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A Major-League Victory

Brian David-Marshall · *The Week That Was*
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Nova are the [Pro Tour-Atlanta](#) champions and I have a theory about how I didn't see it coming . . .

So have you ever seen a movie where the characters do something so colossally dumb that you are tempted to get up and walk out of the theater? They spend the night in the legendarily haunted estate of some deceased, twisted, and sadistic madman to take part in a parapsychology study. Everyone in the audience recognizes the tell-tale signs that they will be picked off one by one in some gruesome manner. Yet they blithely enter past the gnarled doors of the estate where they are directed to separate rooms by the vaguely sinister caretaker of the manor to await further instruction.

"Haven't you ever seen a single razzam-frazzam movie in your life?" you want to scream at them. "The water from the shower head is going to turn to blood and you are going to drown in the bright red liquid while the ornate shower controls become skeletal hands to hold you down. Get the hell out of there right now!"

There are countless iterations of that scenario where you put yourself into the protagonist's shoes and wonder just what the heck they are doing. A guy walks into a room where he sees a dead body and the murder weapon lying nearby. There is no way that you -- having seen countless suspense thrillers in your life -- could imagine the hapless sucker getting his fingerprints all over the bloody knife/smoking gun and yet he will always lean down and pick it up, usually about 30 seconds before the police burst upon the scene.

The problem with that theory is that in real life you never expect that things are going to follow along the plotlines of a Hollywood movie. The first time I realized this was almost 20 years ago, when I was driving around Staten Island with my friends. We were bored and looking for some kind of adventure. Someone suggested we go to the boat graveyard -- some area on Staten Island where boats were junked and bored kids could get into trouble.

After pooling our dim collective knowledge about the location of the boat graveyard we determined that -- not kidding -- the best way to access it was through an Indian burial ground. We trudged through this little collection of plots (of the cemetery and Hollywood variety) and came upon a swampy area that ran behind the high security prison. Despite the fact that it was the middle of the night we had no troubles with visibility since it there was a full moon on the evening of Friday the 13th. I am not exaggerating even a tiny bit here. (When I ran this by Josh Bennett at a "preview screening" the other day he exclaimed, "That is preposterous! I don't even buy it as a story you are telling me -- much less as a movie!") It wasn't until we could hear the packs of wild dogs in the distance that we finally turned back without ever reaching the place where boats went to die.

In retrospect, I would not be the least surprised if we had been picked off one at a time by one by a man wearing a sailor hat made of human skin, eaten by feral dogs, or had to hobble a member of our party to slow down the zombie horde at our heels. And if I was watching myself on the big screen I would have walked out long before that ever happened. I mean, hadn't I ever seen a movie before in my life?

Pro Tour-Atlanta

Got movie fever? Watch Gabriel Nassif, Gab Tsang and David Rood capture their first Pro Tour title by checking out our video archive of all of Sunday's action, from the first draft to the final match.

- Final: Nova vs. We Add (65 MB zip)
- Final Draft (46 MB zip)

Semifinal: We Add vs. Les baltringues de Ludipia

- Part I (36 MB zip)
- Part II (60 MB zip)
- Draft (50 MB zip)

Semifinal: Nova vs. One Spin

- Part I (53 MB zip)
- Draft (37 MB zip)

I had a similar experience on my flight out to Seattle two weeks ago. As the plane boarded, we were greeted by a male cabin attendant in an ill-fitting uniform. One of his eyebrows sat higher than the other and it lent him a sneering quality. When he turned around there was a thick ridged scar that traveled around the back of his shaved head from one ear to the other. It never occurred to me that the "actual" attendant might be bound and gagged in one of the rear toilets. Instead I wondered what misfortune the man had undergone to merit such a scar. This was not the correct behavior for a seasoned movie-goer and by all rights I should have required Wesley Snipes or Steven Segal to rescue me and my fellow passengers.

 If your flight attendant looks like this, **GET OFF THE PLANE!**

I am obviously a little blind in this regard so you will have to forgive me that I didn't realize Nova was going to win the Pro Tour this past weekend after talking to Gab Tsang over lunch on Thursday. All the signs were there but I was just blind to them. This is a different genre here -- we're veering into sports movies -- but all the plot points were intact.

The sports metaphor is always applied to **Magic** events but never is it more so apt than during Team events, where communication and cooperation can make a team much greater than the sum of the individual parts. Much like any sports movie where a rag-tag assortment of players can come together and finally raise their team's performance to heretofore unseen heights.

I was having lunch with Jon Becker and Gabe Walls in the hotel lobby on Thursday when Walls spotted Tsang and called him in to join us. Tsang seemed to be going through actual withdrawal symptoms from being away from his World of Warcraft account for an extended period of time. He questioned his presence at that event and whether or not he could still keep up with the game after all these years. Gab has been playing this game for a very long time -- in fact, I would say only a small handful of people in the room had been at it earlier.

In my preview for the event I mentioned that the last time the Pro Tour had stopped in Atlanta, there was a team event in which Team Canada had finished fourth. While Gab was playing his final round of the Swiss to determine if his team would be playing on Sunday, there was some speculation as to whether or not Gab had been a part of that 1996 team.



Gab Tsang, with some kind of poker face.

