasso>

Posted by Bill at

## Wednesday, September 7, 2011

### [It’s raining again](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/09/its-raining-again.html)

Good Afternoon Teams,

I’d like to start today by introducing Kevin O’Connor our **newest FRC Robotics Engineer**.  Kevin was both a founding student member and an adult mentor for Team 2175 the Fighting Calculators.  He comes to us from GeckoSystems International Corporation where he was a Senior EE Roboticist developing software for the CareBot.  Welcome aboard!

We’re conducting interviews this week for the new FRC Program Coordinator position and for a replacement Field Groomer.  I’m hoping to get everyone in place soon so they have time to get up to speed.  There’s never really a good time to jump in the pool around here, but I’m hoping they can get their heads above water before the registration floodgates open.

My thanks to the 147 teams who applied to be **Beta Testers**.   Frank is reviewing the applications now and will contact all the applicants by next Friday, Sept 16th.  When we have a final list, I’ll let you know who near you will be helping the engineering staff prepare for 2012.

Thinking about Beta Testing the software for the new cRIO FRCII reminds me, the **last day to purchase the original FRC cRIO** is Friday, Sept 30th.  [More details are available in my August 23rd blog.](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/08/ill-be-off-site-tomorrow.html)

I know you’re curious, but we still don’t have a **finalized 2012 Event List** to share.  For those of you who are keeping track, we now have 21 contracted venues and just two locations left who aren’t in contract negotiations yet which is [an improvement from August 12th](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/08/new-addition-to-family.html).

The IT department is working like mad to get **TIMS at least partially open** so teams may begin updating their Team Profiles.  ([Last week I explained that TIMS was unavoidably delayed](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/09/odds-and-ends.html).)  Watch this space.  I have big hopes they will be ready soon.

We’re moments away from determining the **2012 Game Name**.  The GDC’s favorite choices were vetted by Marketing and the surviving choices are making the final lap.  When Legal gets back to me, we can start work on a game logo, swap out "NameTBD" in the 2012 Game Manual and stop referring to the game as “well, you know”.

Oh, and maybe **you can help me**.  This came up in the FRC staff meeting this morning.  How many people do you think watch the streaming video from FRC Regional Events?  Enquiring minds want to know.

122 days until Kickoff
See you then!

## Thursday, September 1, 2011

### [Odds and ends](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/09/odds-and-ends.html)

Good Afternoon Teams,

Thank you for the input on the relationship between FRC and FTC teams.  I can’t remember now if I read it somewhere, or if someone brought it up in conversation, but if any of you are concerned that I’m trying to group source solutions to FRC issues, don’t worry.  What I’m trying to do is get FRC team’s voices heard as I participate in the discussions on issues facing *FIRST.*

The **opening date for TIMS** has been delayed because we are still working out the details surrounding the new (as of yet unnamed) qualification structure.  It doesn’t make sense to open the system to collect data, then force teams to return to the system to re-enter data if our data needs change.  The minute the system is ready, I’ll let you know.

**Attention Mentors:** This year the J&J Mentor award is not limited exclusively to teams that are sponsored by Johnson & Johnson.  If you have a team mentor who is employed by J&J, contact rdoyle@its.jnj.com  for an application. Deadline September 16th.

Last call for **Beta test teams**.  The deadline [**to apply**](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/N3LTRHX) is noon EDT this Friday.

And last chance to [**vote for *FIRST*’s President Jon Dudas’ panel**](http://panelpicker.sxsw.com/) at the SXSW conference.

128 days until Kickoff
See you then!

## Monday, August 29, 2011

### [What do you think? 2 of 2](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/08/what-do-you-think-2-of-2.html)

Good Afternoon Teams,

Next question.  How should we geographically define overlap of as it relates to accessibility of *FIRST* programs?  The group working on the long range plan want to define a measurement of distance between FRC and FTC programs that makes it possible for students to have access to both programs (to participate on both teams at some point).  How far apart can teams be and still have students participate in both?  How far is too far?

Again, I’ll tally your answers Tuesday afternoon and get back to the group working on the long range plan.

131 days until Kickoff
See you then!

### [What do you think? 1 of 2](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/08/what-do-you-think-1-of-2.html)

Good Afternoon Teams,

On the 17th I asked for your input about what to call the events that evolve from the Michigan District Pilot and you were good enough to share your opinions.  The term still hasn’t been finalized (I’ll let you know when it is.), but whenever it is discussed around here I can say “the teams tell me they prefer districts”.

Now I have another question for you.  (Two actually, but to keep the discussions separate I’m going to post them in separate blogs.)

Which comes first, FRC or FTC?  No, this isn’t a question of value.  It’s more of a chicken and the egg type question.  Which happens more often?  A FRC team is formed in an area and eventually FTC teams pop up, or a FTC team is formed and eventually one or more FRC teams develop in the area?  Other than building an interactive map showing FRC & FTC team growth over time and space, (which we don’t have the time or manpower to do) we don’t have any easily accessible data to answer that question.   So, what is your experience?

I’ll tally your answers Tuesday afternoon and get back to the group working on the long range plan.
Thank you.

131 days until Kickoff
See you then!

## Tuesday, August 23, 2011

### [I'll be off site tomorrow](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/08/ill-be-off-site-tomorrow.html)

Good Afternoon Teams,

Thank you to everyone who responded to last week’s call for Beta Teams.  58 applications have been collected so far and there is room for more.  The deadline is Friday Sept 2nd at noon EST so get your application in.  We’ve started to review the choices, but won’t make any decisions until after the deadline.  Teams will be notified on Sept 16th and will have to sign a disclosure statement right away. I’ll keep you updated.

For those of you who asked, Frank has an update on the cRIO FRCII.

