

Judge Manual

Revision History	
Revision	Description
V26-27.1	Initial 2026-2027 Season Release
V26-27.2	Updated Useful Links and Information page

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Overview

Roles Covered: Judge

Job Descriptions

Judge

Judges meet with teams to learn about and celebrate the unique journey and accomplishments of each team and evaluate them against award requirements. Judges interact with students during the interview process and in the pits. As a group, Judges determine the teams that receive awards at events.

Requirements	
Technical	Medium
Physical	Medium
Administrative	High
Communication	High
Pre-event Training	High

If a Judge has an affiliation with a team attending the event, they must disclose the affiliation to the Judge Advisor (JA), Judge Advisor Assistant (JAA), and the rest of the Judges. For more details, please refer to the [Managing Conflicts of Interest](#) section in this document.

Time Commitment

- A Judge should expect to spend 10-12 hours at a full-day event.
- 2-4 hours of pre-event training is required.

Larger events could span multiple days. Be sure to check with your Judge Advisor for more information about the hours needed for the role.

Attire

- Comfortable closed toe/heeled shoes, much of the day will involve moving between the pit area and the deliberation room.
- ANSI Z87.1 or regional equivalent certified safety glasses are required at competition areas and elsewhere as posted
- As one of the event leaders, comfortable professional wear is encouraged.
- Judges must not wear team affiliated clothing, jewelry, team colors, or team created branding at the event.
- If team swag or give aways are present and a Judge accepts the gifts from one team, then the Judge must be willing to accept pins and other branding items from all teams. If the Judge wears one of the items from a team, they must wear all of the items handed out by the team.

Training and Certification

Read and complete all tasks listed in the [Pre-Event Training](#) section.

Any volunteer who applies to a role will be able to get into the Learning Management System (LMS) using the 'FIRST Training' button. Roles with the training required will appear in the 'roles missing certification' area. For more help, you can [read more](#) about how to access your training.

If you have applied for a role but have not received access to the training, please email training@firstinspires.org. A separate confirmation of the role assignment will come later when you are assigned to a role. If you have not received a confirmation email, but believe you should have, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator using the Event Dashboard where you applied for the role.

Judges should be in communication with the Judge Advisor to find out what additional requirements, such as meetings before the event or run-throughs of the space before the event, are required. The approximate training time is 2-4 hours.

Roles and Responsibilities

FIRST is fun for all. The most important role for a volunteer is to provide a safe, fun and welcoming environment for all *FIRST* participants. When executing the duties of your role, always make decisions with the team experience in mind. Ask for help from event leadership if you feel your required duties conflict with the best team experience.

Judge Responsibilities

- Conduct Initial Interviews using the format established for the event: scheduled in-person, unscheduled in-person, or remote/hybrid, as applicable.
- Conduct Pit interviews when assigned.
- Review Portfolios when present and as directed by the Judge Advisor. Portfolios may be submitted through FTC Scoring or collected at the event.
- Complete [Judging Summary Forms](#) – this will be provided by the Judge Advisor.
- Complete [Judging Feedback Form](#) – this will be provided by the Judge Advisor.
- Watch competition matches as directed by the Judge Advisor.

- Within your panel, determine the top ranked teams for each judged award.
- As a group come to consensus with other Judges on the recipient of each award and finalists (if applicable).
- Use interview notes, work with other Judges to create award scripts for award-winning teams.

Prerequisites for Judges

- Prior *FIRST* experience is not required but is helpful.
- Must be at least 18 years of age. 21+ preferred.

Reporting Structure

The Judges and the Judge Advisor Assistant report to the Judge Advisor, who oversees the judging process and facilitates award discussions. The Judge Advisor guides volunteers through the process but does not independently select award recipients.

Modeling *Gracious Professionalism*®

As a Judge, you serve in a visible role at an event. You will interview teams and listen to their stories, challenges, and accomplishments that took place throughout the season. Many students see judging interviews as a stressful time, publicly speaking to new people in an unfamiliar environment. Judges are there to put the team at ease by taking notes and asking questions that will allow teams to demonstrate how they have learned, experienced, and accomplished throughout the season.

