

# Counting down to the Invitational Twinkle, Twinkle, Little All-Star

Mark Rosewater

Monday, April 18, 2005



- [Mark Rosewater Archive](#)



**O**n May 17-20 at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles, California, we will be holding the [9th Annual Magic Invitational](#). Now that the field is set, it's time to update everyone on a few different aspects of the event. For starters, let's begin with this year's attendees:

A view inside E3, a riot of sensory overload.

- Bob Maher (United States) – [Last Year's Winner](#)
- Gabriel Nassif (France) – [2004 Pro Player of the Year](#)
- Julien Nuijten (Netherlands) – [2004 World Champion](#)
- Kai Budde (Germany) – [European Ballot](#)
- Carlos Romao (Brazil) – [South American Ballot](#)
- Osyp Lebedowicz (United States) – [North American Ballot](#)
- Masashiro Kuroda (Japan) – [APAC Ballot](#) (replacing Masashi Oiso)
- Pierre Canali (France) – [Rising Star](#)
- Tsuyoshi Fujita (Japan) – [Resident Genius](#)
- Olivier Ruel (France) – [Road Warrior](#)
- Eugene Harvey (United States) – [Judges' Pick](#)
- Sam Gomersall (England) – [Players' Pick](#)
- Jeroen Remie (Netherlands) – [Writers' Pick](#)
- Antoine Ruel (France) – [Fan Favorite](#)
- Tim Aten (United States) – [Fan Favorite](#)
- Terry Soh (Malaysia) – [R&D Pick](#)

As you can see, 15 of the 16 original invitees were able to attend. The one exception is Masashi Oiso, who had to bow out due to school responsibilities. He is being replaced by Masashiro Kuroda, the second-place finisher on the APAC Ballot.

This year's field marks a fairly substantial turnover from last year. With Oiso unable to attend, only four players (Maher, Budde, Romao, Lebedowicz) are making return trips this year. The rest of the field isn't entirely Invitational rookies, however. Antoine and Olivier Ruel, Tsuyoshi Fujita, and Gabriel Nassif have appeared in previous Invitationals.

Over the years, 84 different players have been invited to the event. So which players have been the most? None other than Jon Finkel and Chris Pikula, tied with six (each are winners as well, with their likenesses immortalized with Shadowmage Infiltrator and Meddling Mage, respectively). Close on their heels are five-time participants David Price, Gary Wise, Mike Long and Kai Budde, who makes the five-timers' club with his appearance this year. Maher, Romao, and Olivier Ruel are all going for the third time.

So what devilish formats do we have planned for these 16 competitors? Take a gander...

## Formats for the 2005 Magic Invitational

The preliminary rounds of the **Magic** Invitational will consist of 15 matches (best two out of three) with each player facing off against every other player once. The two players with the best record at the end of the 15 rounds will meet in the finals. The finals will consist of three matches (best two out of three games each) with the two finalists playing three of the five formats. The winner will be the first player to win matches in two formats. Order of these final matches will be predetermined but can be changed if agreed upon by the two finalists. All of the matches at this year's Invitational will be played on **Magic Online**.

*Budde and Rosewater turn away from a dancing Tsuyoshi Fujita in Cape Town at the 2001-02 Invitational.*

The 15 preliminary rounds will consist of five different formats: three Constructed and two Limited. Each format will be used for three matches.

### Constructed Formats

Competitors will need to construct the following decks for the Invitational:

**1) Standard** – This format will be Standard as it will appear on May 1, 2005.

The following card sets are permitted in Standard tournaments:

- *Eighth Edition*
- *Mirrodin*
- *Darksteel*
- *Fifth Dawn*
- *Champions of Kamigawa*
- *Betrayers of Kamigawa*

As a helpful reminder, the following cards are **banned** in Standard tournaments:

- [Ancient Den](#)
- [Arcbound Ravager](#)
- [Darksteel Citadel](#)
- [Disciple of the Vault](#)

- [Great Furnace](#)
- [Seat of the Synod](#)
- [Skullclamp](#)
- [Tree of Tales](#)
- [Vault of Whispers](#)

**2) Online Extended** – This format will use all of the expansions available on **Magic Online**.

The following card sets are permitted in Extended tournaments:

- *Seventh Edition*
- *Eighth Edition*
- *Invasion*
- *Planeshift*
- *Apocalypse*
- *Odyssey*
- *Torment*
- *Judgment*
- *Onslaught*
- *Legions*
- *Scourge*
- *Mirrodin*
- *Darksteel*
- *Fifth Dawn*
- *Champions of Kamigawa*
- *Betrayers of Kamigawa*

Chris Pikula shows off his Meddling Mage.

The following cards are **banned** in Extended tournaments:

- [Entomb](#)
- [Skullclamp](#)

**3) Auction of the People** – This format is the same as last year's Auction of the People with two exceptions. First, there is a new set of 17 decks built by the **Magic** public. (Check out the original post to see [this year's restrictions](#).) Second, this year's Auction of the People will start the bidding at eight cards and 25 life. (If you're unfamiliar with the auction process, read on.)