* The last day to purchase the original FRC cRIO is Friday, Sept 30th.  8 slot controller with 2x 9201, 2x 9403 and 1x 9472 modules $750 at the FRC discounted price.
* The new cRIO FRCII may be ordered by teams starting Monday, Oct 3rd.  4 slot controller with 1x 9201, 1x 9403 and 1x 9472 modules $525 at the FRC discounted price.  Chassis only (no modules) $285 at the FRC discounted price. Initial deliveries will ship either late November or early December.
* NI will give registered FRC teams one Discount Credit each calendar year.  The FRC discount may be used to purchase the new cRIO FRCII kit (with modules), the chassis only (no modules) or both (1kit plus one chassis) as long as the items are purchased in a single order.
* FRC teams that were registered for the 2011 season may use the 2011 discount right away.  Teams that register for the 2012 season may use the 2012 discount starting Oct 3, 2011.  Teams that consume both credits will not be able to order additional FRC discounted hardware until Jan 1, 2013.  Discount credits may not be carried forward.  (Teams may, however, order additional original cRIOs and cRIO FRCIIs at an educational discount price.)
* Call 1-866-511-6285 to order
* Software for programming the new cRIO FRCII will not be available until kickoff.  Beta teams will be testing this software starting in September.
* Teams may continue to use the original FRC cRIO in competition this year.

The Supplier Summit went very well. FRC teams 151 Tough Techs, 811 Cardinals, 1058 PVC Pirates and 1517 The Lumberjacks came out to give our guests a chance to operate LOGO MOTION robots, the Deans’ List Winners stopped in to answer the supplier’s questions from a student/team point of view and Kate and Collin collected a great deal of feedback.  I expect some great new ideas and opportunities will come out of the day and a half long event.   I enjoyed the chance to talk to a number of suppliers and had an interesting conversation with NI about the benefits and challenges of wrapping the new cRIO FRCII in shrink wrap.  My thanks to everyone who helped make the summit possible.

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|  |
| Local teams demo their robots and discuss their designs with suppliers  |  |

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| --- |
|  |
| Representatives from Microsoft, Intel, Gates Corporation and Grainger deep in discussion |

The Dean’s List Winners met with Dean last week and he asked them to round up missing FIRST Alumni.  They’ve started a [**FIRST Alumni Facebook page**](http://www.facebook.com/groups/203615639698314/?notif_t=group_r2j) Be sure to tell your team members and alumni.   I enjoyed the chance to talk with the Dean’s list  winners.  They had some very interesting and insightful comments that I plan to take back to the GDC.

Boys Latin School of Maryland takes its FRC team 2534The Lakers seriously enough to honor their Regional win.

|  |
| --- |
|  |
| This photo warms my heart. |

*FIRST* President, Jon Dudas is in the running to speak at the next South by Southwest conference  You can [**vote for his panel “Building the Next Generation of Innovators” here**](http://panelpicker.sxsw.com/ideas/view/8947).  Deadline Sept 2nd.

137 days until Kickoff
See you then!

Bill’s Blog 2011-2012

## Wednesday, August 17, 2011

### Do you have a better name for it?

Good Afternoon Teams,

The GDC met in Manchester this past weekend and were able to winnow the pool of **potential 2013 games** down to the top three choices. (Which is a lot harder than it sounds.  A lot of these ideas have the potential to be really good.)  Next month we’ll gather to face the challenge of turning the top idea into a functional game head on.

Work on the **2012 game** is progressing as planned.  We’re finalizing the game manual, procuring game elements and constructing updates to the game fields.  We have a short list of three possible game names and Marketing is vetting the options.  With any luck we’ll have a game name this week and can start ordering branded material.

Because the GDC members would be traveling home on Sunday night at the same time the i.am.FIRST show aired, we were able to show the group a copy on Saturday during a break.   It was a lot of fun watching the show with such a dedicated group of *FIRST* fanatics. If you didn’t see will.i.am’s show about *FIRST*, I’d point you towards an online link for the video, but the i.am.FIRST production team has made it very clear that an official copy has not been posted yet.   All copies of **i.am.FIRST Science is Rock and Roll** currently on line are unauthorized.  When I can point you towards the official version, you can be sure I will.

We are gearing up for the annual **Suppliers’ Summit** occurring later this week.  Our generous suppliers are coming in from all over the country to meet with our Kit of Parts team, provide feedback on their experience, make suggestions on the future Kits of Parts, and have dinner at Dean’s house.  They will also have the opportunity to meet with a few local teams to get feedback directly from some of their end users.  I plan to slip in and out of the events as my schedule allows.

We are also expecting a visit from the **2011 Dean’s List Award winners** this week.  They will be visiting DEKA (Dean’s Research and Development facility), touring FIRST (no they won’t be given any hints about this year’s game), and participating in the Supplier’s Summit dinner at Dean’s home.   I’m looking forward to my chance to meet with them.  Last year’s DLA winners were full of good ideas and valuable insights.  I expect this year’s group will be just as articulate and well informed.  You can follow Lydia @deanslist2011 and Tina @tina\_dutra

What is your team planning to do this fall and winter? We need FRC teams to **Beta Test** the 2012 software and new hardware elements this September through December.  If your team is interested and has the time, [**fill out the application online**](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/N3LTRHX).   Feel free to share this announcement with teams you know may be interested.  An email blast to all teams will go out probably later this week.

**I want your opinion.** We’re going back and forth on what to call the new qualification events.  The Michigan District Pilot is over and this year we will introduce a qualification structure based on lessons learned.  Michigan and a second region will be hosting 2012 qualification events that lead up to a State/Regional Championship.  The problem is, we can’t agree on what to call the events.  Michigan used the term “District”, and technically the events are “Qualification”, but neither term seems just right.  Do you have a suggestion?  Please vote/make suggestions in the comments section.  I’ll tally them up and take the results back to the staff discussions.

