

CyberSalam ^{#26903}



Newsletter & Updates
April 2026

Editor: Dania Ali

Volume 3

Table of Contents

Mentor's Memo.....	1
Team Talk.....	4
Team Spotlight.....	7
Recap & Future Plans.....	8



Mentor's Memo

More Than Robots: Building Cyber Salam Through Service

By: Mentor Saba Waheed

The FIRST volunteer program is exceptionally well-organized and offers meaningful opportunities to connect with kids while gaining a deeper understanding of robotics competitions and their operations. I joined Cyber Salam as a mentor this year and to gain a deeper understanding of the program, I decided to volunteer. This season, I volunteered as a robot inspector, a referee, and a judge at three different events. Each role offered valuable insights that I have been able to bring back to our team, Cyber Salam.

Bringing Volunteer Learnings Back to the Team

My volunteer experiences have directly influenced how I mentor and support Cyber Salam.

Mentor's Memo

How to Apply to Volunteer

It is a straightforward process to apply to volunteer. The first step is a background check because you will be interacting directly with the kids. Once the background check is cleared, volunteers can search for events in their area and review the available volunteer roles. Each role comes with a set of required training that must be completed before the role is assigned. Once a role is requested, the FIRST program will assign the appropriate training based on that role. After all required training is completed, the dashboard is marked as volunteer-ready, allowing the event's volunteer coordinator to assign the requested role. Some roles, such as judging and refereeing, are limited to adults only. You are only required to complete training once.

Robot Game Strategy & Scoring

As a referee, I learned how the robot game is run in real time, how the scoring is recorded, how the Head Referee provides guidance for strategies not explicitly defined in the rulebook, and how fouls are interpreted. Understanding the scoring software and referee input proved extremely valuable for our team's practice sessions. This knowledge builds the team's confidence, knowing that mentors and coaches fully understand how the game is scored and officiated.

Judging

Judging was my favorite volunteer role this season. It provided an incredible opportunity to learn from other teams and observe how they navigate the season. As a judge, I listened to team presentations, asked questions about robot design, outreach, and team structure, and visited team pits for follow-up discussions before award nominations. Through these interactions, I gained insight into team outreach strategies, financial sustainability, risk management, and problem-solving approaches. I also learned about some unique outreach activities teams are doing, such as internship programs, bringing FTC to homeschooled kids, and one team has filed to have their own non-profit status. I also learned how FIRST ensures fair process through a structured, point-based nomination system. Networking with experienced judges further expanded my understanding of the FTC ecosystem and the diverse paths teams take to succeed.

These experiences reinforce why volunteering plays a critical role in the success of both individual teams and the broader FIRST community.

Mentor's Memo

Robot Inspection

As a Robot Inspector, I learned what makes an inspection successful. Inspection is one area before competition in which our team can be well prepared if all items on the inspection checklist are carefully reviewed and checked off beforehand. Volunteering as a robot inspector highlighted common inspection pitfalls that teams often overlook. Issues can be as simple as not having a designated location for the team number plate or poor wire management, which can pose safety hazards on the field. Other common challenges include kids being unprepared to explain their robot's components, such as the number of motors and servos used, the location of the robot switch, or grounding straps. Failing inspection prevents a team from completing registration to compete, making this knowledge critical for team readiness.

How Volunteering Benefits Team Cyber Salam

Cyber Salam is a small community-based team with students from different schools across the Austin, Round Rock, and Pflugerville areas. Unlike teams affiliated with schools, our team has limited resources and does not benefit from direct school or district support. Most of the school teams have a well-established system, where robotics is offered as an elective or a club at school with dedicated space to practice, whereas our team had to secure funding from scratch and establish their name in the community through several events such as bake sales, hosting summer camps, etc. Volunteering under the Cyber Salam name increases our visibility and demonstrates that our team is invested in FIRST not only through competition but also through service.

Volunteering also provides a powerful networking platform. Much like in any professional setting, building relationships is essential. Through FIRST volunteering, we will connect with other coaches, mentors, judges, and event organizers in the area. Our kids invest countless hours preparing for competitions, and when parents and mentors volunteer alongside them, it creates another meaningful avenue for connection and shared commitment.

