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**W**ell we're back. Back from the *Ice Age*, back to that crazy world of twisted metal, *Mirrodin*. The relevant format is, of course, *Mirrodin* Block Constructed; if you want to go to the Pro Tour, this is the format to know. The decks we talk about in this column will be the decks you have to be prepared to beat, if not adopt yourself.

Before he handed the reins of *Swimming with Sharks* over to me, BDM picked up one last set of PTQ deck lists. I have in front of me over 100 deck lists from the recent Harrisburg PA PTQ... but you only get to lay eyes on the most significant nine. Before we get too deep into the analysis, here are the lucky sharks who made Top 8 and how the Top 8 played out.

The Top 8, in seed order:

## Roman, Nick J



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus  
4 Darksteel Citadel  
4 Great Furnace  
12 Mountain

24 lands

4 Arc-Slogger  
3 Furnace Dragon  
4 Slith Firewalker  
3 Solemn Simulacrum

14 creatures

4 Electrostatic Bolt  
4 Magma Jet  
4 Molten Rain  
3 Pulse of the Forge  
4 Seething Song  
3 Shrapnel Blast

22 other spells

### Sideboard

2 Echoing Ruin  
3 Flamebreak  
3 Grab the Reins  
4 Shatter  
3 Shunt

15 sideboard cards

## Bezrukov, Semion S



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus  
4 Darksteel Citadel

4 AEther Vial  
4 Chromatic Sphere

### Sideboard

2 Cranial Plating  
4 Electrostatic Bolt  
1 Great Furnace

1 Glimmervoid  
3 Great Furnace  
4 Seat of the Synod  
4 Vault of Whispers

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20 lands

4 Arcbound Ravager  
4 Arcbound Worker  
3 Atog  
4 Disciple of the Vault  
4 Frogmite  
2 Moriok Rigger  
4 Myr Enforcer  
1 Myr Retriever

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26 creatures

2 Cranial Plating  
4 Thoughtcast

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14 other spells

2 Moriok Rigger  
2 Myr Retriever  
4 Somber Hoverguard

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15 sideboard cards

## Mellert, Frank J



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Blinkmoth Nexus  
20 Mountain

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24 lands

4 Arc-Slogger  
4 Furnace Whelp  
4 Slith Firewalker  
4 Solemn Simulacrum

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16 creatures

2 Beacon of Destruction  
4 Electrostatic Bolt  
3 Flamebreak  
4 Magma Jet  
4 Molten Rain  
3 Pulse of the Forge

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20 other spells

### Sideboard

1 Flamebreak  
4 Grab the Reins  
3 Granulate  
4 Shatter  
3 Shunt

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15 sideboard cards

## Szutar, Ben C



### Main Deck

60 cards

2 Atog

### Sideboard

3 Blinkmoth Nexus  
3 Darksteel Citadel  
2 Glimmervoid  
4 Great Furnace  
4 Seat of the Synod  
3 Vault of Whispers

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19 lands

4 Arcbound Ravager  
4 Arcbound Worker  
2 Atog  
4 Disciple of the Vault  
4 Frogmite  
3 Myr Enforcer  
2 Myr Retriever  
2 Somber Hoverguard

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25 creatures

4 AEther Vial  
4 Chromatic Sphere  
4 Cranial Plating  
4 Thoughtcast

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16 other spells

4 Electrostatic Bolt  
1 Glimmervoid  
3 Shatter  
3 Shrapnel Blast  
2 Somber Hoverguard

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15 sideboard cards

## Jackson, Allen S



### Main Deck

60 cards

11 Forest  
12 Mountain

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23 lands

4 Arc-Slogger  
4 Eternal Witness  
3 Molder Slug  
4 Solemn Simulacrum  
4 Viridian Shaman

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19 creatures

4 Electrostatic Bolt  
4 Magma Jet  
4 Molten Rain  
2 Rude Awakening  
4 Wayfarer's Bauble

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18 other spells

### Sideboard

3 Cosmic Larva  
1 Duplicant  
4 Oxidize  
4 Reap and Sow  
3 Tel-Jilad Justice

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15 sideboard cards

## Materewicz, Christoper J



**Main Deck***61 cards*

2 Blinkmoth Nexus  
 4 Darksteel Citadel  
 4 Great Furnace  
 14 Mountain

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24 lands

4 Arc-Slogger  
 3 Furnace Dragon  
 4 Slith Firewalker  
 4 Solemn Simulacrum

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15 creatures

3 Fireball  
 2 Flamebreak  
 4 Magma Jet  
 4 Molten Rain  
 3 Pulse of the Forge  
 3 Seething Song  
 3 Shrapnel Blast

