

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM

ARTICLES

- ▾ Related links
- ➔ Read other articles

TOURNAMENTS

MAGIC ONLINE

Article Search ▾ ➔

# Standard Comes to the GP Circuit



## Bye-bye Clamp, hello new Standard!

Alex Shvartsman · Week In Review  
 Thursday, June 3, 2004

### Clamp No More

I owe Zvi Mowshowitz a dollar. About a month ago we were discussing whether or not Wizards would do something about **Skullclamp** for the June Banned and Restricted announcement. Zvi felt that based on the results of US Regionals they were going to ban it at the next opportunity, while I thought it would survive June 1st in order for DCI to see whether *Fifth Dawn* entering the metagame might take care of the problem without them having to issue a ban. A bet was made.

To the great relief and wild cheering of most players, [the DCI announced this week](#) that **Skullclamp** is no more.

The artifact has become the first card in some time to be banned from organized play. As of June 20th, it will no longer be usable in Standard or Block formats. The decision was clearly justified. Four copies of **Skullclamp** are present in most of the decks you might find in a Standard tournament today. Affinity relies on it. Goblin Bidding greatly benefits from it. Even the **Tooth and Nail** strategy has morphed into the more successful “Elf and Nail” archetype to take advantage of this incredible card-drawing engine, a version of which won [German Nationals](#).



There was a lot of concern among the players, and the decision is tremendously popular. “It was very cool to chat with players in between rounds on *Magic Online*,” as Justin Gary describes his experience at the recent [Magic Invitational](#). “Though most of them just wanted to know if **Skullclamp** will be banned, and what we think about that.”

Perhaps the only unfortunate thing about this ban is its timing. It will go into effect on June 20th, the Sunday of U.S. Nationals / JSS Championship weekend. It means that one of the greatest Standard format showcases of the year may still be played with many of the same old decks. Part of me daydreams of a scenario where Colin Jackson ejects half or more of the top 8 for illegal decks come Sunday, but of course in reality this will be the last hoorah of the **Skullclamp**.

Once the brain processes the notion that we no longer live in a world of drawing two cards every time a weenie creature croaks, the next immediate question is: what will the metagame look like on June 21st?

Ravager Affinity will survive. It won't be quite as amazing, but even without **Skullclamp** it will remain one of the better decks in the format. The deck will focus even more on generating explosive draws but will have to look elsewhere for its late-game plans. One possibility is that

**Broodstar** will make a comeback as a late-game option for this deck. Another viable card is **Thoughtcast**, guaranteed to generate card economy in this archetype.

Tooth and Nail will likely turn from its recent Elvish ways and return to the more traditional builds that do not involve so many one toughness creatures. Mono-White and Blue-White control will become a lot more prominent, as their global removal becomes a lot more powerful once again in the absence of cheap card drawing.

Interestingly, the best deck of the format may very well be Goblin Bidding. Although **Skullclamp** was very good in this archetype, Bidding was a great deck before this artifact and remains so after. The first major archetype to incorporate the Clamp back when *Darksteel* just came out ironically is the deck that stands to lose the least from its removal.

In fact, some Goblin decks have traded in their **Skullclamps** even before the banning was announced. Italy's Stefano Fiore made the top 8 of GP Brussels this weekend with the following build:

Stefano Fiore	
Goblins	
Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard
4 Wooded Foothills	4 Naturalize
3 City of Brass	3 Sword of Fire and Ice
3 Forest	4 Starstorm
13 Mountain	2 Goblin Goon
23 land	1 Gempalm Incinerator
	1 Sparksmith
	15 sideboard cards
4 Electrostatic Bolt	
4 Oxidize	
8 other spells	
3 Gempalm Incinerator	
3 Goblin Sledder	
4 Goblin Warchief	
4 Skirk Prospector	
4 Goblin Piledriver	
3 Sparksmith	
4 Siege-Gang Commander	
4 Goblin Sharpshooter	
29 creatures	

It is likely that **Oxidize** will not be as necessary in the June 20th metagame, freeing up the room for those **Patriarch's Biddings** to go back in.

Undoubtedly *Fifth Dawn* will create new archetypes too. Brian David Marshall wrote [a very interesting article](#) earlier this week where he explored several of them. I for one cannot wait to see what direction the new metagame will move toward in a few weeks.

## GP Brussels

It is not often that Grand Prix events are played in the Standard format. One such tournament took place this weekend in Brussels, where over seven hundred players showed up to compete for the trophy. The field was predictably geared toward Affinity, with almost two hundred players pursuing that strategy.

Goblins were the second most popular deck, and they dominated the field, placing four decks full of little red men into the top 8. Interestingly, *none* of the top 8 Goblin decks used **Patriarch's Bidding**. It was the two Affinity decks that battled their way into the top 8 that met in the finals however, reasserting that archetype's dominance. In a surprise twist, the overwhelming favorite Kai Budde was defeated in the finals by another German player, Tobias Henke.

Tobias Henke
--------------

Affinity		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Glimmervoid	4 Skullclamp	3 Mana Leak
4 Seat of the Synod	4 Thirst for Knowledge	3 Furnace Dragon
4 Great Furnace	4 Thoughtcast	4 Pyroclasm
3 Vault of Whispers	4 Shrapnel Blast	2 Shatter
3 Darksteel Citadel	2 Electrostatic Bolt	3 Pyrostatic Pillar
18 land	2 Welding Jar	15 sideboard cards
4 Arcbound Ravager	4 Chrome Mox	
4 Arcbound Worker	24 other spells	
4 Disciple of the Vault		
2 Atog		
4 Frogmite		
18 creatures		

Henke's even faster than average version of Affinity certainly got its draws against Kai, and he was able to take down the champ two games to one.

