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Counting the Days

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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Unless you were in Italy this past weekend, **Magic** has been a waiting game for the past week as we build up to the release of *Champions of Kamigawa*. Each day brings us another preview card, a new mechanic or keyword, and 24 hours closer to the release of the new block of cards.

[Grand Prix-Rimini](#) closed the books on *Mirrodin* block, at least as far as major tournaments are concerned. There are still a smattering of Pro Tour Qualifiers on the ledger, but the next time a Grand Prix event rolls around it will be a Limited tournament that introduces the world to the newest block.

DCI overlord Ilya Rotelli had to be pleased as five of his countrymen made the quarterfinals in Rimini, the last *Mirrodin* Block Constructed Grand Prix. In the end, it was Italian Domingo Ottati who hoisted the trophy by playing blue-green control, taking out Tooth and Nail in the finals.



Despite what would seem like an optimistic finals that featured Tooth and Nail and blue-green, there were four Affinity decks in the Top 8, which has to leave players looking in the new set for answers to the deck in Standard format. R&D apparently has tried to create a flavor-based set in *Champions* and offered none of the mechanical hooks that have been a prominent feature in recent block releases. In previous seasons, Madness, Astral Slide, and Affinity have all dominated and then been supplanted by the next mechanic in previous seasons.

There will be no decks served up quite as obviously in the new set. Will players dig deep and find the decks that can knock off the king of the hill or will they just bring Affinity to States? Keep your eyes peeled this weekend for Constructed gems in your Limited tournaments.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

That is the question Aeo Paquette is asking himself about Pro Tour-Columbus. The 19-year-old Canadian has made the Top 8 in both Pro Tours he has ever played, but he is unsure about which event he will be attending next. After making the Top 8 of Pro Tour-Amsterdam, Aeo -- a self-proclaimed "Professional Slacker" -- did not attend the next few events that he found himself qualified to play in.

"I didn't want to go to Kobe because it was far/expensive and I didn't test very much...I was starting to play less at the time," he explained. "After that I quit for several months. So I didn't go to the next limited PT that Herzog won 'cause I wasn't playing at the time."

He eventually squandered his PT points and was actually not qualified for Worlds on the basis of his Amsterdam experience. Paquette had finished second to Andrew Cuneo last year in the first *Magic Online* Worlds Qualifier and in some way it got him to Worlds this year. They say nobody ever actually quits the game, and the avid MTGO player soon found himself being drawn back.

"I got into the game again, starting playing on modo more, and I qualified through my rating so I figured why not," he shrugged.

From there he prepared for the event with Canadian National team member Mike Thicke and former Week-in-Reviewer Jeff Cunningham. He focused on Standard and draft, choosing to worry about Block at a later point. He ended up cobbling together his *Mirrodin* Block deck from his Standard build, making a few changes based on the fact that there was so much anti-Affinity in the format. His Standard deck -- soon to be 'immortalized' in the Worlds 2004 decks -- featured **Chrome Mox** to accelerate his draws against March of the Machines decks and Tooth and Nail. With almost every non-Affinity deck in block running some kind of main-deck artifact removal, he cut them from his Day 3 deck.

His Standard deck build was interesting for a number of reasons. In addition to the **Chrome Mox**, he ran **Shrapnel Blasts**, **Ornithopters**, and zero **Myr Enforcers**. Many players complain about the color requirements of the **Shrapnel Blasts** and have cut them from most Affinity builds. Paquette found that they actually worked well with the aforementioned **Chrome Mox**.

"The Mox is pretty decent in type 2.," Paquette said. "I think they are just far better then Vial seeing as it doesn't actually do anything. Basically they take the place of **Chromatic Sphere**. Also, if you have a card in hand that you can't cast due to mana issues you can just imprint it."



As for the absence of the **Myr Enforcers**, "I played **Somber Hoverguards** instead, mostly because I needed cards to imprint on the Mox but I think it was just better in my deck also because of the four **Cranial Plating**."

