



FOR INSPIRATION & RECOGNITION OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

2020 FIRST® TECH CHALLENGE MUSIC STRATEGY GUIDE

Introduction

Our goal is to provide a consistent musical atmosphere for all **FIRST**® events. Please review the Strategy guides prior to your event. These guides will help make your event sound “professional”.

Taking into account that music is a very subjective area, and everyone’s tastes are different, we try to stay in the genre of “sports music”, which encompasses every genre of music. Sports music has different atmospheric vibes, from walk-in music, to game-on music, to award music, and everything in between.

Our aim is to enhance the event by cheerleading, not only reacting. The guides will help identify areas that need audio attention and the choices in the playlists accurately reflect those needs.

The Objective

To create playlists of music that will not only be inspiring, motivating, and uplifting but one that will also create a positive atmosphere that promotes *Gracious Professionalism*® and *Coopertition*®.

We accomplish this by identifying as many different situations and finding audio elements for them.

I recommend editing some of the music files [adding in/out points] to give a “tighter” flow to the sound, especially for music used during the actual match play. “GameON” music tracks should all be Two Minutes 38 seconds [2:38] in length.

Other areas to keep in mind are the Inspection & Judging periods in the mornings, and the opening ceremonies.

The Game and the Pattern

Each **FIRST** Tech Challenge event is divided into Walk In, Inspection Ambiance, Opening Ceremonies, Match Play, Lunch, Alliance Selection, Playoffs, and Awards.

Every year the organizers create a different “game” for the robots. But the pattern and process is the same for the DJ once the matches start:

“Team Intro's”, *StartUps”, “GameON”, “Wait for Score”, “Fill” repeat.

During **FIRST** Tech Challenge events, when one match is over, the other one starts immediately following the score. And the process is repeated. There are times where you may need to fill due to

an unforeseen circumstance. Those are good times to play some crowd prompting songs, or as I call them Crowd Rallies.

At the end of the day, organizers usually go into Award mode, during which time the DJ plays an "Awards Song" after a team has been announced, and fades the music off when the last person "high-fives" the last judge in line.

TEAM INTROS - The "Emcee." introduces each team in a 2-team alliance, which plays another 2-team alliance. Musically, I like to use good instrumentals especially upbeat karaoke versions of popular songs.

Run the song underneath the Emcee's introductions. When they are about to begin the countdown to the match, fade the music out of the mix. That way all the teams can hear without any distraction.

STARTUPS - Like anything else, sometimes the Robots are not ready after the Team Intro's, therefore it would be wise to have something on stand-by. These delays don't usually last very long, unless something out of the ordinary happens.

"Start Me Up" "Pump Up" songs fit perfectly here as well as some short stadium stings. The "We will Rock You" drum beating, hand-clapping foot-stomping Arena-type staples are perfect for this.

Also "delay" or "connecting" type songs can work well too. Many options to choose from...and sometimes you won't play any if the matches are ready to go after the Team Intro's.

Many times the Emcee's adlib during the delays, either duck the music under them or fade it out completely and just listen for the "all thumbs up" cue that starts the match.

GAME ON- The robots get in place for part 1 of the match: ***The Autonomous Period***, where the robots must compete without any human intervention. It starts with a Countdown from the Emcee and a CHARGE HORN sound effect. The autonomous period ***lasts 30 seconds***. A buzzer sounds to end autonomous and then there is a **8 second countdown** on the clock with an audible 3,2,1 boxing-bell sound to start the ***The Driver Control period***. This is when the players get behind their remote controls and try to "score" more points. The Driver Control period ***lasts 2 minutes***. During the last 30 seconds a steam whistle sounds to start the **End Game**, and ends with a BUZZER sound effect.

In a perfect world the tracks should be edited to 2:38 for maximum impact, however fading out at the end of the match is always a fallback...

During the matches, the DJ does not have to worry about the game sound effects, as they are usually handled by a sideline referee/judge.

The Playoff rounds are a best-of-3, and sometimes there are timeouts, which have traditionally been 6 minutes. The Championship round will also have a mandatory 6-minute turnaround between matches. This is the time to really get the crowd pumped up. Last year some events started to show videos at this time... just be prepared to fill any gaps that may occur during the showing of videos.

During the actual matches, I like using songs with an upbeat tempo, usually a BPM (beats per minute) within the 120 -140 range, and as many instrumentals as possible as the Emcee will be covering the "play-by-play". Usually Techno, Industrial, House music works well, however as the games get "more important" I tend to sway towards epic Hollywood movie scores, as they have a zeal for building tension and suspense. Good "Spy" movie soundtracks have some great sections to use.

