

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

Take Two

Brian David-Marshall
Swimming With Sharks
Wednesday, February 25, 2004



I am a huge fan of the new set-up for theme weeks here at magicthegathering.com. With eleven weekly columns there is no reason to have *all* of the writers addressing the theme week topic. In the past I often stretched the boundaries of the theme to encompass something tangential that I wanted to address. The funny thing is, despite not being scheduled to write an article on theme this week, I do find myself writing near-topic once again. Perhaps it is just force of habit.

When you play in Sealed Deck PTQs it not an uncommon experience to have your opponent flip through their deck after game one and remove a huge chunk for an already sleeved portion of their sideboard. Occasionally they will be switching out one color for another to deal specifically with cards in your deck. Most times they will explain that they built their deck wrong and the switch is to a more correct configuration after every game one. Call it a deck mulligan if you will.

One of the loneliest times in a **Magic** competitor's life is during the deck construction portion of a Sealed Deck event. Players are (theoretically) not allowed to talk to one another during this portion of the tournament and there should be no assistance lent in regards to what cards make the final cut of the deck. It is rare that there is one clear build for any deck. Even when two colors scream out to be played there are still countless permutations of the final build to agonize over. Do you play a splash color? Two splash colors? Seventeen lands? Fourteen lands? Eighteen lands?

The questions don't end and are not always as clear as the ones above. Sometimes they are much less obvious, having to do with the synergy of the whole deck as opposed to individual card choices. Grand Prix: Detroit semi-finalist Josh Ravitz played in a PTQ this past weekend and decided that he had built his deck incorrectly after his first round loss in an eight round tournament:

Josh Ravitz
Edison, NJ PTQ: San Diego Sealed Deck

Main Deck 40 cards	Sideboard
3 Forest	1 AEther Spellbomb
7 Mountain	1 AEther Vial
6 Swamp	1 Arcane Spyglass
1 Vault of Whispers	1 Arcbound Worker
17 lands	1 Arrest
1 Arcbound Bruiser	1 Assert Authority
1 Chittering Rats	1 Battlegrowth
1 Clockwork Condor	1 Blinkmoth Urn
1 Gemini Engine	1 Carry Away
1 Goblin Dirigible	1 Cloudpost
1 Gold Myr	1 Contaminated Bond
1 Hematite Golem	1 Crazed Goblin
2 Krark-Clan Stoker	1 Dead-Iron Sledge
1 Leaden Myr	1 Disarm
1 Nim Shambler	1 Drooling Ogre
1 Pewter Golem	1 Echoing Truth
1 Slith Firewalker	1 Elf Replica
1 Spikeshot Goblin	1 Fists of the Anvil
14 creatures	1 Gate to the AEther
	1 Goblin War Wagon
	1 Hallow
	1 Hoverguard Observer
	1 Hunger of the Nim
	1 Inertia Bubble
	1 Leonin Den-Guard
	1 Lightning Greaves
	1 Loxodon Mender
	1 Metal Fatigue
	1 Molten Rain
	1 Myr Landshaper
	1 Myr Moonvessel
	1 Neurok Prodigy
	1 Nim Lasher
	1 Nuisance Engine



1	Omega Myr
1	Override
1	Pteron Ghost
1	Seat of the Synod
1	Skyhunter Cub
1	Steel Wall
1	Sunbeam Spellbomb
2	Surestrike Trident
1	Tangle Golem
1	Tangleroot
1	Tanglewalker
1	Tel-Jilad Chosen
1	Vex
1	Viridian Joiner
1	Welding Jar
1	Whispersilk Cloak
51 sideboard cards	

Josh found that his initial build was not quite right and struggled with mana and a lack of any early artifact removal. He had only a **Deconstruct** in his splash color and found himself unable to cope with early **Bonesplitters** and **Morningstars**. He also had to contort his mana to try and accommodate the double red of **Slith Firewalker** and triple red of **Flamebreak** in his three color deck. With the pressure of the deck construction portion behind him Josh was able to reevaluate his deck with a more discerning eye after his round one loss.