I see the question on last week’s blog about when will the new **cRIO FRCIIs** be available for purchase, but I can’t give you a date yet.  Frank Merrick (the Deputy Director of FRC) is discussing the time line with NI right now.  When we know, I’ll share with you.

143 days until Kickoff
See you then!

**8/12/2011 Bill Blogged - New Addition to the Family**

Good Morning Teams,

The first of the **new cRIO-FRCIIs** arrived in Manchester this week. By the time I could get downstairs to take a picture, the engineers on the first floor had already hooked it up to one of their test stations. FRC, NI and WPI will be using these stations to test and verify new images, library functionality and sensor support as we prepare for 2012. We might even connect them to new technologies, you never know.


I understand teams would really like to know **the 2012 competition schedule**; unfortunately it is still too much in flux for me to share. We have 8 venues contracted and another three dozen engaged in the contract process (but not finalized yet). Then there are the venues we’re starting negotiations with and the venues we‘re still trying to pin down. It is a long and involved process and if we share the list before the majority of contracts are in hand, there’s always the potential for unintentionally giving a venue the upper hand in negotiations. I can, however, tell you that we will be keeping week one limited to just a few events like last year. We will be beta testing this fall and are planning a week zero event in order to ensure week one runs smoothly. Then we will be doubling up on FTAs at week one events to make sure everyone is ready and the season goes flawlessly. When I have the 2012 competition schedule finalized, you will be the first to know.

149 days until Kickoff
See you then!

8/4/2011 Bill Blogged - Have you seen this?

Good Afternoon Teams,

There’s just 10 days left until the i.am.FIRST special premieres on ABC (Sunday, Aug 14 7/6c). [You can learn more about the show here.](http://iamfirst.dipdive.com/)

jcpenney is a big supporter of FIRST. They are currently running a Pennies from heaven challenge to both promote their philanthropic venture and to raise more support. [You can check it out on line.](http://jcpenneyafterschool.org/who-we-help.aspx)

And, if you didn’t see it in the comments section for Tuesday’s blog, Team 3069, Finney High School from Detroit, and the Michigan Engineering Zone (MEZ) will be featured on Thurs 8/4 at 8PM in "Detroit in Overdrive" on the Plant Green channel. [More info and a channel finder here.](http://planetgreen.discovery.com/tv/detroit-in-overdrive-see-the-revolution.html)

156 days until Kickoff
See you then!

8/2/2011 Bill Blogged - 8.02.11

Good Afternoon Teams,

I couldn’t let today go by without wishing you a Happy WiFi Day. Thank you, WiFi, for all you do for FRC. May teams experience minimal packet loss and excellent QOS in the coming year!

In other news, [this video by team 1816 Edina Robotics](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9Xg0YONETo) was just brought to my attention.  It’s good to know teams are already preparing for the upcoming season. I find their behavior (and meeting location) very inspiring.

158 days until Kickoff
See you then!

**8/2/2011 Bill Blogged - Every four years**

Good Afternoon Teams,

Presidential candidate Governor Jon Huntsman met with Dean at DEKA today and always thinking of ways to promote *FIRST*, Dean brought him across the street to *FIRST* Place. Dean introduced the Governor to the campers in *FIRST* Place who demonstrated Lego and FTC robots. Then they spoke with team 151 Tough Techs who were kind enough to come in on short notice with their Lunacy robot to talk about FRC and demonstrate a ‘big bot’ for the Governor.

I didn’t get any pictures because I was busy answering questions and meeting with members of the press. The Associated Press, The Boston Globe, The LA Times and The Concord Monitor (a NH paper) interviewed Dean and Governor Huntsman and spoke with the campers and FRC Team members. Our local ABC affiliate WMUR and representatives from NBC filmed the event so you may see us on the news.

Now, I really have to get back to work.

159 days until Kickoff
See you then!

**7/27/2011 Bill Blogged - Survey says...**

Good Afternoon Teams,

On the 14th I mentioned the results from the preliminary Brandeis survey had just arrived in house. I've had some time to look them over and thought you'd like some details. Participating teams were asked to have one mentor and multiple student team members complete separate mentor and team member surveys.

Mentors told us:

* The teams they represent have been involved in FRC for an average of 5.2 years. 79.3% are school based and 28.6% of the school based FRC teams use the KOP in the classroom.
* The FRC teams who participated in the survey have an average of 6.5 mentors and 22.7 members with an almost 3/4-1/4 male female split. High School Juniors are the most represented class on FRC teams at 27.6% followed by Seniors 25.8% and Sophomores 22.7%.
* FRC has had a positive impact on everything from student awareness of how math and science is used in the real world 96.1%, to student understanding of basic scientific principles 94.1%, to teamwork skills 95.6% and problem solving skills 95.8%

Student team members told us:

* 0.4% of responding FRC students were on a JrFLL team in the past, 13.7% were on a FLL team and 5.2% either were, or currently are on a FTC team.
* The majority of responding students indicated they were actively involved in deciding team strategy 89.9%, robot design 86.3%, robot build 86.7%, and fund raising 81.9%. (Community service came in at 70.4%.)
* 93.4% of responding students stated they had the chance to do lots of different jobs on their team, 93.9% indicated they had important responsibilities and 93.2% felt they were an important contributor to their team.
* FRC students acknowledged the impact mentors had on their experience. 93.3% felt they had a chance to get to know at least one adult on the team really well and 92.4% felt they learned a lot from the adults on the team. 91.5% gained self-confidence.

We will be meeting with Brandeis next week to determine exactly what we want to measure in the upcoming longitudinal study and to determine the best way to identify and track participants. The plan is to follow individual students from FLL, FTC and FRC for as long as possible to measure the impact *FIRST* has on their lives. The information we gather in the study will not only help *FIRST* improve, but will be invaluable for fund raising, development and marketing. If your team is chosen to participate, please do everything you can to ensure students return their surveys in a timely manner.

