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Flummoxed by Fame

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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I am really having a heck of a time figuring out my Hall of Fame Ballot. The more I talk about it, the more confused I become about how to cast my votes. And I have talked about it plenty. It has been, far and away, the most common topic of Magical conversation this past week – and this is with U.S. Regionals less than two weeks away.

I know that I am not alone because none of the people I have been talking to seem completely set on their ballots either. I am not complaining, though. I love the debate, I love hearing from the giants of the game upon whose shoulders we all stand, and I love looking back and reflecting on the early days of the Pro Tour.

In fact, much of the dialogue that has taken place (in the forums of my article from last week and Chris Galvin's article that announced the Hall of Fame) calls to mind the earliest days of **Magic** – even before there was a Pro Tour. Back then the Magic Dojo was still just a spark in Frank Kusumoto's brain, and there were no websites dedicated to **Magic** – heck, there were barely any websites. Players relied on the usenet groups to post theory, argue about issues, and pull together into the online community that eventually coalesced into The Magic Dojo, *Sideboard*, and the various and sundry strategy and community sites that thrive today.

It was quite common to see a thread on those old usenet groups with posts from Chris Pikula, Worth Wollpert, Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz, Mike "Elf" Feuell, Shawn "Hammer" Regnier, Rob Dougherty, Gary Wise, and many more names that eventually went on to become pillars of the **Magic** community. Reading the forums for both of last week's Hall of Fame articles was like a trip through time with every single one of the names listed above and plenty more, like Aaron Forsythe, Jay Molderslug-Sokenzan, Benny Smith, and plenty of interested forum dwellers all chiming in about different aspects of the Hall. (I am not saying that Aaron, JMS, and Benny are not pillars of the **Magic** community -- far from it. I just don't associate their names with the old usenet days like the others I previously mentioned.)

There were a couple common threads. The first was that Jon Finkel is pretty much a lock for the Hall on that ballot and can safely begin booking his travel for next year's Pro Tour. Gary Wise was torn as to how to view this near-certainty.

"I'm having real trouble with my ballot, enough that I'll have to wait a few weeks before making my decisions," Wise wrote on the boards. "I'll be voting for Jon, though a part of me wants to skip the vote since he'll make it in anyway in order to get an additional vote in for someone who I think is less of a shoe-in. After that, I have no one at 100 percent, but Mike Long is my next choice."

Gary's comments prompted two quick and immediate responses. The first was from players who thought the idea of not voting for Jon – for any reason – would be bordering on criminal. Steve OMS wrote, "I do hope that the sentiment of 'let's skip Finkel 'cause he'll definitely make it' doesn't spread as it would be crazy if he didn't make it 'cause of that."

Rob Dougherty chimed in with, "I have to agree with Steve here. If there are 69 voters, IMHO Jon Finkel should get 69 votes. Anything less would be a travesty."

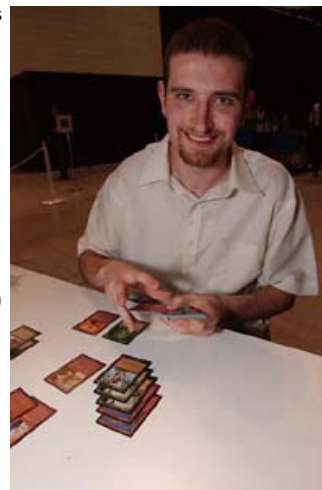
I was speaking with Zvi Mowshowitz this week and he jokingly suggested that the committee did not need to vote for Jon at all. Instead each voter would get to shoehorn one more player onto their ballots. Four Hall of Fame members would be chosen from those ballots and then the Players Committee would be left to vote Jonny Magic into the Hall as the fifth member. Personally, I agree with Rob.



ONE MAN'S BALLOT

Over the course of the voting, we will be posting ballots of voters who wish to make their choices public, along with any additional analysis they used to come to their decisions. If other Selection Committee members wish to provide analysis and explanation of their votes for publication, [click here](#).

- [Brian Schneider's ballot](#)
- [Monty Ashley's ballot](#)



Jonny Magic

The second and stronger reaction was to Gary's suggestion that he was going to cast a vote for Mike Long. Mike has always been the most controversial figure in the game and is – to the best of my knowledge – the only player on the first ballot who was ever suspended for

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Mike Long, *International Man of Controversy*.

cheating.

