

Test your deck against the best in your area **REGIONALS - Tournament Primer**

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For the past few weeks, my normal Learning Curve column has been preempted by a series of articles about building some of the more well-known decks in today's Standard (Type 2) environment. My hope was that players with an eye toward competitive tournament **Magic** might feel inclined to compete in the upcoming American and Canadian Regionals Qualifiers. Qualifiers for the American and Canadian Nationals are held throughout both countries on Saturday, May 3rd and all of the tournaments will be played using the Standard format. Each region will qualify eight players to compete in their country's National Championships that will be held early this summer. In addition to berths at Nationals, there will be abundant product prizes for the Top 8 and beyond, most likely *Onslaught* or *Legions* booster packs.



Regionals are perhaps the most highly anticipated Constructed tournaments of the year. With only a few historical exceptions, they are the only significant Standard tournaments that have any relation to professional **Magic**. State, Provincial, and Amateur Championships are also Standard but they do not feed up into higher levels of competition like Regionals. I don't want to give you the idea that Regionals is shark-infested water with pros lying in wait behind every coral reef. Regionals is actually one of the most wide-open tournament events of the year. Every year there are new decks played by virtually unknown players that show up at Regionals and do well. These decks end up influencing what is played in Standard for the next couple of years. We'll talk about decks more later in this column; right now let's give you the information you need to know if you decide to compete in your Regionals event.

Where is the nearest Regional tournament?

Click here for locations:

- [United States](#)

Where is it?

- [Canada](#)
- [Other countries](#)

First thing you will need to know is where the closest event to you is being held—hopefully you can find one within reasonable distance of where you live. Once you have found an event in your area you should contact the organization running the event and look into preregistering for the tournament. Many tournament organizers offer a small discount—usually \$5—when you register for the event in advance. Not only will this save you money but it will guarantee that you can compete in the tournament should the event reach capacity. Capacity will vary from region to region based on the space that the event organizer has booked but most events can accommodate upward of 500 players so you shouldn't be too concerned about being shut out. The organizer's webpage should contain information about driving directions, local accommodations, and any pertinent information you need to know for the event. If you don't find the information you need on the web you can either contact the organizer by phone or you can simply use www.mapquest.com to obtain driving directions.

Basic preparation

Once you have made arrangements to attend, there are a handful of things you will need to bring with you. The most important item is obviously a minimum 60-card Standard deck with either a 15-card or 0-card sidebar. The sidebar to the right lists the sets that are legal for constructing such a deck. As long as a card appears in any of those sets you may play with any version of that card you own regardless of printing or language. If you were going to play with [Stone Rain](#), for example, a Chinese *Fourth Edition* version is treated the same as a *Seventh Edition* version. You don't need to own the most recent printing of any given card, but that card has to appear in a legal set to be legal. I will use this opportunity to urge you keep your deck as close to 60 cards as possible with at least 24 lands. If you must play more cards, make sure you are playing enough land as well. I am also strongly against the 0-card sidebar. You will play up to 2/3 of you games after sideboarding, why give your opponent the advantage 2/3's of the time?

All organizers are going to ask you to register the deck you are playing. What this means is that you will record the contents of you deck and sidebar on a list that the judges can consult to make sure you are not switching decks or cards during the tournament. In addition to not switching decks during the tournament, you must also start each round with your deck in its original state as listed when you began the tournament—no presideboarding, accidental or otherwise. Judges will do periodic checks throughout the day so make sure you return your deck to its original order each round.

What is a Standard deck?

A Standard deck (also known as a Type 2 deck) is a minimum of 60 cards with the option of a 15-card [sidebar](#) (cards that you can swap into your deck for the second and third games of tournament matches).

You may have no more than four copies of any one card (other than basic land) between the deck and sidebar.

You may only use cards printed in the most recent Core Set and the two most recent blocks. Until July 1st, that means:

- *Seventh Edition*
- *Odyssey*
- *Torment*
- *Judgment*
- *Onslaught*
- *Legions*

On July 1st, the new upcoming set (*Scourge*) will also be legal.

In order to save time when you arrive on the site I recommend having your deck registered before you get there. Again, check your local organizer's website to see if they have a decklist you can download to register in advance. I know that Gray Matter has a deck registration sheet available [here](#) as a PDF; you can use it even if they are not the organizer you will be patronizing. By having your deck reregistered before you arrive you will cut down the likelihood of making errors on the sheet and allow you to spend more time before the tournament making trades and getting in some practice games. Trust me on this count—I have been on the wrong end of more than one deck check after hastily scribbling everything down moments before the tournament began. If you clicked on the link for the deck registration sheet and gave it a quick lookover you probably noticed a spot for your DCI number. A DCI number is something every player needs in order to compete in a sanctioned Wizards of the Coast tournament. They are free so you don't need to worry. When you arrive on site just let the judging staff know that you do not have a DCI number and they will provide you with a form to fill out and a number will be assigned to you on the spot. If you have received a DCI number in the past but do not remember what it is there should be a master list available for the judges to look it up for you. Once you have received a number or had your existing number provided to you should keep it somewhere in your wallet so you will have access to it whenever you want to play in a sanctioned tournament. Not only does the DCI keep a record of all of your matches and provide you with where you rank in your community, country, and worldwide but it has a reward program for playing in its tournaments. Information about premium cards and token cards you receive for playing in DCI sanctioned tournaments can be found [here](#). In addition to deck, decklist, and DCI number you should bring a pen and paper or some other means of tracking your life totals. Dice and or beads are fine but nothing is better for this than pen and paper. It allows you to track life totals for both you and your opponents as well as making necessary notations such as the cards in your opponent's hand if you Duress them and keeping track of your opponent's names should you decide to brag about your victory at Regionals in the form of a tournament report.

