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Singapore Swing



Brian David-Marshall · *The Week That Was*
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I can't tell you how good it feels to be home for more than the time it takes to empty my valise into the washing machine and turn the cab right back around to the airport. [Grand Prix-Singapore](#) was the last leg of a three-week coverage marathon that closed the door on high-level Extended tournaments until the release of *Ravnica* signals the dramatic rotation of the format that will lop off *Sixth Edition*, *Masques* block, *Tempest* block, and *Urza's* block.

The big story on the weekend was the unprecedented number of Japanese players in attendance at the Grand Prix. There are always a fair number of attendees from Japan at any Southeast Asian Grand Prix, but it is actually a seven-hour haul from Narita Airport to Changi Airport -- a longer trip than a cross-country flight from New York to California. Thanks to low airfares and the new Japanese incentive to travel more for events, there were 35 players from Japan on Day One -- or almost 10 percent of the 372-person field.



Iron-faced Ishida took home the trophy.

When the cut to Sunday came around there were more players from Japan than from any other country -- including host country Singapore -- on Day Two. There were 22 Japanese players come Round 9, with only 21 players from Singapore. When the cut came to the Top 8, there were still three Japanese players in the mix including Pro Tour-Nagoya winner Shu Komuro, Pro Tour-Seattle semifinalist Ichirou Shimura, and one of my favorite Japanese players of all-time and the eventual tournament winner, Itaru Ishida.

Ishida has been a successful **Magic** player in Japan long before that became the norm for that country, although it was not until recently that the world at large has become aware of the enigmatic Itaru. I first noticed him during [Grand Prix-Bangkok 2002-03](#) when he reached the finals against Tsuyoshi Fujita. Bangkok was my first solo event and I remember being floored as I searched up Itaru's [Grand Prix Top 8 history](#) only to find that he was well into the double digits in Top 8s.



Is that a smile?

I also remember being frustrated as I tried to get a picture of him. He refused to smile or even show any emotion on camera. He seemed remarkably different from the much more engaging Tsuyoshi, who displayed a range of facial emotions for the camera, from an intimidating glower to an ebullient grin. Itaru would just sit there unreadable with his tightly pursed lips and dead-on stare.

As I have continued to cover events and become increasingly familiar with the Japanese player base, I have grown to realize that this is a game face that Ishida brings to the table that masks a playful and

engaging personality. It was not until last year's [Grand Prix-Kuala Lumpur](#) that Itaru let his guard down enough for me to find out that he had a pretty good command of the English language and an even better sense of humor. I even caught a rare shot of him -- almost -- grinning.

It is an ongoing battle between us where I try to get him to crack that stoic exterior for any in-game pictures I take of him. The slightest hint of upturn at the corner of his mouth is a great victory for me. During this weekend's finals when Ishida gleefully double-Gushed for the [Psychatog](#) kill, I was so shocked by his open display of pure joy that I couldn't reach the camera in time -- although I did get to capture Ishida happily basking in victory with his friends after the match.

On my very long flight home I was going through my computer bag and stumbled across an audio tape labeled "Ishida." It was an unused interview I had done with Itaru after [Grand Prix-Nagoya](#)! This hidden gem revealed an insightful Ishida speaking about his early days in the game, his growing notoriety, and Japan's rise to prominence in the worldwide **Magic** community.



Ishida is surrounded by well-wishers after his Singapore victory.

BDM: Tell me about how you first got involved with **Magic**.

Ishida: When **Magic** first came out, an RPG Magazine did a series of specials on the game introducing it, and as a reader of the magazine I thought it looked like fun and I went out and picked up the game.

BDM: At what point in the game's history was this?

Ishida: This was right around when Revised came out -- before the Japanese cards were available. There was no Japanese language support -- nothing like what we have now. We would try to decipher the rules with a dictionary as we went along. We probably played a really messed-up version with weird rules.

BDM: When did you realize you had a knack for the game?

Ishida: About three years after I started playing -- dictionary in hand -- I won a tournament. That is when I thought, "Okay, maybe I can be good at this game."

BDM: What kind of tournament?

Ishida: There was another player from the same generation who was giving away a Mox as a prize -- a [Mox Emerald](#).

BDM: It is always an Emerald!

Ishida: There were actually five Mox tournaments -- one for each and I won the first one for the Emerald. All the other ones I finished second or third place. It is when I first though I might be good at this.

BDM: When did you first qualify for the Pro Tour?

Ishida: After the release of Japanese editions of the game, they started to run PTQs. At that time there was only one PTQ in the entire country -- in Tokyo. I played in a sealed event and won the invite. Since then I have gone to the Pro Tour 30 or 40 times.

BDM: You recently played on Sunday in a team event. When do you think you will break through into the Top 8 of an individual Pro Tour?

Ishida: I don't know. I take it by and by.

BDM: Many of the older Japanese players from your generation have had to scale back their game as they move into the workforce.



What do you do that allows you to continue to play the game?

Ishida: Magic is my job.

BDM: I have done more than my fair share to perpetuate an image of you as unsmiling in the coverage -- how do you feel about that image?

Ishida: There is a little bit of truth in that image of me as unsmiling. On the Pro Tour there is this language gap --

(At this point translator Ron Foster interrupted Ishida)

Ron (In Japanese): But in Japan you have that reputation as well.

Ishida (laughing): True.

BDM: Is that something you perpetuate, like a poker face?

Ishida: No, not really. When you are focusing on a match other things tend to go out of your mind and you are not thinking about being Mr. Glad Happy-Shake Hands-How Are You.

BDM: Do you have any thoughts on the increased attention being paid to you and the Japanese Magic community?

Ishida: There seems to have been a shift recently as to how everyone else looks at Japan. We are now regarded as one of the top Magic countries, whereas before people didn't know anything about us. I did not know I was so famous around the world. I just think of myself as an ordinary guy. Itaru Ishida is just an ordinary guy.



Ishida led his team to a second-place finish at Pro Tour-Seattle.

Last Chance to Vote

There were a couple of rare treats this past week as Eric "Danger" Taylor attempted to get out the vote for the Road Warrior category by writing a pair of articles for the two major independent websites. The first was a community-driven piece where Eric talked about the meaningfulness of playing in the Invitational. The second was an addition to the impressive body of Magic theory articles that EDT has all too rarely added to in recent memory.



But in the end Olivier Ruel took the invite, leaving only two more slots for open to public vote. This week you have two votes to cast for Fan Favorite from a ballot of almost 40 candidates. Almost everyone who has appeared on a previous ballot is back, plus a few candidates you didn't have a chance to vote on before.

For example, if you think Tim Aten and Jeff Cunningham were the most worthy candidates for the Writer's Ballot, you can vote for them both this week. You think that EDT was a worthy Road Warrior? Here's your chance to put him through. Do you feel Jose Barbero and Antoine Ruel got robbed in their regional ballots by sentimental favorites? Right both wrongs in one fell swoop. You want Kibler? You got Kibler. You want to vote for Pro Tour winners? Gabriel Nassif is already going, but you can send his Atlanta teammates Gab Tsang and David Rood or Nagoya winner Shu Komuro.

The voting closes Wednesday, March 30 so vote now!

Firestarter: Truncating Extended

When the next stand-alone set is released this fall, the Extended format is going to be completely overhauled by the rotation out of *Sixth Edition*, *Masques* block, *Tempest* block, and *Urza* block. There are two sets we can't account for in *Saviors of Kamigawa* and *Ravnica*, but based on what we know now what do you think is going to be the dominant Extended deck? And how will Extended be affected by having the format line up with Extended on MTGO?



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