

## Wise Words: The Test of Time

Gary Wise

Right now, pro **Magic** lacks a true indicator to measure career performance. Baseball, basketball, American football and the like have career statistics that act as indicator to a player's worth, which their respective Hall of Fames then validate by celebrating their new inductees every year. Soccer fans take the opposite approach. They don't have many statistics to keep; they just remember every minute of every game they've ever seen in their lives. **Magic**, while great, just hasn't developed that kind of a following or statistical data... not yet at least. That means we have to resort to other, less precise means to understand what kind of an overall career a player has had.

It's not for a lack of trying, mind you. We have the [all-time money list](#), of course, which while reaching the bottom line, doesn't make a fair comparison between the pre- and post-Masters players. Is Ben Rubin really twice as good as Mark Justice was? Maybe, but not by as much as the money says and that in large part is because the man has won multiple Masters (which Justice never had the opportunity to do). Yes, Masters are tough: you have to beat five of the best players in the world to win one, but they're single elimination and totally match up-dependent: that's one of the reasons the Series has been discontinued and likewise, a big part of why Masters can't be treated as an equal to the Pro Tour in looking at what players have done over time.

***Is Ben Rubin really twice as good as Mark Justice was?***

DCI rating doesn't work either. With the high fluctuations involved in 48k tournaments, the winner of the most recent Pro Tour, in winning fourteen or more matches against the highest rated competition, is almost always sitting on top after their victory. While they may have had the best tournament on the biggest stage the game provides, their high rating for the moment hardly indicates how well they've played over their career. Aside from the individual data the *Sideboard* Event Coverage archives provide, that pretty much leaves us with the admittedly top-heavy age-old pro point system.

I recently got my hands on the amateur standings list, the one GP T.O.s use to figure out who qualifies as a professional and who doesn't. A pro is defined as anyone who has ever earned a pro point, either by playing in a Pro Tour or placing in the Top 32 of a Grand Prix, but the list doesn't just list those players: it also lists their lifetime pro points, from the dawn of time in 1996 to present. The list is slightly flawed: The Pro Tour's first season used a different

pro point standard than the one we use today and only the money finishers from those PTs have had their totals adjusted. In other words, a few of the old timers may be missing as many as 8 points for Pro Tours in which they failed to crack the Top 64. Even still, we're trying to measure success, not failure here. For now, these records will have to do.

I'm a big fan of lists like this. When I was a kid, I knew that Hank Aaron had 755 career home runs. Babe Ruth 714, Willy Mays 660, Frank Robinson 586, etc. The numbers were synonymous with the names and if you read the numbers, the players followed closely in my thoughts. There are obvious problems with using the lifetime pro points list in trying to determine who the best players are. Obviously, that one number doesn't account for either the positive or negative aspects of longevity and as such, I'd suggest you not treat this as such a list. These aren't the best players of all time in order: rather they're merely the players who have accumulated the most points over the years, which in and of itself is an accomplishment worth noting:

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## The 300 Club

- 1) **Kai Budde:** 388
- 2) **Jon Finkel:** 342
- 3) **Darwin Kastle:** 301

Anyone shocked? Without a doubt, Kai and Jon have been the two most dominant players in the Pro Tour's history and it shows in the numbers. Kai needs 12 points to create a club all his own, a total he'll achieve if he can manage a Quarterfinals appearance in Yokohama. Darwin, whose excellence on Pro Tour has been a little more subtle than the two men he trails, has managed to rack up 300 points despite his inability to win an individual Pro Tour. His number is in part a product of longevity, but the consistency required to qualify for all those Pro Tours and the ability to change with the game, at least enough to continue succeeding, should be recognized. Where these three will finish up is anyone's guess



really. I don't see Jon or Darwin getting much beyond 450 or so, but the only real challenge left in the game for Budde may be making the 1000 pro point mark. Don't know if that's realistic, but the fact is he could be at 500 in a year.

### ***Yokohama Watch***

Kai needs Top 8 for 500  
Jon needs Top 16 for 350

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### **The 200 Club**

- 4) **Steve O'Mahoney-Schwartz:** 228
- 5) **Dave Humphreys:** 217
- 6) **Bob Maher:** 215
- 7) **Zvi Mowshowitz:** 207
- t8) **Rob Dougherty:** 202
- t8) **Justin Gary:** 202



There would have been a 250 club had anyone managed to clear the mark without moving onwards, but instead the gap between Darwin and Steve OMS (who, combined with brother Dan has 315 points, beating out the Ruels at 278 for the best all-time brother combination), our first retired player, is enormous, showing what an accomplishment Darwin's reaching 300 in Venice really was. Equally remarkable is the total dominance Your Move Games has on this list: nine players in, we have four lifetime members in Darwin, Humphreys, Dougherty and Justin Gary, as well as recent convert Zvi Mowshowitz. No wonder these guys win. Not only are they all great players, but they're so comfortable with their testing environment that they don't go through the rigors involved with less-familiar groups. They know their jobs and know they can trust their teammates; that has to lend to their success.

