

EDUCATION

'Mathletes' play hard at national competition

By Amritha Alladi

Pacific Sunday News

aalladi@guampdn.com

Not all team sports require a referee, whistle and some type of ball to score points.

For some athletes, a pencil and paper are all that's necessary.

The Guam State Mathcounts Team recently returned from the Raytheon National Mathcounts Competition in Orlando, Fla. with some of the highest placements ever recorded for Guam.

The team included Kevin Cho, Yang Liu and Bryce Collier from Harvest Christian Academy and Yuri Chung from St. John's School. They were all coached by Matthew Lewis from Harvest Christian Academy, a press release stated. Harvest's Mathcounts is offered as a class instead of as an extracurricular activity, according to Cho.

These "Mathletes" competed as individuals and as a team in written matches in algebra, probability, statistics and geometry.

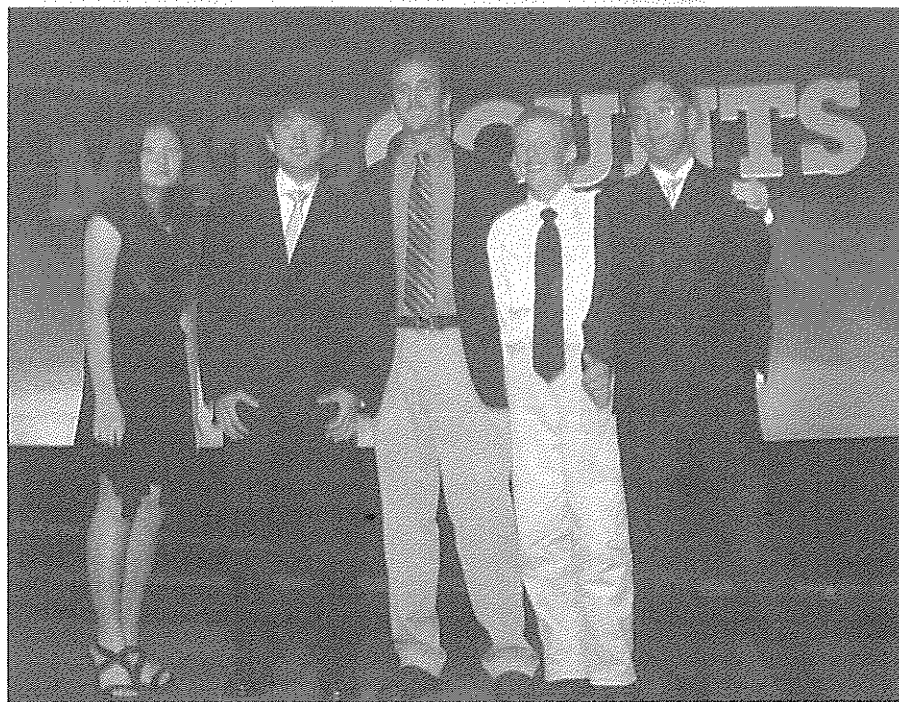
Out of 54 teams, the Guam team ranked No. 36, according to the release.

"I'm really proud of the Guam Mathcounts Team. They did a fantastic job," said Betty Gayle, Guam Society of Professional Engineers state coordinator for the Guam Mathcounts team.

About Mathcounts

She said Mathcounts is open to all middle school students in public, private and military schools. More than 7 million students across the U.S. have participated in the Mathcounts Program, according to the release.

At the beginning of the school year, students in sixth, seventh and



Courtesy of Guam State Mathcounts Team

From left: Yuri Chung, 8th grade, St. John's School; Kevin Cho, 8th grade, Harvest Christian Academy; Coach Matthew Lewis, Harvest Christian Academy; Bryce Collier, 8th grade, Harvest Christian Academy; and Yang Liu, 7th grade, Harvest Christian Academy.

eighth grades can register for the program through their schools. They receive a free math club kit, Gayle said. Then, if they choose to be part of the competitions, their schools pay a fee to be included.

While the program is open to anyone, math coaches at each of the schools hold a schoolwide runoff in January to select up to eight students to represent his or her school in an islandwide competition. By February, the islandwide contestants compete and another eight from that are selected to represent the island nationally. The coach of the school with the student who scores the most points becomes the coach of the island team representing Guam nationally, Gayle said.

"The way we score each school

is, the four individuals on the team, we take the average of their individual tests, plus we add the team round," Gayle said. "(It's possible) one student does so well he pretty much carries the team."

"Sometimes you have individuals who did really well but the team didn't, so they can only compete individually," Gayle said.

Why join?

Aside from providing useful resources to sharpen a student's math skills, Mathcounts provides scholarships the student can later use toward his or her college education.

Plus, she said while a student may not reach the national level or even get to compete, the program may kindle interest in math and subsequently the field of engineer-

ing, which is the ultimate goal here on Guam.

"It spurs their interest to go onto engineering or technical fields," she said. "Sometimes the kids don't know what's out there. ... There's a world of careers they may not have been exposed to."

Fourteen-year-old Cho, an eighth-grader, ranked in the top 12 percent, placing 27th out of 224 competitors in the Individual competition, the release stated.

"Mathcounts isn't about the school math," Cho said. "It teaches the student to think broadly and out of the box."

"It isn't just about getting picked for the team," he said. "So if you're a sixth year (student), you always have a chance the next year or the year after that."

AT A GLANCE

The Mathcounts Competition Program

- ▲ Provides the extra incentive for students to push themselves in mathematics. Consists of fun and creative problems,
- ▲ Competitions have written and oral rounds, as well as individual and team components.
- ▲ Problems focus on the 6th through 8th grade standards of the National Council of Teachers in Mathematics.

The Mathcounts Club Program

- ▲ A fun, challenging and FREE program aimed at engaging a wide spectrum of students.
- ▲ Provides schools with the structure and activities to hold regular meetings of a math club.
- ▲ Depending on the level of student and teacher involvement, a school may receive a recognition plaque or banner and be entered into drawings for prizes.

Source: The Mathcounts Foundation

He admitted it can be stressful at first, but once you get the hang of the questions, you start to notice a pattern and the questions "start to become a little bit more fun," he said.

Even Cho had to turn to the guidance of his older brother, a former Mathlete, and coach along the way to score as well as he did, Cho said.

"Kevin worked really hard this year to improve his rankings from previous years," Gayle noted. "It paid off tremendously."