

Battle of the 'bots

Competition slated tonight in Pocatello

By Casey Santee
Journal Writer

POCATELLO — Justin Newman is confident his team's robot will stack up well against the competition.

Newman, a sophomore at Pocatello High School, is one of dozens of students from Eastern Idaho hoping to be crowned grand champion tonight at the VEX Robot Challenge: Stack-it Ball Plus competition in the school's old gym. The goal is to design a robot that can stack 10 racket balls into a pyramid using a leaning cardboard structure for support.

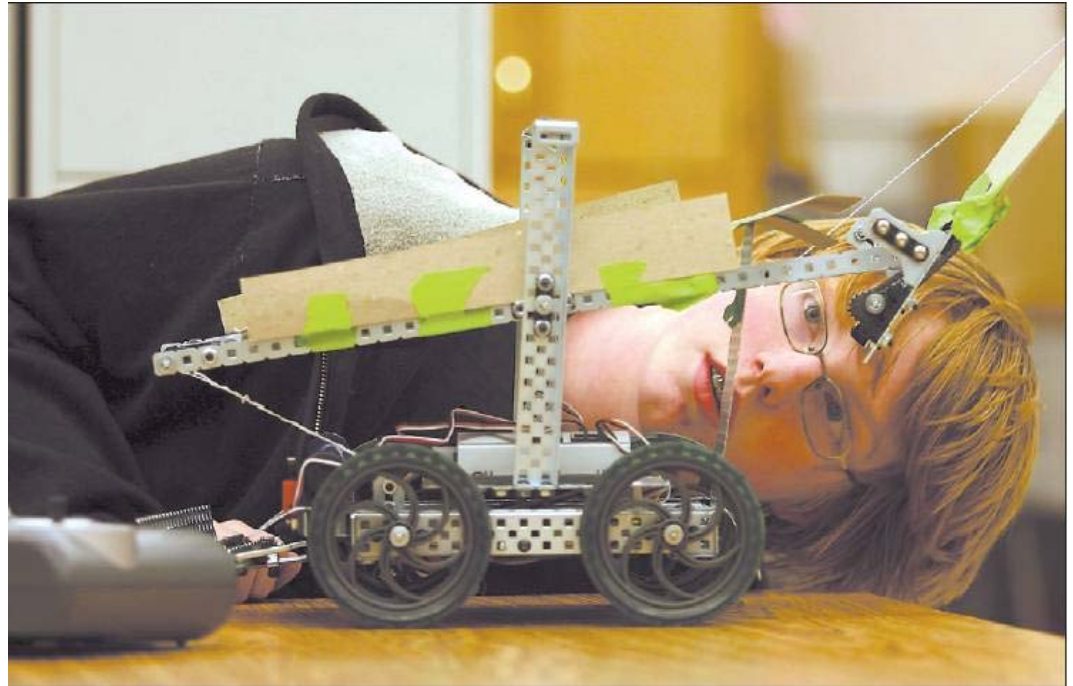
But Newman's aspirations don't end there. He said the event is preparation for an international competition involving larger robots in Portland, Ore., in March.

Newman said despite having a good design, his team's 14-cubic-inch mechanical creation, which looks like a miniature tractor built from a high-tech erector set, didn't fare well at a similar contest last month.

Rather than throwing in the towel, Newman and his teammates made adjustments for the next round.

"We didn't figure in the fact that the wheels wouldn't get good traction on the carpet," Newman said, adding that they regeared the drive system to correct the problem.

Engineer Sharie Ellis teaches the robotics class at PHS. She said it



Journal photo by Carl Frank

Pocatello High sophomore Sam Lyle examines the underside of a robot he's building to compete in the VEX Robotics Challenge tonight in the old gymnasium at Pocatello High School.

started three years ago as a partnership between School District 25 and Idaho State University. The class is funded by a National Science Foundation GK-12 Grant aimed at increasing youth interest in science and engineering.

American Microsystems Inc., also assisted with a \$5,000 donation, and two AMIS engineers have volunteered as mentors.

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The VEX Robot Challenge: Stack-it Ball Plus Grand Championship will be tonight from 6 to 9 p.m. at Pocatello High School's old gymnasium, known as the Pit. Teams from Pocatello, Shelley and Marsh Valley high schools will compete. The event is free to the public.

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AMIS engineer Carsten Ulland said he got involved because it is rewarding watching things “click” for the students. Ulland said he originally got involved in robotics during college.

“When this got going in Pocatello, it was good to see and hard to resist,” Ulland said.

Ellis, in her first year at PHS, took the job a week before the school started after the previous robotics instructor quit.

“It’s neat to watch them succeed,” Ellis said. “Once they do, it makes a difference in their lives. Whether or not they become engineers is not so important.”

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