



Patricia Mikik Doyle/Huntsville Times

Challenger Middle School's Atomic Penguins, Michelle Parks and Shannon Williams, got their Lego car ready for competition Saturday at Liberty Middle School in the FIRST Lego League Competition.

# Gecko takes spill; not team

Students respond as Lego competition lures area schools

By WENDY REEVES

Times Staff Writer  
wendy.reeves@hntimes.com

MADISON - All day Saturday, the Liberty Middle School gymnasium sounded more like the final minutes of a championship basketball playoff game than a math, science and technology competition.

The day got off to a rocky start for the Gecko Techs of Jones Valley Elementary School in Huntsville when someone accidentally knocked the team's robot off a table and it crashed into pieces on the



Patricia Mikik Doyle/Huntsville Times

Jones Valley's Gecko Techs watch their team compete.

floor.

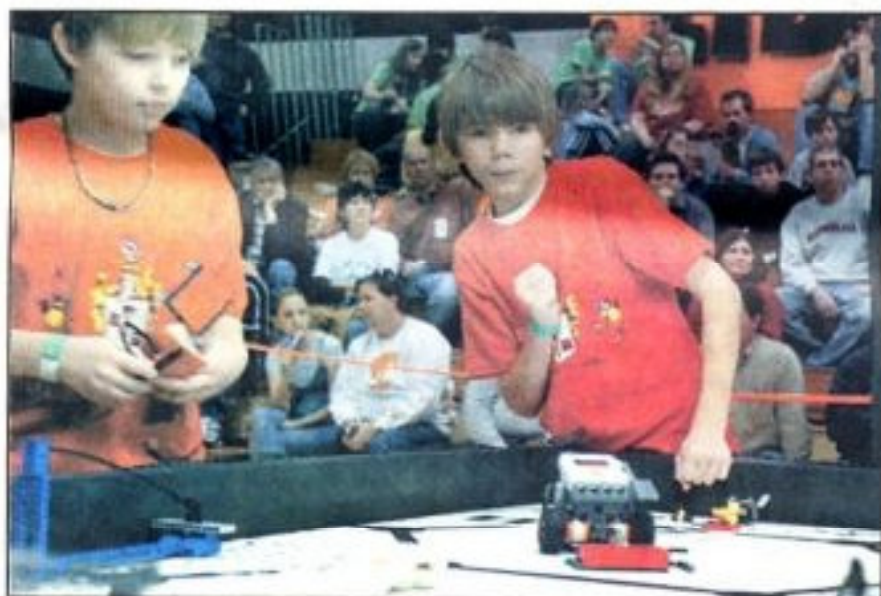
After months of researching the gecko to learn it's more than "a real-

ly cool lizard," team coach Kristy Dunn said the team didn't place blame, but went right to work to put the robot back together.

Minutes before their final turn, teammate Tyler Letson, 9, had a tight grip on the plastic box holding the Gecko Techs' robot.

It was a nail-biting, jumping up and down, hands-clapping and arms in the air cheering 2 1/2 minutes for the team, whose robot finished all the tasks but one. Their final turn ended with hugs and high-fives. Some of the tasks included lifting a truck by a thin cable of carbon nanotubes, testing stain resistant fabric and delivering a molecule

Please see **GECKO** on A14



Students and their families gather in the gym at Liberty Middle School for the FIRST Lego League Competition on Saturday. Blake Rogers, left, and Stuart Russler call themselves the Cholesterol Crusaders from Horizon Elementary School.

Photos by Patricia Mikik Doyle/Hurtsville Times

## Gecko

*Continued from page A9*

to power a molecular motor, causing it to spin and release energy.

When the competition was over, the team's hard work paid off - the Gecko Techs placed third in the overall competition, Dunn said.

They were among 37 teams from area elementary and middle schools, and one home-schooled team, that competed in the annual state tournament of the For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) Lego League.

FIRST was founded in 1989 to inspire young people's interest and participation in science and technology. The program is for 9- to 14-year-olds.

This year's challenge - Nano

Quest - called for the teams to use robotics to explore nanotechnology and the amazing solutions this newest frontier of science and technology can provide in everyday life.

For the research part of their project, the Gecko Techs came up with the idea for a "smart adhesive" they call synthetic "gecko glue." Dunn said they were inspired by the millions of nanohairs on a gecko's foot that create a suction cup-like effect, allowing the gecko to move anywhere without falling.

The team created a carpet of supersticky carbon nanotubes that could form the basis of future types of adhesives, Dunn said. The team decided "gecko glue" might be used to heal open wounds without stitches. It could be used on boots to help them adhere to the moon, like a gecko's foot. Or, it could be used on a beginner's ball glove to help teach players how to catch.

Another group that stood out

in the crowd Saturday was the Damsels in Charge from Liberty Middle School. The all-girl team wore sparkly tiaras, pink T-shirts and pink feather boas around their waists.

"These are not girly girls," said Coach Amber Merrill. "They play sports and are into dance and involved in other activities, but I wanted them to stand out today and make a statement that girls are interested in math and science if provided the opportunity."

Camryn Stokes, 13, didn't think she would participate again after her first competition last year when she saw only a few other girls. She was excited when Merrill proposed an all-girl team. But it took some coaxing to get Alyx Chandler, 13, on the team.

"I had no clue what programming even meant," Chandler said. "Now I have more than some knowledge ... not 100 percent, but I've learned a lot."