Multiple posters asserted that Mike should not be voted in simply on the basis of that suspension. We take a step out onto a very slippery slope here which would prevent players who also have been suspended such as Bob Maher – widely considered to be a Finkel-esque lock on the second ballot – from entering the Hall of Fame.

What if Bob gets into the Hall of Fame despite his suspension while Mike does not get in because of his? I am not taking a stand on this either way at this point, but I am putting it out there for debate. The Hall of Fame committee has been handed criteria to use when casting their ballots and it is up to each voter to determine how they will weight each element when casting their votes.

Do Integrity and Sportsmanship have the same weight as Performance, Playing Ability, and Contributions to the Game? Can a player zero out a category – as Josh Bennett asked in a forum post – and still be elected to the Hall?

That is for each individual voter to determine. I am having a hard enough time just trying to figure out my vote based simply on Pro Tour performance before I factor anything else in. Monty Ashley took the time to pull together a spreadsheet with all of the members of the first ballot and various statistics about how they performed over their careers.

In an effort to break out some of the data, I've listed a few top 10s below. If you want to digest the entire spreadsheet, [click here](#).

Career Winnings

| | | | |
|-----|---------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Jon | Finkel | \$291,869 |
| 2. | Darwin | Kastle | \$147,897 |
| 3. | David | Humpherys | \$143,742 |
| 4. | Robert | Dougherty | \$123,502 |
| 5. | Tommi | Hovi | \$102,685 |
| 6. | Michael | Long | \$102,669 |
| 7. | Michael | Pustilnik | \$100,475 |
| 8. | Scott | Johns | \$96,283 |
| 9. | Jakub | Slemr | \$90,772 |
| 10. | Steven | O'Mahoney-Schwartz | \$88,352 |

The first thing that leaps off the table is that Jon has won twice as much money as anyone on the list – and if you add up the winnings of Darwin Kastle and Dave Humpherys, you come still come up \$230 short of Jon's career. He is near the top no matter how you sort the master stats list, whether you look at points, average points, money, Top 8s, Top 8 percentage, or just about anything else.

Median Finish

| | | | |
|-----|--------------|-----------|------|
| 1. | Tommi | Hovi | 28 |
| 2. | Mark | Justice | 28 |
| 3. | Olle | Rade | 31 |
| 4. | Michael | Long | 39 |
| 5. | Alan | Comer | 49 |
| 6. | Jakub | Slemr | 50.5 |
| 7. | David | Humpherys | 52 |
| 8. | Jon | Finkel | 52 |
| 9. | Svend Sparre | Geertsen | 52 |
| 10. | Scott | Johns | 53.5 |

Median finish is an interesting statistic – one of the few where Jon is not right near the top of the standings. Look at the numbers in that column for Mark Justice and Tommi Hovi. They both made 28th or better in half of the Pro Tours they played in. Tommi's numbers are even more impressive than Justice's, since he played in 12 more Pro Tours in his career. There were 14 players on the list with median finishes better than 64th, which means those players finished in the money in at least half of the Pro Tours in which they participated.

The problem with median finish is that it tends to punish players who stick around past their prime. The players with truly impressive median finishes are players like Finkel and Humpherys, who have played in almost 50 tournaments and made money at half of those events.

Top 8s per Pro Tour attended

| | | | PTs | Top 8s | Avg. |
|-----|--------------|-----------|-----|--------|-------|
| 1. | Olle | Rade | 18 | 5 | 0.278 |
| 2. | Jon | Finkel | 47 | 11 | 0.234 |
| 3. | Mark | Justice | 18 | 4 | 0.222 |
| 4. | Scott | Johns | 28 | 5 | 0.179 |
| 5. | Darwin | Kastle | 49 | 8 | 0.163 |
| 6. | Peer | Kröger | 19 | 3 | 0.158 |
| 7. | Alan | Comer | 32 | 5 | 0.156 |
| 8. | Robert | Dougherty | 35 | 5 | 0.143 |
| 9. | Tommi | Hovi | 30 | 4 | 0.133 |
| 10. | Svend Sparre | Geertsen | 30 | 4 | 0.133 |

Another category I have been looking at is the ratio of Top 8 appearances to Pro Tours attended. Olle Rade leads this category with a robust .278 of a Top 8 per PT appearance over his very short career. Next up is – surprise, surprise – Jon Finkel with a .234 average over a career that saw him attend more than twice the number of PTs as Olle (47 to 18). Not only did he win money at half of the events he attended, but just about every four times he showed up he made it to Sunday.