Had he the chance to do it over he would have built his deck with the following changes:

- 1 **Flamebreak**
- 1 **Slith Firewalker**
- 1 **Deconstruct**
- 1 **One Dozen Eyes**
- 2 **Krark-Clan Stoker**
- 1 **Hematite Golem**
- 3 **Forest**
- 4 **Mountain**
- +6 **Island**
- +1 **Seat of the Synod**
- +1 **Nim Lasher**
- +1 **Arcbound Worker**
- +1 **Carry Away**
- +1 **Echoing Truth**
- +1 **Hoverguard Observer**
- +1 **Neurok Prodigy**
- +1 **Aether Spellbomb**

After every game one Josh would make these changes. He had the opportunity to do it seven times over the course of the day. After the first round loss, Josh went 7-0 in the subsequent rounds and hardly lost a game two or three with his deck's mulliganed form. He made the Top 8 of the tournament—his second such appearance in as many weeks.

I asked Josh what specifically prompted his successful revamp, "Mostly after noticing my lack of artifact removal and efficient answers to equipment—I had none besides the splashed **Deconstruct**--wasn't really going to provide the type of answers I needed to win. I switched to a more tempo-oriented build which lost only a few games throughout the day. Notable moments included Carrying Away a Warhammer followed by **Terroring** that person's **Pristine Angel!**"

"Switching to blue also allowed me to remove cards that were strenuous to my mana base as well as bad creatures such as **Krark-Clan Stoker**. I was able to side in much better cards such as **Hoverguard Observer** and **Neurok Prodigy**. It also allowed me to play with **Nim Lasher**, which is awesome!"

I was curious about Josh's decision to leave the popular **Lightning Greaves** in the sideboard of both versions of his deck. Before I could pose the question he gave me his answer while talking about a **Banshee's Blade** that was sitting in the sideboard of another Top 8 competitor's Sealed Deck. "I would not have run it. I generally don't play equipment—that's just how I build my decks. Most people do play equipment but I generally do not."

You need only look at how Josh reconfigured his deck to understand his reasoning. He switched his colors in order to (among several reasons) accommodate **Carry Away** in order to deal with equipment. There is little chance of a player leaving solid artifact removal in their sideboard in an artifact themed block. In addition to all the **Shatters**, **Deconstructs**, and **Echoing Ruins** that are flitting about most players will include **Turn to Dust**, **Rustspore Ram**, **Unforge**, and **Carry Away** in their main deck builds. By avoiding equipment you create situations where your opponent has dead draws with cards in hand that have no effect on your opponent. To bring it back near the theme you are effectively handing them a mulligan even if they don't know it



That is not to say that you can expect Josh Ravitz to pass you a **Loxodon Warhammer** or **Sword of Fire and Ice** in the Top 8 draft of a PTQ. He will play the best equipment if he has it, which is exactly what happened in the Top 8 of this PTQ. In addition to a Warhammer and **Sword of Fire and Ice** his deck was sporting a pair of **Viridian Longbows**:

Josh Ravitz		
Edison, NJ PTQ: San Diego Top 8 Draft Deck		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
40 cards		
1 Darksteel Citadel	1 AEther Spellbomb	1 Arcane Spyglass
5 Island	1 Barter in Blood	1 Assert Authority
1 Mirrodin's Core	1 Carry Away	2 Awe Strike
1 Mountain	1 Electrostatic Bolt	1 Chimney Imp
8 Swamp	1 Loxodon Warhammer	1 Journey of Discovery
16 lands	1 Scale of Chiss-Goria	1 Leonin Bola
	1 Skeleton Shard	1 Loxodon Mender
	1 Sword of Fire and Ice	1 Machinate
	1 Talisman of Progress	1 Magnetic Flux
	2 Viridian Longbow	1 Malachite Golem
	11 other spells	1 Myr Moonvessel
1 Arcbound Stinger		1 Razor Barrier
1 Arcbound Worker		1 Seething Song
1 Chittering Rats		1 Sun Droplet
1 Clockwork Condor		1 Tanglebloom
1 Dross Golem		1 Tempest of Light
1 Looming Hoverguard		1 Vex
1 Moriok Scavenger		18 sideboard cards
1 Myr Enforcer		
1 Neurok Familiar		
1 Neurok Transmuter		
1 Nim Lasher		
2 Nim Shrieker		
13 creatures		

