

Bright lights flooded into the eyes of nine aspiring engineers, seven of which were girls. We entered the spacious Louisville, Kentucky Expo center, the site of the 2017-2018 VEX IQ Ringmaster World Championship. All nine of us were mesmerized by the sheer amount of light and color. In the vast amount of teams competing there was us, CSMS Girl Power. Unfortunately, as we walked, we noticed that the majority of our competitors were male. However, by showcasing our team, we hoped that one day in the near future, there would be equal representation between males and females in the STEM field.

When most people hear the phrase "Girl Power," they don't think much of it. However, we take this phrase close to heart. To us, girl power is not only a phrase, but an inspiration to show that women are capable of anything that men can do, and even more. Also, to us, being on a Girl Powered team comes with many traits such as creativity, responsibility, and perseverance. Having a diverse team of seven girls and two boys from ethnicities and races from all across the world really shows in our approach to robotics. Also, this was our first year ever participating in a VEX IQ Competition, so we definitely had something to prove, not just to our team and school, but to all of the competitors. Our goal was to show that having a diverse team comes with many more benefits than having a uniform team. Our approach was to compete in every category (driving, programming, STEM Research, and design notebook) and our hard work and perseverance could be seen throughout our projects.

Our Girl Powered team was showcased at various events in order to get as many students, both girls and boys, interested in the STEM environment. For example, the Pompano Beach Chamber of Commerce invited us to demonstrate our team's initiative in our community, to create equal representation in the STEM field. We hoped to encourage more and more schools in Broward County to create VEX teams and more inclusive environments that attract diverse groups of students. When our Girl Powered team attended these events we made sure to share our experiences about how our school redefined the face of STEM by creating a more inclusive environment for all students within the robotics community.

With this being our inaugural year, our team worked long and hard to make sure we put forward our best work. Therefore, each team member tried various roles on the team and added their own touch to each of our projects. For example, at the beginning parts of the year, all nine of us worked to design our robot. However, after each tournament we attended we met as a group and brainstormed different modifications we could add in order to benefit our robot. We also picked our new STEM Research topic. While Arizel, Jason, Carly, and Aiden worked on modifying the robot, the rest of the team started gathering information on our STEM Research topic. Once that was complete, Cassidy, Hannah, Aisha, and Aaliyah worked on writing the script for our project, which we would later film while the rest of the team practiced driving to see who the best drivers were. For the programming portion, all team members visited Carly's house to complete the programming with the help of a parent volunteer. After trying various roles, our teammate, Zhane, found that she liked to program the best. As a matter of fact, throughout our experience, each team member found something that they preferred and contributed an immense amount of work to our team. Trying out various roles gave our team a great experience and helped to prove to our team that although we were the minority group in the competition, we could still win. And that is exactly what we did.

Of course, none of this was easy. Since Coral Springs Middle School is a public school, we did not have the funding to pay for essential parts of the game, such as a playing field, rings or any other game

pieces. Therefore, for most of season, our drivers had to practice driving with a couple of rings on the floor. Because of this, our team had to trust that the drivers were practicing to the best of their ability even though they didn't have a field. However, this was only one of the many difficulties our team had to face throughout the year. Our biggest obstacle took place on February 14th, 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School when a gunman walked onto the campus and open-fired killing 17 innocent students and staff. This mass shooting took place only three days before our state competition in Tampa, Florida and since Coral Springs Middle School is only 1.6 miles away from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School our community was greatly affected. The siblings of three of our teammates attended the high school and were severely traumatized by what had just occurred. This left our team with a big decision to make, should we take part in the State Tournament at Tampa, or do we stay home and mourn with our friends, families, and loved ones. After a lengthy meeting and discussion with our teacher and parents, we had finally settled on an agreement. We were going to compete in the competition because we didn't want all of our hard work to go to waste. Also we had developed a strong passion for the game and we weren't going to let anyone deprive us of what we worked so hard to achieve.

Our team chemistry and attitude towards one another is what helped our team thrive and overcome our obstacles throughout the duration of the year. Our robot design reflected the diversity of our team and showed how each one of our team members contributed something of their own to make our robot truly unique. Being a Girl Powered team continues to inspire us to be the best we can be and h increases our ability to succeed. We felt that this was our chance to prove to our community and all of society that women can work in any field they choose, including STEM, and will succeed when given the opportunity. We are so lucky to have a great teacher and role model, Mrs. Roberts, who has taught us so much and has pushed us to achieve anything that we wish as long as we put in the time and effort. Also, we are incredibly grateful for all the women who have written history and made a path for us and other girls around the world to follow in their footsteps. Some of these women include Marie Curie and Grace Hopper who have changed the way people view STEM and have allowed us, as a Girl Powered team, to continue our journey in the STEM field.

And there we finally were, standing in a sea of thousands of competitors, each one having their own dream about what their future holds. We were overwhelmed by the plethora of lights, noises, playing fields, robots, and people that we almost forgot what we were here to prove. You see, to us it wasn't about winning or being the best, but rather what we accomplished during the journey. Looking back at how much we overcame in order to be where we are today is enough for us to say that we did prove something to ourselves and to our community. And now, and for many years to come, we hope to encourage equal participation of young men and women in competitive robotics.

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Title- The Journey



