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Tips for Young Judges

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After the discussion a month or two ago on young or new judges and the lack of respect, I decided to write an article. As a young but experienced judge, I feel I have some good insight for anyone facing these problems.

First, some background about myself-I began judging in November 1997, here in Memphis, TN, at age 14. The local judges then were Mattie Casper (Level 2) and Shawn Smith (Level 3), and received my Level 1 almost immediately. Shawn encouraged me to go for Level 2, but during the first PTQ at which I judged in January 1998, I ran into problems. At the event, several players complained about me saying I lacked maturity. This became a recurring theme that eluded correction. Still, I was determined to try for Level 2. I attended WotC's GameCamp for the second straight year in 1998, and while there I helped judge the JSSQ at the WotC Game Center. Jimmer, the Level 3 there, offered to test me for Level 2, but suggested I wait and try once again to prove myself to Shawn.

Determined, I returned home and worked on exhibiting more maturity at events. By the Urza's Saga prerelease Shawn was willing to test me. I once again scored 90+% on my judge test, and got my Level 2. Since then, I have judged many PTQs, 3 additional Prereleases (one of which I was Head Judge for), Grand Prix- Memphis, and PT-NY '00. I am now a Tournament Coordinator for a local store, and I work with John Carter (Level 3) in the hopes of getting a recommendation for Level 3.

Enough about me. I've learned a lot of things since I began judging, and the following is a list of tips for any judge seeking respect.

1. Be Confident

Everyone expects a good judge to know their rules, and yet every once in a while, a situation comes up where you don't know what to do. When making a ruling about specific situations, don't be afraid to grab an Oracle (if it's available) or another judge. One thing to NOT do is waver back and forth on the subject. While accuracy in rulings is important, if the players think you don't know what you're talking about, you'll lose respect fast, no matter how right you are.

Also in this category, never be afraid to make rulings against friends, or that may make someone larger than you mad. Example: at Arkansas States last year, a player declared his attack phase, and the other said, "Ok, in response, I'll tap your guy with Ring of Gix." The players, both imposingly larger than me (I'm 5'6", not many Magic players are smaller than me :), got into a debate about what phase they were in: 1st Main or Combat. I ruled they were in the 1st Main, since the NAP said "in response." Later, the person who was the NAP came up to me with his friends and politely asked me to explain why I ruled how I did.

To summarize: confidence earns respect.

2. Act Your Age, and Better

This is something I learned the hard way. While you may be only 14, you are just as qualified as any other judge on the floor, or else you wouldn't be a judge, therefore you are expected adhere to the same guidelines. While people may encourage you to misbehave or put you in odd situations (one judge offered to give me away as an ancillary tourney prize at the Stronghold prerelease), you have to be able to make responsible decisions to act as mature as any other judge on the floor. If you act more mature than you look, players and other judges will respect you for your professionalism. If not, people will use you as an example for why young people shouldn't be judges.

3. Watch Your Language

This falls under #2, but needs to be stressed on its own. Funny situations occur at events all the time, and they frequently involve one or more players doing something stupid. It's all right to discuss these situations, but make sure you do so professionally. Also, if you have a "flavorful" vocabulary, be sure to be extra-careful with your language at tournaments.

4. Don't Show Favoritism

While every judge prefers certain players to some extent, it is important for younger judges not to be hanging out around friends' games, or chatting with friends instead of working the floor. It may be necessary for you to go out of your way to accomplish this. If you can show that you care more for the integrity of the tournament than your friends, you will earn extra respect.

5. Don't Judge Only Big Events

One of the best ways to get respect is by working smaller tournaments in your hometown and proving yourself to the local crowd. While it is important to work big events, if you can

prove to your local group that you're a good judge, word will spread at the bigger events. Offer to run local tournaments by yourself to show to players you're able to handle sticky situations without going to a higher judge. Many times you can make a deal with established judges so you get to run the event, and they are free to play. Then you can follow up with the experienced judge to get his or her thoughts about your performance.

6. **Actively Seek Respect**

This is probably the most important point. Players won't think you're a good judge until other judges do. Those judges won't respect you until you respect yourself. Offer your opinions in ugly situations, and don't be afraid to make tough calls. Maintain a professional attitude, and work to improve your faults. Respect your players, show them that you know your stuff, and they will respect you, no matter how tall or how young you are.

I hope these six points help you in becoming a better judge, no matter what your age is. There's one last thing to say, but it's worth saying, as it's the most important part of being a good judge: Nobody likes a judge who's always serious. HAVE FUN!

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