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# Round and Round

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Swimming With Sharks  
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Something pretty unusual happened two weeks ago. I have spent so much time traveling around to do event coverage (I am in Malaysia as I write this) that I don't have much opportunity to play in PTQs. I get to play **Magic** about as much as I want to and have regular sessions with friends to draft, playtest, and watch the Mets bullpen fail them down the stretch during the week but come the weekends I am usually on the sidelines behind my computer watching other people play.

The weekend before the [Malaysian GP](#) I had the rare weekend off and decided to play in the block constructed PTQ at Neutral Ground. I went back and forth between several different decks that I wanted to play but based on the recent lists I had been looking at I knew I wanted to play either mono-red or Affinity but I couldn't make up my mind. In fact, I never did and decided to get to Neutral Ground early on the morning of the tournament and build one deck or the other when I arrived.



Things did not go exactly as planned--I guess I had really fallen out of the habit of playing in these things--because none of my cards from *Mirrodin* block were in any kind of order. I threw together what cards I could manage to scrap together but it was not anything close to a decklist. Still, I was planning on getting to Neutral Ground early and would have plenty of time to fill in the holes with cards from my friends--whatever deck I decided to play.

I mentioned that things didn't turn out like I planned, right? I left my house and realized about ten minutes away that I had left crucial supplies behind. I had to go back and then when I finally was en route there was a traffic accident outside the Lincoln Tunnel that reduced the flow of traffic to a dribble. I arrived moments before the tournament was ready to start. I tried to borrow an entire deck from someone but all the good ones had been snapped up by people who arrived not quite as late as I did.

Fortunately Seth Burn had the fixings for about half an Affinity deck that wasn't the half I already had with me and I was able to cobble something together with a couple of *Arcbound Ravagers* courtesy of Neutral Ground. The idea was to build the Affinity deck with *Aether Vial* but there were a couple of key cards missing--*Atog* and *My Retriever*. If I wanted to get into the tournament I needed to get the list done and I ended up playing with a less than ideal build.



Last Minute Affinity		
Brian David-Marshall		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
2 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Aether Vial	4 Condescend
2 Darksteel Citadel	4 Chromatic Sphere	4 Furnace Dragon
4 Glimmervoid	4 Cranial Plating	1 Pyrite Spellbomb
4 Great Furnace	2 Shrapnel Blast	2 Qumulox
4 Seat of the Synod	4 Thoughtcast	3 Seething Song
4 Vault of Whispers		1 Shrapnel Blast
	18 other spells	
20 lands		15 sideboard cards
4 Arcbound Ravager		
4 Arcbound Worker		
4 Disciple of the Vault		
4 Frogmite		
4 Myr Enforcer		
2 Somber Hoverguard		
22 creatures		

I was not optimistic about my chances but I had been planning to write about the experience for this column and decided to press on regardless. I was reminded of something that was posted in the forums of one of my columns a few weeks back about looking at the decks that don't make the Top 8. I decided to play all eight rounds--there were over one hundred and fifty players in the tournament--and give a brief synopsis of the match along with my opponent's decklist.

## Round One -- Sergio ? playing Green-Red

So I took home all the deck lists from the tournament and could not find one for anyone named Sergio. Most likely his deck was pulled aside for one of the tournament's periodic deck checks by the judging staff and it became separated from the rest. I don't recall the exact contents of his list but I do remember that he had two **Molder Slugs** out against me in game one. He was also running **Oxidize** main deck. I led off with an artifact land and an **Aether Vial** and as he looked at my board I was hoping that he would hit my land and not the Vial. He read the Vial a couple of times but aimed his **Oxidize** at my land. I spit out a one drop and played two Ravagers in one turn. I was racing against double **Molder Slug** but I still managed to win thanks to **Somber Hoverguard** with **Cranial Plating**. I just kept playing and sacrificing lands and hoping he didn't draw an **Electrostatic Bolt** or **Magma Jet**.

In the second game it took exactly two hits from a Hoverguard to finish him off. The first was for ten and the next was eleven. **Cranial Plating** is simply amazing.