After dispatching his quarter-finals opponent, Josh found himself in the semis for the second time in as many weeks. He faced off against Johnson Wong and his black-white flying deck:

Johnson Wong		
Edison, NJ PTQ: San Diego Top 8 Draft Deck		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
40 cards		
10 Plains	2 Arrest	1 Burden of Greed
6 Swamp	1 Bonesplitter	1 Dead-Iron Sledge
16 lands	1 Echoing Decay	1 Dream's Grip
	1 Essence Drain	1 Forge Armor
	1 Neurok Hoversail	1 Goblin Striker
	2 Raise the Alarm	1 Hallow
	1 Scale of Chiss-Goria	1 Loxodon Mender
	1 Slagwurm Armor	1 Metal Fatigue
	1 Test of Faith	1 Mirrodin's Core
	1 Vulshok Morningstar	1 Neurok Spy
	12 other spells	2 Override
1 Grimclaw Bats		1 Ritual of Restoration
1 Leaden Myr		1 Scrounge
1 Leonin Abunas		1 Spincrusher
1 Leonin Den-Guard		1 Steel Wall
1 Loxodon Mystic		1 Talisman of Unity
1 Pteron Ghost		1 Trash for Treasure
1 Razor Golem		1 Vorrac Battlehorns
1 Silver Myr		1 Wail of the Nim
1 Skyhunter Cub		1 Welding Jar
1 Skyhunter Patrol		21 sideboard cards
1 Slith Ascendant		
1 Titanium Golem		
12 creatures		

In the deciding game of their match, Josh found himself being beaten down by a **Razor Golem** that was equipped with **Slagwurm Armor**. In an effort to kill it, Josh only made it angry. He put all of his men in the way of the golem and Johnson saved his guy with the ridiculously powerful **Test of Faith** resulting in a 6/7 with the additional +0/+6 from the armor.

Josh had used **Carry Away** to steal Johnson's **Bonesplitter** and he also had a **Loxodon Warhammer** and the **Sword of Fire and Ice**. He had no way to get through the **Razor Golem** though until he top decked an **Arcbound Stinger**. He played his guy and piled on the equipment expecting to get in for ten points of damage and a card on the next turn. Johnson played a **Neurok Hoversail** and equipped his **Razor Golem** to foil those plans.

Josh made a crucial misplay a few turns later with a **Neurok Transmuter** in play. He could have used the Transmuter's ability to turn the **Razor Golem** blue and his flier would have been able to attack unmolested due to the protection from blue granted by the Sword. Josh only had one Island and later on needed two blue to turn Johnson's **Loxodon Mystic** into an artifact and then into a blue creature to negate the tapper's ability to negate the equipped creature.

Josh was crushed after the match when informed by spectators of his misplay. It had been a grueling day with eight rounds of Swiss play and two rounds of the Top 8. Every round after the first had been an elimination round for Josh and this was not the ending he was looking for. It is accepted wisdom in my part of the country that Josh is one of the best players in the Northeast not firmly entrenched on the Pro Tour. Most of his contemporaries and CMU/TOGIT teammates know it is just a matter of time for the hard working Ravitz but he will have to wait for another weekend to begin his climb.

Johnson went on to lose in the finals to Mario Melillo. Congratulations Mario!

Brian may be reached at brian@fightlikeapes.com.

*Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is Top8Magic.com, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Brian David-Marshall](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#)

© 1995-2008 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

