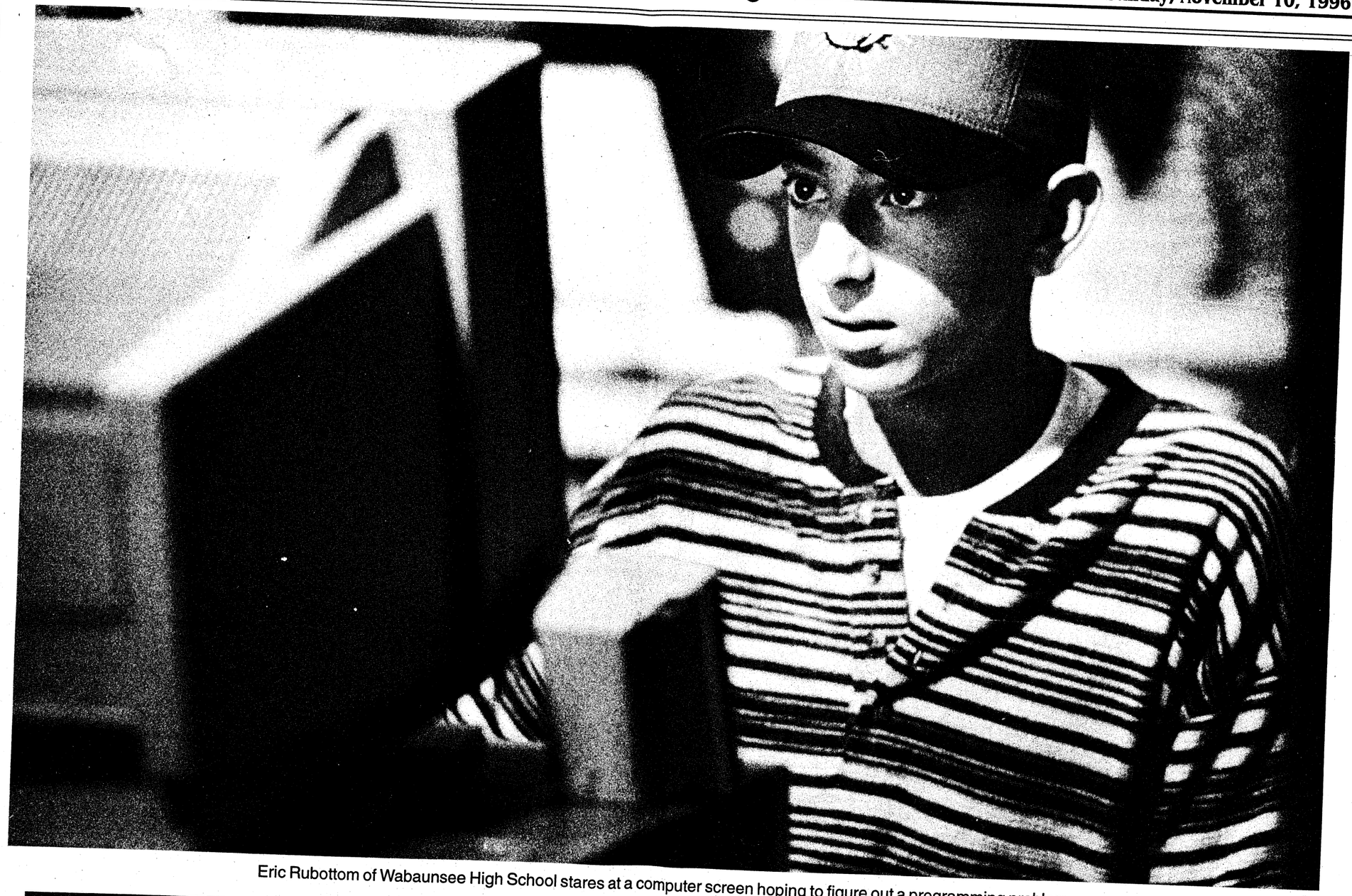
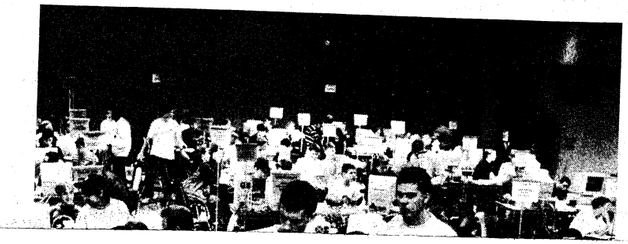


Eric Rubottom of Wabaunsee High School stares at a computer screen hoping to figure out a programming problem.



