

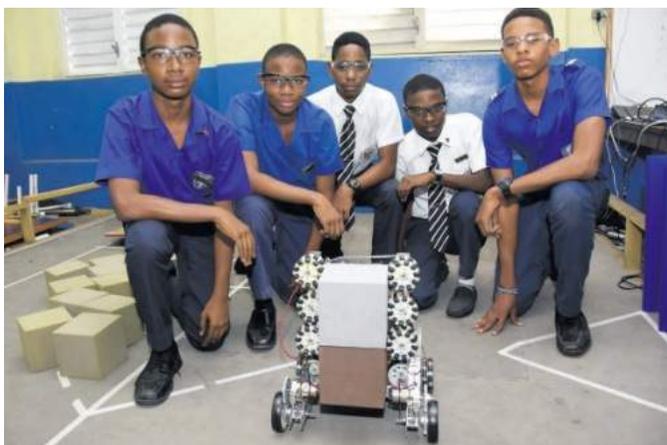
## **JC team heads to New York for robotics competition**

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### **JC team heads to New York for robotics competition**

**THE Jamaica College (JC) robotics team is fired up and ready to compete in the FIRST Tech Challenge in New York on Thursday.**



Members of the Jamaica College junior robotics team (from left): Joel Henry, Gavil Williams, Myles Johnson, Xavier Howell and Aaron Gooden pause for a photo with their robot. (Photos: Garfield Robinson)

A competitor since 2009, JC won the challenge in 2013 and are looking to medal this time around.

FIRST Tech Challenge teams are invited to design, build, programme, and operate robots to compete in a head-to-head challenge in an alliance format. Guided by adult coaches and mentors, students develop STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) skills and practise engineering principles, like keeping an engineering notebook, while realising the value of hard work, innovation and sharing ideas.

Teams must also raise funds, design and market their team's brand, and participate in community outreach. Participants have access to millions of dollars in college scholarships and each season concludes with super-regional championships and a FIRST championship.

President of the JC robotics club Jevaughn Thompson told the Jamaica Observer that, over the two years he has been part of the club, he has seen exceptional growth among his team members.



Members of the Jamaica College senior robotics team (from left) Nathan Campbell, David Smith, Daniel Palmer, Jevaughn Thompson, Aiden Picart, and Chavaugh Wilkins fine-tune their robot at the school recently.

“We are coming from a place of not knowing anything about robotics. Now we are exposed to that, team-building and leadership skills. Also, it is not just a technology-based club or competition; it caters to marketing and business, raising funds, [and] community outreach. So that, coupled with our exposure to science and technology, is a good package,” he said.

Thompson shared that the skills he has learnt as part of the club and while preparing for Thursday's challenge will go a far way in helping him achieve his goal of becoming an attorney, adding that he has already been accepted to the law programme at The University of the West Indies, Mona.

Meanwhile, Jason Brown, information technology teacher and robotics faculty advisor at JC, said that part of this year's preparation included returning to the drawing board and assessing how the programme was being treated.

As a result, Brown said a new coach was brought in and the boys, majority of whom were not exposed to programming, took the initiative and researched, asked questions, watched videos, and are now applying their knowledge. He added that one second-form student pursued computer-aided design (CAD) and is learning how to draw robots in the digital format.

Brown said: "We are the underdogs. We are a Third World country and when we looked at one country's budget for this (robotics programme), it is the Ministry of Education's total budget. So we have to really improvise — some instruments we build and some we buy. We are also grateful to corporate Jamaica for the help they have given us, especially to National Baking Company Foundation for the \$2.5 million."

JC old boy Paul Pounall, coach of the robotics team and a member of the 2013 winning team, said he is keen on exposing the boys to technical skills, a strong engineering workbook and CAD.

He explained that the workbook is a documentation of everything the team does, including the marketing and business plans, which forms a guide.

The coach also said preparation for the competition has to be multifaceted, because the team will have to pitch their marketing plan to and be interviewed by a panel of judges, while the engineers have to be ready for any mechanical issues that might arise with the robots during the competition.

"On each team we have drivers, engineers, a navigator, and the captain. The junior and senior teams, collectively, comprise two grade eight students, two grade 10 students, four grade 12, and three grade 13 students," he added.

For the outreach component of the club, the team teaches the basics of building robots to children at SOS Children's Village.

Regardless of the outcome at Thursday's competition, the team said they they will remain positive.