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Contact:
Maja Hiller, Communications Coordinator
Innovation Academy
(p) 352-294-1785
iacommunications@aa.ufl.edu

UF INNOVATION ACADEMY STUDENTS EXCEL AT THE ORLANDO MAGIC INNOVATION CHALLENGE

GAINESVILLE, Fla. [Oct. 29, 2025] – The University of Florida Innovation Academy proudly congratulates the team of talented IA students who showcased their creativity and innovation at the Orlando Magic Innovation Challenge, earning first place at UF before advancing to the statewide final round, where they placed second overall.

The competition, hosted by the Orlando Magic in collaboration with Blackstone Launchpad, invited teams from universities across Florida to solve a real-world business challenge and come up with a membership program to engage Orlando Magic fans, with a special focus on international audiences.

Representing UF and the Innovation Academy, Archit Namboodiri, Ahan Soni, and Tyler Rasmussen took on the challenge and impressed judges with their original idea and professional pitch.

Reflecting on the experience, the team shared how the innovation Academy gave them a strong foundation for success. "It was kind of the same process we've been doing in our Catalyst class, Innovation in Action," said Archit Namboodiri, highlighting how the experience gained in the classroom and the "How Might We" challenges prepared them for real-world problem-solving and gave them a competitive edge. "It was all skills that we developed through doing this multiple times."

Tyler Rasmussen elaborated on that point, recalling words of advice from Innovation Academy director Dr. Jeff Citty: "I remember Dr. Citty told me, *if you want to do well in a pitch competition, you need a prototype*. And none of the other teams had it." That crucial detail gave them an advantage, and he emphasized the importance of prototyping. "It's going to be what sets you apart from everybody else." The team

developed both an interactive app and a physical prototype to bring their concept to life.

One of the challenges they faced was understanding the corporate structure of a sports organization of that magnitude, but with adaptability, rapid-thinking, and creative problem-solving, the team managed to overcome every obstacle.

For Ahan Soni, thinking outside the box and approaching the challenge with strategy and emotional intelligence was key. He highlighted how understanding your audience can make all the difference. After researching both the company and the judges, the team tailored the idea to their interests. "You don't have to know them personally, but doing a little research on their background helps." Soni explained. "At the end of the day, there's still that aspect of emotion."

The team also highlighted the importance of resilience and openness to feedback: "Be ready to take criticism. If anything, it should push you to go beyond." Shared Namboodiri. "It's always to help you grow as a person — It should only push you to the right direction."

This experience served as a dynamic real-world opportunity that not only connected them with professionals but fostered growth and strengthened their passion for entrepreneurship.

Together, the students demonstrated how innovation thrives through teamwork, creativity, and adaptability.

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The Innovation Academy (UF IA) is one of the nation's most forward-looking undergraduate programs – at one of its most dynamic research universities. UF IA gives motivated students a small-college experience focused on innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship, ethics and leadership on a unique spring-summer schedule. UF IA enrolls and supports academically talented students focused on developing knowledge to grow new business opportunities, services and products through curricular and co-curricular experiences.

For more information, please visit the UF IA website at <https://innovationacademy.ufl.edu/>