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Dark Lining

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The Week That Was
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If every dark cloud has a silver lining, I have to believe the converse holds true as well. When the final point of damage ticked off of Shuhei Nakamura's life total in the deciding game of the final of [Pro Tour-Columbus](#), the entire feature match erupted in activity. People were cheering on the new winner, consoling the loser, taking video, jockeying for the best camera angle for photos, and the event crew immediately began breaking down the set to accommodate the trophy ceremony. Everyone seemed to be moving at once -- except for one silent, unmoving figure.

With the feature match area turned into a churning sea, Pro Tour-Columbus winner Pierre Canali sat quietly and motionless at the final table. If you did not know that he had just won \$30,000 and a Pro Tour trophy in his first Pro Tour event, you would not be able to tell from looking at his face. His expressionless gaze would have looked more at home on the face of someone who just had the Pro Tour ripped from his hands by a savage top deck than someone who cruised to victory in a 3-0 sweep.

The 22-year-old salsa dance instructor talked about what he was experiencing at that moment, what his **Magic** future was going to look like, and about his decision to play with Affinity -- a decision that only seven other players in the entire field made.

When asked how he was feeling about his victory, Canali could only shake his head. "I feel very bad. I'm not really proud of me because I made so many mistakes that I never made when I playtested."

You can playtest day and night and for every conceivable situation but it can never help you to anticipate the pressure of playing on **Magic's** biggest stage for a sizeable cash prize. Canali made a couple of plays that were questioned by observers, and those choices were weighing heavily on his mind after the tournament. Canali cited his attempt to focus and get past the pressure he felt as a contributing factor in his Top 8 play.

"I would be focused so hard on making one play that I missed opportunities to perhaps win the game a turn earlier," explained Canali.

The long weekend took its toll on the young man in his first appearance in a Pro Tour event. Many people overlook fatigue as a factor in tournament play, and not only was Canali playing in a three-day tournament for the first time, he was also contending with adjusting to the different time zones between Europe and the U.S. By the time he sat down to answer my questions he looked completely spent.



Canali's win came in his first Pro Tour appearance.

as a consequence, he expected that none of them would be packing enough sideboard hate for Affinity in whatever deck they chose to play.

When asked to describe his strengths as a **Magic** player, Canali claims that deckbuilding is his forte while his technical play leaves something to be desired. This was a large part of his reasoning behind playing Affinity.

Canali drew a line in the air above his head, "Let's say that Affinity is up here..."

He then drew a line about chest high, "Now say everything else is around here..."

He then drew a line in the air about eye level, "Even if my mistakes lower the deck's power to about here, it is still very good. Which is good because in the finals I think I made a mistake once a turn."

Canali did not think that Affinity would be the dominant deck in the PTQ season because people are expecting the deck and can prepare appropriately. During the Swiss rounds, the French player had to deal with an **Energy Flux** in play seven separate games and he won four of them.

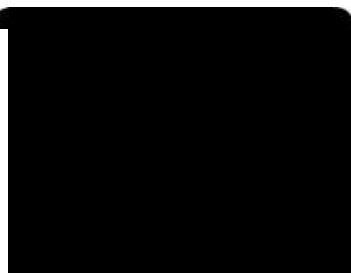
"Most people just had one **Energy Flux** that they could (Vampiric) Tutor for," shrugged Canali.

With main deck **Somber Hoverguards** and non-artifact lands, he could fight his way through a lone **Energy Flux** simply by paying the upkeep on his Ravager and then sacrificing artifacts to it. In his mind, the deck is

VIDEO OF PRO TOUR-COLUMBUS

Watch all of Sunday's final-day action from Pro Tour-Columbus by downloading these archived video files.

- [Top 8 Preview](#) (14 MB zip)
- [Quarterfinals 1](#) (44 MB zip)
- [Quarterfinals 2](#) (76 MB zip)
- [Semifinals](#) (73 MB zip)
- [Prelude to the Final](#) (26 MB zip)
- [Final: Pierre Canali vs. Shuhei Nakamura](#) (59 MB zip)



going to be a strong enough force that you will need to give it more room out of the sideboard than one or two cards.