As a Judge, it is critical that you model *Gracious Professionalism*. *Gracious Professionalism* is part of the ethos of *FIRST*. It's a way of doing things that encourages high-quality work, emphasizes the value of others, and respects individuals and the community. It is an aspirational ideal that we continually strive toward, rather than a standard used to measure or label individuals.

Judges serve as positive role models and caring adults who recognize team accomplishments and encourage students to continue learning. Judges must approach every team fairly, respectfully, and without bias. Because Judges are highly visible at events, their words, actions, and non-verbal communication can have a significant impact on the student experience. Judges must not comment on a team's attributes, compare teams, or make comments that could be perceived as negative, dismissive, or condescending. Discussions evaluating or comparing teams should take place only among Judges as part of the award discussion and deliberation process.

Philosophy of Judging

Judged awards celebrate teams for their activities outside of the robot game, including their outreach, their design processes, and their creativity, while the robot competition (on-field) awards are earned by teams based on their ability to play the game. Please review [Section 6: Awards](#) of the Competition Manual to learn more about the award categories.

Although Judges may only be able to award a few teams at an event, Judges act as cheerleaders for all teams in *FIRST* Tech Challenge. You should make sure to keep a professional demeanor in working with the entire Judge crew. Judges are expected to maintain a light-hearted and friendly demeanor both in the interview room and around the pits, helping to ensure positive and respectful interactions with everyone they encounter.

It is important that both Judges and students have a positive judging experience. The awards are a method *FIRST* uses to inspire and to recognize students for their achievements, help them celebrate their successes, and to cheer them on in their journey through the *FIRST* programs.

Judges should never disclose information that they learned about a team, discussions, or deliberations to anyone during or after an event.

No interview is done, or decision is made, by a single Judge. A Judge must never interview a team by themselves; this is done using pairs or trios! Judges need to work well with others to make award decisions under strict deadlines, which can be tough!

Judges look for teams who are a strong candidate for each award. It is often not possible to perfectly evaluate the definitive best candidate for an award. Instead, Judges are encouraged to make the best decisions with the information that they have in the time they are given.

Understanding Differences and Accessibility

Students may communicate, process questions, make eye contact, or participate in interviews in different ways. Cultural differences, neurodivergence, language, disability, and individual communication styles can affect how students interact with Judges. Be positive, flexible, patient, and avoid interpreting presentation style as a measure of technical knowledge or award worthiness.

If a team requires an accommodation, translator, or interpreter, follow the event's established process and the Judge Advisor's direction. Give students appropriate time to respond and use clear, concrete questions when helpful.

Sibling Teams

Teams with close organizational affiliations must be evaluated separately. Judge each team on its own evidence and ask clarifying questions to understand individual team ownership, contributions, design decisions, and outreach. Similar work between affiliated teams is not, by itself, a reason to exclude either team from award consideration.

Before the Event

Judges should regularly check their email for any pre-event communications from the Event Director, Volunteer Coordinator, or Judge Advisor, which may include details on the following items:

- Details about the event: venue-specific details (where to report), when to report, etc.
- Attending meetings or completing commitments not already outlined in this manual.
- Key reminders or clarifications on any of the items listed in the Pre-Event Training section.

Pre-Event Training

Judges must complete the required reading in this section and are required to pass a certification test prior to serving in this role.

