



Journal photo

Pocatello High School students Dustin Little, Sam Lyle and former student Damon Jordan, from right to left, helped build a basketball-playing robot called "HEX." The boys are members of PHS's Haywire Robotics Team 1569.

# Robo jocks ready to rumble

## Poky High's robotics team eagerly awaits a regional competition in Portland, Ore.

**By Casey Santee**  
Journal Writer

POCATELLO — Some teens get more excited about their birthday or Christmas than about any other day of the year.

But for Dustin Little it's Jan. 8 — the day a NASA video feed eagerly awaited by teens around the world will inform him what kind of a robot to build and in which game it will compete. Little and about 30 other PHS students are members of Haywire Robotics Team 1956. After learning their mission, the team immediately orders a robot kit. There's no time to lose. They've got weeks

of designing and building to do, so it will be ready by March for a regional competition in Portland, Ore. It's part of a global program called "For the Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology," or FIRST, that aims to get children more interested in science and engineering.

PHS's robotics team is funded by a National Science Foundation GK12 Grant through Idaho State University.

"We've had the preps, the snowboarders, the jocks. We've had groups of everyone," Little said of team's membership. People think it's a bunch of nerdy kids getting together but

it's not."

The students meet Monday-Friday for an hour long robotics class — the first one of its kind in Idaho. ISU engineering students help them build their robot to specifications outlined by the video. Last year, the team's 111-pound basketball playing robot, "HEX" competed against other such robots at the Rose Garden in Portland, Ore. Little said all mechanical players had to take turns on offense and defense.

"Everyone is screaming and excited," Little said. "There's so much emotion, I really can't describe it with words."

Teammate Sam Lyle said students take the project so seriously, when they build the robot after school, they sometimes stay until the early morning hours. He said when excitement is running high or when they are in a crunch for time, they've worked until 3 a.m.

If they win in Portland, they earn a spot at the National Championship in Atlanta, Ga.

And while that didn't happen this year, Little and the others now anxiously anticipate their next chance — Jan. 8.