As for sideboards, it was Canali's unusual looking sideboard that drew him a lot of attention early in the weekend -- especially when he went 8-0 with the deck. I watched him play one match in the feature area, and if I did not know he was playing Affinity, I would not have been able to guess it from his opening draw in Game 2. That is despite the fact that he was holding a **Frogmite** and **Darksteel Citadel**. With **Meddling Mage**, **Chill**, and **Engineered Plague**, his post-sideboard hands looked much more like a hand from a Dump Truck deck than Affinity.

Canali spent a lot of time honing the sideboard, and it may not have been pretty to look at but he managed to have something for almost everybody. He continued to make changes right up until the day of the tournament when he added **Kami of Ancient Law**.

"The day before the tournament they were still **Seal of Cleansing** but I found that people can play around a Seal," he noted. "With **Aether Vial** I can put it out as an instant and it is harder for them to play around."



Canali piloted Affinity to a Pro Tour victory.

Canali used his **Aether Vial** to make a fantastic play in the first round of elimination against Geoffrey Siron. Siron attempted to **Circular Logic** one of Canali's spells via **Madness**. With **Madness** on the stack, Canali **Aether-Vialed** a **Meddling Mage** into play and named "**Circular Logic**." When **Madness** resolved, Siron was unable to play the counterspell and Canali's original spell resolved.

For years Osyp Lebedowicz has joked about competing in salsa deck championships, so when it came to light that Canali was a salsa instructor not many people believed him at first. "People kept coming up to me and telling me it was funny but it is very serious. It is a serious thing that I do."

It's serious enough that the current frontrunner in both the Player and Rookie of the Year races worries about finding enough time for playtesting. He is hopeful that he will follow in the steps of last year's French Rookie of the Year candidate, Alexandre Peset, who burst onto the scene with his Top 8 performance at Pro Tour-Kobe and was then embraced by the top French players. He was able to follow up with multiple strong finishes over the remainder of the year, including becoming a member of the French National team and narrowly losing the rookie race to Julien Nuijten's remarkable World Championship run.

Regardless of whether Canali is suddenly hanging out with Nassif and the Ruels or looking for other playtesters, I am confident that we have not heard the last of the new champion. Anybody who could sit there and berate himself for his mistakes after having made a dead-on metagame call, an amazing quarterfinals play, and pocketed \$30,000 in the process will have the drive and determination to stay at the top of his game.

Pierre Canali		
Pro Tour Columbus Winner -- Affinity		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
2 Ancient Den	4 Aether Vial	3 Cabal Therapy
2 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Chromatic Sphere	3 Chill
1 City of Brass	3 Cranial Plating	1 City of Brass
4 Darksteel Citadel	4 Thoughtcast	3 Engineered Plague
2 Glimmervoid	15 other spells	3 Kami of Ancient Law
4 Seat of the Synod		2 Seal of Removal
4 Vault of Whispers		15 sideboard cards
19 lands		
4 Arcbound Ravager		
4 Arcbound Worker		
4 Disciple of the Vault		
4 Frogmite		
4 Meddling Mage		
3 Myr Enforcer		
3 Somber Hoverguard		
26 creatures		

Amateur 2K

Congratulations go out to Dan Roderman for winning the first prize in a \$2,000 cash purse Standard tournament at Pro Tour-Columbus that was only open to players without any career Pro Points. The Ohio native piloted an Affinity deck through a 115-person field to win an \$800 share of the purse.



The tournament, which was sponsored by Strike Zone and Queen's Domain, cost only \$5 to enter and is going to be a regular fixture on the North American Pro Tour circuit. If you can play **Magic**, you are probably reasonably adept at math. Adept enough to realize that \$575 (that's 115 times 5) does not cover \$2,000 in cash prizes. How could the tournament continue when there seems to be a loss attached to it of almost \$1,500? Not only is the tournament series going to continue, but also the prizes may even grow as high as \$3,000 - \$4,000.

Amateur Dan Roderman shows off his cash winnings.