Resources for training and certification:

Judge Pre-event Training List	
Requirement	Resource
Required	Complete the Welcome to FIRST Training
Required	The Judge Volunteer Manual (this document)
Required	The Competition Manual – specifically: • Section 1: Introduction • Section 6: Awards (A) • Section 16: Glossary
Required	Complete the <i>FIRST</i> Data Protection and Privacy Training
Required	Review the Quick Start - Judging Document
Required	Review the Outreach Terms and Definitions
Required	Read and comply with the Volunteer Handbook
Required	Review and complete the Conflict of Interest Form as required
Required	Complete the Judge Certification Test in the <i>FIRST</i> Learning System (For volunteers outside of North America without a <i>FIRST</i> Dashboard Account use the PDF to self-certify)
Encouraged	The Competition Manual – specifically: • Section 8: Game Overview Or, watch the game animation video for a general understanding of the game.
Encouraged	Review the Judging Question Bank
Encouraged	Complete Strategies for Inspiring Success for All modules .
Encouraged	Attend the monthly Volunteer Calls

Event Day

Report Time

The Event Director, Volunteer Coordinator, or Judge Advisor will confirm the time you should arrive typically via email the week before the event. In most cases arriving 1 hour before Initial Interviews are scheduled to start.

If any part of the judging is held in-person: When you arrive onsite, check-in with the Volunteer Coordinator (or follow instructions received on where to check-in) and then report to the Judge deliberation room.

If any part of the judging is held completely online: Follow the directions provided in the email about how to check-in with the Judge Advisor and the virtual deliberation room.

Interview Logistics

The Judge Advisor will brief Judges on the judging process, award criteria, the importance of maintaining confidentiality, how conflicts of interest will be handled, and discuss the forms, timelines, and event-specific logistics. The Judge Advisor should identify the Initial Interview format and explain how reviews of Portfolios will be handled.

- For scheduled in-person Initial Interviews: each team has a defined time with Judges in a dedicated judging space, and interviews are completed before qualification matches begin.
- For unscheduled in-person Initial Interviews: teams are visited during a defined judging window, usually in the pits; inspections or matches may occur during the same period.
- Remote/Hybrid judging: some or all judging activities occur online. Follow the Judge Advisor's event-specific instructions.

Team Interaction and Support

When interacting with teams please always consider the team's perspective. The teams have put significant time and effort into preparing for this event and may be feeling very stressed about everything working out as they have planned.

Today is a very big deal for the team and we are here to help celebrate the accomplishments of the teams!

A Judge's role is to recognize teams doing something right, not to penalize teams from doing something wrong.

Teams may only be completely disqualified from awards consideration for very rare egregious actions and only with approval from *FIRST* HQ. The Event Director and the JA must call the on-call number to discuss the issue.

After Initial Interviews

After Initial Interviews, Judges compare what they have learned and participate in initial deliberations. Judges nominate strong candidates for awards using the published criteria. Judges may then be reassigned into specialized award panels.

Award-specific panels may conduct one or more of the following activities: Pit Interviews, Portfolio review, and match observation, depending on the award and the event's judging plan. After completing review activities, each panel creates a ranked shortlist and submits it to the Judge Advisor for final deliberations.

Feedback from Event Volunteers

Judges do not solicit, accept, share, or consider feedback about teams from other event attendees, including other volunteers. If a Judge witnesses behavior that they are unsure of, the appropriate action is to bring their concerns to the Judge Advisor, who will follow proper procedures for escalation, if necessary.

Managing Conflicts of Interest

Conflict of Interest – a conflict between the private interests and the official responsibilities of a person in a position of trust.

All listed volunteer roles will be asked to disclose any potential Conflicts of Interest, and to complete the [Conflict of Interest and Disclosure form](#). During the Judges meeting, Judges will be asked to declare any potential conflicts to the rest of the judging pool. Some scenarios of conflict of interest:

- A coach/mentor volunteers as a judge or a referee.
- A parent/relative of a team member volunteers as a judge or a referee.
- A recent alum (student or adult) of a team competing at the event volunteers as a judge or a referee.
- A sponsor of a team competing at the event volunteers as a judge or referee.

Having a Conflict of Interest, or even the perception of a Conflict of Interest can affect a team's experience, even if decisions that were made throughout the day were not biased in any way. The perception of potential favoritism is enough to discourage a team, coach, or mentor, and take away from their overall experience at an event. Knowing what Conflict of Interest is, and how to avoid being in a position that could be a conflict will ensure all teams feel they have been evaluated fairly.

