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Just as autumn turns to winter so too do the PTQ seasons pass into one another. We're just at the beginning of the team PTQ season now which will qualify you for Pro-Tour Atlanta. Very little has been written about the *Champions* team format and given that this format will be at the forefront of most tournament players' minds for the next month or so now seems like an ideal time to start.

For those of you who are thinking about attending a team PTQ but aren't sure what's involved I'll give you a quick rundown. As I mentioned you need a team of three players who you'll play alongside of throughout the day. It's much the same as a regular sealed deck except this time you get given two tournament packs and four boosters from which you must construct a forty-card limited deck for each player on your team. These packs are split between the sets in the current block but right now we only have *Champions of Kamigawa* so you'll receive two *Champions* tournament packs and four *Champions* boosters as your card pool.

During deck-building you sit with your team and you can discuss all of the decks with your team so you can come to a joint decision about how to split up your cards amongst the three decks. You also need to assign sideboard cards to specific players; if you have two decks with white in them only one of them gets the Quiet Purity in the sideboard for example.


Every round pits your team against another team, with each player squaring off against a player from the opposing team. You all play best-of-three games as usual and whichever team wins the most matches, wins the round. This is generally considered a better system than individual sealed deck as a couple of mana-screws don't automatically mean a loss as your team-mates can still win the round for you even if you lose.

## Team Sealed Strategy

When building your decks there are a few things to bear in mind. As you look through your card pool you'll hopefully be able to pick out a few cards that are just much better than the rest. I'm talking Dragons, Kumano, Meloku, Hideous Laughter, that sort of thing. You should pay attention to these and make sure you're able to maximise their effectiveness. Maybe you'll have a Time of Need in your card pool, which could steer you towards putting Kumano in a red-green deck. Maybe you want to build a more controlling blue-black deck to take advantage of the Hideous Laughter instead of playing it in a red-black deck where it kills all of your own guys and you can't Splice it onto anything. Maybe you want to increase the number of Forests in your green deck to make sure you can cast Jugan, The Rising Star when you draw him.

You also want to make sure you make the most of the lesser cards in your card pool by pairing the colours up correctly. There are some commons that have obvious implications for deck-building. If you're lucky enough to open multiple Glacial Rays you want to try and maximise their power by including the good Arcane cards in the deck that has the Rays in. If you open up a couple of Devouring Greeds you obviously want to look and see if you can build a spirit heavy deck of some description that will make the Greeds more powerful.

There are also some other decisions that are not quite as obvious but that you need to watch out for if you're going to make the most of your card-pool.



Two examples of this come from the deck-building process my team went through at one of our Team PTQs this past weekend. We'd opened up a nice selection of cards and were deciding how best to split them up. One of the things that influenced our decision was the fact that we had three Call to Glory. Normally, this is a fairly mediocre card but our white pile had two Kitsune Blademasters and two Mothrider Samurais in it. We also noticed a Ronin Houndmaster in the red pile and on closer examination of the "barely playable" selection we also noticed that we had a Devoted Retainer and two Battle-Mad Ronins. This steered us towards a red-white aggro-Samurai build with all eight Samurai in it. We also were then able to maximise this strategy by including other creature with tap effects such as Kabuto Moth, Frostwielder and Kitsune Diviner so that each Call had the potential to double up the effects of those creatures. By making this decision we turned the normally mediocre Call to Glory into a true powerhouse and I had a lot of fun wrecking people with it all day long.



*Sometimes the larger card pool will open up new possibilities*

The second example comes from our decision to divide up our removal spells. We had built a green-black deck and a blue-black deck to go alongside the red-white one. Initially we had a Glacial Ray in the red-white deck, and were splashing for a Yamabushi's Flame and a Red Honden (to go alongside two other Hondens) in the green-black deck. We also had two Rend Spirit and one Rend Flesh to distribute and we put one Rend Spirit in each of the black decks, and the Rend Flesh in the blue-black deck.

When we looked at the card pool a little more closely we noticed that the green-black deck had Kami of the Hunt and a Kodama's Might, which gave us two reasons to play the Arcane Rend Flesh over the non-Arcane Rend Spirit in that deck. We swapped them over accordingly. Once we'd done that we also realised the Green deck had a lot more Arcane cards than the white-red deck, so we also swapped the Glacial Ray and the Yamabushi's Flame between those decks.

On more than one occasion during the swiss rounds I looked over to see my team-mate casting Rend Flesh and Splicing Glacial Ray onto it! These minor changes to the decks made a significant overall improvement and definitely helped us throughout the day.

How you split up your colours is very dependant upon the cards you open and how they interact. Going into the PTQ though, you should have a fair idea about what the common archetypes in the format are, and what cards are needed to make them work. I've covered blue-white, black-red and multi-colour green decks but there are other commonly played colours like blue-black and white-red that also work well together. Knowing how to make the most of these decks is important.

Due to the fact that there are five colours and three decks you'll usually need to split one colour between two decks. Typically you can expect this to be black as it's deep and will hopefully have several removal spells that you can split between decks. This usually means a green-black spirit-focused deck to abuse Soulshift and a Greed or two if you have them, and then splitting the remaining black cards and the other three colours between the other two decks. Black-red and blue-white are the most common choices but sometimes you have to modify this as your card-pool dictates.

There's a small amount of strategy involved in where to seat your different decks too. Quite often the team captain is the best player on the team and they are sat in the centre seat because that's the seat they want to be in if they make it to the Rochester draft after the swiss. Quite often you might see this player with the slower, more controlling decks such as blue-white, so if you have a deck that

you feel is particularly good against that combination – something that has a lot of fear effects for example – then it might be worth considering putting that in the centre seat in the hopes of an increased chance of playing it against non-black decks.

### Team Rochester Draft

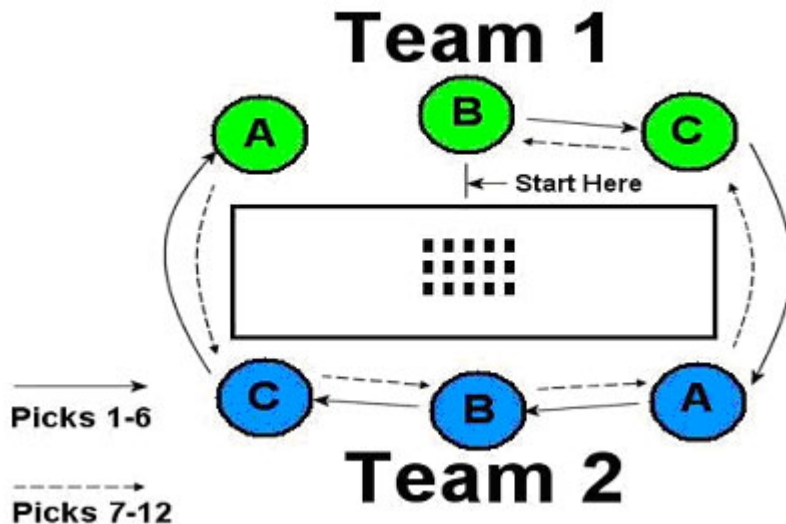
If you make it through the swiss with enough wins you'll eventually find yourself in a team Rochester draft to win the invite. Team Rochester drafts function much the same as regular eight player individual ones so if you're unsure how these work it'd be a good idea to check the Magic: the Gathering Floor Rules on the format.



To summarise though, both teams sit on opposite sides of the table with all team members next to each, not alternating like they do in team booster draft. Player A on the first team sits opposite player A on the second team and so on.

Player B on one of the teams opens up their booster and lays it face up on the table. They pick a card, and then the players continue to pick cards in a clockwise order around the table. When the 6th player picks their card, the order reverses and that player takes their second card and the players then pick in an anti-clockwise order again. The draft direction reverses again when the player who opened the pack picks his 2nd card and then the last few cards are drafted in a clockwise direction again.

The first pack will be drafted like this:



Once a pack has been drafted the next player around the table opens up their first booster and proceeds to draft in the same fashion. Player A on the first team will be the 6th player to open their pack and they draft this clockwise as normal. Once this pack has been completed however that player will open their second booster and this time the draft will start off anti-clockwise, bouncing off of player B on that team.

This might all sound a little confusing but it's very simple in practice and there will be judges on hand to clarify anything for you and to remind you when each pack switches direction.

The basic result of this style of drafting is that your team drafts two thirds of the packs in a clockwise direction, and one third of the packs in an anti-clockwise direction. This means the player in seat C gets the highest number of "first" picks from the pack; they get to pick from seven different packs opened by your team before the other team can take a card from them.

For this reason I prefer to have this player drafting some variation of the multi-colour green deck I discussed a few weeks ago. By doing this you increase the likelihood that you'll be able to successfully play any of the bombs that your team might open. Green has a good amount of mana-fixers and if your green deck opens up something like Kumano or Kokusho you'll be able to play it instead of having to hate-draft it from your opponents. Typically I'd draft the C seat as a green-black Spirit deck that splashes for any bombs you might open as this gives you a lot of chances of drafting Devouring Greed to push the power level of that deck up significantly.

How you split the other colours can depend on how the packs open for you. In the Rochester draft my team participated in we drafted red-white in seat B, and blue-black in seat A. This ensured that we weren't sharing any colours with neighbouring team-mates. This strategy worked out well for us on the day; we were able to sweep our opponents and win the invite to PT Atlanta.

Another choice you can make in the draft is to draft your colours reactively, instead of simply deciding your colours in advance. In this instance you would try to draft cards to beat the decks of your opponents. This would mean doing things like drafting black Fear creatures very highly against the non-black decks and drafting cards like Frostwielder against the blue deck, which typically has vulnerable one toughness flyers.

This option is perfectly viable but a lot tougher to do in practice, as you have to keep a close eye on what your opponents are drafting as well as paying attention to your own draft. If you don't have a lot of experience with Rochester drafting I'd recommend sticking to an arranged plan unless you happen to open up powerful cards that require you to switch colours in order to be in a position to play them.

Even when you are sticking to drafting specific colours always keep an eye out for powerful cards and especially any combat tricks your opponents might be drafting. If you know their green deck hasn't got any Kodama's Might or Serpent Skins for example you are going to have much easier combat decisions in your match. Similarly, if you know they *do* have them you might want to play around them where you can.

Remember also that cards you wouldn't normally play might suddenly become playable if your match-up dictates that. If you're playing against a blue-white player with a Cage of Hands and two Mystic Restraints then you should probably maindeck that Quiet Purity you drafted. If you're drafting against a black-blue player then Yamabushi's Storm should probably be quite a high pick in the draft for you as it can take out Cutthroats, Cruel Deceivers, Nezumi Ronin and many of the blue flyers for a very low cost.

If you have a Team PTQ near you then I hope you'll give some consideration to attending. Team Limited really is one of the best formats out there, it's a *lot* of fun to compete in, and who knows, if you do well I might find myself sitting across from you at Pro-Tour Atlanta in a few months!



*Knowing your opponent's combat tricks can make tough choices easy.*

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