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GP Madrid 2004

-or the biggest Magic the Gathering Event ever

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When I received my invitation to come and Judge at Madrid I was thrilled. It would be the first one I would be at outside of my usual travel range: Germany, Belgium, England and off course the Netherlands. The added problem was that I don't speak any Spanish at all, so I was a little nervous about that.

Friday, GP Madrid 2004: day – 1

The flight arrived on time and all the way I had planned to take the Metro to the hotel, but coming out of the airport I thought it might be wiser to take a taxi instead, not wanting to risk getting hopelessly lost. Well that nearly turned out bad, as the driver didn't speak any English but with some signing and pointing we got on the way. I was a bit worried but it was needless as I arrived without any problems.

After Checking in I took another taxi to the site, this time more confident in the ability of the taxi drivers of Madrid. I enjoyed the ride seeing as I would not see a lot of Madrid this weekend.

At the site I saw the first people I knew and it turned into a small reunion. A lot of the non-Spanish Judges I had met before at other GP's. I went into the site to say hi to Bruno Barracosa, who was to be the Head Judge of this event. His first GP as a Head Judge. With him was Jesper Nielsen who would be his Back-up.

We had a talk about me being a team leader, and if I had any previous experience. Well I had been at GP Amsterdam. The hardest part of the interview is always when they ask what your good points as a Judge are. As this talk came rather unexpectedly I was caught off guard. It turned out right any way as later that evening during the Judge briefing I was named as one of the team leaders.

The rest of the day I helped out where needed, helping with registration or setting stuff up. I also played a few hands of Magic, the only ones I would have time for this weekend. After registration was closed we had the Judge meeting.

After the introductions we had no time for the teams to meet with their team leader as we had to leave the site, as it was being closed by security. That would have to wait until the next morning. The number of registered players was more then 700. If this was going on like any other European GP we would go well over the record set in Kobe.

No taxi for us then but we took the Metro to the hotel were we all went out for something to eat. We spread out and had a nice meal and turned in. 7:45 would mean the real beginning of GP Madrid.

Saturday, GP Madrid 2004: day 1

At 8 registration started and we were there doing crowd control while 4 computers were used for registration. We had it down well but the players kept on coming and coming. At a time everyone that could go was recalled for the Judge meeting and after that we were going to setup extra tables. On Friday the place was setup for 1100 players so extra tables where ordered and they needed to be set up so everyone pitched in.

With so many players the first delay of the day was trying to register them all. Once every one was seated we divided the material and decklists over the separate land stations so that we would be faster in distributing the product. The decklists were handed out first and then our second problem of the day would show its ugly face. According our information there should have been 1500 decklist but we were missing more than 200 after distribution. When everybody was seated, even the late entries, it was announced: we had **1353 players** in this tournament. This would be the biggest GP ever. A spontaneous applause erupted from players and Judges alike.

Deck registrations had begun and they started printing the missing decklists but even with fast printers it takes a long time to print up more than 200 double-sided decklist. Deck registration took more than 1 hour, so we lost a lot of time there. The deck swap went ok and deck construction was on its way as we set up the lands on the land station. My team was divided over all four stations and both of the deck check teams would begin counting decks list as soon as they came in. After all the lists were handed in we would start helping counting the lists.

This put 3 teams on deck counting and we were supposed to do it in 1 round. Well Bruno told us he hoped we would have been able to do it in that time but but he had counted on 2 rounds for it. Well the teams did the unimaginable and we completed counting 1353 in 1 round, that was more than 80 decklists per Judge counting. We even did a recount of the decklists with too few cards, getting a few miscounts into the right pile, preventing disruption to the tournament because of a wrong count.

So round 2 started and the decklists without lands on them were handled first. Both deck check teams and the logistics, that happened to be my responsibility, did this. After this we were too far into the round to take care of the illegal main deck lists so we moved them to the 3rd round.

We team leaders had our first meeting with the Head Judge. It wasn't going well because by the end of round 2 it was 5 PM. We needed to help speed up the tournament as much as possible otherwise we might end cutting to top 128, ordering in breakfast for them and after that begin the first draft (ok this is a joke). He asked us to talk to our teams and inspire them into working as hard as they could. Well we did and round 3 went much better.

The meetings became regular between the rounds, as were the team meetings after that. We were doing okay from there on in. That was until round 6 when all of a sudden people had been dropped from tournament by mistake. Thinking human error, this was corrected but we lost some time again. The meeting with the Head Judge before round 7 warned us that we might have a problem that round. It seemed that the problem with the wrongly dropped players would occur this round to as it seemed to be linked to the DCI reporter. Sometimes it would drop a random player and not the one who wanted to drop.