On a separate note, I mentioned last Friday that Saturday, August 14th 7-8pm ET ABC will be airing a made for TV special about the *FIRST* Championship. Don't be surprised if the *FIRST* website has a temporary new landing page soon (like the landing page that appeared just before will.i.am's performance at the Super Bowl). We're gearing up for an increase in public interest after the special airs. You can help out by promoting the upcoming special in your area and by fielding any and all questions you can about FRC and *FIRST* as a whole. With any luck, this special will generate more support for teams and events throughout the USA.

164 days until Kickoff
See you then!

7/22/2011 Bill Blogged - Will.i.am and i.am.**FIRST**

Good Afternoon Teams,

What are you doing Sunday, August 14th around 7pm? ABC entertainment just announced they will be airing **i.am.FIRST – Science is Rock and Roll**. Everyone in FRC knows the Black Eyed Peas and Willow Smith performed for FIRST teams at Championship, but what you might not know is the entire event was filmed for a television special. The ABC entertainment release says(and I quote) “The … special takes an inside, up close look at the 20th Annual FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Championship, a worldwide science and robotics K-12 competition that celebrates technology and features live performances by The Black Eyed Peas and Willow Smith, as well as special appearances from a host of high profile celebrities speaking out to support STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education.”

[You can read the whole press release here.](http://www.usfirst.org/uploadedFiles/About_Us/Media_Center/Press_Releases_and_FIRST_News/2011/iamFIRST-ScienceisRockandRoll_FINALrel7-22-2011_FIRSTversion2.pdf%20)

If you can, please spread the word both to existing FIRST fans who might want to see the show and to possible sponsors, donors, mentors and future team members who want to know more about FIRST. This is a national opportunity for us to get FIRST in the public eye. Be prepared for an increased interest after the 14th.

169 days until Kickoff
See you then!

7/20/2011 Bill Blogged - I’m really not here

Good Morning Teams,

Officially, I’m out of the office on vacation this week, but you know how it is, once you’ve discovered FRC, you’re never really not thinking about FRC. I’m trying to enjoy my time off, but really I’m mulling over the strategic plan for FIRST and looking forward to starting the 2013 game plan with the GDC. Yes, I said 2013.

I’ve been told HR has just posted the [new FRC Program Coordinator position](http://origin-www.usfirst.org/aboutus/content.aspx?id=972) opening on our website (along with several other opportunities). Please spread the word. I’d love to see applicants with FIRST experience.

If you’re at IRI this week, be sure to say “Hi” to the representatives from The Bridgespan Group. They’re working with FIRST to develop the FY 2013-2017 Strategic plan. They weren’t able to get to any competitions during the 2011 season so we thought it would be a good idea if they saw an off season event to get some idea of what we’re all about.

I hope everyone has a safe and healthy week and I’ll be back on Monday raring to go.

171 days until Kickoff
See you then!

7/14/2011 Bill Blogged - It’s a good thing Ben & Jerry’s delivers

Good Afternoon Teams,

This is the time of year that the engineering staff are almost glad they work in the basement of the old mill where FIRST is headquartered. It’s hot here in Manchester and most of us need regular applications of ice cream to keep going. Matt and Ryan are camped out on the third floor with a field improving radio performance in the presence of a large number of wifi networks. Derek, Rob and Monica are behind closed doors testing prototypes and finalizing designs for the 2012 field elements. We know enough about what the game will look like to want to remind everyone, “’tis the season to buy pool noodles”.

Here on the fourth floor, Marketing is switching the usfirst.org website to a new content management system which should be up and running by August. The website will look very much the same, but behind the scenes the system will allow us to make important functional changes. During the transition we’re limiting content changes (to prevent having to make the changes twice) but once the system is in place we’ll be back up and running and we can start improvements to functionality.

The initial results from the May Brandeis survey of FRC teams arrived today. Brandeis will be in next week to discuss their findings and if anything interesting comes from that conversation I’ll be sure to let you know.

I hope you are enjoying the warm weather. If you can’t get enough LOGO MOTION during the off season, be sure to check out the [Off Season Events listing](http://www.usfirst.org/roboticsprograms/frc/content.aspx?id=436%20) on our website.

Congratulations to Sergio Seguel of Team 2576 The Chilean Heart who mentored the FLL team that has been selected to participate in Moonbots 2.0. To every FRC team member who mentors other teams – you make an important difference. Thank you for changing the culture one student at a time.

Best Buy is offering Community Grants that could benefit your team (if you have a 501 ( c ) (3) ). [The deadline is August 1st.](http://www.bestbuy-communityrelations.com/community_grants.htm)

Time Warner Cable is holding a [trivia contest](http://www.connectamillionminds.com/campaigns/itaintrocketscience) every day until Aug 4th based on “It Ain’t Rocket Science”

177 days until Kickoff
See you then!

7/8/2011 Bill Blogged - It’s all fun and games

Good Morning Teams,

This time of year I think wistfully of summer vacations and long days spent by the water. In reality I’m besieged by decisions about the 2012 season that have to be made soon in order for the staff to get to work making the next season a reality.

Everything is up in the air (as usual) but we do have a big picture plan.

* TIMS will open for team profile information in late August.
* Registration for FRC events is scheduled to begin in late September.
* We have several additional new Regionals planned.
* FIRST staff and key volunteers are working to contract venues at all event locations.
* When we have a firm competition schedule, I will share it right away.