Paquette piloted his deck through two rounds of the Top 8 and met up with Nuijten in the finals. Between the prize differential and the standings in the Player-of-the-Year race for the end-of-year payout, there was more money on the line than there had ever been before in a single match of **Magic**.

"A lot of things were going through my mind," Paquette said. "I was already very happy to come so far and I knew how bad the match up was, but still the idea of being World Champion and all of the extra money kept popping onto my head. All I can say is I've never been so nervous in my life. I've never even come close to being as nervous as I was there before in my life so I didn't really know what to do myself."



Regardless of his emotional state, Paquette did not think there was much he could have done to alter the outcome of the finals.

"I don't believe the matchup is winnable in a best-of-five match," Paquette said. "The only game I won out of the four we played was the one where I played my whole hand on turn one and I still would have lost to an **Oxidize** for my **Plating**."

Still it marked an improvement from his last Pro Tour Top 8, when Paquette did not win a game. If he continues to improve on that curve, the \$40,000 he won last year playing **Magic** should be dwarfed by this coming season when he wins every Pro Tour he plays in, right? Don't tell that to Aeo, who may not even attend Columbus.

"I'm not completely sure but currently I'm thinking I'm not going to go to the Extended one because I've never played Extended before and I know absolutely nothing about the format. So if I go I would like to be prepared and that means a *lot* of play testing which I have never done."

Personally, I think success may have come too easily for young Aeo. He does not seem to have a sense of what a prodigious achievement making the Top 8 of his first two Pro Tours actually is. I am not completely sure, but I think you need to go back as far as Shawn "Hammer" Regnier and Preston Poulter who accomplished the feat in the first two PTs. I believe Kamiel was playing in his second Pro Tour when he made his first Top 8, and even if there is one or two more examples it is a remarkable and rare feat.

Amazingly, Paquette does not have the sense of entitlement many players with consecutive Top 8 berths would find themselves saddled with. Despite winning \$40,000 and coming a match shy of almost \$60,000, he is reluctant to anticipate similar success in the future -- although he will not dismiss it as possibility.

"I think I could make money playing Magic, but not enough to make a living. Consistently, I don't think I will make \$40,000 a year. I'm still debating even going to Columbus. But I think if I make three straight Top 8s it might influence me to try harder and make a living off of it.

"I just believe there are a lot more than eight very good people playing on the Pro Tour and that means that they can't all make Top 8 in every event."



Paquette is going to wait and see how *Champions of Kamigawa* treats him before making a decision about attending Pro Tour-Nagoya. The next time he shows up on the tour could be in Atlanta for the next team event, where he hopes to play with Jeff Cunningham and Mark Zajdner. Based on his "reservation" at the Sunday Pro Tour table I'm sure he will have no trouble securing them or anyone else he is interested in playing with.

That is, if he shows up.

Counting down to Columbus

Grand Prix–Rimini sent a series of ripples through the invite list for the upcoming Pro Tour in Columbus. It was the last major event to take place before the ratings run earlier this week. It qualified eight new players, as well as propelling players up and down the ratings ladder. Joe Kambourakis -- last seen reporting from Grand Prix–New Jersey -- has been following the fluctuations acutely the past few weeks. He had a 2033 constructed rating and was hoping it would be enough to squeeze into the Top 50 for the purposes of a ratings invite.

According to the most recent run that put him in 92nd worldwide. Fortunately for him, the invites pass down if the players ahead of you are previously invited. With names like Jeff Garza, Gabriel Nassif, and Julien Nuijten (to name a few players who have popped up in my column recently) on or near the top of the list, there were plenty of slots to trickle down. Kambourakis tracked down as much info as he could regarding Pro Point invites and PTQ slots that were awarded and has determined that he is 49th among players without an invite. That means the invites would pass down as far as the three players tied for 93rd -- Sigurd Eskeland, Alex Lecky, and Kentarou Iino.