High school students from around

solve all of them," said David Gustafson. "We try to have problems so that teams solve at least one of them."

The rounds may have been all business, but in between it was literally fun and games. Several teams would play video games after completing the prob-

Teske, 15, competed for Wamego High. Wamego High School finished with 71 points.

"It was a little bit more difficult because we haven't had as much practice in Pascal," said Charlie Kilian. "It was more fun."

Tegan Teske and William Kilian of Wamego wait to fine out if they have the correct answer.

High school students from the state compete in programming challenges

It's Terminal

Erica Shaffer
Staff Writer

The K-State Union ballroom may not have been the war room in Dr. Strangelove, but there certainly was enough hardware—and enough talent—to cause some havoc Wednesday.

Fortunately, the occasion was more benign. More than 40 teams of bright, talented high school students gathered for the fourth annual High School Programming Contest, sponsored by the K-State department of computing and information sciences. Several area schools participated, including Wabaunsee, Wamego and Junction City high schools.

Schools could field up to three teams of no more than four students. Students were allowed to compete at either a beginning or advanced level. They also had to bring their own hardware, software and powerstrips. Any programming language could be used in the competition.

The contest consisted of six rounds.

"We give the students a problem and we give them 25 minutes to solve the problem," said Rodney Howell, one of the contest organizers. "They get bonus points for any time left in the round."

A typical programming problem could be writing a program to find the square root of a number, without having the benefit of a button on a calculator that will figure it out for you.

Contest officials projected the time remaining onto a screen set up over the stage. They only had two opportunities to solve the problems for points. Once the programmers got the cue to begin, nothing could break their concentration, not even a rowdy, impromptu performance by the cast of "Hair" in the courtyard one floor below.

"Generally we won't have teams that color graphics. One game put the player behind a gun that, when it came upon unsuspecting bad guys, blasted them to Kingdom Come in a spray of blood. The students really enjoyed this game.

But when time came for the next round to begin, students made a mad dash for their stations.

The contest wasn't just an opportunity for the students to show off their programming stuff. Competitors were treated to lunch and a tour of Nichols Hall. Not a bad recruiting tool.

"A number of the students that have competed in the contest end up coming to K-State and majoring in something within the College of Engineering," Howell said.

The students can see what the university has to offer in the way of facilities, and interact with faculty they may be learning a few tricks from in the future.

When the contest ended, team Raider 2 from Shawnee Mission South captured first place in the advanced division by scoring points in all the rounds. Team CCR from Olathe East High School won first place in the beginner category.

Cousins Charlie and William Kilian, both 17, Asher Mertz, 15, and Tegan Eric Rubottom, 15, and Nick Jernigan, 17, competed for Wabaunsee High School. They finished with no points in the advanced division, although they were able to solve some of the problems after the allotted time.

"They were pretty hard, but I bet it would have been much better if we were using a different programming language," Rubottom said.

"They were real difficult, kind of overwhelming," Jernigan said. "You really have to know what you're doing in order to figure out how to answer them. I don't think it would have been better necessarily if we'd used a different language, but it certainly would have been better if we were more fluent in the language we were using."

Team MK Productions from Junction City garnered 21 points in the beginner division.

Probably the youngest programmer was Ben Voight of Smoky Valley, a 14-year-old sophomore who competed in the advanced division. He came in second place in 1995, but wouldn't do as well this year with a score of 140 points.

"I didn't really prepare," said Voight, who was using his father's computer for

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Ben Voight from Smokey Hill reacts after Eric Schmidt reveals that he has the incorrect answer. Voight, 14, was the only one-man team at the competition.

Photos by Rod Mikinski