Career Pro Points

| | | | |
|-----|---------|--------------------|-----|
| 1. | Jon | Finkel | 380 |
| 2. | Darwin | Kastle | 320 |
| 3. | David | Humpherys | 281 |
| 4. | Steven | O'Mahoney-Schwartz | 226 |
| 5. | Robert | Dougherty | 222 |
| 6. | Tommi | Hovi | 215 |
| 7. | Michael | Pustilnik | 208 |
| 8. | Alan | Comer | 192 |
| 9. | Michael | Long | 191 |
| 10. | Scott | Johns | 164 |

Average Pro Points per PT attended

| | | | |
|-----|--------|--------------------|-------|
| 1. | Olle | Rade | 8.556 |
| 2. | Jon | Finkel | 8.085 |
| 3. | Mark | Justice | 7.389 |
| 4. | Tommi | Hovi | 7.167 |
| 5. | Steven | O'Mahoney-Schwartz | 6.647 |
| 6. | Darwin | Kastle | 6.531 |
| 7. | Robert | Dougherty | 6.343 |
| 8. | Jakub | Slemr | 6.154 |
| 9. | Alan | Comer | 6.000 |
| 10. | Scott | Johns | 5.857 |

Pro Points and Average Points are a little skewed since the way they are awarded has changed over the years. Players who finished below 64th during the first season – and possibly the second – did not receive any points. Randy Buehler explained that things began to resemble the current system by season three but that things have continued to change slightly as the Pro Tour has evolved.

"The modern PT Point system came in starting with the beginning of season three and hasn't changed much since then," he said. "First and second were lowered from 32 and 24, respectively, to 25 and 20 just this season, but I think that's the only change to individual Pro Tours. Team Pro Tours used to give one point for just showing up but were raised to two points like four years ago. And the team event at Worlds started giving out PT points like 2-3 years ago."

Personally I prefer to rely on Pro Points to determine things over the course of a season, such as Player of the Year and Players Club status. (Speaking of Player of the Year, I don't have space to go into it this week but is there any doubt that Olivier Ruel is going to win that award this year? Last week's title at [Grand Prix-Bologna](#) -- his second GP win this season -- on the heels of his Top 8 at Philly suggests he's on a bit of a roll.) For looking at a player's career, I prefer to look to money, median finish, and factor in career longevity.

If you want to see how two voters have reached their conclusions, you can check out the reasoning behind the ballots of [Brian Schneider](#) and [Monty Ashley](#). I will be providing my own personal process at some point in the near future in a similar format. I will not only be using numbers but somehow factoring in the integrity, sportsmanship, contributions, and play ability of the potential Hall of Famers.

More Candidate Reaction

There were a number of candidates who returned their responses to my questionnaire for last week's column after my deadline. Darwin Kastle, Mike Pustilnik, Terry Tsang, Gab Tsang, Satoshi Nakamura, Gary Krakower, Hammer Regnier, Olle Rade, and Mike Long (in a rather bizarre fashion that was more subscription drive than answer to any questions) all popped their heads up in the days following last week's column.

Rather than reprint answers from each player to every question, I'll touch on one answer from everyone who took the time to answer what I posed. Gary Krakower's email came in about three minutes after I turned in the column, so he's first in the queue.

Gary had conflicting emotions when he saw his name on the Hall of Fame ballot. "I had an interesting mixed reaction of pride and a sense of how old I was," he said.

Gary does not see himself making the hall but was not terribly surprised to see his name on the first ballot.

"I am proud of how I did in **Magic** though I also realize there are people on that list that have done far more in terms of results or in terms of contributing to Magic in general (through articles). I did play a long time and did fairly well for a long time, so in that sense I was not surprised as many of the fellow players in the mid '90s stopped playing within a couple of years."



