

Robot-soccer makes its debut

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Robot-soccer, in which tiny robotic figures play football on a table tennis-size board using a golf ball, has come to Dubai, as part of Dubai Shopping Festival 2001 events. Organised on the sidelines of the ongoing Information Science Innovation Conference 2001 at the American University in Dubai, the Robot Soccer Championship Dubai 2001 highlights the global advancements in artificial intelligence, as the box-shaped robots move around the board with the agility of ace footballers.

Each team is made of three robots, one of them being the goalkeeper. The robotic teams play football without human control, through a computer that is linked to an overhead camera. The human operator steps in only when there is a foul, and at the start and end of the match. The referee is a human.

The eight teams in the championships are from Austria, Germany, Korea, Philippines, Poland, Singapore, Taiwan and the UK. The championship is recognised by the Federation of International Robot-soccer Association (FIRA), which conducts the FIRA Robot World Cup in different countries.

Jong-Hwan Kim, Professor, Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Korea, and president of FIRA, said: "Robot soccer is part of the exciting developments taking place in the field of artificial intelligence.

These tiny robots are not controlled by any human element, and are able to take quick decisions like a human footballer. We are pleased to introduce this 'sport' into Dubai." Prahlad Vadakkepat, Assistant Professor, Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering, National University of Singapore, and General Secretary of FIRA, said: "The robot soccer is played along FIFA rules, but there are differences. Each team has just three players. The duration of each match is 10 minutes, but it takes about an hour because of the fouls."

Dr Abdulla Mohamed Al Karam, Manager of the Research Unit, Dubai Internet City, said the Robot Soccer Championship Dubai 2001 was an integral part of the Information Science Innovation Conference 2001 which has gathered more than 200 scientists from all over the world. While the preliminary rounds will be held at the American University until March 20, the finals will be held at the Dubai Internet City on March 21. The matches are open to the public. The chief referee is Dr Elmer Dadios of Philippines. The event is being co-ordinated by Elias Bou Saab, Executive Vice-President and Director of Admissions, AUD.