The big story of this tournament was that of German amateur Johannes Mitsios. Mitsios played a highly unorthodox version of Blue-White control and managed to go undefeated through most of the tournament. Beginning the event with just one bye, he entered the top 8 as first seed, losing only one of his fourteen matches (to a mono-red control deck).

Johannes Mitsios UW control		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Flooded Strand	4 Thirst for Knowledge	4 Exalted Angel
3 Coastal Tower	4 Wrath of God	4 Purge
9 Plains	3 Wing Shards	4 Rewind
7 Island	2 Worship	2 March of the Machines
23 land	3 Pulse of the Grid	1 Worship
4 Pristine Angel	4 Mana Leak	15 sideboard cards
4 Silver Knight	4 Damping Matrix	
8 creatures	4 Chrome Mox	
	1 Talisman of Progress	
	29 other spells	

Mitsios played some cards that have not seen the light of high level tournament play before. **Pristine Angel** seems an unlikely choice in a format where **Exalted Angel** exists (which Mitsios used only in his sideboard). **Worship** is an extremely powerful and under-used card in this environment, as many decks simply do not have a way to kill your creatures easily, particularly if you have **Pristine Angel** out. In fact, that strategy alone gives most Tooth and Nail builds an unsolvable problem. **Chrome Mox** is another surprise – a card rarely seen in a control strategy. Then there is **Pulse of the Grid** – this card is extremely interesting but many felt it was a touch too slow for constructed. Still, Mitsios uses it instead of the generally popular white Pulse.

The question now is, how or why was this new metagame deck so successful in this tournament? Was it a fluke, or did Mitsios succeed by seeing what many other players have missed? One sure way to find out is to see whether any other players will be able to duplicate his success over the next few weeks, now that his deck list is posted.

## Coming Up: NAC

Next Saturday, the North American Challenge finals will take place in Milford, MA. Over 100 players qualified to compete in this tournament that will award over \$10,000 in cash and product prizes, with \$2500 of it going to the winner. Check [here](#) for more details.



## Magic Trivia

Last week's question:

*What location has hosted more **Magic** world championships than any other?*

Seattle, WA has been a host city for all the early World Championships, thanks to its proximity to the Wizards HQ at Renton, WA. The Pro Tour returns to Seattle soon with a Team tournament later this year.

New Question:

*What **Magic** novelist was an Editor-in-Chief of Duelist magazine?*

(Please do not e-mail me the answer. It will be posted in next week's column.)

## Bad Play of the Week

Courtesy of Alex Barry:

"I was at the pre-release and was playing in game 1 of the second round. I began play with a hand consisting of **Raksha Golden-Cub** and a **Skyhunter Patrol**, amongst other things. After the 5th turn, I put my hand down to make some adjustments... and I forgot about my hand!!! Later in the game I had 9 mana, a **Lightning Greaves** and a **Bonesplitter** out. After he attacked for the win, I realized that I was two cards short. That's when I noticed my **Raksha** and **Skyhunter Patrol** lying face down on the side of the table. Fortunately I was able to win the other two games!"

Please e-mail me any **Magic** news, stories, tournament results, or anything else you think should appear in this column. You can contact me by clicking on the link below.

### Interact

Rant, rave and share



[Discuss "Standard Comes to the GP Circuit"](#) on the message boards



[Respond to Alex Shvartsman](#) via email

### Consult

More articles by Alex Shvartsman



[Famous Red Decks in Magic History](#)  
12 days ago  
The origin of "Sligh" and more

### Explore

Similar articles



[Author Changes at Magicthegathering.com](#)  
5 days ago  
New authors for Week in Review and Swimming With Sharks!  
Scott Johns



[Round and Round](#) The brute force power of Vial/Plating Affinity  
6 days ago  
Brian David-Marshall



[Gob-volution](#) The incredible evolution of Goblins  
13 days ago  
Brian David-Marshall

- More [News](#) articles
- More [Pro Tour](#) articles

### Continue

Other recent articles



[Oscar Clans for Icy Fun](#)  
Twilight wins MTGO Community Contribution Award  
Chad Ellis  
Today



[Hyalopterously Yours](#) Ice Age's cutest darn little creature  
Anthony Alongi  
Today



[Selecting Ninth Edition Week 8](#) Viashino Cutthroat vs. Viashino Sandstalker, Zur's Weirder Sketches, and Flavor Text Submission  
Magicthegathering.com Staff  
Yesterday



[The Dawn of Magic's Ice Age](#)  
Designing Ice Age  
Skaff Elias  
Yesterday



[Sending Signals](#) Good communication is the key to a successful draft  
Scott Wills  
Yesterday

▪ All [Alex Shvartsman](#)  
articles

▪ [More recent articles](#)  
▪ [Return to Magicthegathering.com](#)

[WHAT'S NEW](#) [CORPORATE INFO](#) [WHERE TO BUY](#) [INTERNATIONAL](#) [SUPPORT](#) [SITEMAP](#) [PRODUCTS](#)

© 1995-2004 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.  
[Wizards is headquartered in Renton, Washington, PO Box 707, Renton, WA 98057.](#)  
[PRIVACY STATEMENT](#)