We’re also discussing:

* We need to find ways to reduce trophy costs. Here, the cost cutting discussion includes weighing the benefits of eliminating the second trophy vs. downsizing the two trophies currently awarded to winners.
* We have to plan for the future of Championship. When the number of Regionals x6 exceeds the number of berths at CMP, how should we determine which teams should be invited to participate?
* We’re looking closely at the volunteer model in FRC as compared to the rest of FIRST and other youth centric programs. Should we be background checking every volunteer who comes in contact with students?
* We continue to look for ways to reduce Regional expenses, examining everything from venues and dates to equipment rental and contracted services.

In other news:

My congratulations to the [FRC Teams in Mexico who attracted the attention and interest of President Calderon this year.](http://www.usfirst.org/aboutus/content.aspx?id=19872)  The forum [“Foro Mexico **FIRST**”](http://ingcomputacion.itam.mx/blogfirstmexico/) is a direct result of their conversation with the President and provides all FRC teams an opportunity to make suggestions and offer support to the growing FIRST community in Mexico. Please visit the website and share your tips for success and lessons learned in bringing FIRST to your community. Go Mexico Teams!

Dean Kamen and several FIRST teams are featured in Time Warner Cable’s newest Connect a Million Minds TV special called “It Ain’t Rocket Science” which is now available for viewing on line.

<http://www.connectamillionminds.com/videos.php#79>
<http://www.connectamillionminds.com/videos.php#80>
<http://www.connectamillionminds.com/videos.php#81>

183 days until kickoff
See you then!

6/30/2011 Bill Blogged - Time flies

Good Afternoon Teams,

Believe it or not, life at HQ is busy during the off season. I apologize for neglecting to blog last week and for blogging late this week, but I want to assure you, it’s not for lack of activity here in Manchester.

The GDC met on site this past weekend. Conceptually the 2012 game is a lock and the 2012 Game Manual is 90% complete (and on track to be shorter than previous years). Now, in addition to following up on the 2011 season and making all the repairs/changes/upgrades that were pushed off until after Championship, the staff can get started on all the logistical and administrative tasks that go into turning a game concept into a successful competition. We need to finalize the designs, order game pieces, prepare fields, redesign field road cases, update the field management system, schedule events and chase down all the hundreds of other details that go into hosting a successful season. Meanwhile, the GDC needs to finalize the scoring and turn our attention to the 2013 game.

You’d think the GDC would want rest on our laurels for a moment having designed a game in record time, but we are still far from our goal of getting a season ahead. The GDC has monthly onsite meetings scheduled through the fall and will be holding conference calls at least weekly in order to get everything done. One of the many reasons I enjoy working with this team has to do with the game selection process that Linda did a good job of describing in her [guest blog](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/06/insiders-view-of-gdc.html). As a group we tweek game ideas that didn’t make it in prior years and we modify game ideas that evolved during game development but were left behind in the final cut, while at the same time members propose radical new game ideas. In the end we often take a piece from each of these categories to construct something completely different.

So, what else is happening at HQ this week?

* FIRST as a whole is reviewing and updating our strategic plan. We’re trying to define the ultimate goals of the organization, describe what success looks like, and map out the steps necessary to get there in 5 – 10 years. This is not as easy as it sounds.
* FRC is developing a Qualification Event Structure based on what we learned during District Event pilot. We’re currently in negotiations with RDs and Regional Planning Committees from areas that are interested in participating. I’ll let you know the minute we have dates and venues locked in.
* Kate, Collin, Carla and assorted staff members are preparing for the annual Supplier’s Summit and Dean’s List Summit which will include dinner at Dean’s house this August.
* IT is completely redesigning the Volunteer Information Management System (VIMS) and making upgrades to TIMS and STIMS in preparation for FRC registration this fall.
* The engineering staff is developing the 2012 control system which will incorporate the new 4-slot FRC cRIO II. They’re going to need Beta Test teams again this year. Watch this space, I’ll let you know the second they’re ready to take applications.
* We’ve reviewed the initial applications submitted by candidates for the new [**FRC Engineer position**](http://www.usfirst.org/aboutus/content.aspx?id=972) and we’re initiating the interview process. If you are interested in (and qualified for) the position, and haven’t yet submitted an application, consider this last call.

191 days until the 2012 kickoff
See you then!

6/15/11 Bill Blogged - What percent of viewers read the title?

Good Afternoon Teams,

I’ve finished my first pass of the end of the season survey (my thanks to everyone who participated) and I’ve started to distribute the detailed answers to other departments to help them in future planning. Here’s some of what teams had to say:

* 76.5% of respondents liked the inclusion of a mini-bot in LOGO MOTION
* 69.6% of respondents would like to see some sort of mini-bot included in future FRC games (I have no comment on how soon that might materialize)
* 80.8% of respondents chose the quantity of qualification rounds (more rounds) over increasing the length of individual qualification rounds (more time spent on the field)
* 60.8% of respondents prefer giving teams a fixed amount of time to connect to the field over reducing the number of rounds in order to build in time so that all teams may connect to the field
* A surprising 23.2% of respondents told us participating in more than one competition event a season would be a burden

Human Resources tells me we’ve already received 5 applications for the [new FRC Engineer position](http://origin-www.usfirst.org/aboutus/content.aspx?id=972). If you’re interested, contact HR soon.

Summer hours start for the office staff in Manchester June 20th. We’re all still putting in full work weeks, but most of us are working longer days Monday through Thursday so we can get out earlier on Fridays. We will have a limited staff in the building on Friday afternoons, so please plan ahead if you need to contact someone.

206 days until the 2012 kickoff
See you then!

6/10/11 Bill Blogged - Want work you can feel good about?

Good Afternoon Teams,

I mentioned 6/1 that I’d be looking for an additional FRC staff member soon. The job (along with several others) has just been [posted on our website](http://origin-www.usfirst.org/aboutus/content.aspx?id=972).  I’m hoping to see applicants with FIRST experience. Spread the word.