Gary Krakower just missed last week's deadline.

Terry Tsang looked back on the red-blue deck he piloted to a Top 8 finish at Pro Tour-New York '99 (although it took place in New Jersey) as the highlight of his career.

"The highlight has to be PT Secaucus where I made Top 8 and 2 of my teammates played in the finals. We dominated that PT. Five people played our deck...three [made the Top 8](#), one Top16 and one didn't make Day 2. Ryan Fuller was playing an old version of our deck and came in ninth."

"Lowlights would be my first two seasons on the PT," Terry continued. "I was bad for Pro Tour standards back then. I would dominate locally but couldn't put together good performances in the PT. I persevered though."



Mike Pustilnik was intrigued by the Players Club benefits.

Mike Pustilnik has always been one of the most stubbornly fair players on and off the Pro Tour. He was of two minds when it came to the Players Club benefits for Hall of Fame members.

"I became aware of it when I read Chris Galvin's article," Pustilnik said. "Clearly, it is a tremendously valuable benefit, and one that I would be happy to receive. Is this benefit fair to those that need to work hard to qualify for or stay on the Pro Tour? I don't know. This is a tough question to answer."

Satoshi "Hatman" Nakamura was surprised to find out that he was the only Japanese player on the first ballot.

Satoshi had a pretty good reason for not getting his replies back to me any sooner, as he had just gotten married the day before he sent in his answers. His work

with a Japanese game company and his impending marriage took a bite out of his **Magic** playing time over the past year and limits his ability to qualify for the Pro Tour.

"I can practice **Magic** one day in each weekend, and if I can, I try to attend PTQs and GPs," Nakamura said. "Recently, I can be qualified one time per year on average."

Pro Tour-Atlanta winner Gab Tsang would not be drawn into the debate regarding the quality of play between the Year One class and the current crop of Pro Tour players. "It's not really fair to compare generations. It's like comparing Babe Ruth to Alex Rodriguez – they are both amongst the elite, but A-Rod had the opportunity to learn from the past, whereas the Babe had nothing.

"Obviously if you put A-Rod and his technology in the 1900's he would be the best of all time. But if the Babe and his talent were born in 2025 there is no telling what he could accomplish. I like to leave comparisons within each generation."

Somehow Mike Long turned my question about career highlights in an infomercial for his **Magic** strategy site, but before going into Ron Popeil mode he did recount some of his career highlights within the confines of playing **Magic**, which include being on three U.S. National teams and playing alongside Jon Finkel, Matt Place, Matt Linde, and George Baxter, among others.

Today Mike runs a subscription-based service that helps aspiring **Magic** players improve their game and he puts that endeavor ahead of his accomplishments as a player for his career highlight. Love him or hate him, Mike will remain at the center of the debate surrounding the Hall of Fame until the final ballots are cast.

While Long did not include a lowlight in his letter to his **Magic** subscribers, he did turn up in Darwin Kastle's lowlight reel which featured two near-misses in the Player of the Year race.

"The year Paul McCabe won player of the Year I had the lead in the POY standings going into Worlds and I had a losing record at that event," Kastle said. "Possibly more upsetting was when Mike Long got caught pretending to

shuffle during a match with me at PT-LA and after 45 minutes of deliberation got off with a warning and beat me 2-1 and made Top 8 while I made Top 16 and that season finished second to Bob Maher for Player of the Year.”

Firestarter: What's the frequency, Kenneth?

So how do you determine what weight to give to each of the voting criteria that were laid out for the Hall of Fame committee? Do you value integrity, sportsmanship, and contributions to the game as much as performance and playing ability?

What happens when a light-hitting player such as Eric “EDT” Taylor picks up the seven points he needs to be Hall-of-Fame eligible? Eric’s resume as a player lacks the big finishes but his contributions to the game as a writer have been tremendous.

What about Mike Long's suspension? And Bob Maher's, when it comes to next year's ballot? And what about players who have never been suspended but are considered to have been “known cheaters”?

What is the distinction between sportsmanship and integrity?

I know it's a lot of stuff for a firestarter but that's just the tip of the iceberg with which the Hall of Fame Committee has to contend.

*Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is Top8Magic.com, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.*



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