

The fact that we are eight months late submitting this and that you are graciously still accepting it sort of encapsulates our rookie season last year and has taught us a lot about the spirit of FIRST. We felt behind and completely overwhelmed throughout the entire season, and yet help was available everywhere we turned.

Gail and Ken were just an email away and they always had the answers we needed. Our mentor team met with us during build season and helped us through some programming issues. Our sponsors, Criterion Manufacturing Solutions, were amazing. Their engineers helped us sort out some of the problems with our design and our kids were able to work along side them. The time they donated was far above and beyond anything we could have asked for. But we were really taken by surprise by the spirit of FIRST when we arrived at our first event at Kettering. It was a competition unlike anything we had ever experienced.

We had our robot inspected and let's just say it wasn't even close to passing. We had misinterpreted some of the rules about the dimensions for the robot. We were so discouraged and didn't see any way we would be able to compete. We started kicking around some things we could do to possibly change the design and spent the rest of the night in the machine shop. The mechanics there were great. We needed some parts we didn't have and the event announcer called for help for us. Parts came from everywhere! Long story short, we did finally pass inspection and were able to compete, but it wouldn't have been possible without the help of many others.

My advice to rookie teams and to those thinking of forming a team:

- Do it! Form the team. It will be the best experience you could give your students. Our students gained so much confidence and ability from the start of build season until our final competition. One of our graduates that was on the team is in engineering school right now and loving it. He credits his decision to go into engineering directly to his experience in FIRST.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. It's available everywhere. Though it is a competition, everyone wants to see you succeed and will go out of their way to help you. This year we are taking parts we don't need or use just to share with other teams if needed.
- Make sure you have a decent cart at the competitions for your robot. You will have to move quickly, through doorways, and sometimes over cables. Make certain your robot won't fall off the cart. Don't be intimidated by some of the other teams carts—just make certain that it will get your robot around the competition in one piece.
- Watch the competition and participate in all the activities. You will be really busy and may feel like you don't have time but make time to watch some other matches and soak in the ambiance. It's fun, so have fun.
- Read the rules and follow them. Then read them again to make certain you followed them. If you have questions, ask.