2020 PLAYLISTS

I have yet to come across a musical genre that does not work at a **FIRST** event. Even international songs have made it into our mix during an event. Our demographic is not only Students; mentors, parents, family, and other spectators also make up the audience. Not everyone will be happy with every song that is played, but hopefully everyone will have a good time by the end of the event.

Most of the top hits, especially today's modern pop genre, have suspect lyrics and content, be cautious when playing this musical genre, as this is usually what most students are listening to.

**To play it safe, if a song has a "Radio-Edit" or "CLEAN version",
don't even listen to it, just don't play it.**

For instance from the Top 100 Billboard Pop music and Spotify for 2019 so far, I found a little over 75% would not be **FIRST** friendly. That's a lot of mining to get to the gems.

***Songs that use profanity in their lyrics, Please Don't Play,
Even if they're the most popular songs out there***

***Songs with content about Sex, Drugs, Bullying,
Taunting, or Violence should also be avoided***

Songs that are going to be used should be sorted into their prospective playlists, ranging from Walk In music all the way through to the Awards and Walk Out.

These guidelines and suggested playlists are meant to keep our events consistent with each other, however it does not preclude any event from playing music that is regional to that area. Keeping in mind always, that we are an **all-ages family sporting event**, and some very popular songs may not be appropriate to be played at a **FIRST** event, such as anything practically from Drake, Nicki Minaj or even John Travolta's & Olivia Newton Johns "Grease Lightning mega dance mix".

Please keep in mind that this season we will Not Be Able to Play ANY music from John Williams and the Star Wars franchises...

Therefore, no Star Wars Theme, Imperial March, Cantina Band etc..... Though classical composer Gustav Holst's The Planets Op.32 sounds eerily familiar to the Star Wars soundtrack, there is a recording of John Williams conducting the Boston Pops Orchestra rendition of the 1916 seven-movement suite. Basically teetering on the line, so out of respect to our sponsor this year, we should just avoid that track all together...In fact scratch off all the John Williams library for this year...

2020 THEME - *FIRST RISE*SM, powered by *Star Wars: Force for Change*, and *SKYSTONE*SM

The 2019-2020 season is sponsored by Star Wars: Force for Change and it is setting out to inspire citizens of the galaxy to work together, strengthening and protecting the Force that binds us and creating a place where collaboration and collective wisdom can elevate new ideas and foster growth.

Each league has it's own theme under the *FIRST RISE* banner. The 2020 *FIRST* Tech Challenge game is called "Skystone". You have the power to help the cities, towns, and places you call home reach new heights. This is your opportunity to lead our future forward—and up, together we rise.

The two-team alliances, will challenge and try to outscore each other via strategy, communication and performance...to get a better idea it's recommended that you visit the **FIRST** website and watch the animation video...

WALK IN MUSIC

Doors open early morning, and the many of the participants are eager to get to their pits, while the supports & public find their way into their seats. The morning music mix feel should feature the theme of the season, if possible, and have an easy tempo and uplifting groove.

Most teams, mentors, staff, etc. have probably had long night's prior, therefore blasting high-octane music at this point may not be highly advised. But playing very slow music isn't the right choice here either.

Current and popular songs would work best here; it eases everyone into a rhythm of familiarity and sets a positive tone for the day.

LUNCH MUSIC

Similar to walk in music, it's a part of the day that would be considered "downtime". The morning of competitions have concluded, and everyone is in need of a break. Not only do the robots need to recharge their batteries but also us humans. The feel again is slightly subdued and very easy going.

Usually the breaks last for approximately an hour, but it's good to have a little extra put aside. We've tended to go with songs about the theme and lean more to current music during the lunch break.

AMBIENT BACKGROUND

During the morning and prior to the opening ceremonies, team must go through an inspection and be judged. It is very important for everyone to be able to hear each other; therefore the music should not be overbearing, loud or intrusive. Easy listening, chill, and even upbeat folk songs would be apropos.

OPENING CEREMONIES

This is when the fun begins. And this is when the music begins to "rev up" a notch. Intro music for the Emcee, and even some instrumental background music while the judges are being introduced works well here. Having short "walkup" songs [aka stings] can be used when guests are introduced either for a speech or acknowledgement.

The DJ should be able to go with the flow, as he will be reacting rather than leading, but it would all depend on the Emcee and time...if the event is running slightly behind, they may just want to plow through, and get to the matches.

During the opening ceremonies the National Anthems are also sung at this time, it is imperative to have the your back-up Anthems on stand-by just in case there are any technical/artist difficulties.

