

38TH ANNUAL MATH SUPERBOWL

# A COMPETITION FOR THE MATHLETES

Individual and team tests give way to engineering challenge for hundreds of students



NICK MASUDA / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Hundreds of elementary school students competed in an engineering challenge that had them to build a tall structure with just 30 paper straws, meter of tape and rubber band.

By ELIAS ATIENZA  
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

“Are you ready, mathletes?!”  
For the more than 350 students participated in the 38th Math Superbowl on Wednesday at Warren Hall in the Earl Warren Showgrounds, it was just as competitive as a Little League or YMCA basketball game.

After two hours reserved for registration and test taking – with each student taking two individual tests and a team test – it was time for the most exciting portion of the morning, at least for the students.

They got to put their math skills to the test in an engineering challenge, all done in grade-level teams. Each student group had to try and build the tallest tower using only 30 paper straws, a meter of tape and a rubber band – all in 25 minutes. The requirements were stringent: Each tower had to stand on its own for 15 seconds, with no assistance from a student or leaning on any permanent structure.

Students from across Santa Barbara met the challenge with enthusiasm. They immediately leapt into action, talking with each other and planning their towers. Whispers and shouts flew back and forward. As they began to plan, they also started laying the foundations for their towers.

Some groups were more successful than others. While some towers grew to more than eight feet, others never were able to soar. One tower resembled the Leaning Tower of Pisa. But unlike the Italian structure, which has

been standing for more than 600 years, the leaning tower of straws tumbled despite an extraordinary effort by student builders to keep it upright.

A few enterprising student groups also used their instruction paper to add to the height, which helped some groups rise even taller.

After 25 minutes, time was up and the remaining towers were measured. The winners would be announced during the awards cer-

Please see **MATH** on **A4**

# Hundreds participate in 38th Math Superbowl

## ■ MATH

*Continued from Page A1*

emony, with the tallest an eight-foot, nine-inch masterpiece by the sixth-grade class at Mountain View.

The keynote speakers were two UC Santa Barbara mathematics students: Ph.D. student David Nguyen, who is his third year in the program, and Gulnoza Bobokalonva, who is finishing up her bachelor's degree and will be graduating in June.

The two discussed how they first came to math. Both did not decide to pursue math at an early age. Ms. Bobokalonva's journey started with music, but she realized that it wasn't what she wanted to do for the rest of her life. Through a conversation with her father when she was still a teenager, she said she emerged with the determination to study math. Mr. Nguyen started off as an engineering major when he was an undergraduate student, but said he decided to switch to math in his senior year.

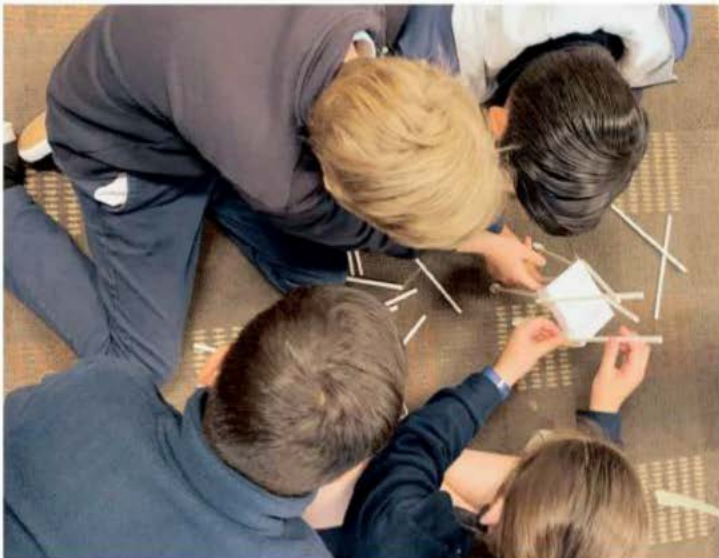
Both spoke of the ups and downs of math. Mr. Nguyen said that he kept a journal in order to keep track of what he was working on and to write down the "good moments" of his work in mathematics. He admitted that math could be "long and hard."

"Write down your goals," Mr. Nguyen advised. He also explained that whenever math was making him feel down, he would open up his journal to "reliving the good moments."

Ms. Bobokalonva struggled with math initially, but started to extol the virtues of math, calling it "beautiful" and said that math teaches you not to give up.

She also said that it was best to collaborate with your friends, instead of trying to do it all yourself, but had some uplifting words.

"Keep going and believe in yourself," Ms. Bobokalonva said. She also spoke of having the right mentor to guide you in learning about math, saying she did not believe in the idea that somebody is "not good at math."



NICK MASUDA / NEWS-PRESS

Students worked in teams as they took on the engineering challenge.

Mr. Nguyen and Ms. Bobokalonva gave words of wisdom to the elementary student mathematicians in Warren Hall about their future. The two advised students to continue pursuing math, but only if it made them happy.

"Don't do something that doesn't make you feel happy," Mr. Nguyen said, saying that it was "fulfilling" to do something you enjoyed. Ms. Bobokalonva added that if students could keep doing math, "keep on doing it."

To finish off the morning at the Superbowl, a plethora of awards were given out, with each grade having individual and team winners.

The first-place winner for the fourth grade was Adams Elementary student Eddie Perko, followed by Washington Elementary's Jasper Fischer and Peabody Charter's Atria Husein.

The first-place winner for fifth grade was split between two students, Mountain View's Bennett Sullivan and Washington Elementary's Mel Mayo. Brandon Elemen-

tary student Joy Xie and Washington Elementary's Levi Reece tied for third.

The sixth-graders were the eldest students at the Math Superbowl. The first-place winner mirrored the fifth grade, as two students split the honors, Charles Palmer from Montecito Union and Cooper Salts from Washington Elementary. Second place was even more crowded, with four students sharing the honor. The four students were Mountain View's Alexander Hajda and Santa Barbara Charter's Avolio, with Washington Elementary having two students, Rainier Mayo and Sophia Hale. In third place was Isla Vista Elementary student Jack Gainer.

Washington Elementary was the ultimate winner of the 38th Math Superbowl, scoring a possible 729 points out of 900.

Mountain View Elementary was second, with 686 points, while Montecito Union edged into third with 678 points.

*email: [eatienza@newspress.com](mailto:eatienza@newspress.com)*