

Student robotics teams wows judges in Mexico



Ayden Arabi, Allegra Buchanan, Amaya Gajadhar, Ethan Gajadhar, Patrick Northrup, Madeline Northrup, and Chase Sullivan are inspirational York Region tweens embracing a future that will feature much automation and many automatons deployed to assist humanity.

Their connectivity to that "Brave New World" expressed through their fine coding skills, engineering abilities, and robotics competition savvy was on full display in Mexico from May 27-30 as they captured the First Place Champion Award at the International Open First Lego League Championships.

"The Magnificent Seven" earned an unprecedented four major awards: Robot Performance Award Finalist; Core Values Award Champion; Winning Alliance; First Place Champions Award at the prestigious STEM competition and competed against 67 robotics teams from more than 20 countries.

Renee Northrup, one of the two volunteer coaches on the Equipe Francobotique staff, praised the unique achievements of her robotics squad in late-May in Mexico.

"We won 1st Place in the robot game Alliance Challenge, beating the 2025 FLL World Festival Champion team from Brazil in the final match by five points! [Our] four major awards [were] more than any other team in attendance. No other Canadian team has ever returned from an international FLL championship with four major awards, nor won the 1st Place Champion Award in an international Alliance Challenge. Through the hard work and determination of the ten students (including three high school mentors) on our team, Canada earned a reputation [for] innovation and robotics excellence on the world stage. The Canadian national anthem was played when the winning alliance was announced. It was a truly special moment for our team and for Canada."

The hardware haul to which Coach Northrup referred comprised of keeper plaques and colorful Lego-bricked trophies was on full display atop a Canadian flag at their clubhouse in Aurora on Thursday night. The table brimming with awards was a focal point and conversation starter at the robotics team's celebration event which included an engaging chat with local media and a victory cake-cutting ceremony.

Veteran robotics team member Madeline Northrup described the awards that the septet captured at the Centro Cultural Universitario in Zapopan, Mexico: "The Robot Performance Award was based on how our robot performed on a table. Each mission by the robot has an amount of points—the max score is 545 points. We earned a perfect score. We also earned a perfect score at the competition in

Worcester, Massachusetts.?

Patrick Northrup was pleased with the robot's performances in Mexico in the international spotlight: "Our robot accomplished all its missions. It has a 95% reliability. We've measured it during competition during a modified collaborative game.?"

The robot, designed by Équipe Francobotique, was not only 95% reliable, but it also demonstrated grace under pressure during some razor-thin victories, described with great enthusiasm by Chase Sullivan.

"The five-point difference in the Winning Alliance competition was even closer than we wanted. It was a big win for us and it was fun working with our Mexican partners. We beat Brazil?the 2025 Champions?in the Alliance Challenge after playing four games against them.?"

Allegra Buchanan described the suspense felt by the team while they waited for their Alliance scores: "We were waiting to hear the announcement. I wasn't at the table and I was so nervous when they played it, but when they announced we won, I was in shock and I thought "What's going on?" It felt so amazing?it didn't feel real for at least a few minutes.?"

Buchanan's teammate, Amaya Gajadhar, expressed similar sentiments when the team's final scores were read publically: "When we won, I felt really happy and proud. We did a really good job this season. I felt like we accomplished something really big. Now, we've got a great reputation in robotics.?"

Ethan Gajadhar, a rookie on Équipe Francobotique, described the best part of winning a world championship in Mexico: "One of the best parts was meeting so many different teams from around the world at the competition. After nine months of hard work, it was fun to complete my first year with a championship. I learned that you can't always finish everything yourself and that teamwork is always involved in a successful, new project.?"

The importance of teamwork and learning new skills was reinforced by Ayden Arabi who reflected on the incredible journey undertaken and the final results earned by Équipe Francobotique: "First Lego League offers the kinds of experiences that we can use in the future. It opens doors that you didn't know existed. It's amazing to experience this kind of competition and it sets us up for leadership roles as well as positions in Engineering and coding a robot as well as software jobs. I enjoyed the quick decision-making, the troubleshooting, and the problem-solving we had to do during the competition.?"

After competing in international robotics championships for five years, Madeline Northrup is "ageing out?" and offered some closing thoughts as she moves on from her role as player to mentor for the 2026-27 season: "One of the things I learned over the years is that travel is stressful, but when you do it with friends, it feels so much better to travel. These championships?we also won the worlds in Arkansas in 2023-- made me feel proud to be a Canadian. I also saw the differences between the countries at the competition.?"

The Aurora-based team?decked out on Thursday night in their archeology-themed khaki vests adorned with a Canadian flag and set off with vivid red Club 44642 t-shirts for their clubhouse celebration?has been embraced by the local community.

This widespread support was evident, based on the twenty-four sponsor patches adorning their official vests including the Town of Aurora; RBC Wealth Management Dominion Securities?Anwar Wealth Partners; Value Mobile; Maria DePrisco?Barrister and Solicitor; DanAngel Inc.; AFRY?Association Des Francophone de la Region de York; Michelle Manganaro?Investment Advisor?RBC Wealth Management; First Canada; The Town of East Gwillimbury; Caring Touch Home Health Care; Mon Avenir?Consiel Scolaire Catholique; DSF?Devry Smith Frank LLP?Lawyers and Mediators; Tangles Hair Salon and Spa; EEC Saint-Jean; Academie de la Moraine; Abtek Ltd; CanCODE; Aurora Family Eyecare; Witron; Subash Suntharesan; Lions Club International; Peace of Mind Massage; and AS.

Coach Northrup expressed her gratitude towards her club's sponsors whose generous contributions made the trip to Mexico possible. She also shared insights into the composition of her regional robotics all-star team ? comprised of youngsters from Aurora,

Newmarket, Vaughan, East Gwillimbury, and Richmond Hill.

?The ten students on Équipe Francobotique attend four different French-language public and Catholic schools in York Region. Seven are team members in Grades 6 and 8, and three are high school students who mentor the younger students. We are a not-for-profit community team coached by two parent volunteers. Équipe Francobotique represents l'AFRY (Association des francophones de la région de York). This is the fourth year in a row our team has been selected to represent Canada at an international FLL championship.?

After listening to their inspirational stories and enjoying a slice of victory cake with Équipe Francobotique, it was easy to see that the ?Brave New World? of automation and automatons will be a much better place with Ayden Arabi, Allegra Buchanan, Amaya Gajadhar, Ethan Gajadhar, Patrick Northrup, Madeline Northrup, and Chase Sullivan leading the way and solving the problems of the 21st century.

By JIM STEWARTLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter