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The Class of Columbus



Brian David-Marshall · *The Week That Was*
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This past week saw the last major event before the bulk of the **Magic** community begins to turn its attention to 60-card decks for two months. Grand Prix—Osaka all but closes the books on the Team Limited season, with just one more weekend of PTQs to go. The week after that is the always exciting Prerelease weekend, but a scant seven days later the Extended PTQ season will kick off while the pros are busy drafting in Japan.

PTQ players have a veritable smorgasbord of decks from which to choose. You need only look at the results from [Pro Tour—Columbus](#). The Top 8 featured eight distinctly different decks, and if you step back and take a bigger picture you find a few more archetypes lurking in the Top 16. I turned to the players who know the format best to find out what they thought about their performance, the upcoming Extended PTQ and GP season, as well what changes they would make to their decks if they were to play them again.

Extended PTQ season
If you're looking to flex your Extended muscles, there are plenty of opportunities over the next few months. In addition to the [PTQ season starting Jan. 29](#) that feeds Pro Tour—Philadelphia, [Grand Prix](#) in Boston, Eindhoven, Seattle, and Singapore offer the format.

I chased these guys down all over the globe and I was able to sit seven of them down long enough to answer my questions. Pro Tour Winner Pierre Canali (Affinity), runner-up Shuhei Nakamura (Red Deck Wins), third-place finisher Nick West (Scepter-Chant), fifth-place finisher Gadiel Szleifer (Reanimator), sixth-place finisher Masashi Oiso (Black Desire), seventh-place finisher Ryuichi Arita (Life), and eighth-place finisher Geoffrey Siron (Madness) were all kind enough to discuss the Extended format. (Special thanks to Ron Foster and Raphaël Levy for translation services!)



The Class of Columbus: Siron, Oiso, Ruel, Nakamura, Arita, Canali, West, Szleifer.

BDM: When you finally chose the deck that you played into the Top 8 of Pro Tour—Columbus, what were the factors that led you to make that decision? What decks did you expect to see? What kind of metagame were you expecting?

Pierre (Affinity): First of all, I thought that everyone had in mind that the deck was not really adapted to the format, because of all the hate cards such as [Pulverize](#), [Energy Flux](#), [Pernicious Deed](#)... So most of the players thought: Affinity is going to be hated against, no one will play it. If no one plays it,

let's leave the hate cards out of the sideboards. As planned, everyone thought this way, and eventually, playing Affinity worked out perfectly. I thought every deck could be played as no decks had much better results than any other. "The Rock" was on the top list, and Affinity was pretty solid against it.

Shuhei (Red Deck Wins): I figured there would be people playing Affinity, and there would be lots of Goblins, Rock, and Reanimator. The way I pictured [the metagame] is that it all comes down to how much people were still expecting Affinity. MTGO was a bonanza of Affinity hate before the banning of Skullclamp. How many people would test post-Skullclamp Affinity in Extended online? How many people would put strong anti-Affinity cards like Pulverize, Energy Flux, or Shatterstorm in their decks?

Nick (Scepter-Chant): I knew the deck, I had designed it, and I didn't expect people to have tested against it giving it an edge. In testing, the deck also proved excellent against the decks I thought many people would play -- combos like Reanimator and Aluren, with some other wacky decks and loads of Rock and Tog. I thought there would be slightly less beatdown.

Gadiel (Reanimator): The factor was that my deck had good matchups with Rock, Goblins, Red Deck Wins, blue-green, and Affinity . . . and could still beat the other decks. I expected a little bit of everything because the Extended PT always has that.

Masashi (Black Desire): I was expecting The Rock, Reanimator, and RDW. Still, I didn't expect the metagame to be completely made up of just those three. Most combo decks can't beat The Rock, so I went in assuming that there wouldn't be many combo decks.

Ryuichi (Life): It's the same deck I used at Grand Prix–Okayama. I was expecting Red Deck Wins, Goblins, and Malka (Rock). I thought there would be a lot of combo decks.

Geoffrey (Madness): During testing we had 50/50 against almost all the field except Life. We expected a lot of Rock so it was a obvious choice. We thought the field would be 30 percent Rock, 20 percent RDW, 15 percent blue-green, 15 percent Tog, and 20 percent the rest of the field.

BDM: *Where did your deck come from?*

Pierre: Guillaume Matignon thought about adding **Meddling Mage** to the deck, some other Frenchmen and I worked on it. Raphaël Levy believes he helped with the sideboard.

Shuhei: I didn't feel that any of the decks I was working on were at the level they could win, so I asked Oiso and Katsuhiro Mori to show me how their Desire deck worked, and I also asked Tsuyoshi Fujita to show me how his RDW deck worked, planning on choosing between them. I ran out of time, and with only 15 minutes left before the beginning of the tournament, I decided to use RDW because it was the simpler one.

Nick: My own creation.

Gadiel: It is basically based off a Grand Prix Top 8 list but I changed it substantially.

Masashi: I tweaked the design of the deck I used in GP Okayama.

Ryuichi: I borrowed my deck from Ibamoto.

Geoffrey: It was a mix of different decklists from PTQs, Grand Prix, and Pro Tours.

BDM: *Let's talk about matchups. What were your best matchups in the Swiss rounds? The worst ones? How much of your success and/or failure in the Top 8 was due to matchups? Was there any deck you were hoping to face in the Top 8? Any you wanted to avoid?*

Pierre: My best matchup was Aluren, and the worst Mind's Desire. I don't think I could have gotten better matchups -- the Life deck being the deck I definitely didn't want to face, and Madness being the one I did want to face.

Shuhei: RDW can win against almost any deck, but it has trouble catching up if the opponent starts out fast. However, if its opponent takes even just one or two turns to try to set up, RDW can just kill them. Probably the best matchup is against Cephalid Breakfast. For obvious reasons, the worst is Life. RDW has no chance against that deck without Sulfuric Vortex. I lost two rounds in the Swiss to Goblins, so I was hoping I didn't get paired up against Olivier. Since RDW works against just about any deck, I figured my chances against anyone but

Reviewing Columbus

Can't remember exactly what went down at Pro Tour–Columbus? Check out these pages for helpful reminders:

- [Deck archetype breakdown](#)
- [Top 8 profiles](#)
- [Top 8 decklists](#)
- [Complete coverage](#)

Arita were about equal.

Nick: Reanimator decks seemed to be the best matchup (7-0 against them in the Swiss) but I am always partial to playing Aluren. It seems like they can't ever win. I was hoping Gadiel would beat RDW as that gave me two combo decks up to the finals. Matchups are very important as matches are best of 5. I think any of the Top 8 decks could have made the finals if they chose the pairings

Gadiel: Scepter-Chant and Life were the worst matchups. I actually got my best matchup [in the Top 8] and just got screwed. I would have wanted to avoid Life and Scepter Chant but it didn't come to that.

Masashi: My deck has good odds against The Rock and Life, but struggles against Affinity. I was hoping to see UG Madness, Reanimator, Life, or WU Scepter. I didn't want to hit Affinity, Goblins, or RDW.

Ryuichi: I had a good matchup against most decks, because mine wins on life. If it's a deck that defeats you regardless of your life -- like a Brain Freeze/Millstone deck -- then I'm in trouble. My best matchups are against Madness, Goblins, and RDW. My worst matchups are against Desire and Scepter-Chant.

Geoffrey: You don't really have good matchups with this deck but don't have bad ones either . . . except Life. If I could have chosen, I would have liked to play against Reanimator. I played Canali's Affinity in the quarters and after my roommate tested all night the matchup was 60/40 in his favor. The main reason was that the sideboard was not really tuned to beat Affinity. What is tough in blue-green madness is that you can tune your deck against different matchups just by changing sideboard card. For example, against Mind's Desire you really want to run **Stifle** in sideboard, if you do it's a easy matchup. If you don't it's a really hard matchup.

BDM: *What do you think of the other Top 8 decks? Are there any you would choose over the deck you played in Columbus if you had to play Extended tomorrow?*

Pierre: I liked the others decks in the Top 8...except for Madness maybe. I don't think that I would change decks if I were to play an Extended tournament -- maybe Desire, it's great -- but I would have to play it a lot before I could pretend to play it well.

Shuhei: Affinity, Goblin, Reanimator, and Madness are all good metagame decks, and while they are established archetypes, there's still room for personal touches -- there's room for some different cards to be used. Scepter and Life are both rogue decks that caught people by surprise. They did well because no one was expecting them. Desire is a deck that has seen a lot of play and have been thoroughly tested, so it's a near-perfect deck. All of them had the potential to win the event; it was a matter of matchups. I think this Top 8 was one of the best ever, because it exemplifies the variety and potential inherent in **Magic**. If I were to play in an Extended event tomorrow, I think I would take RDW, just because I have an intimate understanding of how it works (I actually used a similar deck at last year's Finals). I'm interested in Oiso's Desire deck, too -- I'd like to try that sometime.

Nick: I think all the decks in the Top 8 are excellent. They accurately depict what the field should contain. I will play what I think has the best chance and that will change from tournament to tournament. Tomorrow? I'll play Madness as it is relatively straightforward and has good all around matchups. I would add **Waterfront Bouncers** to the Top 8 version before playing it.

Gadiel: Reanimator, I still feel is one of the top 2 decks in the format. I think Life is the other.

Masashi: I think they're all good decks. After looking at the results, if I were to use a different deck, I think probably the best one overall is Life.

Ryuichi: I wasn't expecting Scepter-Chant.



Pierre Canali piloted Affinity to a PT victory.

Geoffrey: I am a big fan of Aluren. I think that the Netherlands build by Frank Karsten was really good even if I think that **Havenwood Battleground** is bad.

BDM: *Turning to the Extended PTQ season, what do you expect the scene to look like in a couple of weeks?*

Pierre: I would say the same decks as in Columbus, with a greater showing of Affinity. I expect to see a lot more **Energy Flux** and **Pulverize** and likes in the sideboards.

Shuhei: I imagine that the metagame will become narrowed in the next few weeks. It's hard to predict which will be the top decks, but it's likely that unique decks similar to the Life deck will show up.

Nick: Like the Top 8, but with Cephalid Breakfast and Rock there too.

Masashi: I think The Rock will disappear, and Life and other combo decks will come to the forefront.

Geoffrey: Lots of RDW.

BDM: *If for some inexplicable reason you found yourself playing in the PTQ ranks this February, what deck would you be playing and why?*

Pierre: Affinity I think, not because it's the best deck but because I feel comfortable with it. I've already played it a lot and have the necessary training to play it again even though the surprise effect won't be the same.

Shuhei: I would use RDW or Goblin. Both of these are relatively easy decks to play, and you can build a sideboard that works against any Top 8 contender deck.

Nick: Again, something consistent and all-around solid. Like Madness.

Gadiel: Ummm . . . a sealed deck because I would win anyway. I guess Reanimator or Life because they are the best decks, like I said.

Masashi: I would play Life. It has favorable matchups against just about every other deck in the environment.

Ryuichi: I would play an infinite life deck. It's pretty easy to use, and it has favorable matchups against most decks, especially if you know how to sideboard.

Geoffrey: Aluren, it is the funniest deck.

BDM: *Were there any decks from Columbus that finished outside the Top 8 that merit the attention of PTQ players? Were there any decks that did not show up in force but might do well in the wake of the Columbus results?*

Pierre: Yes!! The terrific Cephalid Breakfast!! An interesting deck made in Spain!!

Shuhei: Cephalid Breakfast. If it wasn't so weak against RDW, there would have been at least one person in the Top 8 with it. I wouldn't be surprised to see permission decks with Counterspell show up.

Nick: Cephalid Breakfast, this deck is powerful and although subtly different from Reanimator it is probably more powerful. The Chant Control I and a few others played along with Life did really well, based on the numbers of those decks showing up. All of these decks did really well so I think they will be more played in a greater percentage than they were in Columbus.

Gadiel: That Spanish combo deck was pretty good. Rock merits attention in that it sucks.

Masashi: Cephalid Breakfast. Neither I or anyone I test with even thought of that one. It's a really interesting deck -- I'd like



to try playing it sometime. Maybe Dancing Ghoul, because it's so hard to stop.

Ryuichi: Even though it didn't make it to the Top 8, I thought Cephalid Breakfast was really interesting -- I think I would choose that one, because it looks fun.

Geoffrey: Bernardo Da Costa Cabral made top 16 with a Scepter-Chant deck that is probably a lot better than the one Nick West was playing.

BDM: *If you were going to play the same deck, what changes would you make to it based on the Columbus results? What would your sideboard be?*

Pierre: I would tune the deck more for the mirror matchup, and less against The Rock.

Shuhei: I can't think of any changes to make to the main board. Maybe I would add Pillage as a metagame card. As for the sideboard, I thought about using Blood Oath against Goblins, but that didn't really work out, so I would probably swap that out for Shard Phoenix. Flametongue Kavu didn't do as much as I wanted it to, mainly because of Chill, so I would replace it with Sulfuric Vortex (against Life). I would also add Pyrostatic Pillar to deal with Desire and Aluren decks.

Nick: The maindeck would gain a Daze and the last Fire/Ice with three red Apocalypse pain lands to support Fire. The board would get a Rebuild and an extra Enlightened Tutor. Kai did a good article which summed up some of the good points. I had come to some similar conclusions with hindsight.

Gadiel: I don't want to give up my Grand Prix tech, sorry.

Masashi: I think I would change my sideboard so that my anti-control cards become anti-creature cards.

Ryuichi: I think my deck would do better with a speed boost, so I would put Chrome Mox in. Now that everyone knows what's in my sideboard, I would add a Serra Avatar.

Geoffrey: My list -- take out a Forest and Roar of the Wurm, add City of Brass and Merfolk Looter. The sideboard plan really depends of the field, but four Chill is a no-brainer.

BDM: *Which of the Top 8 decks is going to be the easiest for PTQ players to just pick up and play? Which is the toughest? Can you explain why?*

Pierre: The easiest would probably be Red Deck Wins because there's not much to think about when you're playing it. The toughest would be Mind's Desire: Very hard to play fast and clean

Shuhei: RDW is easily the easiest deck to put together and play. I myself hate red and normally never play it, and I managed to make Top 8 of a Pro Tour with it. On the other hand, the Desire deck is probably as complicated as you can get. I practiced with that deck as much as I could the day before the tournament, but I'm not even half as good with it as Oiso is.

Nick: People are familiar with Ravager as it is current. The beatdown decks are the easiest to just pick up and play where as most of combo and control are harder. If you want an easier combo deck then Life is probably the simplest.

Gadiel: RDW because its just a mindless luck deck. I don't know which is the hardest. I'd say probably Desire because it has the most decisions and one mistake will be the most costly, but Affinity, Life, Reanimator, and Scepter-Chant have some amount of decisions also -- although they are not as hard as Desire.

Masashi: Reanimator is probably the easiest to use. As long as you mulligan correctly, all you have to do is swing for the win. Desire is a combo deck but doesn't necessarily kill in one turn, and it takes a lot of thinking and calculation to use. If you haven't practiced with it, it's easy to run out of time while using it. It's probably the most challenging deck to play right now.

Ryuichi: RDW is the easiest, by far, because it's pretty simple -- burn, attack, burn, attack, burn. The trickiest deck is Desire -- even I'm not sure when is the best time to try to go off.

Geoffrey: Definitely blue-green Madness. It's cheap, can win against everything, and you can adapt the deck to the field very easily.



BDM: Does anything need to happen in Extended? Were the last few bannings enough to create a fun and challenging environment or will something else need to be done in the coming months?

Pierre: Nothing needs to happen, the environment is healthy enough and open to new changes.

Shuhei: The format has been tremendously improved after the bannings. I don't mind an occasional game ending in the first few turns, but it gets a little boring when every game is like that. Right now, I think the right balance of power--while high--has been struck, and the format is really interesting.

Nick: Good question, I like the format. It is diverse but there are some cards that see play in many, many decks. None of them break the format like the banned cards did but things like **Vampiric Tutor**, **Brainstorm**, **Meddling Mage**, **Cabal Therapy**, and the moxes show up in many, many decks. I wouldn't ban any as they are all good skill cards.

Ryuichi: I think Extended is a lot more fun now after the bannings. I don't think there need to be any more cards banned.

BDM: *It is never too soon for you to be thinking about the races for Player of the Year/Rookie of the Year (you know who you are). I hope to see you all in Nagoya in a couple of weeks . . . any predictions?*

Pierre: I'm sure I'm not going to win. I'm a Constructed player and still learning Limited! Although I think I'm starting to understand. My predictions? No one will stop Olivier!

Shuhei: I think it will be hard for anyone to overtake Canali in the Rookie race, after he won Columbus. After all, you need to get invited to the Pro Tour first, so it's quite a hurdle. Nicholas West might be able to do it, though. As for Player of the Year, I'd like to say ME! but that's a little unrealistic. Considering he's already won a GP this season, I'm betting it will be Olivier Ruel -- he seems to have the wind at his back this year.



Many point to Olivier Ruel for Player of the Year.

Nick: Myself and Pierre Canali both have many more points than any other rookie and if we go to all the events we stand a good chance at Rookie of the Year. I think this is the year of the French rising to power, so to speak, but the Japanese are probably still the strongest as a group of players with two Japanese PT events this year.

So for Player of the Year, I am going to predict either one of the strong Japanese players or Olivier Ruel. It is still a bit early for this though and anything could happen.

Gadiel: John Pelcak and I will do well in Nagoya. He will Top 8. I will probably just top 32 or something. I'll go out on a limb and say I will make the Top 5 in Player of the Year :)

Masashi: I think Olivier Ruel has the momentum this season, and will likely take the Player of the Year title. As for Rookie, I think Gadiel Szleifer will take it -- he's shown good results in both Constructed and Limited at PT Columbus and GP Chicago.

Ryuichi: I think either Olivier Ruel or Oiso have the best chance of being Player of the Year. I really want to see Takashi Akiyama become Rookie of the Year.

Geoffrey: Pavlos Akritas is going to win Nagoya because he just had a little girl named Cassandra.

Team results

It was a busy week for teams trying to qualify in the waning days of the season. Check out the [coverage from Grand Prix–Osaka](#) to get the skinny on all the drama that went down there. (There are also some tantalizing hints about the future of the Pro Tour.) The winning team was old-school powerhouse P.S.2, featuring Katsuhiro Mori, Masahiro Kuroda, and Masahiko Morita.

Kuroda was the first Japanese player to ever win a Pro Tour and his two wingmen have done more than their fair share of winning themselves. In fact, of the four teams to make the elimination rounds only one player out of the 12 individuals -- Kenji Tsumura -- hadn't made it to a Grand Prix Top 8 prior to this past weekend.

It was interesting to read in the coverage that Olivier Ruel and Bernardo Da Costa Cabral made the trip to Japan three weeks ahead of the Pro Tour to take part in the event. North American players

without the will -- or the frequent-flier miles -- to make such a trip had to be content with the PTQ scene. Former MTG.com columnist and all-around good guy Chad Ellis made it on to the Tour at a Connecticut PTQ along with Chris Manning and Bruce Cowley. That is two straight Pro Tours for which Chad has qualified via the PTQ circuit.

In Minnesota, Tim Aten and Jon Pelcak were joined by Gerry Thompson and took second at a qualifier as Bearl Jam. You might recognize this as the core of :B, the top U.S. squad at the last team Pro Tour (Seattle) and winners of Grand Prix-Chicago. For both of those events, the third slot was filled by Gadiel Szeleifer, who is stringing together an impressive run both in individual and team events. Look for :B to be eager to defend their No. 1 rating at Pro Tour-Atlanta.



Pelcak (left) and Aten (center) continued their team success.

Perhaps the most remarkable feat of the weekend has to be the performance of Dar Fluggen Taggen (Adam Carrasco, Nathan Huffnagle, and Seth Vulatic). Or should I say performances? After making the finals of a PTQ in Philadelphia on Saturday and falling short of the mark, the team trudged to Maryland to do it all over again. This time they won. Nice job, guys.

Here are all the North American PTQ results that are fit to print for this past weekend ("fit to print" means that your local organizer sent in the results in a timely fashion. If you don't see your event listed, then you know who to blame.)

Event City	Event Date	Event TO	Team Attendance
Louisville, Ky. (PT Qualifier)	1/8/2005	Brennan Moody	23
Finish: 1. 152 Snow Ninjas (Michael Donovan, Jeffrey Blyden, Tim Galbiati); 2. Treehouse (Doug Tice, Tillman Bragg III, Jeff Baker)			
Los Angeles (PT Qualifier)	1/8/2005	Dan Gray	27
Finish: 1. Big Decks (Nathan Waxer, Geoffrey Bell, Nam Tran); 2. Brothers Lalazaki (Doug Lunn, Pierre Lalague, Marc Lalague)			
Dallas (PT Qualifier)	1/8/2005	Edward Fox	17
Finish: 1. Super Troopers (Bryan Bambenek, Jon Black, Steven Livingston); 2. Fully Reinstated (Mitchell Waldbauer, Andy Van Zandt, Herman Armstrong)			
Philadelphia (PT Qualifier)	1/8/2005	Glen Friedman	50
Finish: 1. Short Lean and Mean (Nick Muraca, Eli Kassis, Seneca Hobler); 2. Dar Fluggen Toggen (Nathan Huffnagle, Seth Vulatic, Adam Carrasco)			
Montreal (PT Qualifier)	1/8/2005	Mauro Bongiovanni	21
Finish: 1. W/O Ron Jeremy (Mathew Schmaltz, Stephane Faure, Tobais Rosman-Simionescu); 2. New Bee (Ying Zhou, Kaixin Wang, Ning Zhang)			
Pittsburgh (PT Qualifier)	1/8/2005	Mike Guptil	25
Finish: 1. Sir Marks-A-Lot (John Hunka, Joe Gagliardi, John Marks); 2. Mr. Nice Guy Games (Paul Sekeras, Joseph Lute, Ron Kotwica)			
Bloomington, Minn. (PT Qualifier)	1/8/2005	Steve Port	23
Finish: 1. The Biggest Dirtiest Mustache (Brent Heaser, Paul Ziegler, Takano Sato); 2. Bearl Jam (Tim Aten, Gerry Thompson, John Pelcak)			
Newington, Conn. (PT Qualifier)	1/8/2005	Tom Shea	19
Finish: 1. Succession (Christopher Manning, Bruce Cowley, Chad Ellis); 2. The Tall and Merciless (Paul Calder, Michael Carnes, Christopher Thoms)			
Baltimore (PT Qualifier)	1/9/2005	Laurel Chiat	35
Finish: 1. Dar Fluggen Taggen (Adam Carrasco, Nathan Huffnagle, Seth Vulatic); 2. I.D.C. (Seth Manfield, Andrew Chapman, Jonathan Biedron)			

Firestarter: The Extended Season

Affinity surprised everyone by doing well in Columbus. How much of that was a result of the surprise value, as Pierre Canali mentioned? Will sideboards chock full of **Pulverizes**, **Energy Fluxes**, and **Rebuilds** be enough to keep the Columbus-winning deck in check or will Affinity find a way?

If you are not planning on playing Affinity in the upcoming PTQs, what are you planning to do to stop it? Click on the Discuss link below and join the conversation.



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