

USENIX notes

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USACO NEWS

ROB KOLSTAD

USACO Head Coach

The USA Computing Olympiad continues to lead the world in training programs. As of this writing, 52,178 students have registered for training, including 8,900 U.S. students. The students solve training tasks and vie for top dog status in our monthly contests, which generally attract 900–1,000 participants from as many as 80 countries.

These fierce competitors battled through six contests, spread over most of the school year, to earn the coveted invitation to Colorado Springs, where they spent eight days on the campus of Colorado College. The 2006 USA Invitational Computing Olympiad (USAICO) garnered competitors from Russia, Poland, Romania (2), China, Canada (4), and, of course, the good old U.S. of A. (12).

Along the way, wunderkind Matt McCutchen, a senior from Rockville, MD, was the top U.S. performer in three monthly contests and the U.S. Open. He was crowned USACO National Champion. Zeyuan Zhu from China earned the USACO World Champion plaque for his outstanding sustained performance as an international competitor.

The USAICO comprises five traditional contests (3–4 challenging algorithmic problems over 3–5 hours) and the exciting Speed Round, where scores for the 15 serially presented tasks are updated in real time and contestants can unseat winners with each new programming task.

In the end, the U.S.A.'s John Pardon and China's Zeyuan Zhu fought to a tie for the gold medal. Silver medals went to Matt McCutchen and Canada's Richard Peng. Bulgaria's Rostislav Rumenov won the bronze medal.

The top four U.S. students were invited to participate in the IOI (International Olympiad on Informatics, the

holy grail of pre-college programming competition) in Mexico: Juniors Matt McCutchen, John Pardon, and Bohua



*U.S. IOI Contenders (left to right):
Matt McCutchen, John Pardon, George Boxer,
Bohua Zhan*

Zhan, and senior George Boxer.

The IOI was held August 10–20, 2006, in Mérida, Mexico, the heart of the Yucatán peninsula. A city of about one million people, Mérida is surrounded by territory of the former Mayan empire and is only 1.5 hours from Chich'en Itza, the renowned pre-Columbian archaeological site.

Mérida's weather in August is hot, of course: close to 100°F, with very high humidity. The contestants spent most of their time in air-conditioned spaces, but we poor organizers worked in the hot convention center, where the roof actually collected more heat than we'd have experienced sitting outside.

The first day's tasks were quite traditional, similar to the USACO contests and algorithmic in nature. Matt McCutchen led the way with a perfect 300 points; all four U.S. students were in contention for gold medals (awarded to 1/12 of the contestants).

The second day's tasks were nontraditional; scores were dramatically lower across the board. John Pardon again pulled a gold medal out of an extremely stressful situation; the other three earned silver medals.

All in all, the USACO continues to serve the world market, with many students at the IOI saying that USACO training enabled them to earn a berth on their country's team and a medal at the IOI.

Congratulations to all the great per-

formers. Thanks to USENIX, we can continue this fine program that encourages and recognizes pre-college programmers.