

## The Interesting Tale of the JPL Invention Challenge

The JPL Invention Challenge, a yearly mini FRC hosted by JPL for schools and other groups. This year, the challenge was to create a device that could shoot a 7" diameter playground ball at an 18 that consisted of 3 targets, the bottom hole, the top hole, and the top of the one, the one being in the shape of a candle to celebrate the invention challenge's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The target was 6 meters away and the set up zones were 2 meters by 2 meters with an unlimited height. At first, the challenge didn't seem that bad and I was confident that we could do it easily. When Neato said that veterans and anyone else who wanted to participate could go to the back table, more than half the class went back there. For the first few days Neato had us all think of an idea of our own then show it to the class, the most supported ideas would be followed and everyone would fall into place. This did not happen. We all came up with our own ideas and a couple were followed, but everyone didn't fall into place. The veterans tried for days to get everyone organized which failed. Neato then started cutting people from the group by the quality of their sites, good ones remaining and bad ones being removed from the group. After this was said and done, there were only a few of us left, Sam being the only non-veteran in the group. At this point, month had gone by and we still were only thinking about what we were going to do. That whole event really annoyed me because we wasted a whole month trying to organize people who didn't care and would eventually be removed from the group. I think that Neato shouldn't let that many people be in the JPL group regardless of their skill or talent. Too many people means too many ideas and therefore too many thoughts to manage. If we had started the challenge with the size group we ended with, we would have had a better grasp on the challenge and would have had more time and less ideas going towards the challenge. I only wanted to talk about this because it is a problem that Neato needs to address. Beyond that, I think that the challenge was a success. What I mean by this is that the overall goal of the challenge was accomplished, building team work and resourcefulness skills. There was a lot of negatives to overcome, one of which being the formidable day when all hell broke loose, the day Cole wasn't here and I was in the class, leaving the rest of the team to get really angry at each other. When we actually got the thing built we really liked how it looked, it sounded cool, and it was effective in hitting the target repeatedly. Hans was a successful cannon in every other situation except in the competition, which sucked, but we still feel that if our peg hadn't broken, we would have gone to finals. Speaking of finals, it sucked that because of the shootings we couldn't go, the whole point of the challenge was to go to JPL and experience the competition in its fullest, but no, they didn't want any unessential people being there. In the end, I think that despite all of the struggles and mishaps that occurred, the challenge ended well for us and I am looking forward to whatever the challenge for next year will be.