

HackBCA Interview

Today I met with Stefan Gorski and Mark Koellmann to interview them on their time at HackBCA on Saturday, March 22nd. HackBCA is a “hackathon” where students compete in a computer science competition to create different programs in a set amount of time – 3pm Saturday to 1pm Sunday.

While interviewing Stefan and Mark I learned much about the hackathon experience.

When I asked about Stefan’s experience at the hackathon, he said that it was a very eye-opening experience. The amount of new technology is incredible and these hackathons show just how much there is. He talked about the many incredible things certain groups did such as money transfers through text and even a virtual reality Tron style game.

Mark talked about how it was a brand new experience for him with the working with groups to work on projects like these and working all night to finish the project.

Stefan told me he learned that one always has to challenge themselves even if they don’t succeed. It is true that even if you fail to win, the losing is still a great learning experience.

Mark learned about all the new technologies that are available and will soon be available.

The hackathon was filled with dozens of groups of students and he told me how the group makeup included students in ranges as far as advanced as professional programmers and as new as students who have never programmed before. He told me despite the competitive attitude one might expect, there was no conflict within the varied groups.

For Mark it was a stressful event because they had to compete against groups who all wanted to win.

The group from Cranford was made up of six students, Joe Flynn, Nick Prezioso, Mark Koellmann, Stefan Gorski, Austin Brogan, and Will Brown. They made a game using the game engine for Minecraft, a game where you can place blocks in similar fashion to Lego. The “Mad Maze Game” they designed contained a premade maze and by using an online live broadcasting service called Twitch, the game had two teams – “red” and “blu” – try to get their Minecraft character to the center of the maze by typing commands in the Twitch chat bar. Whenever a person would type in left the character will move left, if they type in right, he turns right and etc.

The challenges they told me they had to endure were fatigue and getting stuck when working with code. Poor internet was also a challenge.

Stefan told me he was favorite part was the experience of being surrounded by many intelligent people who are all working on different projects using technologies we’ve never seen before.

Mark's favorite part was the presentations and everyone's reactions his group's project and other group's projects.

Stefan's advice for those who would like to join a future HackBCA or other hackathons, is that they should look at hackathon websites and follow the twitter feeds of hackathons. Staying up to date with dates and information will help.

Marks advice for anyone doubting to go is to just go. It is open for anyone to join and if you need help there are many mentors there who can help you with anything. It is a very laid-back environment; there is no pressure that comes with it except any you bring upon yourself. It's also a free entry.

Interview by Ruslan Polyanskiy