"Part of getting a dealer's table at the Pro Tour involves putting together a proposal than involves bringing more people to the Pro Tour. Queen's Games and Strike Zone put together a proposal where we sponsored this tournament. We each put up a \$1,000 prize but we don't get any of the tournament entry fees. Those go to cover judge staff and administrative costs for the people organizing the tournament. If I had it my way the tournament would be free," explained Jim Bruso of Queen's Games.

"The whole point is to get people to come to the event and realize there is all sorts of stuff they could be doing here. You get more people attending a Grand Prix than you do at a Pro Tour. The perception is that if you go to a Pro Tour and play in a side event you are going to get slaughtered by Jon Finkel. I had one of the players who made the Top 8 come up to me after the event and say he would have gone home after the LCQ if not for this tournament."

Jim Bruso and Dustin Johnson of Strike Zone made a big deal out of the event. When **Magic** tournaments began in the mid- to late 90s, it was common for organizers to give away \$1,000 prizes. But with the advent of the Pro Tour and a regular series of PTQ tournaments, those tournaments faded away. As the Top 8 sat down for this event, Jim plopped the \$2,000 in cash on the table to show everyone what they were playing for and all the prizes were given away in cash.

They are hoping to bring in one or two of the other dealers on the Pro Tour circuit for the next one to double the purse. Other plans include a trophy inscribed with each winner's name, which would travel to each Pro Tour stop.

Bruso said that they had plans to invite the Top 8 players from this event to compete in Atlanta but it is not clear whether or not the winner will be eligible by the time it rolls around. Roderman is a long-time Ohio player who came of age at the fabled Reality Recess store than launched the **Magic** careers of Worth Wolpert, Tim and Mike Aten, Jason Opalka, and Mike Flores. Roderman has somehow managed to maintain his amateur status over the years.

"I have actually won money at a couple of Grand Prix," laughed Roderman.

At Grand Prix events, a top 32 finish earns a player a single Pro Tour point, but Roderman took 33rd and 34th at separate events and finished within the amateur prize payout for those events.

He has also qualified for the Pro Tour a couple of times and is currently qualified for Pro Tour-Nagoya. He is thinking about attending which would end his amateur run after all these years.

"I am very confident that I can play at that level and I am more of a Limited player than Constructed -- I just play what my constructed friends tell me to play," he said, after borrowing his winning deck from Arizona State Champion Adam Prosak.

With his \$800 for the Amateurs, \$500 from the PTQ he won two weeks ago, and the roughly \$200 he won in an Unzipped tournament also this past weekend, Roderman thinks he can swing the costly trip to Japan to take his game to the next level.

Speaking of PTQs...

Here are the winners of last weekend's North American PTQ events. Congrats to everyone who did well and good luck in Nagoya.

Event City	Event Date	Event TO	Attendance
Columbus (Last Chance Qualifier)	10/29/2004	Mike Guptil	132
Finish: 1. Bryn Kenney; 2. Semion Bezrukov; 3. Matt Scott; 4. Michael Day; 5. Vishu Doshi; 6. Chris Lepinski; 7. Adam Minniear; 8. Gary Cornwall			
Columbus (PT Qualifier)	10/30/2004	Mike Guptil	185
Finish: 1. Mark Zajdner; 2. Robert Dougherty; 3. Harry Durnan; 4. Mauro Stivoli; 5. Brian Kowal; 6. Jim Herold; 7. Masataka Shimada; 8. Brent Kaskel			
Columbus (PT Qualifier)	10/31/2004	Mike Guptil	156
Finish: 1. Matthew Wood; 2. Michael Day; 3. Vishu Doshi; 4. Shingo Adachi; 5. Giovanni Gesiot; 6. Dylan Brown; 7. Nathan Bramlett; 8. Tony Gregg			

Firestarter: PTQ&A

There were eight very different decks in the Top 8 of the Pro Tour this past weekend. What will the dominant decks of the PTQ season look like? Is Affinity the best deck or did it just benefit from under preparation and some good matchups? If the PTQ season started tomorrow, what would you be playing based on this past weekend's results? Let us know in the message boards below.

*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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