Kambourakis' research is by no means official but it should give players a pretty good idea of where they needed to be to earn an invite to Pro Tour–Columbus. Here are the Top 100 players in Constructed as of the most recent ratings run. Congrats to everyone who made it.

<u>Rank</u>	<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Compound Rating</u>
1	Jeff	Garza	United States	2183
2	David	Cox	United States	2168
3	Olivier	Ruel	France	2155
4	Eugene	Harvey	United States	2149
5	Tomi	Walamies	Finland	2148
5	Kamiel	Cornelissen	Netherlands	2148
7	Terry	Soh	Malaysia	2142
8	Gabriel	Nassif	France	2131
9	Manuel	Bevand	France	2112
9	Sylvain	Lauriol	France	2112
11	Grgur	Petric Maretic	Croatia (Hrvatska)	2108
12	Julien	Nuijten	Netherlands	2105
13	Kyoung Geun	Nam	Korea (South)	2104
14	Kwan Ching	Yuen	Singapore	2101
15	Katsuhiko	Mori	Japan	2100
15	David	Solis	United States	2100
17	Andrew	Cuneo	United States	2099
17	Josh	Phillips	United States	2099
19	Richard	Proffitt	United States	2093
20	Federico	Dato	Italy	2092
20	Rickard	Osterberg	Norway	2092
22	Takahiro	Suzuki	Japan	2091
23	Benjamin	Blackman	United States	2081
23	Josh	Lewis	United States	2081
25	Blake	Quelle	United States	2080
26	Matt	Schmaltz	United States	2076
27	Lars	Dam	Denmark	2072
27	Stefano	Fiori	Italy	2072
29	Jeff	Cunningham	Canada	2070
30	Thomas	Guevin	United States	2068
30	Jakub	Slemr	Czech Republic	2068
30	Omar	Bonilla	Dominican Republic	2068
33	Justin	Gary	United States	2067
33	Tatsunori	Kishi	Japan	2067
35	Murray	Evans	Canada	2064
35	Erik	Thoren	United States	2064
35	Jonathan	Isaacs	Scotland	2064
38	Bryan Daniel	Dominguez	Dominican Republic	2063
39	Alexandre	Peset	France	2062
39	Paulo	Rosa	Brazil	2062
41	Raphael	Levy	France	2061
41	Richard	Hoan	Canada	2061
43	Raffaele	Lo Moro	Italy	2060
43	Ryou	Ogura	Japan	2060
45	Matteo	Cirigliano	Italy	2059
46	Masahiro	Nishiwaki	Japan	2058
46	Kazuya	Hirabayashi	Japan	2058
46	Brant	Faulkner	United States	2058