Overall, my experience as a FIRST volunteer this season has been immensely valuable. Whether you are a mentor or a parent, spending a day immersed in what your child has been working on all season provides perspective, appreciation, and deeper engagement. Based on my experience, I highly recommend volunteering and experiencing the program firsthand. It reinforces Cyber Salam's commitment to learning, service, and collaboration, helping our team grow stronger both on and off the field.

Team Talk

Scouting in FTC Robotics!

By: Ismaeel Ibrahim

In FTC robotics, matches are not won by designing the perfect robot but also by being able to strategize on the field and display exceptional teamwork between team drivers, coaches, human players, and alliances alike. One of the most significant factors in winning matches to have in your arsenal is the ability to scout because it is what separates good teams from great teams in this DECODE season. A high-performing robot should be coupled with scouting since it is what creates a winning alliance. Following our first meet at the FiT-Central GEMS League, we quickly realized that we didn't prepare as much as we could for determining the tactics our opponents would be using.

We also noticed that all of the top teams in the league, even if they believed they had a superior robot, had always scouted; thus, to elevate our team, we integrated it into our team's strategy.

Why Does Data Matter?

To start off, let's define what scouting really means in terms of FTC. Scouting is the process by which you collect objective data on all of the robots at the competition. It allows teams to not just look at a robot on the practice field and think, "Oh, it can launch three balls at once," but rather to have hard numbers to focus on. When you track these metrics, you are able to know how many balls a given robot can shoot in the 30-second autonomous period or their overall consistency during Tele-Op, which would determine what type of strategy would be required for the match. Moreover, scouting allows teams to communicate with their alliances to align strategy based off of robot capabilities. If one of the robots has one or more limitations, that information can be used to discuss with the alliance how they can complement those limitations, and vice versa, to optimize match performance. While at earlier stages of the season it is not very important, when the actual league tournament begins, the data will be crucial for Alliance Selection when the top-seeded teams choose their partners based on what would have good chemistry rather than choosing the robot with the maximum output. For instance, two robots that can only shoot at the goal from close range would block each other.

Methods Commonly Utilized by World Champions

While a near-flawless robot may cruise through earlier stages of the competition, as you dive deeper and deeper, the tougher the opponents get, and strategy, driving under pressure, and scouting matter more than ever.

Team Talk

Methods Commonly Utilized by World Champions Continued

Top teams at the World Championships tend to use a dual approach:

- **Pit Scouting**—By visiting the pits of other teams, you are able to interact with other teams to learn about their robots' capabilities and components of the robot, like its drivetrain or type of outtake for the shooting. This comes in handy when determining the strategy to use because the type of robot you are playing against can tell you how heavy their chassis is and whether your robot could handle contact with them without committing any fouls.
- **Match scouting**—Not only can you find data online on the FTC event web, but for fresh information, you can assign team members to analyze the qualification matches of other teams. By doing this you are able to see how reliable the team's robot is, whether it is capable of defending, and how they do under pressure. Although it is difficult and is a long process that takes weeks to collect all the data, even having the data of most teams provides both a tactical and strategic advantage.

Now, it is important to recognize that you shouldn't just focus on quantitative data only but also on qualitative data when considering what type of data you want to analyze or collect. This is because even if a team has a very high max points scored in a match, it might be because they were playing against a team that put no pressure or that their alliance assisted them in earning a lot of those points (quantitative). It is also important to see the qualitative data because it can tell you whether the robot is able to shoot from the far zone or the close zone and issues a robot might have, like rubber bands snapping or motor overheating. These might seem like minor details, but they make the difference between two great robots.

Collecting the Intel

Data without analysis is as good as arbitrarily counting the number of grains of sand at the beach. In order to make use of the data you collected, you have to effectively sort it on a standardized system that is easy to use. Many teams use free tools like Google Forms and Excel to perform data analysis for them and put extra notes on qualitative data on the side when they scout. This also allows you to make sure the data that you have is clean, and if there are any outliers, you know which teams have a very incredible autonomous or outtake. While scouting alone will not win you tournaments, when you amalgamate it with a mechanically perfect robot, it allows you to win matches against robots of the same caliber by providing crucial data that helps you determine match strategy and what is expected.

