

UCF programmers place 7th in world

By Sharon McBreen

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

The University of Central Florida computer team this week programmed its way to a \$1,000 prize and the title of seventh best in the world.

The team, in Kansas City for the international programming finals, will return home Sunday with a plaque and the knowledge that they competed with some of the most impressive colleges in the country.

It wasn't as high as they had hoped to rank, but team members said they were pleased.

"We didn't make any mistakes on our performance," said team member Bill Horan, 22, of Georgia. "We tackled the problems we felt we should have."

In the last 10 years, UCF's computer team has placed in the top 20 of the world finals six times. It placed fifth last year, second in 1986 and fourth in 1985.

This year the three-member team competed against 600 teams in regional contests. UCF earned a chance to compete in Kansas City after winning the Southeastern regionals in November.

Thirty teams, representing seven countries, were in the finals Wednesday afternoon. The top seven teams won scholarships. Melbourne University in Australia ranked first; Michigan State University was second; Stanford placed third; Virginia Tech was fourth; the University of Florida placed fifth; and Harvard University was sixth, followed by UCF.

"The competition is getting rougher," said coach and former team member David Van Brackle. "It's becoming more and more well-known. They're learning more and more what it takes to win."

The object of a programming match is to solve more problems than the other teams in five hours.

First, programmers have to come up with the right answer. After that, they have to write instructions, or programs, that will make the computer come up with the right answer, too.

The team loses points for each minute it spends solving the problem, and it is marked down for turning in a wrong guess. The team with the best speed and accuracy wins.

For the first time, UCF and UF competed together in the international finals; UF won the good-natured rivalry between the two.

"We like to maintain bragging rights for the best programmers in Florida," Van Brackle said.

But seventh in the world is nothing to scoff at, considering the school is a fraction of the size of many of its competitors. Van Brackle said the young age of the school makes its hungry.

"We have to remake our reputation every year. To me, it's holy quest to show the world what we can do."

"It's more of a personal achievement."