

CS Major One of 16 Semi-Finalists to Vie for \$100,000 in TopCoder Invitational

Computer Science major Ambrose Feinstein recently put his skills to the test against the nation's top coding wizards for a chance at a \$100,000 grand prize. Feinstein was one of 16 professional and amateur programmers to reach the semi-final round of the first-ever TopCoder Invitational, which was held on Nov. 2 and 3, 2001, at the Foxwoods Casino and Resort in Mashantucket, CT.

The invitational tournament lasted for three months with online elimination matches held each week. Then the top 256 programmers from the online matches competed in regional rounds to determine the 16 semi-finalists. Feinstein, who competes in a variety of programming competitions, found the competition to be stimulating.

"All of the problem sets were very difficult," says Feinstein. "I started on the hardest problem and probably should have used another strategy. In the format TopCoder uses, time is just as significant as total problems solved. So it was challenging but still fun."

Scoring in TopCoder competitions is based on two factors: intensity (the ability to use a particular coding language while under pressure) and velocity (the ability to write good code quickly and accurately.) The Orlando resident's competition included programmers from Stanford, California Institute of Technology, Cornell, MIT and University of California, Berkeley. Although Feinstein didn't advance to the finals, it is a terrific achievement to reach this level.

"The fact that Ambrose made it to this level is a very good indicator of what excellent students we have in SEECs and what



Ambrose Feinstein's competition group, which competed last in the TopCoder semi-finals, included (from left) James Lee (*handle: steevai*), Feinstein (*handle: ambrose*), Jason Woolever (*handle: qubits*) and Jon Salz (*handle: milhouse*).

fine programs we offer," said Dr. Ali Orooji, Feinstein's professor and advisor of his ACM programming team. "We're very proud of how successful Ambrose has been in these competitions."

The \$100,000 prize went to Stanford student Jon McAlister of Houston, TX, but Feinstein wasn't too disappointed. Sponsored by TopCoder Inc., a new company that recruits computer programmers for high-tech corporations, the tournament prominently displayed his programming talents for various facets of the industry.