All volunteers at an event have a responsibility to act in the best interest of the event which means to treat all teams fairly and equitably.

Volunteers should use prior *FIRST* experience to help inform their decisions but should not use prior knowledge or perception of any specific team to inform their decisions either good or bad. Every team, at every event, deserves a fresh blank slate with all volunteers.

A volunteer who does not disclose their conflict of interest can compromise the integrity of *FIRST* Tech Challenge events. In judging, this could cause harm to the reputation of a team, or the perception of the award outcomes. Egregious violations of a failure to disclose a conflict of interest by a Judge could cause a team to be removed from award consideration.

Conflict of Interest, in some cases, can be quite easy to see. In other cases, it may be less obvious, and it may be difficult to decide what constitutes a true Conflict of Interest. In some cases, the bias may be apparent, while other times a Conflict of Interest may be perceived by a team or a coach. It is best to keep the following in mind when volunteering:

- Be open and forthcoming about any conflicts you may have with a team competing at the event.
- If there is a known Conflict of Interest, avoid making decisions about a team that would change the outcome of the day, such as speaking for or against a team in judge deliberations, or holding some teams to a different refereeing standard than others.
- Remove yourself from any situation that could be perceived as a Conflict of Interest.

End of the Day

At the end of the day, Judges gather their notes and give them to the Judge Advisor for safe disposal.

After the Event

Feedback

We strive to create support materials that are the best they can be. If you have feedback about this manual, please email customerservice@firstinspires.org or by [contacting support](#). Thank you!

Participate in the Monthly Webinars

We recommend Judge Advisor join in the discussion webinars that are offered during the season. Volunteers may sign up for these discussions using the links found in the [Key Role Webinar Schedule](#).

Important Tools

Public Schedule

The Program Delivery Partner or the Event Director should publish the public schedule of events before the event. This schedule will have a high-level overview of all the activities for the event. It is important that everyone at the event does their best to stay true to the public schedule so that teams and volunteers who have planned their day around these times have a good experience.

Time	Agenda
7:15 am	Doors Open for Staff & Key Volunteers
7:30 am	Judges and Inspectors Report
8:00 am	Doors Open for Teams
8:30 am	Judging & Inspection Commences
10:15 am	Team Check-in Hard Deadline (Check the Competition Manual)
10:30 am	Match schedule is generated and distributed to teams. (Check the Competition Manual) <i>Note to Scorekeeper: 6 Matches total (Check the Competition Manual)</i>
10:40 am	Drivers' Meeting with Head Referee & Opening Ceremony
11:00 am	Qualification Matches 1 - 8 <i>Note to Scorekeeper: 7-minute cycle-time</i>
12:00 pm	Lunch
12:45 pm	Qualification Matches 9 - 45 <i>Note to Scorekeeper: 5-minute cycle-times</i>
3:50 pm	Qualification Matches Projected End
4:00 pm	Alliance Selection
4:20 pm	Double Elimination Rounds 1 - 4
5:10 pm	Award Ceremonies Start & Double Eliminations Round 5
6:20 pm	Projected End of Event
7:00 pm	Doors Close
<i>Occasionally things that happen out of the event's control may impact the schedule. In these cases, work closely with the Event Director to understand the updated agenda.</i>	

Figure 1: Example Schedule for a 30 Team Event with Traditional Judging

Registered Teams List

The Program Delivery Partner may provide a list of teams registered for the event or the scorekeeper can export a report of all the registered teams for the event. Sometimes this list may change the day of the event based on which teams show up. The Scorekeeper report will have the most accurate information about who is competing at an event. Notes that teams may be competing only in the judging portion of the event and not have a robot present.