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22 other spells

**Sideboard**

3 Detonate  
 1 Flamebreak  
 3 Grab the Reins  
 2 Leonin Bladetraps  
 3 Shatter  
 3 Shunt

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15 sideboard cards

**Helwig, Jared****Main Deck***60 cards*

24 Forest

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24 lands

4 Eternal Witness  
 4 Fangren Firstborn  
 3 Molder Slug  
 4 Sylvok Explorer  
 3 Tel-Jilad Chosen  
 3 Troll Ascetic  
 4 Viridian Shaman

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25 creatures

4 Beacon of Creation  
 3 Echoing Courage  
 4 Oxidize

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11 other spells

**Sideboard**

4 Creeping Mold  
 4 Karstoderm  
 1 Molder Slug  
 2 Sword of Fire and Ice  
 4 Tel-Jilad Justice

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15 sideboard cards

**Murphy, Matt****Main Deck***60 cards***Sideboard**

14 Island	3 Acquire	3 Annul
8 Plains	4 Condescend	3 March of the Machines
2 Stalking Stones	3 Echoing Truth	3 Mindslaver
-----	3 Last Word	3 Platinum Angel
24 lands	2 Pulse of the Fields	3 Purge
	3 Thirst for Knowledge	-----
	4 Vedalken Shackles	15 sideboard cards
	3 Wayfarer's Bauble	
4 Leonin Abunas	-----	
4 Pristine Angel	25 other spells	
3 Solemn Simulacrum		
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11 creatures		

	Quarterfinals	Semifinals	Finals	Champion
1	Roman, Nick J	Roman, Nick J	Jackson, Allen S	Jackson, Allen S
8	Murphy, Matt			
4	Jackson, Allen S	Jackson, Allen S		
5	Szutar, Ben C			
2	Mellert, Frank J	Mellert, Frank J	Bezrukov, Semion S	
7	Materewicz, Christopher			
3	Helwig, Jared	Bezrukov, Semion S		
6	Bezrukov, Semion S			

This Top 8 didn't have a lot of surprises as far as deck archetypes go. The Top 4 led off with the main expected decks of Red, Affinity, Red, and Affinity; along with another Red deck in the bottom bracket, we had the minority -- but not *too* different -- archetypes of G/R Land Destruction, Mono-Green Beacon, and U/W Angel.

I'm not going to go into the Affinity basics in this article. The chances are that if you had been following Swimming with Sharks before my taking over, you know very well how Affinity works already. These decks happened to be variations of Aether Vial Affinity -- just with no dedicated green sideboard. If you are preparing for GP New Jersey next weekend, Aether Vial Affinity is going to be your most important matchup. It looks like PTQ level players seem to be valuing the number of available sideboard slots they have more than overall card power. Both of the Aether Vial Affinity decks in this Top 8 elected to go with a red sideboard that didn't demand the dedication of a ton of Tree of Tales; while Electrostatic Bolt and Shatter aren't *quite* up there with Viridian Shaman and Oxidize, neither Semion or Ben chose to sideboard more than one land.

The much more interesting story is the other dominant deck -- mono-Red. All four players ran four Slith Firewalkers main, four Magma Jets main, and three Shunts in the sideboard (more on that later). Two of the decks were very dedicated to an anti-artifact theme with 4 Electrostatic Bolt and 3 Furnace Dragon main and some combination of 6 Detonate/Echoing Ruins/Shatters. The other mono-Red deck played a more damage-intensive strategy instead, utilizing all 4 Furnace Whelps main, as well as Beacon of Destruction. Frank Mellert really likes his smoke. Furnace Whelp might seem a little under-powered when compared with big cousins in other blocks (namely Fledgling Dragon and Lightning Dragon) but the fact that he comes online for full pump on the next turn without need for Echo or Threshold makes Furnace Whelp a powerful short term threat. In a deck like mono-Red, Frank only needs one or two hits off of a Furnace Whelp to put the opponent into point blank range.

