Coach Lorrie Martin looked on as her team celebrated their first Quahog Bowl championship. A bit surprised and somewhat in awe of the accomplishment, she sat with the team mascots (a collection of stuffed animals representing the nickname Cephalopods) as other coaches offered heartfelt congratulations. Coach Martin and the Cephalopods from Regional District #13 serving rural, inland Durham and Middlefield Connecticut, were headed to Seattle, Washington and the National Ocean Sciences Bowl finals competition.

The Quahog Bowl is an annual event coordinated by Connecticut Sea Grant and Project Oceanology. It is the Connecticut-Rhode Island regional bowl of the National Ocean Sciences Bowl (NOSB), a nationally recognized and highly acclaimed high school academic competition that provides a forum for talented students to test their knowledge of the marine sciences including biology, chemistry, physics, and geology. The NOSB was created in 1998 in honor of the International Year of the Ocean and since its inception, the competition has grown to include 25 regional competitions with 300 schools and over 2,000 students participating annually. The NOSB mission is to enrich science teaching and learning across the United States through a high-profile national competition that increases high school students’ knowledge of the oceans and enhances public understanding and stewardship of the oceans.

A national competition with a lot of local flair, the Quahog Bowl takes place each February on the UConn-Avery Point campus. A typical competition involves 16 teams from Connecticut and Rhode Island, each with five high school student members and a teacher from the school serving as the coach. Each team competes in a series of round robin matches on the morning of the competition and then goes into an elimination round in the afternoon. Each match requires team members to answer individually and also to work as a team to develop answers to the challenging ocean-based questions. Points accrue throughout the match, ending with a winning team who earns the right to move onto the next match. At the end of the day, one team is declared the winner and spends the next couple of months preparing for the National competition later in the spring.

All of the teams, however, have spent months studying and practicing, sharing in the camaraderie of building a team and absorbing tremendous volumes of information about the world’s oceans. They all come to the competition ready to challenge themselves and other teams. Their coaches are able to motivate and encourage them while providing perspective so that they have a great time, win or lose. The dedication of the coaches to the process of preparing their teams for the event is commendable.

Upon graduation, many team members have gone on to study at local universities, including UConn. Our dedicated volunteers hail from all over southern New England and include graduate students and faculty from local colleges and universities. Many of our volunteers are past participants of the Quahog Bowl (or a bowl from another part of the country) who want to give back by contributing their time.

As regional coordinators, we aim to host an exciting and organized competition while providing a genuine community atmosphere and experience for our teams, coaches, volunteers and family and friends in the audience. The event depends on sponsorship from local and distant venues, including the Consortium for Ocean Leadership (host of NOSB), our host institutions and many others such as Mystic Aquarium, Mystic Seaport, Dominion and Rhode Island Sea Grant.

The Quahog Bowl Competition Day is open to the public, so if you want to see some amazing students take up the challenge of this rigorous competition, come and join in the fun!
Dave Bednarz,
Ledyard High School
2012 Quahog Bowl champions

As a coach for a team that has won the Quahog Bowl, I see this competition as an incredible opportunity for students to compete academically at a regional and perhaps national level. The amount of dedication that I see in my students is inspiring.

The Quahog Bowl not only inspires high academic achievement in my Ledyard High School students, but helps them to develop great interpersonal relationship skills as they mesh as an effective team and meet other students with backgrounds that may be very different from theirs.

The camaraderie within and between teams in the Quahog Bowl has made it an environment where Ledyard High School students have learned to be gracious winners and losers. This is an invaluable lesson for real life.

Lorrie Martin,
Coginchaug Regional High School
2014 Quahog Bowl champions

I had a young man on my team who in school, operated with special needs for years. He has a love for the ocean, and he somehow gravitated to our Ocean Bowl team. Though not always equipped with the higher level science courses that often accompany NOSB success stories, he was an avid “ocean fact collector” with a mind like “flypaper.” A reader of historic ocean literature with a passion for PBS and NOVA videos, he would just “mop up” the odd ball questions in a way that would leave my jaw dropped….HOW ON EARTH DID YOU KNOW THAT??!! Somehow he was a cog in our very special Coginchaug Cephalopod “machine” that just unexpectedly rolled to First Place in the Connecticut/Rhode Island Regional Quahog Bowl and then on to 10th place at the National NOSB Competition in Seattle. To this day, this past NOSB Spring Adventure has not advanced past the DREAM stage in my mind – a euphoric experience that this team just left in the memory of this ole Ocean Bowl Coach of eight years.

BUT, the most amazing part of the whole tale was the sensitivity, cooperation and “can-do” attitude that every one of the NOSB coordinators, judges, competing teams and coaches displayed. All contributed to the success story throughout this incredible experience.

I would be so remiss not to mention the incredible support and encouragement that our awesome NOSB regional coordinators, Diana Payne and Thaxter Tewksbury, provided to this “surprised” coach and her small town team after our regional win – a positive push that continued right through the three-day National Competition in Seattle. No problems were too insurmountable for Diana Payne equipped with her backpack full of team pins, energy, spirit and enthusiasm for her first-time little team from Connecticut.

Diana Payne is the education coordinator for Connecticut Sea Grant at UConn. Thaxter Tewksbury is director of Project Oceanology.