



FIFTH PLACE RECIPIENT

# Fair Play Over Winning

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In that year of freshman, I participated in the robotics club of our school and looked forward to the regional competitions where success would mean a ticket to the national level competition. The spirit of our team did not allow us to give up, and we devoted hours to constructing the robot, each challenge being overcome with a combination of ingenuity and skill. That is until one week before the special day when we encountered something that challenged us more than any circuit or code we worked on. One of our last changes was when I realized that there was a mistake in the thorough programming of one of our robots. Its speed exceeded the permitted activity level. Unintentionally, this gave us a real boost when we were in a real bind.

I told my peers about the glitch, which I proposed that we correct to avoid cheating. The team was split; some argued that since it was not a deliberate attempt to cheat, what if we let it lie low so that we do not tamper with our robot in the warmth of the competition? For some people, including me, winning on the knowing could be better and possible. In one heated discussion, we decided that the moral thing to do was to change the programming of the robot we were creating for the competition, even though the decision would reduce our perceived advantage over the other teams. This choice spoke to who we were: a team that appreciated the fair play principle rather than trying to triumph constantly.

The days leading to the competition became the most hectic as the team had to code and test to ensure the robot met the set competition benchmark. There were many days of worrying

and doubting, especially when it was more time to make the final decision, but we did not change our minds. Although our robot performed exceptionally well in this tournament, we still need to win. More importantly, though, we earned something better than a trophy: the respect of everyone there. Our coaches and rivals complimented us on our integrity and fair play throughout the competition. This episode made all of us understand that that is not the essence of life – to earn a lot of money – but rather to assert the self.

In retrospect, I understand how that decision made us who we are. Sticking to the right was not small; instead, it was taking the easy way of convenience. It taught us that this is what we are; the choices we make in these moments are not just limited to competitions but to life. Participating in fair play upheld the spirit of the competition while also defining the right approach among the members of our community. The satisfaction coming from our choice was much deeper than any regret as to why we did not win. It taught us that it is not how many games you win or how often you effectively predict the trajectory of your life, but it is about doing what is right and fair.