

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

Ruel-ing the Tour

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Thursday, November 11, 2004



Olivier Ruel has been playing **Magic** for a long time. At one time he was considered among the best French players in that country's emerging **Magic** scene. He and his brother Antoine first came to the public's attention during the 1999-00 season when they (along with teammate Florent Jeudon) formed Black Ops and won Grand Prix-Cannes.

From that, they were invited to participate in a special team event along with the top two teams from the first team Pro Tour and the other team Grand Prix winner that was taped for ESPN. The unsung French team dispatched Team Antarctica with Steve and Dan O'Mahoney Schwartz and Jon Finkel, announcing their presence on the Pro Tour.

Olivier Ruel plays to the camera in Columbus.

Olivier went on a worldwide tear that included 11 Grand Prix Top 8 appearances and culminated in a Top 2 at Pro Tour-Osaka during the 2001-02 season. After a brief slump that found him in danger of falling off the Pro Tour gravy train, he has bounced back in the last year to be considered one of the best players in the world.

He posted a Top 4 finish at Pro Tour-Amsterdam last year, finished second at Grand Prix-Hong Kong, placed sixth in Pro Tour-Seattle teaming with his brother Antoine and Gabriel Nassif, and won French Nationals. He went on to place 27th at Worlds and, after nearly falling the train at the start of the season, took home another \$18,000 and change with an eighth-place finish in the Player of the Year standings.

He picked up right where he left off with another Top 8 in Columbus and just this past weekend, after 12 fruitless trips to the Top 8, he finally won his first Grand Prix trophy in Helsinki. Once considered among the best French players, he now deserves consideration as one of the game's best players -- period.

When asked to explain his recent successes, the Limited-format specialist credited friends and being prepared to play that other format most Pros profess to hate.

"2003-2004 has definitely been my best season as I finished eighth at the race after almost falling from the train," Ruel said. "The new thing for me is to get good results in Constructed. Even though I still don't feel like I am good, I can pick the right deck more and more often before a tournament. Big thanks to Yann Hamon for giving me the Goblin deck the night before Columbus!"

Olivier Ruel

Pro Tour Columbus -- Extended Format, Fifth Place -- Goblins

Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Bloodstained Mire 4 Mountain 4 Rishadan Port 4 Shadowblood Ridge 4 Sulfurous Springs 2 Swamp <hr/> <p>22 lands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Goblin Matron 4 Goblin Piledriver 4 Goblin Ringleader 1 Goblin Sharpshooter 4 Goblin Warchief 3 Mogg Fanatic 1 Siege-Gang Commander 4 Skirk Prospector 1 Sparksmith <hr/> <p>26 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Burning Wish 4 Cabal Therapy 2 Chrome Mox 2 Living Death <hr/> <p>12 other spells</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Cave-In 1 Chainer's Edict 3 Cranial Extraction 1 Decompose 3 Duress 1 Meltdown 1 Patriarch's Bidding 1 Perish 1 Pyroclasm 1 Reanimate 1 Tendrils of Agony <hr/> <p>15 sideboard cards</p>

Olivier is on a good pace to surpass his Player of the Year finish from last year. Not only has he gotten off to a better start, but the new Pro Tour Point system that went into place this season is less top-heavy in favor of winning a Pro Tour than in seasons past. Under the new system, Pro Tour winners only receive 25 points. Olivier



has yet to win a Pro Tour although he seems to finish in the money at will. He had no complaints about the new system.

"It seems a lot more fair, 32 was really ridiculous," he said. "This new system should award the more consistent players."

When asked what it would take to add a Pro Tour trophy to his mantle, Ruel downplayed his accomplishments and explained how much has to go right once you make it to the Top 8.

"I consider Amsterdam 2004 as my only PT Top 8 I really deserved. I've been really lucky in Osaka and Columbus. Both times I didn't play my own deck. Winning is very hard. You need many things to happen. Good testing, good deck in the metagame (which is sometimes also true in draft), luck in the games, good match ups in the top 8..."