The 17 selected decks will be auctioned off amongst the competitors. The person who successfully bids on a deck in the draft will play that deck for all three rounds of this format. The auction will work as such: Players will randomly be numbered 1-16. The first player (number one) selects one of the 17 decks. He must then place a bid on the nominated deck.

Bids must name a starting hand size and starting life total (eight cards, 25 life being the starting bid). The next player must pass or declare a lower bid. If a player passes, they are removed from the remainder of the bidding for the current deck.

Starting hand size is considered the primary bid, with starting life total secondary. This means that a bid of "five cards, 20 life" is considered lower than a bid of "six cards, one life." The player with the lowest bid plays that deck in the tournament. Players may not underbid themselves.

After the bidding ends, the next player numerically who has not yet nominated a deck (player number two if he did not take the first deck, for example) selects a new deck. If all players have nominated decks, the nomination returns to the player with the lowest number. After all 16 players have drafted decks, the auction ends. If you've done the math, you've realized that this means one deck will not be drafted.

For more information about the Auction of the People decks, see below.

## Limited Formats

*Aaron Forsythe takes a break from the grind of working at E3 2004.*

All Limited events will have a 40-card minimum deck size restriction. The following are the Limited formats used at the 2004 **Magic** Invitational:

**1) Invasion Block Booster Draft** – This format will be a traditional Booster Draft. The draft will be in the following order:

- *Invasion* booster pack
- *Planeshift* booster pack
- *Apocalypse* booster pack

**2) Vanguard Sealed** – This format is a Sealed Deck format with one twist. It will be played using Vanguard. After constructing their decks, each player will choose an avatar. The three matches will then all be played with the Vanguard starting hand size, starting life total and special abilities associated with the chosen avatar. The sealed product for this event will be one *Champions of Kamigawa* tournament pack and two *Betrayers of Kamigawa* booster packs. If you're not up to speed on the available avatars, Bennie Smith's "Into the Aether" [over the last three weeks](#) has outlined what you can play.

## Auction of the People

With almost 1200 decks submitted, we had a lot of interesting options. As I said in the original article asking for decks, we were judging based on creativity, entertainment, and playability. Because of the auction structure, power level was not horribly relevant. In addition, we weighted our choices toward decks with more interesting word choices. All of the deck graders were told, the more common the word, the higher the bar needed to be set.

### WORD FUN

Among the nearly 1200 decks submitted, there were almost 350 different words chosen. You can [go here](#) for a complete breakdown of words submitted. Here were some of the more interesting comparisons we've come across (number indicates


In the end, we've found our 17 decks for this year. To see the actual deck lists, you're going to need to [read Mark Gottlieb's column for this week](#), but I thought I'd give you a little taste today. Here are the 17 words that this year's decks are built around:

- ability
- additional
- another
- blood
- blue
- burn
- light
- lose
- master
- mind
- no
- pit
- pool
- top
- two
- voice
- word

times that word was the keyword for a deck):  
Swamp 5, Forest 3, Mountain 1, Island 1, Plains 0  
Death 23, Life 11  
Fire 12, Burn 7, Flame 4, Lava 4 (Water 0)  
Discard 10, Draw 3  
Untap 3, Tap 1  
Flip 14, Coin 7  
Goblin 10, Dragon 7  
Arcane 12, Spirits 4  
Light 5, Shadow 5  
Nightmare 6, Dream 4  
Magic 7  
Auction 0, of 5, the 2, People 6

[See them all](#)

## Bob Maher's Card

Last May, Bob Maher (nicknamed "The Great One") won the 8th Annual **Magic** Invitational and earned the right to make a **Magic** card. He submitted a 2/1 creature for  with the ability "During each upkeep you reveal the top card of your library and must pay life equal to the card's converted casting cost and put it in your hand."

I can't give away the rules text today, but I can say that it is almost exactly the same with only one small change (which improves the card). I do know the card's been showing up in the FFL League (the league the developers play that's a year ahead). I also cannot show you the art because we're planning to premiere it during this year's Invitational. So what can I say? The card is going to be a black rare in *Ravnica*. It will be called Dark Confidant and has the flavor text "Greatness, at any cost."

## A Touch of History

Since you'll have to wait until May for this year's Invitational, that doesn't mean you have to go without any Invitational coverage. After all, we have eight years of history to tap into. Last year, for example, I wrote an article that told the [history of the Invitational](#). Along with recapping each event, this article includes links to all previous online coverage of the Invitational.

In addition, here's a link to [all of the tournament reports](#) written by Invitees posted on the Wizards web site. We're even including two tournament reports by yours truly.

Please join us Tuesday, May 17 for the start of this year's Invitational. Remember that in addition to the winner's card, we will be letting the readers choose a card from among the remaining 15

submitted to be printed in a future set (although without the player's picture in the art or the sly flavor text reference).

See you then. (Provided, of course, you don't read my weekly column, otherwise I'll see you in a week.)

Mark Rosewater