Team Talk

Design Iteration in Action: When Version One Isn't Enough

By: Mohammad Ali

In the field of robotics, it seems the first iteration of a design is hardly ever the last version. And this season, Cyber Salam #26903 learned the hard way, beginning with the very first design of our original robot. The design concept was based on a color sensor paired with a high-speed propeller mechanism to identify and launch specific balls, matching a field "motif." To have an advantage in the upcoming competitions, we invested considerable time in designing and 3D printing custom parts for the intake slope and the magazine.

However, as we arrived at our first and second league meets, we quickly came to realize that our approach was not up to the pace of the game. While our magazine may have been good for the index, the speed was not up to par. We were taking an unreasonable 10 to 15 seconds to simply line up and shoot one singular ball. While we were working within the theme, we saw others working hard at what we would later come to realize was "throughput"—speedily collecting and shooting items. We would come to realize that speed and throughput would score us more than our approach, which was based on accuracy and therefore slower.

The realization that our strategy was not working was an opportunity to make a big change. We quickly came to understand how important it was to be able to shoot quickly as opposed to shooting precisely using the sorting. Our new strategy is to focus on creating a new version of the robot, placing emphasis on speed and not on a complex magazine system. The failure of this strategy was what we needed to learn to focus on what the successful teams are actually doing in the match and not what we started out to do.



Team Spotlight

TEAM VOICE

Hey! I'm Dania, a high school sophomore and the outreach lead for the team. This is my second FTC season, and it's been a huge learning experience that's helped me grow as a leader. Organizing events and collaborating on initiatives like our pop-ups and summer camp has taught me how much communication, planning, and teamwork matter. One of the biggest lessons I've learned this year is the importance of talking to other teams and actually applying their feedback. Those conversations have helped me improve our outreach, strengthen our ideas, and become a more confident teammate. I'm excited to keep building on these experiences and continue helping our team grow both on and off the field.

Dania



TEAM VOICE

My name is Zidan Harb, and I lead the team in programming. This is my second year in FTC, and coming back to this robotics program has fueled me with a lot of excitement! I manage the code for the TeleOp and Autonomous periods in the robot game. I use softwares such as PedroPathing and Panels in Java to help us reach maximum performance with our robot design. Since I use programming as a personal hobby personally, I was able to implement my code logic and structure that I use to use in this season's code set. I also learned how to manage our GitHub repository efficiently and organize code using basic principles such as commenting in code files, or organizing the files into folders for easy navigation. I am proud to help the team thrive in this season's game, and also learn skills to use in my life regularly in the future.

Zidan



Recap + Future Plans

GEMS LEAGUE TOURNAMENT

Stats

- February 7th, 2026 - Cedar Ridge HS
- 36 teams total
- 1 win, 4 losses (W-L-L-L-L)
- Reach Award Winner

Lessons Learned

- Even if you don't win all your games, you still have a chance. Don't give up.



AUSTIN SEMI AREA TOURNAMENT

Stats

- Feb 15, 2026 - KIPP Austin College Prep
- 32 teams total
- 2 wins, 3 losses (L-W-L-W-L)
- Sustain Award Winner

This was our final official event of the season. We ended the season participating in 5 events! Our team is now focusing on other off season events.



Recap + Future Plans

LIGHTSADERS 2026 ROOKIE INVITATIONAL

Stats

- Feb 28, 2026 - St. Gabriel's Catholic School
- 11 teams total
- 5 wins, 2 losses (W-W-L-W-L-W-W)
- Resilience through Adversity Award



ROBOT DAY SNEAK PEEK



Be on the lookout for our Robot Day newsletter!

“Listening to others people’s ideas never hurts; the best solution is often a combination of all ideas.”

–Sarah Tauseef, Cyber Salam Programming Team

WE’RE RECRUITING!

Fill out the interest form and we will contact you with next steps!



Interest Form