Things had to go very right for Oliver in Helsinki this weekend as he was in 14th place going into the final round and had discounted any chance of making the Top 8. Once he got into the final group, he drafted a three-color deck and was able to emerge with his first Grand Prix title. It is not a draft strategy he hopes to employ in Nagoya.

"Heh," laughed Ruel. "Certainly not. I was so tired and so surprised to be Top 8 in Helsinki that I really tried to have the funniest deck I could. I destroyed Anton Jonsson's draft, which I really regret, but when I started going into his colors I didn't have much choice, which I think he understood."



Ruel hoists his prize from Grand Prix-Helsinki.

Olivier and his brother Antoine are both known for their unusual designs for **Magic** Invitational cards as for the play skill that got them to the Invitational in the first place. One year they came up with a card called Penguinscape that was an enchantment that made all penguins in play blue. With his impressive record of late, it seems that Olivier could be making a return trip to the **Magic** All-Star event.

"When my brother and I first qualified for the Invitational in Capetown we didn't have much inspiration so we started thinking of how bad a card could be," explained Ruel. "So we tried to do something funny that no one would ever want to open in a pack -- '&#\$' that must be my 12th Ruel!' -- We knew this type of card wouldn't be published but we did not have a good chance to win and we came for fun so we went for the bad funny cards.

"I chose a penguin because I just find them so cute. I almost went for koalas but I like blue a lot more. One day I met a Japanese guy in GP-Rimini, and he asked me why Penguinscape would make penguins blue and not white and black . . . good point indeed, but I guess living on an island made them blue. I hope I can be elected for the invitational this year, I'm sure I can design better."

It appears that Oliver may be getting the band back together for Pro Tour-Atlanta, saying his team should be himself, Antoine and Jeudon.



Ruel has plenty to smile about lately.

"It depends on how much Florent practices before the PT. At his best level he's a much better drafter than Antoine and I but he hasn't played much lately."

If he and Antoine can find a willing third member, they may travel to Japan weeks ahead of the Pro Tour in Nagoya to play in the Japanese Team Grand Prix as well. There is no European Team Grand Prix on the schedule so Japan is one of the few options he has on the GP circuit.

Not that Olivier minds being in Japan. The affable Frenchman gets along with just about everyone. He is also one of the few Western players to have forged bonds with the Japanese players. If he and Antoine can't find a third to travel with, they have toyed with the idea of picking up a Japanese Pro for their third.

"Only the Japanese are really different from everyone else. They are really nice, despite they don't speak much English. They never complain when they lose. And some of them are among the nicest people I've had the chance to meet. I really wish everyone would get to meet Go Anan or Tsuyoshi Fujita some day," Ruel said when asked to describe the different clusters of players around the world.

Ruel values the opportunities that **Magic** has afforded him as much as the financial aspect of winning.

"I like tournaments, I like the people I meet there. With **Magic** I traveled all over the world, learned English, met so many people and discovered so many places, cultures, mentalities."

The next event up on Olivier's travel calendar won't take him very far from home. Grand Prix-Paris will be just moments from where he lives, but with almost 1,500 players expected he knows it will be one of the toughest Grand Prix he has ever played in. I know I won't be surprised to see another picture of Olivier hoisting a trophy.

Got Decks?

Tired of crawling through the Champs page to download those text files to playtest the new Standard format. Well, have we got a zip file for you. There are more than 900 Champs Top 8 decklists in one fat download if you just [click here](#). Happy testing...see you in the casual room.

One Good Link Deserves Another

Jason Mastaitis writes a Mets Blog over at <http://www.nj.com/weblogs/mets/> that is part of my morning web ritual. He also writes for Doc Baseball and recently posted this [shocking confession](#), complete with a link to this very site.

It is funny because although I read the site almost every day (although I could not take the daily beatings after the Zambrano trade and avoided all Mets web content for a while afterward), I never made the connection that Jason was -- most likely -- the same guy that used to come to tournaments I ran back when I owned Gray Matter Conventions.