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### **The 175 Club**

- t10) **Ben Rubin**: 197
- t10) **Gary Wise**: 197
- 12) **Tommi Hovi**: 196
- t13) **Alan Comer**: 192
- t13) **Mike Pustilnik**: 192
- 15) **Ryan Fuller**: 184
- 16) **Alex Shvartsman**: 182
- t17) **Raphael Levy**: 181
- t17) **Mike Long**: 181
- 19) **Dirk Baberowski** : 175

While only nine players have cleared 200, eleven others are within a Pro Tour win of that goal. Rubin recently passed Comer as the highest rated player on this list without a win in either individual or teams play, meaning his numbers haven't benefited from the padding those achievements bring with them. In other words, he's better than his numbers suggest and had he beaten Dave Price and Brian Selden in his two PT finals, he'd be fifth on the all-time list. Hovi is at least partially retired, a major part of the reason I passed him in Venice to become the top ranking non-American/non-Kai player on the list.



*He's better than it seems.*

If not for his being hired by WotC last year, there's no doubt Comer would be well beyond 200, but the most decorated player to never appear in the Invitational is going to have to resign himself to being passed quite often over the next year or two. Pustilnik is presumably going to Yokohama, so that tie should end when he de-planes.

In Fuller, we come to an interesting case, as he ranks as the highest player on the list to be suspended from Pro Tour play for cheating, which brings into question the legitimacy of his mark, though there can be no question the man can play the game. Also interesting is Shvartsman's placing, in that he must have the highest percentage of pro points earned through GP play by a huge margin over anyone with 100 pro points or more. His Pro Tour career has been far from exemplary, with his Team Illuminati managing a Top 4 finish at 2001 PT-NY, but he has only managed himself one individual Top 16 finish in his career. Of course, he's unmatched in Grand Prix play.

### ***Yokohama Watch***

Rubin needs Top 128 for 200  
Wise needs Top 128 for 200  
Pustilnik needs Top 16 for 200

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## The 150 Club

- 20) **Mike Turian:** 172
- 21) **Kyle Rose:** 170
- 22) **Scott Johns:** 164
- t23) **Bill Jensen:** 163
- t23) **Dave Price:** 163
- 25) **Jakub Slemr:** 160
- 26) **Svend Geertsen:** 157
- 27) **Olle Rade:** 154
- t28) **Chris Benafel:** 151
- t28) **Dan Clegg:** 151

Turian leads off this group buoyed by his very strong 2000-01 season, where he won PT-NY and made the Quarterfinals at the World Championships. His spot in the Top 20 looks safe for the moment, if only because the next couple of guys on the list have been less active in recent years, but right behind Johns and Rose is Bill Jensen, who is looking likely to be a rapid climber over the next little while.

This sub-section is interesting in that it has a lot of names that either appear to be on the downside of their careers or have stopped playing in the competitive arena. Rose and Johns have both slowed in their PT dedication, though Kyle did just play in a Masters while the grapevine says Scott will be making yet another comeback soon. Dave Price just chose to miss his first PT ever, after announcing he was retiring more or less in his Invitational report this year. Slemr and Rade are European powerhouses of the past who, while making the occasional appearance at local GPs, just don't play the game much anymore, while Benafel and Clegg, two road warriors of the GP circuit, can look back on



this past year as the worst of their respective careers. This could mean that with the exception of Jensen, it'll be a while until a new name makes its way into the Top 20.