Test Event Teams							
Number	Team Number	Name	Affiliation	City	State	Country	Rookie Year
1	1	Team Unlimited	PTC & FTC1 Team Unlimited 4-H Club	Sharon	MA	USA	2007
2	7	Tactical Sheep	TechBrick Education/DoD STEM&TechBrick Education	Aberdeen Proving Ground	MD	USA	2007
3	16	bigskyrobotics		missoula	MT	USA	2007
4	18	Techno Chix	Girl Scouts Heart of the Hudson	Port Chester	NY	USA	2007
5	22	100 Scholars	100 Black Men of Atlanta/Georgia Power/Johnson Research and Development/NCR/Lockheed Martin & 100 Black Men of Atlanta, Inc.	Atlanta	GA	USA	2007
6	25	Rock N' Roll Robots	Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles/NASA&Girl Scouts	Pasadena	CA	USA	2007
7	99990	Off-Season Demo Team	Off-Season Demo Team				1992
8	99991	Off-Season Demo Team	Off-Season Demo Team				1992
9	99992	Off-Season Demo Team	Off-Season Demo Team				1992
10	99993	Off-Season Demo Team	Off-Season Demo Team				1992
11	99994	Off-Season Demo Team	Off-Season Demo Team				1992
12	99995	Off-Season Demo Team	Off-Season Demo Team				1992
13	99996	Off-Season Demo Team	Off-Season Demo Team				1992

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Figure 2: Competing Team Report

Event Layout/Map

The Program Delivery Partner and Event Director should publish a map of the venue before the event. In some cases, details on the map might not be available until the day of the event.

The Event Layout / Map should detail the following:

- Load-In Path
- Parking for Personal Vehicles and Busses
- Team Check-in
- Volunteer Check-in
- Competition Area
- Pit Area (May include the [Pit Map](#))
- Judging Room Locations (if applicable)
- Safety Details as available (Emergency Exits, AED, Shelter in Place Locations)

