

What is Hebocon

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Hebocon is a robot sumo-wrestling competition for those who are not technically gifted. It is a competition where crappy robots that can just barely move gather and somehow manage to engage in odd, awkward battles. To my knowledge, this is the only robot contest in the world where people with no technical capabilities to make robots are presented prizes.

In July 19, 2014, the first Hebocon competition was organized and held by Hebocon Master Daiju Ishikawa in Tokyo, Japan. After a video about the competition was included in the Jury Selections of the Japan Media Arts Festival, held by Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs, Hebocon has made media appearances in many countries, and now, it looks like Hebocon is about to go international.

The word Hebocon derives from the Japanese word *Heboi*.

Heboi

The Japanese adjective *Heboi* is used to describe something that is technically poor, or low in quality. The object of Hebocon is to enjoy Heboiness.

There are two aspects of Heboiness in Hebocon.

1: Heboi robots

Heboi robots do not even move properly, and may break at the slightest impact. It will even fail to move forward smoothly.

Such robots are worthless from an engineering standpoint, but they possess an appeal that impressive robots just do not have.

For example, say there is a baby who has just turned one, toddling about. You may find the sight of the baby trying to walk adorable. The same thing can be said about Heboi robots; there is something adorable about robots that don't even have their parts functioning properly trying to somehow engage in battle.

In addition, Heboi robots are prone to suffer from “technical difficulties.” Although a baby would not lose a leg when they fail to walk properly, a Heboi robot would. One Heboi robot’s body was thrown out of the ring as the robot’s tires accelerated too much; another Heboi robot’s motor would just be dead all the sudden. Hebocon is ridden with such accidents, and it is such incidents that make Hebocon all the more exciting.

2: Heboi creators

Why are some robots so Heboi? That is because their creators have Heboi technical abilities.

A creator with low technical capabilities does not factor in their own incompetence. They are likely to think of an amazing robot with all sorts of cool features before they actually go about trying to build it. In time, they will realize that they do not have the ability to realize the super robot in their mind, and so they make the compromise to build a simple robot instead. However, they will not be able to build even the simple robot they thought of, and so they will make yet another compromise, and end up building what we talked about earlier: a Heboi robot.

Other types of Heboi creators will lose interest in the middle of making their robot, and get sloppy with their work; not even bother to test out if a feature of the robot actually functions; and in some cases, give up participating in the competition all together. But it’s all good: that is what makes Hebocon what it is.

A good look at a participating robot reveals the human weakness of its creator. This is another factor that makes Hebocon interesting. Observing the robots in Hebocon is like reading confessional literature. That’s why I always say “Hebocon is not engineering; it is literature.”

Is it possible to make a robot with no technical skill?

Yes, of course it is. Go into a toy store and buy one of those moving toy dogs, rip off its exterior, and stick some cardboard on there, and you'd be looking at your original robot. Get some pieces of wood, sharpen them, and give your robot some horns: your robot's attacking ability has just sky-rocketed. You might even get more creative and install a motorized weapon onto your robot. Didn't quite work out? That's Okay! That is what we call Heboi. Grab that faulty robot of yours, and participate in a Hebocon competition!

In Japan, a company called TAMIYA sells an easy-to-assemble kit of motorized toys. (http://www.tamiya.com/japan/kousaku/k_item/robocraft/kit71101.htm) Perhaps similar products are for sale in your country. Such products can easily be modified, so they are perfect material for building a robot. Although you may end up worsening how the toy moves by attempting to modify it, that's okay! That is what we call Heboi. Enjoy the fact that it doesn't move right!

Hebocon is for everyone

Hebocon is a robot sumo-wrestling competition for the technically ungifted. However, there is no need for technical experts to be discouraged.

If you just forget all the technical skills and knowledge you have about your field of expertise, and use only methods you have never tried before, you will be able to participate in Hebocon as a novice. Forget about how to control servomotors with Arduino, how to use a soldering iron, and forget about the difference between voltage and current. Try to just forget all of that, go back to being an eight-year-old, and build a robot. Focus on how you can avoid using anything technical, and only try out ridiculous ideas you've never seen or heard of in your life. If things aren't looking good, then you have the right to participate in Hebocon. No matter what happens, you absolutely must not attempt to reach perfection through an endless cycle of the trial-and-error approach. Doing so would produce polished technology, and that is not what we call Heboi.

The spirit of Hebocon

Make up for technical incompetence with strategy

Sumo-wrestling is not just about pushing the opponent. Even if a robot is Heboi, with a strategy, it may be able to defeat an opponent. It could sweep the opponent's legs, record sound, mimic a venomous insect, and its operator could scream out special move names. Even if a strategy has no real effect, there is no problem. After all, it is much more important to get the venue bursting with laughter than it is to win.

Do not let your guard down until the match is on

Please do not forget: your robot is Heboi, and therefore, its parts will easily fall off. Make sure to come prepared with tools and spare parts. Also, do not attempt to conduct maintenance on the day before the competition. You'll screw something up, and your robot will become unable to move at all. Beware of shock and impact when transporting your robot to the venue.

Shame on you, winner; be proud, loser

Defeat is proof of Heboiness. It is when you've lost you should feel most proud of yourself. However, losing on purpose is unacceptable. True Heboiness can only be achieved through fighting hard, and then losing.

All failures are beautiful

Your robot might not move because you put the batteries in the wrong way. You might attempt to fix your robot at the venue, and end up screwing it up even more. Or, you might lose your robot on the way to the venue. All of such things could happen to you and your robot, and all those failures would prove how Heboi you are. Such Heboiness will surely be acclaimed at Hebocon.

Praise the Heboiness of others

The venue will be full of Heboi robots and their creators. Praise the Heboiness of each other, and respect one another.

Always enjoy Heboiness

If in the end, you enjoy Hebocon, that means you will then have understood the greatness of Heboiness. What I am talking about here is not just limited to what you see in the Hebocon competition venue. The ultimate goal of Hebocon is for you all to achieve a life in which you can enjoy Heboiness.

If you step outside the Hebocon competition venue and take a look around you, there should be a lot of Heboi things around you. You ought to find the appeal of such things, and love them.

Furthermore, you should challenge yourself to try something you are not good at, besides robot making. Even if doing that particular thing used to get you all frustrated till now, you might be able to enjoy your Heboiness in that particular activity after you have experienced Hebocon. After all, you already know how funny it is to fail, and to be unable to make things work.

To wrap up

So there you have it. That was the essence of Hebocon. Let me just say in the end that Hebocon is not a serious tournament. It all started with me fooling around to have a good time. Don't be caught up on winning and just enjoy yourself!

Daiju Ishikawa, Hebocon Master

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