211 days until the 2012 kickoff
See you then!

6/8/2011 Bill Blogged - Full House

Good Afternoon Teams,

This week, the **Regional Directors** are in town for a three day meeting. I met with them yesterday to review 2011 and prepare for 2012. We discussed FRC’s plans to expand Bag & Tag, increase FIRSTChoice and extend the event model (along with a few other topics I can’t mention here). If your team isn’t already in regular [contact with your Regional Director](http://www.usfirst.org/regionalcontact.aspx), make a point of getting to know him/her. They are a terrific resource and they want to help your team succeed.

While I’m thinking about 2012, I should mention. The version of **Wind River Workbench** we expect will be in next season’s FRC Kit of Parts is not certified for use on 64-bit Windows operating system. Keep that in mind if you upgrade any team computers over the summer.

And since 2012 is built on what we learned in 2011, now is a good time to mention I was surprised to learn that one of the drayage locations for robots that were shipped to a bag & tag events had a problem with **robot shipping crates** that weren’t built to meet the [shipping crate construction standards](http://www.usfirst.org/uploadedFiles/Robotics_Programs/FRC/Game_and_Season__Info/2011_Assets/Shipping%20Crate%20Construction.pdf).  The drayage facility did everything they could to work with the crates, but asked me to remind everyone to read the instructions. If a robot crate isn’t built to spec, it has a dramatically increased risk of sustaining damage.

Now that we are between seasons, returning teams should know the deadline to **purchase an 8 slot cRIO chassis** (if for some reason your team wants one more) is 10/1/2011, As I have already mentioned, FRC will be supplying 2012 Rookie teams with the new 4 slot cRIO-FRCII in the kit of parts. Returning teams may re-use the 8 slot cRIO in 2012 or purchase the new 4 slot chassis (without modules) for under $300 this winter. The current cRIO modules will work with either chassis. Contact National Instruments at 1-866-511-6285 to get more information or to place an order. The 8 slot cRIO with modules included is $750.

In other news:

Congratulations to the [2010-2011 Google Rise recipients](http://www.google.com/diversity/rise/recipients.html%20) Team 399 Lancaster High School Eagle Robotics and Team 3328 Noho Robo

FRC has been included on the [2011-2012 NASSP National Advisory List of Student Contests and Activities](http://www.nassp.org/awards-and-recognition/nassp-national-advisory-list%20). This nationally recognized status makes it easier for staff members and students at many schools to convince their school administration FRC events should be treated like educational field trips. If your principal and school board don’t already know FRC is on the list, you might want to give them a heads up.

Kate tells me she’s just finished her first pass of the **2011 Kit of Parts survey results**. She still has all of the individual comments to read (and she does read all the comments), but she thought you’d be interested to know:

* More than 1000 FRC members completed the survey, 27% of whom were students
* 84% stated their experience with kit was either good or excellent (only 2% described their experience as poor or very poor)
* 80% said we should keep the registration fee the same as last year and have teams reuse parts from year to year
* 68.1% described their experience with FIRSTChoice as either good or excellent (4.7% chose poor 0% chose very poor)
* 63% said the kit inspires student team members to work with and know more about STEM (16% said no, the kit didn’t inspire students)
* 47% of respondents said there are parts in the kit that they use throughout the year (beyond build and competition season)

213 days until the 2012 kickoff
See you then!

6/2/2011 Bill Blogged - An insider's view of the GDC

Good Afternoon Teams,

Linda Maulding aka Wallace joined the GDC in April as the first ever Rotating Member. She is a Xerox engineer and mentor for one of the original FRC teams, the X-Cats Team 191. Because Linda has a fresh perspective on Game Design, I asked her if she would share her impressions of the first meeting she attended in Manchester this May. Here’s what she had to say:

I began as a FRC Team 191 mentor in 1999. It's been 12 years and I am still fired up about FIRST Robotics! At the moment I am riding on a new high. I am part of the Game Design Committee (GDC)! I get to see first hand the muscle that went into 20 years of robot popping, mind binding, kid rocking, hand slapping, FIRST Robotics Competition games!

Just to put you on notice, I might use some words to describe the GDC that may seem outside the box, things like crazy in love, compassionate, grueling, persistence, laughter, tenacious, head of the class, integrity, loud, agile, and Sherlock Holmes.

When I first arrived in Manchester I had no idea what to expect. But even in my travels, I was reminded each time the pilot lowered the landing gear and these little wheels came down to assist this gigantic plane to land safely, how much tenacity game design plays in every day technology. The fact that a committee can bring together different minds, from different corners of the world, and different fabrics of intellect to develop a winning game that can not only highlight the importance of a rookie, but also stroke the egos of the veterans, is a miracle!

Typical work sessions at the GDC begin with warm fuzzes for the appetite and a choice of liquid eye openers to ensure creative juices flow throughout the day. Then it’s down to business, and I mean business. As I glance around the room, I see team members prepared for battle armed with sketches, power points, laptops, thinking caps, sneakers, jeans, pencils and erasers, ready to jump start another season. The team is given instructions for the day. Today’s task: narrow the team’s double digit list of brainstormed game designs to a manageable smaller list. The team agrees to take on the challenge. I observe briefly to learn the session protocol. While observing I hear and see the passion the team has, as they literally take ownership of a task and work it to satisfaction as a team.

After reviewing and discussing all the game designs, we then used a tactical approach to reduce the list to 3 with at least two other designs tied for 4th. Now that we have a manageable list, we move into what I call Shake-n-Bake. We take the ingredients of each game, knead them together, and throw them into the game arena to see what cooks up.

In order to do that we must now move the working session from a conference room onto the game field. The idea is to mimic each game as closely as possible to identify hiccups and complications. It also allows the team to be proactive in solving issues that may surface during the actual game play. Since we are early into the GDC sessions, there aren’t any sample game pieces or robots available, so the team becomes the tools they need to play the game.

