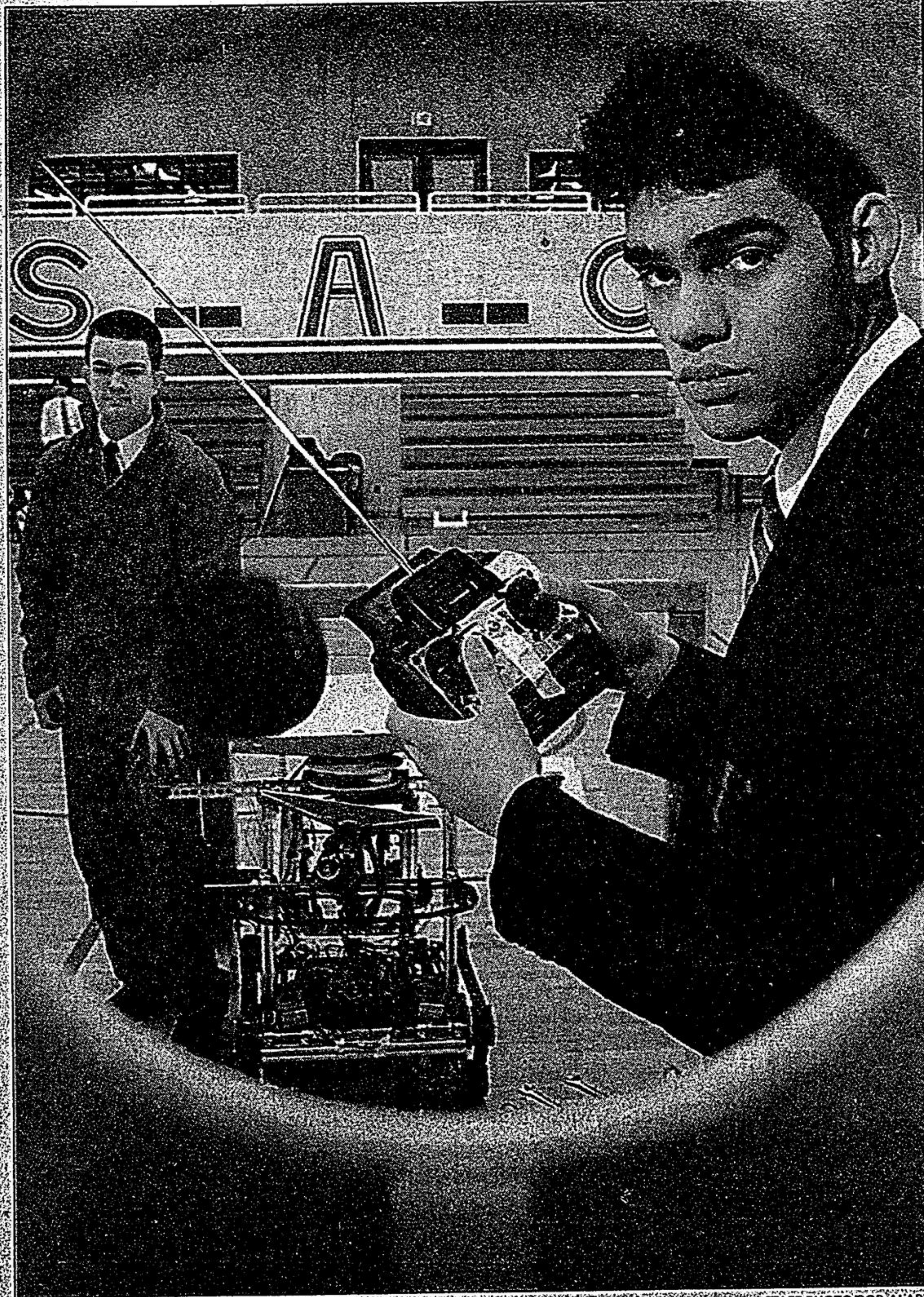


AT THE SCHOOLS

Thursday, March 29, 2001



STAFF PHOTO/ROB ALARY
Mike Sunderani steers remotely through a course, aims and fires a racquet ball from SEK-C, St. Andrew's Engineering Kenetic Control robot. More than 20 students took part in the research and design of the device which competed in a country-wide robotics competition at Centennial College last month. With Mike is classmate Dustin Magee.

BATTLE OF THE 'BOTS

BY JEROME WATT
Special to *The Economist & Sun/Tribune*

Most competitions are won through blood, sweat and tears. But this competition takes bionics, oil and gears.

St. Andrew's College competed for the first time in the eighth annual robotic games at Centennial Community College in Scarborough last month.

Forty students from the Aurora private school spent 420 hours building a robot for the competition. The team was also required to make a video and a website detailing the building process.

The competition coincided with engineering week and promoters hoped it would encourage young adults to get involved in engineering.

This year's event was the "Robobiathlon", where each team's robot had to navigate obstacles and fire on targets at the end of the course.

"We are trying to start a trend at our school," said St. Andrew's student Alex Tse as he and a group of other students huddled around their robot outside the gymnasium, where the competition had the atmosphere of most major athletic events — complete with mascots, cheerleaders and bleachers full of cheering fans.

The team's robot is about three feet high and three feet wide. The top features a bin with a slight incline on either side that allows squash balls to be funnelled into the robot's gun. The barrel of the gun is mounted below the bin and is aimed using a flashlight. The entire device is operated by remote control.

The students rolled out their robot for a test run before the competition. As

with any major event, it's all in the preparation, which involved a lot of problem-solving on the part of St. Andrew's students.

The budding robotic engineers had to overcome a multitude of problems to get the robot to work.

The team had to use ingenuity to overcome the limitations of the equipment.

"From the beginning, we had to decide whether or not to use a track system or a wheel system," said Andrew Gosbee, team leader for the group.

"We decided to go with the track system because we needed more stability. These (tracks) were built for control, not speed."

"The team had to use ingenuity to overcome the limitations of the equipment."

"The boards couldn't handle that much current," Gosbee said. "It would overheat them. We ended up having to attach relays to them."

The team also had to work without proper equipment.

"We didn't have a machine shop to use," Tse said while the other students did some last-minute repairs on the robot with duct tape. "We had to use the KISS rule."

Richard Khoury found duct tape useful.

"Oh, it's a life saver," he said.

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