

Never underestimate a girl. The downfall of most of our competition last year came from the fact that everyone underestimated us. A first-year team, not to mention an *all-girls* team. Some of our own male VEX participants thought we were put at a disadvantage. With no boys and all first-year members apart from one, we let them believe we were at a disadvantage. In the beginning, we were optimistic. We went to our first couple of competitions trying to figure things out, and we didn't do as well as we had hoped. But we did not give up. The boys looked at us and assumed we wouldn't make it past regionals. We proved them wrong by working hard, making adjustment's, and successfully winning match after match at the regional level. We won regionals, and we competed well at states. We ended our first year as a team with more of a smashing success than we ever thought possible. Yes, we are girls. No, that does not put us at a disadvantage.

The Eaglettes have inspired more girls to join VEX at North Point High School, and we have set the precedent for female teams at our school. Our next goal is to set a precedent for female VEX teams everywhere. Being a girl in a male dominated VEX club can be extremely intimidating. This feeling of intimidation starts with young girls in elementary, middle, and high school, then continues into adulthood. This is what can prevent some women from entering male dominated fields like science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Being a first-generation all-girls team, we found that it was our responsibility to eliminate the intimidation of participating in STEM careers. Also, we encourage young girls to participate in STEM careers through the Robotics clubs at their own schools and teach them to be unafraid of being different. The Eaglettes have taken up the challenge for promoting the Girl Powered initiative. For the past two years, we have hosted the Girl Powered workshop here at our high school, in order to find and encourage young girls still intimidated by the large male presence in VEX Robotics and help

girls to follow their dreams no matter what. We volunteered to help young girls to build their own robots using donated VEX parts, tools, programming, and then to compete against each other in a healthy fun competition. We also have successful female guest speakers from STEM fields come to talk with the girls, so they can see first-hand that they can achieve anything they set their minds to. By helping these young girls overcome their fears of learning how to build their own robots through the workshop, they can see they are not alone, and that they have a common interest with other girls. To inspire future generations of females in STEM careers like engineers, doctors, pilots, mechanics, lawyers; it encourages us to be better role models. We always feel so rewarded coming away from the workshop after seeing the smiles, collaboration, and overall joy they share at doing something they love.

We have embraced being a Girl Powered team. We earned respect from our school by working harder and going beyond the expectations of others. We have proven that we are equal to the boys of STEM. However, being Girl Powered is about so much more than proving to ourselves that we are worthy of being taken seriously in competitions. Being Girl Powered is about showing every girl that being female is not a disadvantage. This is about encouraging every girl to break through the stereotypes that girls encounter. Also, by providing every girl the opportunity to create their own future. The organization educates young girls that they can make a difference in this world, and that they matter. Being “Girl Powered” is understanding that it is all our responsibilities to ensure we support the girls of today, so maybe the girls of tomorrow don’t have to know the feeling of fear, and the feeling of being unequal to their male peers.

Every team member tries different roles on the team. Each member of the team has a primary role, but on the days where one task needs more attention, we fill that void. We like to be versatile in our skills so that our knowledge can increase by participating in these multiple

roles. This is extremely useful to us when someone is absent or cannot attend a competition. If our primary programmer cannot participate in a competition, we know we have someone to back up the role of programmer. In competitions, when we find we need to make adjustments to our robot, we have other girls who can step in to solve the problem. This versatility in our fields of expertise on the team increases our chances for success. Also, this ensures that not one person is alone in making the decisions on how the robot is designed, programmed, or strategies for winning. With multiple people involved in multiple aspects of our robot, we push the boundaries of our ideas and constantly collaborate with our teammates, so that we can get new perspectives on our ideas and knowledge. This allows us to build off each other, with our diverse knowledge and experience with robotics, engineering, math, and improving communication skills. Our exposure to everyone's ways of thinking even helps us improve ourselves and our own thought processes.

Diversity and perspective are such important aspects of what makes our team so special. We are all bound by womanhood. However, the diverse and complex nature that each girl brings can add to our innovative designs and creations for our team to compete. For example, the girls taking engineering classes collaborate on the mechanics of the robot, and the girls taking computer programming classes can bring their ideas together to create different aspects of the robot. These individualized design perspectives were discussed and agreed upon and bundled together to create different elements of our robot such as, our rotating claw and canon shooter ideas. Diversity not only plays a large role in our team, it plays an even greater role in our school dynamics. Some schools lack diversity in their programs, VEX especially. However, North Point High School is welcoming to everyone, no matter what your background, this is reflected in our VEX club. The club has so many different types of people from a wide variety of backgrounds,

which we feel we are very lucky to interact with so many different types of people. Diversity on our team is especially important to us because we are young women. People tend to stereotype women being weaker in a variety of ways, regardless of race. Today, discrimination of race and sex still exists, and some people believe that one's race or sex is superior. The Eaglettes are progressive in meeting these challenges of both aspects for these global problems. Not only are we a team full of strong, capable young women; our team is filled with *diverse*, strong, capable young women of all races and religions. The relationship we have with one other could be viewed as intimate. Despite having almost no familial relations in common, we love our team members like real sisters. We prove typical stereotypes wrong every day by being a part of this growing initiative.

Our female role model is Ada Lovelace. She is often considered the first female computer programmer, because she was the first person to create and publish an algorithm to be used on the first modern computer. This computer was called the Analytical Engine, created by Charles Babbage. She is not well known, but she is inspirational to us because she was the first *person*, not just the first woman, to create a programming code for computers. During her early career in the 1800's, she was a mathematician and writer. We can thank her for all the capabilities of modern computers today. She was the first to recognize that Babbage's machine could be used for applications above and beyond pure calculations. Her algorithm reflected the potential she saw in the simple "computing machine." Her work is possibly the most important in the world of technology, and she hardly gets the credit she is due. We admire her for her revelation and her knowledge that has propelled us to where we are now.

We are so incredibly thankful for this experience, and the ability to build our knowledge of creating robots for competition. We always have fun while spending time together, and we

love that we have set a precedent for North Point High School in being the first all-girls team in VEX last year. We hope we have and can continue to inspire other girls to get involved with VEX and STEM programs in their own schools. We've taught our region to never underestimate a girl. We showed Maryland what it means to be a girl last year. This year, we're going to show the world.