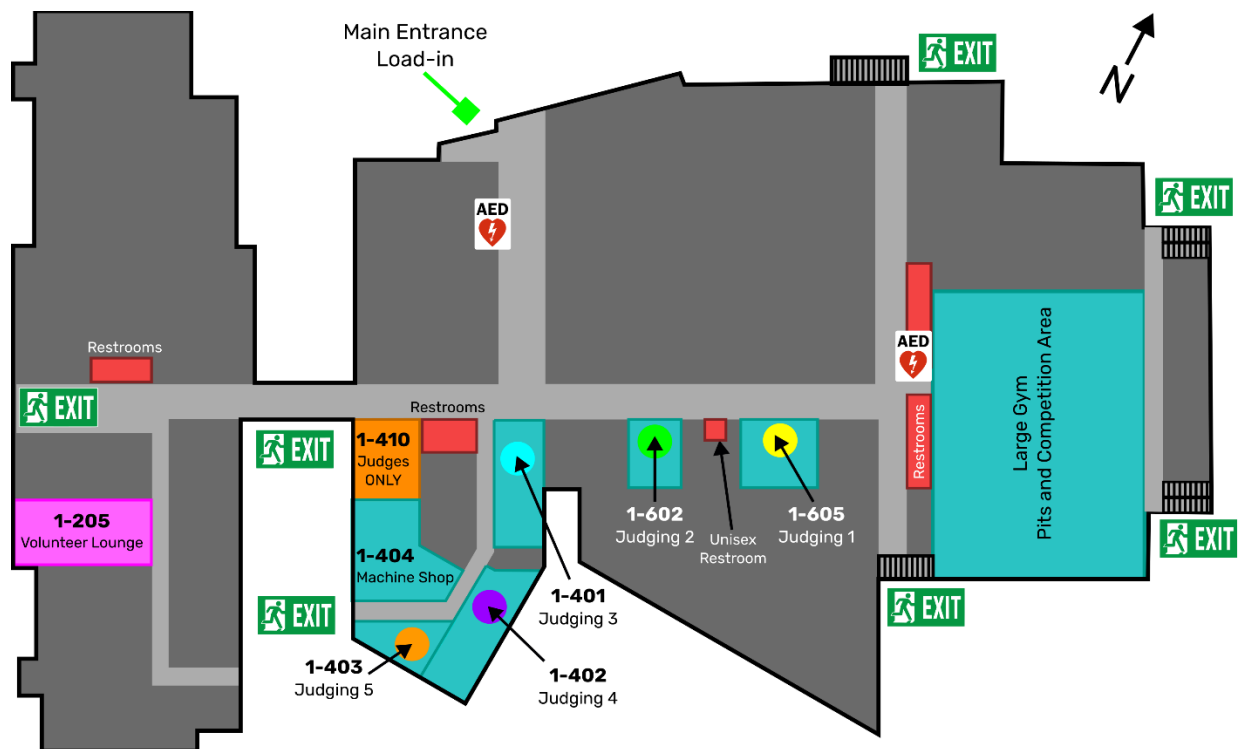


Figure 3: Example Event Map

Judging Schedule

	Panel 1 Room 1605	Panel 2 Room 1602	Panel 3 Room 1401	Panel 4 Room 1402	Panel 5 Room 1403
08:30 AM –	22077 Marcus Minions	8204 Blue Machine	—	27534 RoboChargers - Yellow	25783 Tech Titans
08:50 AM –	13542 RoboChargers - Blue	21171 ITKAN Robotics - M12	27532 RoboChargers - Orange	23344 Technical Turbulence	27536 RoboChargers - Gold
09:10 AM –	26300 Anomaly	27533 RoboChargers - Purple	20482 Wylie E. Robote	12430 Dub East	26693 Triad Robotics
09:30 AM –	23434 Cristo Rey Dallas Robotics	7172 Technical Difficulties	18871 RoboChargers - Green	18227 Area 52	19991 Chuckieheads
09:50 AM –	26542 Apex Genesis	13537 RoboChargers - Red	19564 ITKAN Robotics - MAS	19990 Marcus de-TECH-tives	13552 RoboChargers - Pink
10:10 AM –	27531 RoboChargers - Cyan	24563 Flower Mound Firewall	26722 Tech Support	27535 RoboChargers - Silver	20483 Wall East

Figure 4: Example Judging Schedule of Scheduled Initial Interview

Match Schedule

The match list will be generated on the day of the event after the teams have been confirmed. This schedule will list which teams will play in which alliance (Red or Blue) and it will also list a match start time. Some events will have more than one competition field. Some events will have more than one division, in which case each division will have its own schedule.

Total Number of Teams Competing: Teams:11
 Total Matches per Team: Matches Per Team:5
 ALLIANCE Red or Blue
 Total Number of MATCHES: Matches:14

Start	Match	Field	Red 1	Red 2	Blue 1	Blue 2
8:00 AM	Qualification 9	1	12758	11536	12494	11282
8:07 AM	Qualification 10	2	12329	12622	8089	12789*
8:14 AM	Qualification 11	1	7135	7078	11780	12758

Planned MATCH Start Time
 MATCH Type
 Field Assignment
 SURROGATE MATCH Indicator

Figure 5: Example Match Schedule

Pit Map

Pit maps are typically provided by either the Event Director or by the Scorekeeper. Having a map of where each team is in the pit is key, as teams, parents or Queuers might need to find. Pit Maps created in FTC Scoring will appear on the [FTC-Events](#) page.

