

Craig Kielburger Secondary School takes robotics success to next level

Team delivers strong showing in debut at provincial finals

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With technology constantly changing, the learning curve for those in the world of robotics is ... well, never ending.

For those who embrace that reality, the possibility for improvement - and increased success - is also without limits.

Just ask Mike Druiven. Founder of Craig Kielburger Secondary School's Robotics Team and still at its helm since retiring last year, he's seen the tech-savvy students' expertise - and competitive results - progress each year since the club's creation in 2013.

That upward trajectory continued earlier this spring with their first trip to the FIRST Robotics (For Inspiration & Recognition of Science & Technology) provincial finals at Mississauga's Hershey Centre.

"Every year the goal is to do better, aim a little higher," said Druiven,

whose team now includes 30 members - with a healthy mix of newcomers and veterans, plus a strong retention rate over the years. "That's (constant improvement) all part of the plan."

Not only did CKSS's Robotics Team - nicknamed Hidden Figure - reach the provincials, but made it to the semifinals in an 80-team field.

"It felt great," said Grade 12 team captain Ansar Khan, who last year was part of a two-person team that took top honours in the Skills Ontario Competition Robotics & Control Systems category. He's applied to the University of Waterloo in hopes of studying electrical engineering. "Even though we didn't make it in the past I went to the provincials and saw just what it took to qualify and the level of competition.

"I've always been interested in computers and engineering and this (FIRST Robotics) really teaches

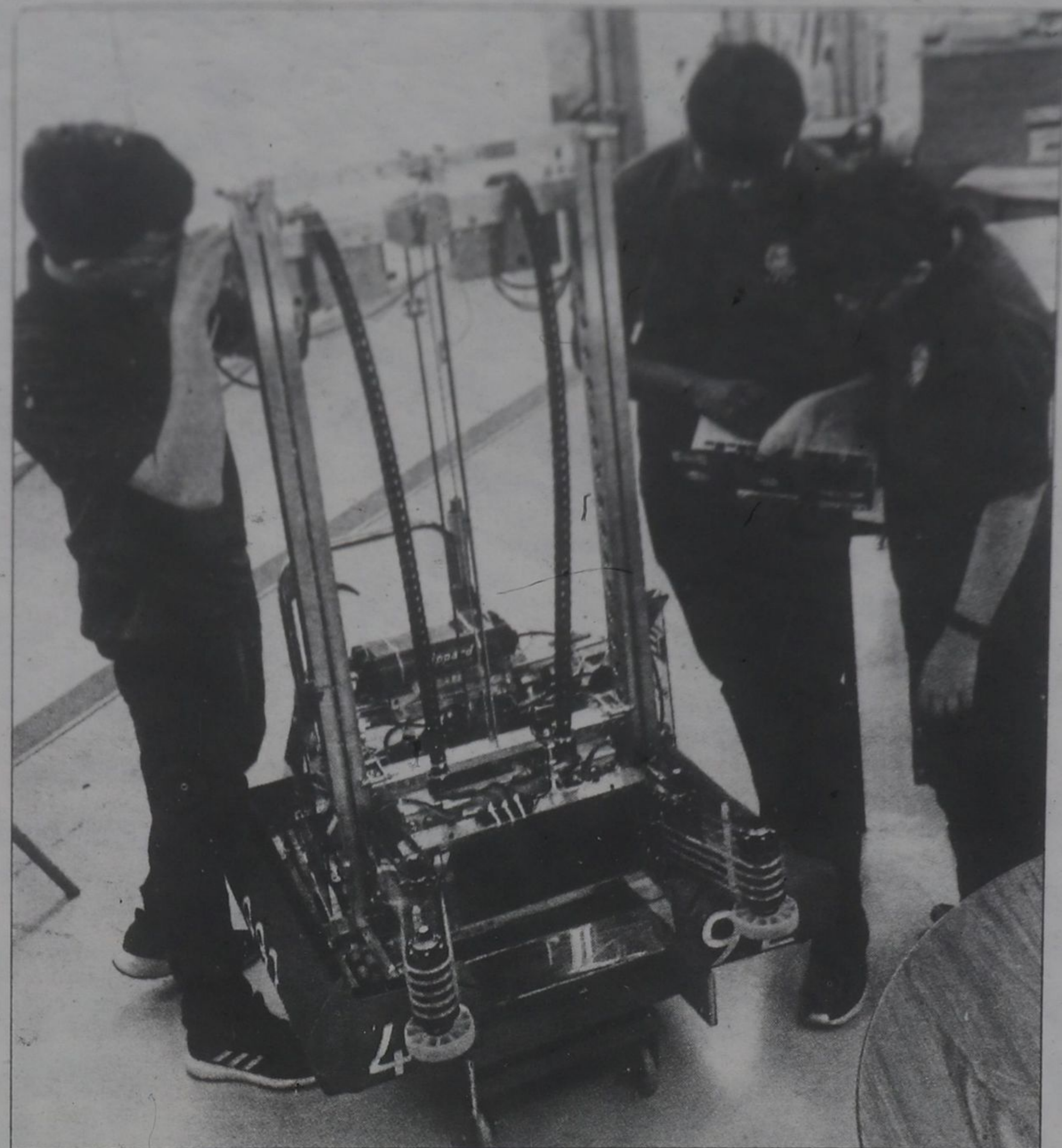
you the skills for industry and university. It puts you ahead in all these stem fields."

