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Back in the Saddle

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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All right, people ... everyone needs to calm down (at least until Mark Rosewater posts a follow-up to his controversial article from Monday) and focus on the business of actually playing **Magic**. There are still almost three weeks to go before all the Hall of Fame ballots are due and plenty of time to debate the merits and demerits of the candidates. Personally, I would like to see more people focus on the former instead of the latter. Rather than put the spotlight on the bad guys, I think more could be gained by shining it in the direction of the players who approached the game with honor, integrity, and a sense of obligation to the next generation of players who would follow in their footsteps.

But like I said, there is plenty of time for that debate in the remaining weeks. (For you Hall of Fame junkies, we have three more ballots for your reading pleasure this week, all from within the halls of Wizards of the Coast: Wizards R&D Vice President [Bill Rose](#), current R&D member and former Level 5 judge [Charlie Catino](#), and Latest Developments columnist [Aaron Forsythe](#).) After almost one whole month of tournament inactivity, players here in the United States are licking their collective chops at the prospect of taking a bite out of new Standard format this weekend at Regionals.

The Road to Worlds begins with Regional championships around the globe and many countries have already begun the process of sending out invites to their National Championships. There have been Regional events in such countries as Singapore, France, and Japan, but this weekend's U.S. Regionals will mark the first time that *Saviors of Kamigawa* is tournament legal for Standard in a major tournament. It is also the first time that U.S. Regionals takes place this late in the year – late enough for it to herald the start of a new format.

Traditionally, Regionals took place in the U.S. somewhere around April or May and was played out in an explored Standard format that did not take into account the third set of the current block. Now that the Pro Tour season becoming synchronized with the calendar year – ending around November with Worlds – Regionals has been nudged back into the last weeks of June. Hopefully now it can showcase the final act of the *Kamigawa* saga (and further blocks down the road).

The *Mirrodin* block show is still running, though, and many of the pundits are predicting that a dense canopy of green will prevent anything new from shining through. Cards such as [Tooth and Nail](#), [Troll Ascetic](#), and [Beacon of Creation](#) are all on the minds of deck designers as they prepare for this weekend's long-awaited action. There is no question in anyone's mind that the most commonly played card this weekend will be the once-maligned Forest – so much so that players are digging through their common boxes for the lowly [Rushwood Dryad](#) and similarly unlikely [Blanchwood Armor](#).

"Tooth and Nail is so much better than any other deck," explained Olivier Ruel, the leader in the Player of the Year race. "The trouble is the mirror match. I would play Tooth and Nail this weekend with some kind of land destruction in the sideboard for the mirror. I would definitely run [Creeping Mold](#) and [Plow Under](#) for the mirror."

Zvi Mowshowitz is known for – among many other things – his Constructed set reviews. While he does not claim to have any special knowledge about the current Standard format ("I don't know Standard right now. You're on your own," he freely admits), he did identify a handful of *Saviors* cards that he expected would make an impact this weekend, including the set's chase rare in the early going.

"I'm sure [Pithing Needle](#) will be around," explained Zvi. "I expect to see [Arashi](#), [Adamaro](#) and [Thoughts of Ruin](#) around as well. [Stampeding Serow](#) as well."

Players all over the world have been drooling at the idea of returning [Eternal Witness](#) or [Viridian Shaman](#) to their hand every turn with the Serow in mid-range green decks. Zvi did not expect to see any new decks emerging this weekend despite conclaves of designers trying to flip [Erayo](#), [Soratami Ascendant](#) onto the metagame map. "I don't expect much from Erayo. I don't think the deck has what it takes but I would be happy to be wrong."


Zvi may not be up to date for Standard at the moment, but you can be sure he will be pretty quickly as he became the latest player to be scooped up by Wizards of the Coast's R&D department, for the internship position that involves building future Constructed decks all day long. When Zvi was actively playing **Magic**, he was among a small handful of players to hold the unofficial title of "World's Best Deck Designer" and should be an excellent addition to an already impressive collection of



Magic minds.

Zvi has never made any secret that this has been his aspiration for quite some time and he was thrilled that it was finally going to happen. "I couldn't be more excited. This has been my dream job for as long as I can remember."

But I digress from Regionals and all the talk of green. Singapore's Michael Potter took part in his local Regionals a few weeks back and confirmed that green was the deck to beat, although it was far from the only dominant deck. Like any Regionals tournament, there were plenty of players who sought the road less traveled – but that road apparently led to the back of the room.

 "The mid to lower tables ended up full of a wide variety of decks," explained Potter. "The top tables appeared to be mainly monoblue Shackles and Tooth. Almost all of the blue decks appeared to be running **Hibernation** to deal with the untargetable green creatures that Shackles couldn't deal with."

Regionals are always potentially grueling tournaments with large fields and plenty of rounds, but the Singapore event sounded especially trying as it was played outdoors – we're talking jungle here, folks.

"It is hard to play in these tournaments. Seven rounds outside in the heat tests more than **Magic** toughness. You need to be physically tough," laughed Potter.

Back in the day, players at my local Regionals were no strangers to long days and heat. In order to accommodate more players and relieve some of the stress, additional events have been added around the U.S. For example, whereas last year there were events in New Jersey and Boston for players in the northeast, there are now four possible tournaments with Boston, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Connecticut. This does not necessarily add up to extra invitations to U.S. Nationals, though. Where last year's events – for the most part – offered eight invitations, this year's events offer four guaranteed invites. Should attendance exceed 411 players at a location, eight slots will be given out.

Good luck to everyone playing this weekend.

Firestarter: So...

What are you going to play? If you are attending Regionals this weekend, let us know what deck you are planning on playing and why.

*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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