The Youth Advisory Council and How
It Has Changed My Botball Experience
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1 Introduction

At the advent of my Robotics education, I found myself as a young, impressionable sixth grader, sitting in a desk in the classroom of one Mr. David Culp, who was at the time a science teacher at Dewitt Perry Middle School. As Mr. Culp described the many joys and also trials we were likely to face in our time playing Botball, I became more and more enthralled with the concept of designing, building, and then programming fully autonomous robots made out of LEGO's. Ever since, I have excitedly pursued every opportunity to engage myself in the world of robotics presented by the KISS Institute for Practical Robotics, such as the Research and Design Website Challenge, participating in the Global Conference on Education Robotics, and even writing a paper such as this one - the first occurrence of which was back when I was only a seventh grader. Due to my eagerness to do all things robotic, it seemed fitting that I should apply to become a member of the Inaugural Botball Youth Advisory Council in September of 2008.

What is the Botball Youth Advisory Council? In the words of Jamie Boiles, one of the previous KIPR staff members responsible for the creation of the Council, the Youth Advisory Council (or YAC as it is lovingly nicknamed by its members) is a chance to, "not only promote Botball through social media but to also advise the KISS Institute on issues related to Botball." [1] However, to me, YAC is so much more than this; while also being the things outlined previously, YAC is a chance for kids from all over the country to get to know each other and accomplish things not only for the staff at the KISS Institute, but also for everyone in the Botball program. Through the Council, I have made many friends from across the nation who I look forward to seeing again at GCER as I did last year. Being on the Council has given me an opportunity to lend my opinions and suggestions to the people at KIPR in order to improve the Botball program as well as the chance to work with complete strangers in order to accomplish things in the field that I truly love.

2 The Application Process

'Okay,' you say, 'when can I sign up for such an amazing council such as the one that you have just outlined?' While I would be eager to tell you that you may sign up right away, this is not entirely true. However, you are more than welcome to fill out an application to be on the

2010-11 Youth Advisory Council in September. Filling out the application itself appears a very daunting task; what with two pages filled with fill in the blanks, check boxes, free answer questions and 250-word paragraphs, at first glance, the application to be on the Youth Advisory Council does not appear to be your friend. However, the questions are easily answered and are designed primarily to gauge your abilities with different aspects of public relations, such as the use of social media sites. Below is an example drawn from the 2010 YAC Application.

Social Media that you actively interact with (select all that apply):

_____ Facebook	_____ MySpace	_____ Twitter	_____ Ning
_____ YouTube	_____ Flickr	_____ Blogging	_____ Instructibles
_____ Botball Community Forum	_____ Digg		

Other (Fill in other media networks) _____

Figure 1: A section of the 2010 Youth Advisory Council Application

As you can see, some sections of the application can be as easy as a check here and a little writing there. Once the entire application has been completed, you also need to procure a letter of recommendation from an old teacher, mentor, or a parent/guardian describing why you would be a good candidate for membership on the council. The one who fills out your letter of recommendation then emails your completed application and letter of recommendation to the current YAC members. Once the application deadline has passed, the current YAC members then read each submitted form in a blind review process and decide the members for the new term.

3 The Structure of the Council

The Youth Advisory Council is divided into two main branches: Public Relations and Communications, each of which have their own Vice President. Above them is the President. Once the members of the year's council have been determined, an election is held for the offices of President, V.P. of Public Relations, and V.P. of Communications. Everyone else on the council then decides for themselves whether they would prefer to work in Public Relations or in Communications.

The main job of Public Relations is as follows: reach out to everyone else in the Botball program to receive their input on how to make the competition better, promote Botball through social media and other venues, and create new programs to get connected with the community. For the past two years which I have been on the council, I have found a unique niche inside of the Public Relations department: making videos to promote Botball to the masses. Last year I attended the Texas Regional, Oklahoma Regional, and of course the Global Conference on Educational

Robotics. There, I took lots of footage on my camcorder which I then turned into 3-6 minute long videos of the events. These videos were uploaded to the Botball Youtube account (www.youtube.com/Botguy12) where they can now be viewed by the world. If you really enjoy interacting with lots of people and doing things to help incorporate feedback or promote the program, Public Relations is the branch for you.

Communications is the branch of YAC which is responsible for the creation of all of the techie things, such as the creation of the Botball Community Forum (http://community.botball.org)[2] , the writing of the YAC Guide to Botball, and things along those lines. If you are really good with computers and enjoy designing websites and things such as that, you might consider being a part of the Communications branch.

4 Conclusion: the Impact of the Council

To me, joining the Council was a great decision. As I mentioned earlier, I am very much involved in the Botball program as well as the field of robotics. The Youth Advisory Council gave me an opportunity to give back to the program after all it had done for me; I got to work with strangers from around the country, getting to know them as we completed a task to help improve the Botball experience for all of the students and not just ourselves. In my opinion, being a part of the YAC has not only given me a sense of accomplishment, but it has also made me look forward to the Global Conference so much more: knowing that I will be able to see the people that I have been working with for the entire year and being able to witness the impact that we have had on all of the students who participate in Botball makes me feel that all of my hard work was worth it. From the perspective of a current YAC-er, I highly recommend applying for the 2010-11 Botball Youth Advisory Council. I have had a blast these last two years and I love being a part of such an amazing council!

5 References

[1] KIPR. Botball robotics education. http://old.botball.org/botnews/blog/2009/02/inaugural_youth_advisory_counc_2.php, 2009.
[2] Botball Community Site. http://community.botball.org/, 2009.