Not one of these mono-Red decks played with all 4 available copies of Pulse of the Forge.




The Murphy and Helwig decks seem pretty standard versions of mono-Green and U/W to me; if you go up against these colors at GP NJ, don't expect the opponent's deck to deviate overmuch from the listed card choices. Murphy played with main-deck Acquire and only half the Pulses he could have. With the format getting faster and moving away from big artifact creatures like Darksteel Colossus, I don't know how good main-deck Acquire will be.

Pulse of the Fields is actually one of my favorite cards right now, and is doubly good in a deck with Pristine Angel. The most surprising thing about Helwig's deck is the absence of Blasting Station. Many mono-Green decks with Beacon of Creation have started using Blasting Station as "a green Fireball."

Last, but in this case, first, is Allen Jackson's G/R Land Destruction deck. Jackson's deck is essentially a bunch of good cards. He has cards that are solid in many different matchups: Molten Rain against Tooth and Nail, Magma Jet and Electrostatic Bolt for early game defense in a variety of match-ups. The really interesting thing about Allen's deck is that he has trump against everything but U/W. Arc-Slogger thrashes green, Molder Slug is a one card hammer and anvil against Affinity, and a big Rude Awakening kills Red decks just about every time it resolves. The only thing I don't get about Allen's deck is the 15 cards off to the side. His is one of the only ones in the format that I've seen that has Forests main but not Oxidizes; I'm not sure where he brings in Cosmic Larva. It sure is big, though.

## Story Time

The biggest name in the PTQ came within a hair's breadth of Top 8. Dr. Michael Pustilnik -- MikeyP to his friends and fans -- has a stack of titles taller than the Empire State Building: GP Champion, PT Champion, Masters Champion, other GP Champion... but this time around, MikeyP was going for PTQ Champion. Here's his deck:

Pustilnik, Michael M		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Chrome Mox	1 Atog
4 Great Furnace	4 Flamebreak	4 Barbed Lightning
13 Mountain	3 Granulate	2 Beacon of Destruction
21 lands	4 Magma Jet	3 Echoing Ruin
	4 Molten Rain	1 Granulate
	4 Pulse of the Forge	4 Shatter
	2 Pyrite Spellbomb	15 sideboard cards
4 Arc-Slogger	4 Shrapnel Blast	
4 Slith Firewalker	29 other spells	
2 Solemn Simulacrum		
10 creatures		

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In Round 8, Mike was fighting a mono-Red mirror for Top 8. Not surprisingly, the decorated doctor was playing very tight mathematical **Magic**

*MikeyP, Pro Tour Los Angeles '01*

according to a paradigm defined only recently, called the Philosophy of Fire (basically applying advantage principles to assembling 20 damage rather than the traditional focus on card advantage) Mike's opponent Entwined Grab the Reins on his Arc-Slogger, a play that would both rob Mike of his best threat and put him to nine. He thought for a bit and sent Magma Jet at the opponent's head. One of the top two cards from the scry was Shrapnel Blast. Mike put the Shrapnel Blast second from the bottom and repeatedly activated the Arc-Slogger such that he would kill with that Shrapnel Blast the following turn. Mike drew and went for the Shrapnel Blast kill... and bought an opposing Shunt.

He then untapped and followed up with a Pulse of the Forge for Top 8.

The lesson? MikeyP is without a doubt one of **Magic's** most decorated champions. It is pretty likely that he was the best player in the PTQ. He played tightly. But what is the difference between Mike's sideboard and the three that made Top 8? What was the card that won the matchup for Top 8 where Mike was playing so well?

At least according to this PTQ's success stories, if you want to run mono-Red, it looks like you should have -- and at the very least, respect -- Shunt.