After his match I asked him about that team and he smiled, "Nah, that was before my time -- if you can imagine that!"

Tsang actually first emerged on the Pro Tour the same season as Atlanta, so it wasn't that much before his time. He made the Top 8 of two Pro Tours that season, and until this weekend had not played on Sunday since then -- with only two Grand Prix Top 8 appearances in between. He has remained active on the tour and has always been one of the most feared after-hours draft opponents, but the success that came to him early on had eluded him since. How did I miss the comparisons between the weary Tsang and Tom Berenger's Jake Taylor in

"Major League"?

Obviously the most successful player on that team has to be Gabriel Nassif, with three finals appearances and five Top 8s overall. Nassif broke through into Sunday play in his second Pro Tour experience as part of Les Plus Class in 2001, when his squad fell to Phoenix Foundation. Since that breakout weekend, Nassif has been a dominant force on the Pro Tour -- however, all of his other Sunday appearances until this weekend's triumph took part in the Constructed half of the game. This season had gotten off to a slow start for the reigning Player of the Year, and up until this weekend one had to wonder if the high life of free airfare and comped hotel rooms was softening his game. Corbin Bernsen's Roger Dorn, anyone?

David Rood is harder to classify in terms of the cast of "Major League" -- he doesn't line up well against Dennis Haysbert's Pedro Cerrano and the mighty Jobu, nor does he have the troubled background of Charlie Sheen's Rick "Wild Thing" Vaughn. I would actually compare him more to manager Lou Brown, as played by James Gammon. Rood actually pulled this unlikely team together because the two Gabs were the guys he wanted and trusted to be on his team.

They might not have been the most prepared team coming into the event, but the trust they placed in each other and their

ultimate belief in the team concept led them to victory.

(In a nice bit of plotting, both David Rood and Gabriel Nassif had previously reached the finals of a team Pro Tour only to lose to the dynastic Phoenix Foundation. In a poor bit of plotting, the Yankees of the Pro Tour did not make the playoffs this season.)

Nova relied on communication and trust throughout the second day of competition. They did not have any set colors that were defaulted to any one player -- throughout the second day, each player had played all five colors at one time or another. They had one draft against Osyp's NFC where both Nassif and Rood were already in red but they were each able to trust in Tsang when he made a splash into red himself for a Yamabushi's *Storm* that would devastate Osyp's largely 1-toughness draft.



Teamwork helped Nova to a Pro Tour victory.

Their strategy during the drafts was to have the other team open first and then sculpt their opponent-specific strategy based on those choices. If they could make an opponent abandon those early choices, so much the better. They lost the coin flip to determine choice in the finals, but when We Add chose to kick off everything continued to fall into place for Nova.

If Pro Tour-Atlanta were a movie --and in the opening scene a weary Gab Tsang (played by Berenger) slumped into an easy chair and questioned his ability to continue to play a young man's game -- you could safely leave the movie after that scene with full confidence that his team would overcome adversity, pull together as a team, and finally win the big one that had eluded them all for so long. It was only my blindness to scarred flight attendants, eye-patched maitre-d's, and my willingness to trudge through an Indian burial ground under a full moon that caused me to not see it myself.

Now I know that you might be thinking that We Add was the team that should have the Hollywood ending, since they were the first players in the history of the Pro Tour to reach Sunday after earning their invitation to play in a Last Chance Qualifier. They did have a Hollywood ending -- it was just the ending to "Rocky". They will have to wait for the sequel if they want to win.

Speaking of Winning

Two more Invitational spots have been determined with the results of the Player's ballot being announced over the weekend and the announcement of the Resident Genius ballot.

Sam Gomersall was the most popular choice among the players at the Pro Tour when they were all presented with the question "Who is the most feared side draft opponent?". Gomersall is a perennial money winner from England who is definitely one of the most formidable after-hours drafters on the tour. It may seem like an upset when you contrast his resume with some of the other talent on the ballot, but talking to the players early in the weekend he was the favorite all the way.



The other ballot that has been settled is last week's Resident Genius, and Tsuyoshi Fujita won by a wide margin. His deck creations have become ubiquitous components of every metagame with which he has tinkered, and the man who recently introduced Sneaky Go to Extended will get to play around in the unique metagame of the Invitational.

The ballots are winding down, with only a few more chances for you to push your favorite players through into the Invitational fray that will ultimately lead to two new cards being made by the players. You need only look at *Solemn Simulacrum* and *Meddling Mage* to realize the impact this can have on the future look and feel of the game, so make sure you get your vote on.

This week's ballot is another new category that offers you the choice of players whose approach to the game includes traveling outside of the expected itinerary of your average Pro Tour **Magic** player -- whether it is pursuit of end-of-year payouts, for playtesting, or just to meet new friends and see the world -- and take on the mantle of the Road Warrior.

Firestarter: What's Hot This Week?

I basically had enough time to come home, throw my laundry in the washer, and file my column before I have to turn around for Grand Prix-Singapore, the third leg of my coverage journey. I have not been able to keep a close eye on the goings-on over at the PTQ Top 8 page during these last few weeks.

What do you guys think the new dominant decks have been? I noticed that Rock has started to take an invite here and there -- is that the deck to beat?

What do you think the Singapore metagame is going to look like? And what decks do you want me to focus on in the coverage?



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