SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2009 THE GREENVILLE NEWS

Robots open new vistas for teens



PATRICK COLLARD / Staff

Robots go head to head Friday at Littlejohn Coliseum.

Students, machines seek trip to world title match

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CLEMSON — Lucy the robot is more than an engineering accomplishment for the 11 Pickens County high school students who created her. In addition to her ability to pick up and dump balls in competition, Lucy has opened new horizons to her creators.

In their rookie year of FIRST Robotics competition at Clemson University's Littlejohn Coliseum, the students from Easley, Pickens and D.W. Daniel high schools are hooked.

"When you're on the floor, there's no other feeling like it," said Chris Looper, a Pickens High junior. "It's excitement. The giant lights in your face and hearing people screaming behind you — it's pretty incredible."



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Eric Bickle, from left, Chris Looper and Curtis Todd of Pickens' Team SPARK compete Friday.

Team president Curtis Todd, a Daniel High junior, said the team had mentors from Bosch, but team members came up with their own design

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Chris Todd, left, William Shelton, and Eric Bickle, right, of Team SPARK from Pickens prepare their robot to compete at Littlejohn Coliseum in Clemson.

ROBOT

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and did their own work.

"They allowed us to make some mistakes and we learned from them," Todd said.

Building a robot wasn't as complicated as Pickens High sophomore William Shelton thought it would be.

"If you can put simple parts together, you can create something as complex as a robot," Shelton said.

The students are among 1,000 young people from nine states and Brazil in the competition, which continues from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. today.

The event is open to the public.

Forty-three teams and robots are competing in Clemson. The teams received the same kit of parts and had six weeks to design and assemble their robots, which can be no heavier than 120 pounds.

Worldwide, more than 35,000 high school students participate on more than 1,500 teams in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Israel, Mexico, the Netherlands and England.

The regional events will lead to an international championship April 16-18 at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta.

For more information on the competition, go to the FIRST Web site at www.usfirst.org, FIRST Robotics Competition, or http://www.ces.clemson.edu/main/FRC/index.html.

Live streaming video of the matches will be provided at http://www.clemson.edu/tlt/stream/frc/ during the Palmetto Regional.