This is a fun time, but one of the most productive, because it gets you right in the heart of the game! We run and crawl around on the field as robots, working the game, asking questions, throwing out good ideas, throwing out bad ideas, tweaking strategy, solving problems, and creating some too, all for the love of the game!

We Shake-n-Bake each game to ensure we have exhausted possible scenarios, answered as many questions as we could, and dotted many I’s and crossed a lot of T’s. By now it was late evening and we were exhausted as we lay sprawled on the game field eating ice cream! I smiled as I remember the daily schedule did say 8AM to 7PM ish!

As we got up to leave the session, a new burst of energy was in the air, so someone suggested we meet at this interesting watering hole that serves fried pickles to continue the discussion! Little did I know my day was not over! We arrived at the watering hole, ordered refreshments, scanned the gallery for FIRST alums then the discussion continued!

It’s been a while since I’ve had to stay completely focused for that many hours of the day. Being on the GDC I have developed a new love for grueling and I’m loving it!

The next day, while walking down the hill to the work session, I learned that the team came up with **another game idea** in the twilight hours at the thirsty fried pickles place! (Ok, I will admit some of us could not hang, so we left to get some sleep.) Remember when I said the short list could get longer…it just did!

The day began with the team running the Shake-n-Bake act on the newest game idea. The task for the day: narrow the list to 3 again and then Shake-n-Bake the games to pick the best 2. Since we knew the drill, we got to work.

During the working sessions, all the bases are covered. The team may not have all the answers and they may not all agree on everything, but I can almost guarantee that if you think they missed something or didn’t consider something, think again. They covered it! **This team is the head of the class!**

The team works hard at turning over every leaf and magnifying details so that when the lights go on, none of the delicate craftsmanship falls through the cracks. The ability to develop WIN –WIN scenarios for all involved, including the students and their sponsors, is at the heart of every work session. The team takes very seriously the opportunity to challenge and inspire young minds while promoting co-opertition between corporate and education industries. Not only is everyone heard, they are also given a chance to be a part of the solution.

I can’t wait for the next meeting. We still have a lot to get done before the 2012 game will be ready for Kickoff.

219 days until the 2012 kickoff
See you then!

6/1/2011 Bill Blogged Again - What did you do with your weekend?

Good Afternoon Teams,

I hope everyone had a good Memorial Day Weekend. Team 3323 Potential Energy marched in their local Memorial Day Parade. Did your team do anything interesting?



Here in Manchester we’re gearing up for a GDC meeting next weekend. The Engineering team is waiting impatiently for raw materials to be delivered so they can prototype some of the latest designs. Fortunately, they had a few game pieces to keep themselves busy.

We’re going to need help in the coming season, so I’m looking to add an additional FRC Engineer to the team in the near future. Keep an eye on the [employment section of our website.](http://www.usfirst.org/aboutus/content.aspx?id=972) Details will be posted once the final t is crossed. I’ll keep you informed.

On a different note, as we’re wading our way through all the information collected this past season, a FRC staff member recently passed on this story: As Judges in Seattle were trying to decide which team would receive the Gracious Professionalism Award, one of them witnessed a student from one of the top three choices telling the FTA “you don’t \*\*\*\*ing know what you’re doing”. Needless to say, that team didn’t stay in the top three for long. Heads up teams, we can hear you.

Other info:

NASA's [INSPIRE program](http://www.nasa.gov/offices/education/programs/descriptions/INSPIRE_Project.html) is seeking applications for its 2011-12 Online Learning Community (OLC). Deadline: Thursday, June 30.
[Ashoka's Changemakers](http://www.changemakers.com/stemeducation)  is seeking "models that bring STEM expertise into public schools, thereby using resources from the private and not-for-profit sectors in new ways to further student learning." Winners are eligible for more than $120,000 in cash and in-kind prizes. Deadline Wednesday, August 3, 2011.

220 days until the 2012 kickoff
See you then!

5/25/2011 Bill Blogged - We continue full speed ahead

Good Afternoon Teams,

The GDC took a break this weekend (after meeting two weekends in a row), but work on the 2012 game continues. The Engineering team has been busy prototyping the game elements and a full sized field is ready and waiting on the first floor for when the GDC returns in June. (No. You can’t see it. We’re in lockdown until January 7th.) During our next meeting, we’ll use the elements to “play” the game again and again (using patient GDC members as robots) to establish the rules. We still need to develop the end game, and there’s the scoring to work out and the manual to write, but I’m cautiously optimistic that 2012 is going to be a very exciting season.

Upstairs we’re talking about Bag & Tag; what worked, what didn’t and how to expand the number of Bag & Tag events for 2012. This summer the staff is going to work on streamlining load in, improving load out, and beefing up communications to teams that need to ship to Bag & Tag events. If you’ve never been to a Bag & Tag event, you might want to [read up on it this summer.](http://www.usfirst.org/roboticsprograms/frc/content.aspx?id=3570%20)

If you’ve ever considered hosting your own off season event (lots of fun, great practice for your drive team and a potential fundraiser) you’re going to want to check out [How to Host an Off-Season FRC Event](http://www.usfirst.org/uploadedFiles/Robotics_Programs/FRC/Events/2011/How%20to%20Host%20an%20Off-Season%20FRC%20Event%20%2828May%202011%20Edition%202%29.pdf%20) by Andy Baker & Chris Fultz

Kate and Collin send their thanks to everyone who completed the KOP survey and tell me they’re reviewing the responses now.

The 2011 Season team survey link was blasted to your team main and alternate contacts last Thursday. As of today there are only 118 responses. I asked a lot of questions about the future of FRC so make sure your team participates before the Sunday, June 5th deadline.