Record: 1-0 matches and 2-0 games



## Round Two -- Mike Jones playing Angel Control

Mike Jones		
Angel Control		
<b>Main Deck</b>		<b>Sideboard</b>
60 cards		
15 Island	3 Annul	1 Annul
9 Plains	4 Condescend	3 Echoing Truth
24 lands	2 Last Word	1 March of the Machines
	2 March of the Machines	3 Platinum Angel
	2 Pulse of the Fields	1 Pulse of the Fields
3 Leonin Abunas	4 Serum Visions	3 Purge
3 Pristine Angel	3 Talisman of Progress	3 Scrabbling Claws
3 Solemn Simulacrum	3 Thirst for Knowledge	15 sideboard cards
9 creatures	4 Vedalken Shackles	
	27 other spells	

This was another very quick match. In the first game I got out a first turn Vial and was able to put a Disciple and a Ravager into play despite what was an obvious **Condescend** waiting in Mike's hand. I was able to finish him off with the Disciple Ravager combo within a couple of turns. In game two he took a mulligan and kept a land light hand. I had sided in **Condescends** but they never mattered and when he tapped out for **Pulse of the Fields** I **Shrapnel Blasted** him for the match.

Record: 2-0 matches and 4-0 games

## Round three --David Wallin playing Blue-Black March Lattice

David Wallin		
Death March		
<b>Main Deck</b>		<b>Sideboard</b>
60 cards		
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Barter in Blood	3 Acquire
5 Island	4 Condescend	3 Annul
2 Stalking Stones	4 Darksteel Ingot	3 Echoing Truth
11 Swamp	3 Death Cloud	3 Grim Reminder
22 lands	4 March of the Machines	3 Terror
	3 Mycosynth Lattice	15 sideboard cards
	4 Night's Whisper	
4 Solemn Simulacrum	4 Talisman of Dominance	
4 creatures	4 Thirst for Knowledge	
	34 other spells	

So much for the idea that people weren't gunning for Affinity as much this week. **Molder Slug**, **March**, **March** definitely told a different story in the first three rounds. Still, I don't think these decks are fast enough to run with Affinity. I actually hadn't played with it prior to this weekend and the speed and raw power of the deck made a strong impression upon me. In most games I killed my opponent within the first four or five turns of the game.

I own this match in two quick games as well. Other than two points in one game during the first round I actually hadn't taken a point of damage in any of the games while my opponent's life totals were eroding in nine and ten points masses. I sided in the **Condescends** in this match as well and I actually countered a **Barter in Blood** and a **Death Cloud**. I will probably change them to **Overrides** if I play this deck again though.

Record: 3-0 matches and 6-0 games

## Round four -- Eric Swain playing Crystal Witness

Eric Swain Crystal Witness			
			
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	
10 Forest	3 Annul	2 Duplicant	
11 Island	4 Condescend	4 Last Word	
21 lands		3 March of the Machines	
	3 Crystal Shard	4 Tel-Jilad Justice	
	4 Echoing Truth	2 Troll Ascetic	
	4 Oxidize	15 sideboard cards	
	2 Serum Visions		
4 Eternal Witness	3 Thirst for Knowledge		
4 Solemn Simulacrum	23 other spells		
2 Triskelion			
2 Troll Ascetic			
4 Viridian Shaman			
16 creatures			

I can't impress enough on you how powerful this deck was even with my horribly misbuilt version. Maindeck Shaman and **Oxidize** with side boarded **Tel-Jilad Justice** and **March of the Machines** for games two and three? No problem. He took a mulligan game one and I ran him over--or should I say the deck ran him over. It had very little to do with me.

I mulligan in game two but I still managed to emerge without taking a point of damage--somehow.

Record: 4-0 matches and 8-0 games

## Round five -- TJ Impellizieri playing Counter Tooth


TJ Impellizieri Counter Tooth			
			
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	
4 Cloudpost	4 Condescend	1 Bringer of the White Dawn	
11 Forest	4 Oxidize	1 Hoverguard Sweepers	
7 Island	3 Reap and Sow	3 Last Word	
22 lands		3 March of the Machines	
	4 Serum Visions	3 Mindslaver	
	4 Sylvan Scrying	4 Tel-Jilad Justice	
	4 Tooth and Nail	15 sideboard cards	
	4 Wayfarer's Bauble		
1 Darksteel Colossus	27 other spells		
1 Duplicant			
4 Eternal Witness			
1 Leonin Abunas			
1 Memnarch			
1 Platinum Angel			
2 Viridian Shaman			
11 creatures			

TJ and Bryn Kenney were playing similar decks. In a new twist on the Counter Tooth deck they slid a **Memnarch** into the mix--just when I thought I had seen all the artifact hate I could stand!

**Cranial Plating** put TJ under tremendous early pressure and even though he cast a **Memnarch** against me he had to put it in the way of an equipped **Frogmite**. In the second game he resolved a **March of the Machines** but I had a pair of **Disciples of the Vault** in play and the lands in my hand became **Shocks**. Once again I took no damage. That was definitely about to change though!