49	Jussi	Perälä	Finland	2057
49	Bas	Knapen	Netherlands	2057
49	Nick	Meves	United States	2057
52	Kyle	Rose	United States	2056
53	Robert	Dougherty	United States	2055
54	Marco	Blume	Germany	2054
54	Patrick	Miller	United States	2054
56	Sasha	Zorc	Croatia (Hrvatska)	2053
56	Kyle	Goodman	United States	2053
58	Kyle	Jefferson	United States	2051
59	Alexander	Sacal	Mexico	2050
59	Sean	Fitzgerald	United States	2050
61	David	Humpherys	United States	2049
61	Brian	Selden	United States	2049
63	Ondrej	Baudys	Czech Republic	2048
63	Aeo	Paquette	Canada	2048
65	Vincent	Lemoine	Belgium	2047
65	Jasar	Elarar	Canada	2047
65	Cole	Swannack	New Zealand	2047
68	Travis	Turning	United States	2046
68	Giammaria	Muratori	Italy	2046
68	Sebastian	Zink	Germany	2046
68	Aaron	Boyer	United States	2046
72	Jonathan	Watson	United States	2045
73	Eivind	Nitter	Norway	2044
73	Enrico	Nai	Italy	2044
75	Emmanuel	Vernay	France	2043
75	Antoine	Ruel	France	2043
75	Maximiliano	Conca	Argentina	2043
78	Tsuyoshi	Fujita	Japan	2042
78	Konrad	Brandt	South Africa	2042
80	Tomohiro	Yokosuka	Japan	2039
80	DeQuan	Watson	United States	2039
80	Stefan	Fries	Germany	2039
83	Markus	Bell	Germany	2038
83	Gonzalo	Patti	Argentina	2038
85	Gorou	Matsuo	Japan	2037
85	Alessandro	Vegna	Italy	2037
87	Aaron	Amendolia	United States	2036
88	Brian	Lynch	United States	2035
88	Dan	Jenkins	England	2035
88	Alex	Lieberman	United States	2035
91	Joe	Gagliardi	United States	2034
92	Joseph	Kambourakis	United States	2033
93	Sigurd	Eskeland	Norway	2032
93	Alex	Lecky	Canada	2032
93	Kentarou	Ino	Japan	2032
96	Carlos	Coro Sanchez	Bolivia	2031
97	Kenji	Kimoto	Japan	2030
97	Sean	Buckley	United States	2030
99	Raphael	Gunther	Brazil	2029
99	Frank	Karsten	Netherlands	2029
99	Kevin	MacPhee	United States	2029

All in and All Over

If you have flipped by any of the ESPN family of channels in the past few days you have likely seen **Magic's** own David Williams losing in a heads-up match to Greg Raymer at the 2004 World Series of Poker. And by losing, I mean taking home \$3.5 million for finishing second. Williams lurked back in the pack for most of the earlier installments and leapt to the top tables as the tournament winnowed down the field. There was not much footage of him early but the last few shows featured him prominently. If you look close you can see a number of Dave's **Magic** friends rooting him on from the sidelines.

I should have an interview with **Magic's** most famous player for next week's installment of The Week that Was.

PTQ Results

Event City	Event Date	Event TO
Dallas, Texas (GP Trial)	9/11/2004	Edward Fox
Finish: 1. Jeffrey LaRue; 2. Andy Anders; 3. Robert Moore; 4. Eric Knapp; 5. Leonard Lansford; 6. Jeremy Ross; 7. Jeffrey Haskovec; 8. Jeffrey Zandi		
Manhattan, Kan. (GP Trial)	9/11/2004	Steve Ferrell
Finish: 1. Thomas Glowiak; 2. Richard Germar; 3. Mohammad Mohmand; 4. Loren Canady; 5. Leroy Denaoyer; 6. Quanah Gray; 7. James Zhan; 8. Chris Standfuss		
Chicago, Ill. (PT Qualifier)	9/11/2004	Alan Hochman
Finish: 1. Timothy Gruneich; 2. Jeff Novekoff; 3. Thomas LaPille; 4. Michael Purn; 5. C.J. Morello; 6. Joel Stob; 7. Eddie Bontkowski; 8. Jimmy Fricke		
High Point, N.C. (PT Qualifier)	9/11/2004	Jim Bailey
Finish: 1. Shaun Mack; 2. John Spires; 3. Matthew Kimbrell; 4. Justin LaRose; 5. Paul Hayworth; 6. Lawrence Creech; 7. Andrew Carrier; 8. Conrad Kirby		
Nashville, Tenn. (PT Qualifier)	9/11/2004	Jym Recsinti
Finish: 1. Donald Buchanan; 2. Matthew Frazier; 3. Christian Valenti; 4. Ron Eubank; 5. Harry Baker; 6. Robert Watson; 7. John Mayes; 8. Chris Rheal		
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. (PT Qualifier)	9/11/2004	Marvin Paguirigan
Finish: 1. Mark Zajdner; 2. Mike Frac; 3. Michael Abramovich; 4. Filip Hajduk; 5. Mike Vasovski; 6. Barry Slade; 7. Michael Singh; 8. Scott Sweezey		

*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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