The responses to the 2011 Championship survey tell me we need to increase seating for the fields in the pits, improve communication to teams about special events, and tweek the schedule to reduce conflicts. (And trash cans, I won’t forget about the trash cans.) I appreciate the constructive feedback (and have made note of several good ideas) and will share your comments with the other departments involved in the planning and execution of the 2012 Championship. With everything we learned about holding an event in St Louis this year, I have every expectation next year’s event will be even bigger and better.

If you’ve ever heard [Science Friday hosted by Ira Flatow](http://sciencefriday.com/), you’ll be interested to know he’s asked Dean for a couple of inventive “kids” (up to 24 years old) who have invented something interesting to highlight in an upcoming show. If you know of anyone in FRC who meets those qualifications, send me an email ASAP at FRCTeams@usfirst.org and I’ll pass your recommendations on.

You probably know by now that Brandeis is conducting a survey of FRC and FTC teams for FIRST. At this moment only 175 FRC team leaders have replied from the 380 teams who were selected to participate and only 450 team members have completed the survey. We were hoping for a whole lot more involvement. If you are a team that was invited to participate, or if you know a team that was invited to participate, please encourage everyone to complete the process. In addition to giving us feedback about the program, the Brandeis survey will help us attract more sponsors and donors in the future.

227 days until the 2012 kickoff
See you then!

**5/17/2011 Bill Blogged - Is that a one or a zero?**

Good Afternoon Teams,

The GDC met over the weekend here in Manchester (again). We’ve been able to zero in on one concept for 2012 and have started beefing up the idea to add more scoring opportunities. We spent a lot of time discussing bumper rules and protective zones, but haven’t come to any absolute decisions. It’s important to the GDC that the final version of the game doesn’t result in all teams creating similar robots. We like to see multiple solutions to a common challenge. It’s what innovation is all about.

My thanks to the members of the GDC who are giving up their weekends trying to fit 2 years’ worth of work into one season and my reassurances to the teams; we won’t waste the GDC’s other good ideas. We’re keeping notes to ensure those ideas will be back on the table as we plan future diabolical games.

In other news:

Today is your team’s last chance to participate in the Kit of Parts survey. The collector closes tonight at 11:45pm. Please make sure your team has both a technical mentor and a student complete the survey before the deadline. The link went out in an email blast to your main and alternate contact.

I still need release forms from the following Dean’s List students. If you know them, please encourage them to contact deanslist@usfirst.org ASAP.

* Diane Bernardoni
* Tina Dutra
* TJ Evarts
* Amy Frankhouser

I’m finding the results of the Championship team survey very interesting reading. Thank you to everyone who told me honestly what you think. I’ve shared the data with FRC staff members and will use your comments to improve future Championships.

235 days until the 2012 kickoff
See you then!

**Wednesday, May 11, 2011**

**[Wait, did he say pool?](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/05/wait-did-he-say-pool.html)**

Good Afternoon Teams,

The GDC met for the first 2012 onsite meeting last weekend and to quote Dean, “we made great progress”.   We spent most of the day Saturday in the 4th floor Einstein conference room throwing around ideas for the 2012 game.  Sunday we gathered on the FRC field set up on the 1st floor to throw around game elements (figuratively speaking) and some more ideas.  The Engineering Department keeps a collection of items on hand for the GDC and we had some fun testing the behaviors of certain items under certain interesting conditions. (Sorry, I can’t be more specific than that.)

To meet our goal of finalizing the 2012 game early this year, we had to winnow the pool of game ideas down to just a few finalists last weekend and it looks like we have some real winners.  We’re playing around with everything from field configuration to length of play (watch for a few questions in the FRC end of season survey coming soon).  We plan to reconvene this weekend to further refine the finalists.   I’ll let you know what transpires.

My thanks to the 300 teams who have completed the 2011 Championship survey.  There is just one more day left before the survey closes then I’ll be reviewing the results, so if your team attended CMP, please make sure your main or alternate contact completes the survey before tomorrow.

There are just 6 days left to complete the Kit of Parts Survey.  So far 720 teams have started the survey, which sounds like a lot, however, last year we heard from a total of 811 teams (and we had fewer total teams).  Please make sure your team participates.  We want to hear from you.  Interesting note: although we invited both mentors and students to participate, 3/4 of the respondents so far are mentors.

There are just 8 days left to [**purchase additional trophies, medallions and pins**](http://www.usfirst.org/uploadedFiles/Robotics_Programs/FRC/Game_and_Season__Info/2011_Assets/2011_Trophy_Medallion_Reorder_Form.pdf) if your team wants extras.

June 30th is the deadline to [**purchase additional game pieces**](http://origin-www.usfirst.org/uploadedFiles/Robotics_Programs/FRC/Events/2011/2011_Game_Piece_Order_Form.pdf) if your team is planning an off season event.     We have limited quantities left, so orders will be filled on a first come first served basis.  I believe [**AndyMark**](http://www.andymark.com/SearchResults.asp?Cat=234) also has game pieces available.

For those of you who are asking, no, we don’t have the dates for next year’s individual regional events yet.  We do know we’re having a six week season starting with week one March 1-3, 2012 if that helps, but the Regional Planning Committees are only just starting to work on contracts with venues for the 2012 season.  I’ll be sure to let you know when we have an official calendar.

Don’t forget, [**Dean has a fundraiser to help your team**](http://origin-www.usfirst.org/roboticsprograms/content.aspx?id=18445).

241 days until the 2012 kickoff
See you then!

Posted by Bill at [1:36 PM](http://frcdirector.blogspot.com/2011/05/wait-did-he-say-pool.html) [0 comments](https://www.blogger.com/comment.g?blogID=5222664694558307733&postID=7888382384114248708)