Thanks for the daily reading material, Jason. If you have any inclination to play **Magic** again, your next Prerelease tournament is on me!

This Week's Winners

Here are your North American PTQ winners from the past weekend. Congratulations to everyone and good luck in Nagoya.

Event City	Event Date	Event TO	Attendance
Denver, Colo. (PT Qualifier)	11/6/2004	Eric Smith	69
Finish: 1. Chase Keaten; 2. Tyler Hatchel; 3. Kenneth Churchill; 4. Brandon Montoya; 5. Kevin Hansen; 6. Michael King; 7. Frank Gradiska; 8. Alex Wappelhorst			
Margate, Fla. (PT Qualifier)	11/6/2004	Jeff Williams	62
Finish: 1. Adam Levy; 2. Brandon Young; 3. Joseph Capalbi; 4. Steve Horowitz; 5. Erik Smith; 6. Djamel Medragh; 7. Bret Herring; 8. Michael Canada			
High Point, N.C. (PT Qualifier)	11/6/2004	Jim Bailey, Jr.	87
Finish: 1. Nathan Zimmerman; 2. J. Sawyer Lucy; 3. Chris McDaniel; 4. Shaheen Soorani; 5. Jason Vogt; 6. Michael Zaun; 7. Jonathan Delano; 8. Thomas Drake			
Winnipeg, Manitoba (PT Qualifier)	11/6/2004	John Mansfield	37
Finish: 1. Paul Thiessen; 2. Jason Olynyk; 3. Dale Oleschuk; 4. Walter Henderson; 5. Bryan Neufeld; 6. Christian Blanchard; 7. Trevor Molinski; 8. Adam DeBoer			
Toronto, Ontario (PT Qualifier)	11/6/2004	Marvin Paguirigan	74
Finish: 1. Gary Krakower; 2. Derek Denholm; 3. Jason Snow; 4. Sacha Bakht; 5. Michael Singh; 6. Charles Richey; 7. Jeremy Kunkel; 8. Colin McCann			
Lincoln, Neb. (PT Qualifier)	11/6/2004	Merlin Hayes	38
Finish: 1. Zack Wolff; 2. Brent Heaser; 3. Ryan Greene; 4. Skylin Thompson; 5. Troy Gould; 6. Philip Rogers; 7. Nick Mohon; 8. John Pelcak			
Rochester, N.Y. (PT Qualifier)	11/6/2004	Rick Lipman	53
Finish: 1. Brian Wojcik; 2. Joe Weber; 3. Lee Churchill; 4. Marcus Gay; 5. Jeff Lickfield; 6. Bruce Brewington; 7. Gary Herschel; 8. Zachary Auburn			
Newington, Conn. (PT Qualifier)	11/6/2004	Tom Shea	63
Finish: 1. Robert Peacock; 2. Chris Herkner; 3. Paul Serignese; 4. Matthew Fletcher; 5. Jonathan Morawski; 6. David Shiels; 7. Michael Cannistraro; 8. Jeffrey Fairfield			
Indianapolis, Ind. (PT Qualifier)	11/6/2004	Victor Aldridge	69
Finish: 1. Bob Wagner; 2. Aaron Hauptmann; 3. Nick Little; 4. Azrael Spear; 5. Gary Richie; 6. C. Raquet; 7. Ben Lorenz; 8. Christoffer Andersen			

Firestarters: Friendly Drafting

The Top 8 for this round of Pro Tour Qualifiers has been Rochester Draft. In Helsinki, Olivier Ruel went into his neighbor's colors to salvage a draft and ended up winning the whole thing. How important is drafting cooperatively to you? Do you try to pay attention to your neighbor's signals or do you just take the best cards regardless of what the people around you are playing? Tell us about your experiences with PTQ Top 8 drafts, MTGO drafts, or store drafts -- as long as they are of the Rochester variety -- by clicking the discuss button below the article.

*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.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Brian David-Marshall](#) archive