TEAM INTRODUCTIONS

Usually during the first go through of the Qualifying matches, I like to use an instrumental piece of music while the MC is introducing each team. All types of instrumentals work well here, even upbeat jazz. However, it should be upbeat and motivational, as each team is getting into the starting gate.

Please don't play any songs that would be one team-specific here or during the matches. You can acknowledge some teams theme songs during "In-Betweeners" but not before their matches.

GAME ON - Qualifying.

During these matches, the Emcee is usually doing a play-by-play commentary over the sound system; therefore using songs with lyrics tend to get in a battle with the announcer.

My experience has been to use instrumental music usually with a heavy techno beat and as it gets closer to the playoffs I try to increase the tension with more dramatic and epic music.

GAME ON - Finals

These songs should now be more dramatic and intense as it builds up to reveal the champion Over It seems to have become traditional to start the first match with **FIRST** music staple and "Sandstorm" by Darude, and if the set goes to a 3rd match I've always used an edited version of the song The Black Pearl [aka He's a Pirate] from Pirates of the Caribbean.

I recall one season I didn't play it at the World Champions and the following year I had a group ask me why, since they had travelled a long way their team made it to the finals, and they were disappointed they didn't hear it...then it dawned on me...they're actually listening, and want some tradition.

AFTER MATCHES/IN-BETWEENERS

After the match ends, there is an anticipatory period as everyone awaits the results. However with **FIRST** Tech Challenge, if the scores are not ready immediately, they may just move onto announcing the next match. The DJ would have to be alert to what is happening on the field.

These songs are used to keep everyone's toes tapping but are not necessarily "interactive Crowd Prompt" songs. Once the score is given, there may be some time to play an upbeat song while waiting for the emcee to introduce the next match. In-betweener or Crowd Rally songs can get the audience up dancing, clapping singing or just nodding their heads.

FIRST FAVES or CROWD RALLIES

These are usually the real "upbeat, get the crowd into it" songs. Including **FIRST** favorites like YMCA, Cotton-Eye Joe, Cha-Cha-Slide etc.

From a strategic point of view, we don't want to have everyone burnt out by lunchtime. It's great to get them up after the first couple of matches of the day, as their excitement level would have carried over from the opening ceremonies.

And as the day goes on it's nice to take them on a ride too. Similar to a roller coaster, which goes through a series of ups & downs with a few curves thrown in. The challenge is to keep everyone excited for the whole ride, but especially near the end of the day when it all counts.

AWARDS CEREMONIES

After the games have concluded for each day, there is an Awards Ceremony to recognize those teams that have been chosen to receive them. The Emcee usually describes the award, and then the merits of the team and then the team(s) name. Everyone cheers at the announcement, and begins to clap as the teams make their way down to the floor area.

The music played here is usually the upbeat, energetic variety. Think celebratory songs from your favorite sports team.

The Awards given out at a **FIRST** Tech Challenge event include the following:

FIRST Dean's List Award

Inspire Award

Think Award

Connect Award

Innovate Award, Design Award

Motivate Award

Arm Control Award

Some optional awards include:

Promote Award

Compass Award

Judges Award

Special Moments/Mentor Dances

During **FIRST** events they occasionally have a mentors moment, where they all come out and do a dance of some sort. It's good to have a few of these on standby. Check out the song choices in the crowd rally section, but just in case, keep the Chicken Dance or the Macarena at the ready. This year's big sing along hit is Old Town Road by Lil Nas ft. Billy Ray Cyrus and in the dance-along vein it's Blanco Brown's The Git Up...

REQUESTS

Everybody wants to hear their favorite music, regardless of where they are it seems. Because we play so many different types of music, and so many different songs, some guests think that it's an all-request radio station.

Some fail to realize that we are trying to create an atmosphere. Their intentions are great; they are probably having a good time and also want to contribute. If someone approaches, be as diplomatic as possible, most of the times they ask for something that is already on the playlist.

The problem that arises is that many DJ Booth locations are not in a fan-friendly accessible area, and safety issues become a major concern. Therefore, for the present time, **WE WILL NOT BE TAKING ANY REQUESTS** from the floor.

If there are songs that are not on the playlist, especially International or Regional songs, and you think they'd be a good fit with our presentation then send those requests via email to requests@firstmusicdjs.com. I will listen to them and slot them in when possible.

Conclusion

Pace yourself, it is a LONG day, and you will have to be on your toes the whole time. It's a non-stop show as far as the music is concerned. Hopefully I've programmed the music so they will be singing YOUR praises. It's a win-win for everybody!