Record: 5-0 matches and 10-0 games (with 198 of a possible 200 life points still in the bank)

## Round six -- Mike McGee playing Mono-Red


Mike McGee Mono-Red		
		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
25 Mountain	3 Beacon of Destruction	4 Detonate
25 lands	4 Fireball	4 Electrostatic Bolt
4 Arc-Slogger	4 Flamebreak	3 Furnace Whelp
4 Slith Firewalker	4 Magma Jet	4 Shatter
4 Solemn Simulacrum	4 Molten Rain	15 sideboard cards
12 creatures	4 Pulse of the Forge	
	23 other spells	

Mike was not excited about this match-up and claimed he needed several things to go right in game one to win. By 'several things' he must have meant to say 'several Molten Rains' because that is what happened. I failed to get a fast draw for the first time all tournament and he destroyed my lands for several turns. One Magma Jet, Pulse of the Forge, and a Fireball later I was handed my first game loss.

Mike sided in twelve cards against me--everything but the Whelps--and we had a back and forth game that saw me die to a Fireball with McGee at a tantalizingly low one life. Frowns.

Record: 5-1 matches and 10-2 games

## Round seven -- Matt Nash playing Mono-Red


Matt Nash Mono-Red		
		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
2 Blinkmoth Nexus	2 Detonate	2 Detonate
4 Darksteel Citadel	3 Fireball	2 Flamebreak
4 Great Furnace	2 Flamebreak	4 Grab the Reins
14 Mountain	4 Magma Jet	2 Leonin Bladetraps
24 lands	4 Molten Rain	3 Oblivion Stone
4 Arc-Slogger	3 Pulse of the Forge	2 Shatter
4 Slith Firewalker	3 Seething Song	15 sideboard cards
4 Solemn Simulacrum	3 Shrapnel Blast	
12 creatures	24 other spells	

Aaaaargh! I needed to win one more match and I would be able to draw my way into the Top 8. In game one of this match I apparently checked off that I lost five points to a Shrapnel Blast that had actually taken out one of my creatures. The accounting error did not come to light until after the match. I probably would have won the game with the five extra points as I went from 15 to 0 over the course of one turn thanks to Pulse of the Forge. I won game two but for the third time in five games I could not deal the crucial final point of damage to a critically wounded opponent in game three.

By the way... I got a real charge out of the Leonin Bladetraps in Matt's sideboard. It is pretty funny tech for the Rude Awakenings that have been bopping around the format.

Record: 5-2 matches and 11-4 games

## Round eight -- Tim Gillam playing Affinity

Tim Gillam Affinity		
		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		

4 Darksteel Citadel	4 Cranial Plating	2 Atog
4 Great Furnace	4 Paradise Mantle	4 Furnace Dragon
4 Island	4 Thoughtcast	2 Glimmervoid
4 Seat of the Synod		4 Pentad Prism
4 Vault of Whispers	12 other spells	3 Shrapnel Blast
20 lands		15 sideboard cards
4 Arcbound Ravager		
4 Arcbound Worker		
4 Disciple of the Vault		
4 Frogmite		
4 Ornithopter		
4 Qumulox		
4 Sombra Hoverguard		
28 creatures		

There was some talk that a 6-2 record might make the Top 8. Most likely we were just playing to end up in the Top 16 and earn half a box of booster packs for our day's effort. I was on the ropes early in game one but I managed to topdeck an **Arcbound Ravager** with two Disciples in play. He had similar luck in game two and in game three his draw seemed unexciting. I was worried about **Furnace Dragon** but it never showed up and I won my half box.

Record: 6-2 matches and 12-5 games

Both Mike McGee and Matt Nash went on to make the Top 8. TJ Impellizieri finished ninth and I ended up in twelfth. There were actually four red decks in the Top 8. Joining them were two Affinity decks, one Mono-Green, and one Counter Tooth. Matt Boccio ended up emerging on top with his Vial Affinity deck. I am not going to put all the Top 8 decks into this article but I thought you deserved to see a good Affinity deck for taking the time to read this far.

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 AEther Vial	4 Furnace Dragon
3 Darksteel Citadel	4 Chromatic Sphere	1 Glimmervoid
1 Glimmervoid	4 Cranial Plating	4 Pentad Prism
4 Great Furnace	4 Thoughtcast	3 Shrapnel Blast
4 Seat of the Synod	16 other spells	3 Terror
4 Vault of Whispers		15 sideboard cards
20 lands		
4 Arcbound Ravager		
4 Arcbound Worker		
1 Atog		
4 Disciple of the Vault		
4 Frogmite		
4 Myr Enforcer		
3 Myr Retriever		
24 creatures		

Next week: I should have all the bugs worked out of my Time Machine and we will take it for a spin!

*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.*



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