The event

Once you arrive and register for the tournament you will have to wait a short while before the first round begins. Two quick notes about that. One: Even if you preregistered you should make a point of letting the organizer know you are there—just because you preregistered does not mean you showed up. Two: The starting times listed for tournaments don't always reflect reality. If there are more people than expected the tournament can take longer to start than anticipated. Everyone who runs these events has been doing it for a long time and wants you to have a good time so that you will come back. Try to be patient with them—the job is much harder than it looks.

While you are waiting you can take advantage of your spare time by looking at some of the other decks people are playing or even getting in some practice games yourself. There will probably be a large dealer area where local stores will have set up to sell single cards (you can probably find that elusive last card you need for a deck or collection), gaming supplies such as dice and card sleeves, and even boxes and booster packs. Other organizers will go out of their way to have a local **Magic**card artist make an appearance; check their website to see if you are in one of the lucky regions. You will also find that Regionals is going to be the mother lode of all trading opportunities. There will be hundreds upon hundreds of players in attendance wielding their trade binders. If you are an avid trader, Regionals is worth attending for that aspect alone.

Playing Magic

Once the tournament begins you will have 50 minutes per round to win the best two out of three games. The match is concluded once one player has won two games. If that has not happened by the time the time has elapsed the player whose turn it is when time elapses (the active player) will be allowed to conclude that turn and there will be five additional turns beyond that. Including the active player's turn when time elapses, each player has three turns. At that point if the game is not concluded it is considered a draw. Each match will go to the player that has won the most games, or it will be a draw if both players have won the same number.

All Regionals tournaments are going to be run Swiss style. This means that all of the players can play for as many rounds that are announced at the beginning of the event regardless of the number of losses they accumulate. After a number of rounds—the number is based on the attendance—the top 8 players will be awarded invitations to compete in Nationals. There will be additional prizes given out to these players as well. Players that do not finish in the top 8 will also win prizes, although how deep the prizes go down will vary from region to region.

Professional Event Services, for example, will give prizes to at least the top 32 players at their events in Detroit and Columbus. Most organizers will give out prizes to the Top 16 at the very least.

During the tournament, you may find that you come up against a game situation that you do not understand or a rule you are unfamiliar with. It is very, very important that you call a judge over and ask for clarification in these instances. In fact, before the tournament begins, you should pay attention to who the Head Judge is and become visually familiar with the other judges at the event. Make sure you have your rules questions answered by a tournament judge and not another player in the event.

There should be a full schedule of side events to play in if you decide to drop from the tournament. These will range from booster drafts to Type 1 tournaments and are usually run continually throughout the day. You cannot play in two tournaments at the same time, so if you decide to play in another event make sure that you let the staff know you are dropping out of the tournament you were in previously. Most side events are run single elimination which means that once you lose you are out of the tournament. You should understand that before you sign up.



Learn to recognize judges – the fellows in the striped shirts.

Researching and building a deck

First things first: if your deck is legal, feel free to just show up and try it out. It isn't imperative that you do a lot of practicing or research, but some players like those aspects of competitive **Magic**. (Trying to figure out what decks other people are going to play in advance is what we call the **metagame**.) If you think you are that type of player, the following section is for you.

Over the past few weeks I have written about a number of decks that are currently doing well in Standard ([red-green](#), [Reanimator](#), [blue-green and Psychatog](#)). My approach to the articles was in regard to how to prioritize trading for the rares in those decks and how to possibly

replace them with less expensive options. If you are interested in learning more about the strategy of these decks and how to play with or against them I recommend looking at our sister site, www.sideboard.com. There you will find a wide variety of complex strategy articles written by top-notch players that will help you prepare for the environment. I know that many players are opposed to the idea of copying a deck from the Internet. In that case you can use those articles to prepare for the decks you will face—most tournament **Magic** players do not share your compunctions. In addition to the Sideboard there are a number of other resources. Starcitygames.com has an amazing [Regionals deck center](#) that you can access; it contains the winning decks from dozens and dozens of similar tournaments held throughout the world. In fact, Regionals has been the talk of most independent **Magic** websites. Check out the new "[Magic Radar](#)" on mtgnews.com for a good list of other **Magic** sites. Additionally, local stores will often post their decklists online; [Neutral Ground](#) recently held a large Standard tournament that featured two interesting black decks in the Top 8 and the all of the decks are available on their front page.

In closing

If you have been thinking about playing tournament **Magic**, I urge you to dive into Regionals and see how many laps you can swim. Regardless of your outcome I hope you will share your stories and decks with me and I will try to incorporate them into a future column.

As for future columns, I have storm brewing for next week on [Learning Curve](#) that I am sure you don't want to miss.

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A typical Standard deck: 60 cards with a 15-card sideboard.