Following in the footsteps of his older brother, second-year member Shaurya Manocha took the driving reins this year after discovering a knack for it during an off-season event.

"It's not so much my driving ability ... anyone can take the controls and operate a robot. It's more about not letting the pressure get to you during a match and following instructions."

He and the Hidden Figure crew did an impressive job of that at the Hershey Centre, where two alliances of three teams each were tasked with having their robots place milk crates - dubbed "power cubes" - on large balancing scales to tip the scale and gain ownership.

Alliances can also trade power cubes for power ups, giving them a temporary advantage. At the end of the match, robots can climb the tower attached to the centre balancing scale using a rung, giving



Steve LeBlanc/Metroland

Craig Kielburger Robotics Team members (from left) Brett Hobbs, Ansar Khan and Shaurya Manocha work on their robot.

them additional points.

School teams have just six weeks to build their robot after each year's rules and regulations are announced in January. After that they have only one opportunity to test it out before the competition - which is held on a basketball-sized playing field.

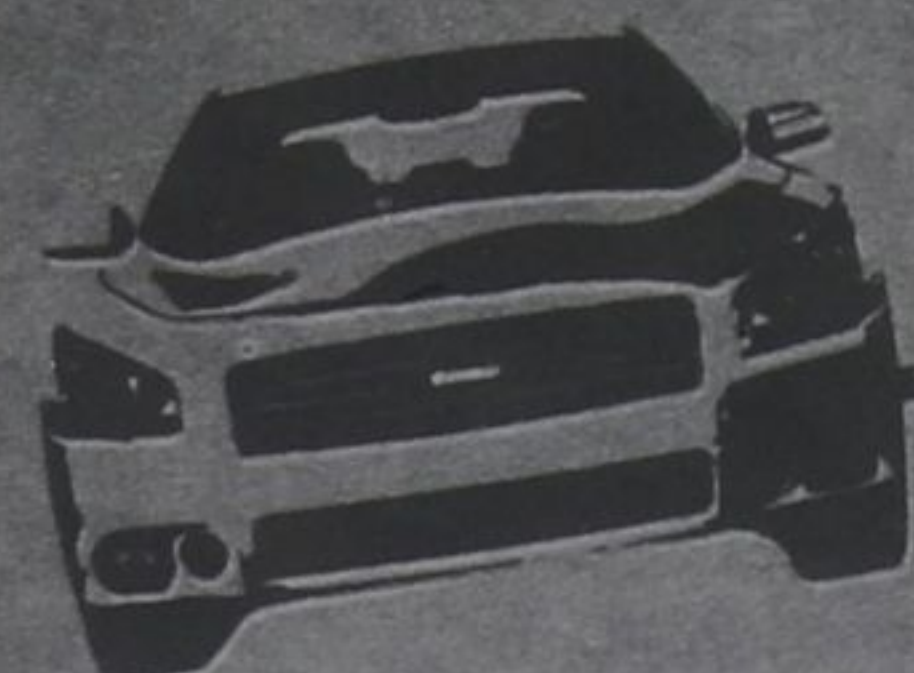
To that end, CKSS took advantage of an invitation to practice at a club in

Oakville this year, one which provided conditions much closer to the actual FIRST Robotics environment.

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