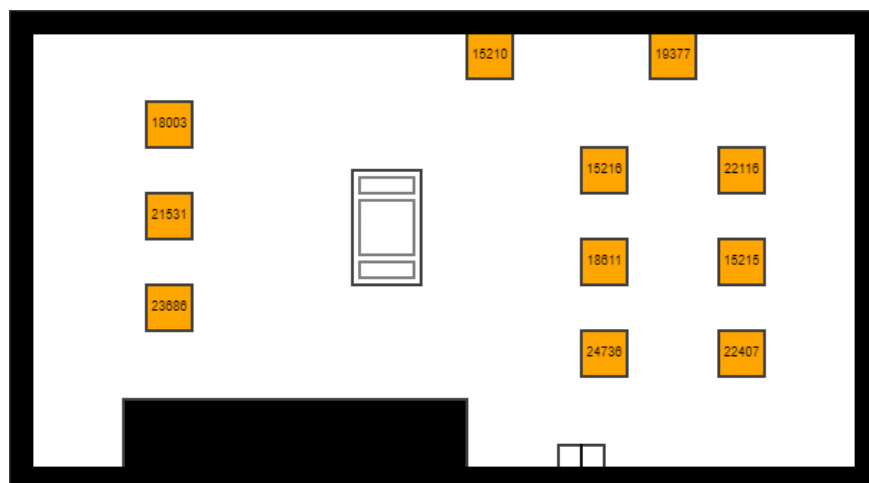


Figure 6: Example Pit Map for a small 12-team Qualifier Event

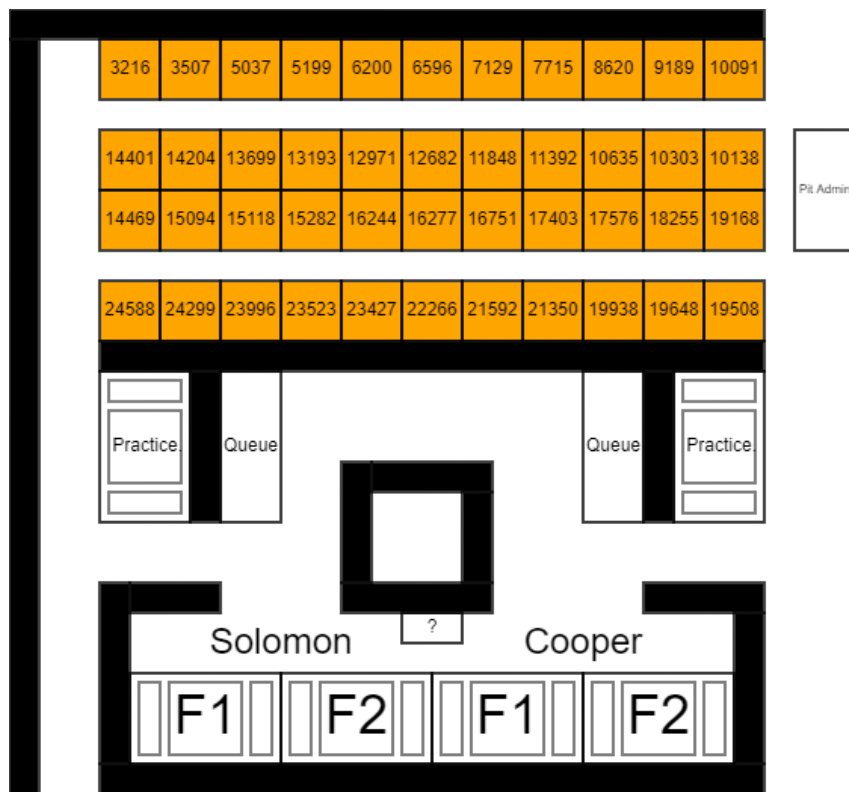


Figure 7: Example Pit Map for a Typical Regional Championship Event

Useful Links and Information

Pre-Event Support



Mon – Fri 8:30am – 5:00pm Eastern Time (UTC-4 or UTC-5)

[Contact Support](#) including live chat or email customerservice@firstinspires.org

Program Resources



[Event Search](#)

ftc-events.firstinspires.org



[Game and Season Resources](#)

ftc-resources.firstinspires.org/ftc/game



[FIRST Tech Challenge Blog](#)



[Event Resources](#)

ftc-resources.firstinspires.org/ftc/event



[FIRST Tech Challenge Website](#)

firstinspires.org/robotics/ftc



[Volunteer Resources](#)

ftc-resources.firstinspires.org/ftc/volunteer

Feedback

We strive to create support materials that are the best they can be. If you have feedback about this manual, please email customerservice@firstinspires.org or by [contacting support](#). Thank you!