This was expected so after the players were seated a line formed at the computer. Then the thing you most dread in a tournament happened, they announced a re-pairing. Players listened and remained seated until the new pairings were posted. After that all the results were entered manually. Needless to say we had few problems after that.

The rest of the rounds went well. We got all the results to the score keeper in good time, but all the delays got us finished after 3 am. It was announced that the Metro was no longer supplying transport but each player would be reimbursed for the money he spent on a taxi during round 11 on Sunday. Well that was met with applause from the players. It was also announced that the draft would not begin at the usual time of 8 am but instead at 9 am.

The last round ended and standing posted and players were escorted out of the site. After we setup the draft tables for the morning we had our final Judge meeting for the day. Bruno Barracosa complimented us for our hard work. Also the Judges for day 2 main event were announced and told to be at the site at 8:30.

Once again I would be a team leader. After that it was to the hotel to sleep a staggering 3 to 4 hours before breakfast.

Sunday, GP Madrid 2004: day 2

All the players arrived on time and the first draft went smoothly. Actually thinking about day 1 it was going to be a "boring day". Well I could not have been more wrong. Not problem wise or time wise but more personal. During the first 3 draft rounds Bruno Barracosa asked me if I had ever called a draft before. Well I had, during the many PTQ's I judged before. So I was to call the second draft, for 128 players, at a GP, wow.

I was ready for it, heard it many times done before so knew how to do it. Well so I thought. As the second draft neared I started to get nervous. Still I got as ready as I could be. The first

booster started okay although I was startled a bit as I heard my voice on the PA system.

During the first booster I mixed up the number of cards being passed and though it was solved easily it shook me up a bit. Bruno Barracosa came over and talked me through it giving me some tips, like turning the microphone off between calls. Well I should have thought about that myself. Also to take the time I needed, taking a few seconds extra per pick if I needed that time.

So I started the second booster, reminding the players it should be past to the right, counter clockwise. This booster was going well as I remembered to tick off the number of cards in a booster, as I usually do when calling the draft. Only during the 8th pick I forget to let them pick up their booster. Well I was certain I had told them to pick it up, but 128 players and 15 Judges can't be wrong I guess. Well maybe I did say it but had turned off the microphone at the time, I will never know for certain.

The third booster went without any problems and I was happy it was over. I had heard drafts being called before and now I know why an experienced Judge usually does it. It is hard, really hard that first time, but I expect to do better the next chance I get to call a draft for 128 players.

The rest of the rounds went by like a charm getting round 15 done before 7 PM. After that the roster for table Judges were told, and I was to Judge a quarterfinal Match. So we got Pizza delivered and had a meal while waiting for the players to draft and build their deck.

The quarterfinals went by fast, without any problems as far as I could see. After that I finally had the time to do the one thing I don't like to do: Judge reviews. It is a hard to do this, writing up judges and what you think about them. However on previous tournaments it had been made clear how important it is to do it.



Henk Claassan table judging the quarterfinals

After the last clean up and congratulations to Kai Budde (yes he did win GP nr 7) it was time for a trip to the hotel. No taxis in site we took the Metro. After that to the bar, I wanted a drink and I bought first round and we had a nice talk. After a while the artist who had been at this GP, Rob Alexander came in the bar and we bought him a drink, as thanks for the private signing he did for the Judges after finishing his regular stint. We had a nice talk before turning in.

Monday, GP Madrid 2004: day +1

Well I did start with arriving in Madrid so to be fair the trip to the airport needs to be here too. At breakfast we met, my room mate Andrzej Cwalina, George Michelogiannakis and Bruno Barracosa. Together with Andrzej and George I had arranged to go to the airport together as our flights were leaving at almost the same time. Bruno joined us and offered to come too, although he had no fixed time to leave. He was taking a taxi and we could join him. Well fine by us, so another taxi ride took us to the airport.

We parted there and I checked in, using an extra opened counter to get checked-in in time. And after a cup of tea with Bruno I said goodbye and went to the gate. The flight was fine. Although we left late I didn't miss my connecting flight and arrived home in time to go to work. Yes really after all this I had to go to work, no rest for the wicked, right.

Epilogue

Or should I say conclusion. To be honest there was no way I would have wanted to miss this GP. Even if I had known how busy we would be and how little sleep we would get I would not have wanted to miss it. It was great, really. One of the best GP's I've been to.

(If you made it this far, thank you for reading. I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I did writing it)

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