### ***Yokohama Watch***

Jensen needs to Top 8 for the third consecutive time to have a shot at Top 20

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### **The 125 Club**

- 30) **Bram Snepvangers**: 147
- t31) **Kamiel Cornelissen**: 144
- t31) **Olivier Ruel**: 144
- 33) **Tsuyoshi Fujita**: 142
- 34) **Nico Herzog**: 141
- 35) **Sigurd Eskeland**: 137
- 36) **Brian Hacker**: 135
- 37) **Mark Justice**: 133
- t38) **Antoine Ruel**: 128
- t38) **Gab Tsang**: 128
- t40) **Tom Guevin**: 127
- t40) **Tomi Walamies**: 127
- t42) **Noah Boeken**: 126
- t42) **Randy Buehler**: 126

Here we get into some very close national races. Bram ranks #1 in the Netherlands just ahead of Kamiel, whose place on this list is remarkable in that he didn't earn a single point in the 20th century. Olivier is the top ranking player from France, Fujita, Japan's top entry and Herzog's strong Chicago placing finally vaulted him out of the giant shadow cast by 2000 PT-NY winner Sigurd Eskeland, long considered Norway's top player. Noah Boeken, by the way, is the top rated player on this list to not have appeared in a Pro Tour on a Sunday.

***Notable in this section of the list are three names: Hacker, Justice and Buehler.***

Notable in this section of the list are three names: Hacker, Justice and Buehler. Hacker retired from individual play years ago and will be missing this year's teams event for the first time, suggesting that number may stay where it is. Justice, considered by most experts to be the game's best pre-Finkel

player, ended his career over four years ago, depriving himself the points earned for just showing up that totals belonging to the likes of Dave Price and I have benefited from. Buehler, who actually used to play this game before designing it, accomplished his total over just two years and did so with only one Top 8 finish, his win in Chicago. The run of strong performances he put up between that tourney and 1999 PT-London is one of the best ever seen on the Tour.

### ***Yokohama Watch***

Bram needs Top 128 for 150  
Kamiel needs Top 32 for 150  
Olivier needs Top 32 for 150  
Fujita needs Top 16 for 150  
Antoine needs Top 2 to be the best Ruel

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### **The 100 Club**

t44) **Benedict Klauser**: 122  
t44) **Eivind Nitter**: 122  
46) **Mark LePine**: 121  
t47) **Andre Konstanczer**: 120  
t47) **Casey McCarrel**: 120  
49) **Matt Vienneau**: 119  
50) **Brian Davis**: 118  
51) **Donnie Gallitz**: 117  
52) **Chris Pikula**: 116  
t53) **Franck Canu**: 115  
t53) **Nicolas Labarre**: 115  
55) **Trevor Blackwell**: 114  
t56) **Matt Linde**: 112  
t56) **Jens Thoren**: 112  
t58) **Brian Kibler**: 110  
t58) **Patrick Mello**: 110  
t60) **Dave Bachmann**: 109  
t61) **Kurt Burgner**: 109  
63) **Dave Williams**: 108  
t64) **Gary Krakower**: 107  
t64) **Pete Leiher**: 107  
t66) **Itaru Ishida**: 106

- t66) **Jelger Wiegersma**: 106
- t66) **Tom Van de Logt**: 106
- 69) **Brian Selden**: 105
- 70) **Terry Tsang**: 104
- t71) **Mattias Jorstedt**: 101
- t71) **Shawn “Hammer” Regnier**: 101
- t73) **Janosh Kuhn**: 100
- t73) **Trey Van Cleave**: 100

...and now the list starts to congest. My thinking is that this bunch of players being as close as they are suggests that to get beyond this point, an individual must be possessed of either exceptional skill or dedication, not that these guys are slouches. This batch includes almost fifty Top 8 finishes between them.

This list is where longevity really starts to play a role. Canu, Krakower, Leiher, Ishida and Van Cleave join Boeken as 100 pointers without Sunday match play. These are all guys who qualified time and again and never got the lucky bounces bunched up enough to make a Top 8 (though the chase isn't over for Itaru). I find it especially fitting that Donnie Gallitz, who has always felt his contributions have been under appreciated, would be left off those lifetime baseball lists: they usually stop at #50.

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## Other Notes

Just missing this list are John Larkin (who I sure hope will finally get this particular monkey off his back in Yokohama), Brock Parker (who will not be making the trip) and Toshiki Tsukamoto, the first Japanese player invited to the Invitational. After that though, there's a major expanse: the next active player on the list is Pierre Malherbaud at 95 and he's the only player attending this week's Pro Tour aside from Larkin needing anything less than a Top 4 finish in Yokohama to reach 100.

So what does this prove? Not much really, it's just number crunching for the sake of number crunching. If nothing else, the players on this list, or at least some of them, will keep an eye on their position within, if only for bragging rights or something to aim for. Of course, this all changes very, very soon. Then you get to crunch all over again.

Next week, I'll be in Yokohama. I'll try to get an email to my editors, but there's a chance I won't be able to get something in on time for posting. Guess we'll see then.

Have a good week.