

# A Surprising Premiere

Search

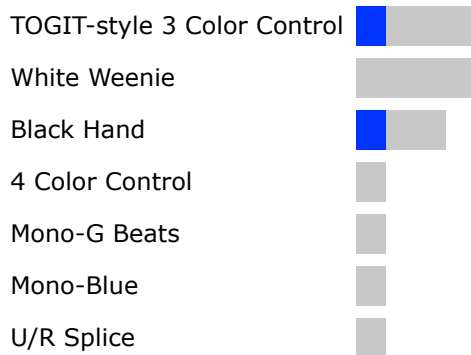
Mike Flores

Thursday, July 07, 2005

The summer's *Kamigawa* Block PTQs for Pro Tour Los Angeles are now underway. As we've done with the past couple of Constructed formats, *Swimming With Sharks* is going to provide you with the Top 8 deck lists every week in order to help you prepare for your own local PTQs.

Many players approach these lists as "the decks to play," but I think that they are most useful for predicting what your opponents will be playing across the table, for giving you a leg up on the competition rather than putting you in the exact same position. Each week we will not only provide the deck lists themselves, but also tally up the decks to show which archetypes are showing up and advancing. The competitors most adept at playing the metagame will be able to use these tools to tailor their choices and make for the most potent archetype decisions... or even give birth to new rogue options.

Without further preamble, the first unofficial tally:



■ PTQ winner ■ PTQ Top 8

(The above statistics come from Orlando, Florida and Little Rock, Arkansas only; at my count, Orlando had only seven of eight decks reporting.)

## Surprise, Surprise

Two things surprised me about this Top 8 set. The first one was that there were only three copies of the card *Gifts Ungiven* out of fifteen deck lists. Contrast that with the Top 8 of PT Philadelphia where more than three times the number of *Gifts Ungiven* in half the decks, and where *Gifts Ungiven*-based engines dominated the whole show, bashing everyone else before meeting in the finals. Interestingly, the only copies of *Gifts Ungiven* at the PTQ Top 8s level showed up in a new Mono-Blue deck, piloted by Lawrence Watts in Little Rock.

### Lawrence Watts



#### Main Deck 61 cards

#### Sideboard

21 Island

2 Consuming Vortex

2 Hisoka's Defiance

2 Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch

1 Mikokoro, Center of the Sea	4 Disrupting Shoal	3 Minamo Scrollkeeper
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	3 Gifts Ungiven	2 Quash
1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds	4 Hinder	2 Thoughtbind
_____	3 Honor-Worn Shaku	4 Threads of Disloyalty
24 lands	2 Konda's Banner	_____
	3 Oppressive Will	15 sideboard cards
	3 Umezawa's Jitte	
2 Azami, Lady of Scrolls	_____	
4 Jushi Apprentice	24 other spells	
2 Keiga, the Tide Star		
2 Kira, Great Glass-Spinner		
3 Meloku the Clouded Mirror		
_____		
13 creatures		

This deck sure can draw a lot of cards. With early game Jushi Apprentices and late game Legendary Lady of Scrolls, Watts's deck is superb at winning long attrition wars. Assuming he makes it to the late turns intact, the top of Watts's curve matches the predicted opponent's Meloku, and goes one better with Keiga.

This deck tries to do something no successful deck out of Philadelphia did: counter its opponent's spells. In the Top 8, Kenji Tsumura's two measly Time Stops were the only main deck permission in the room, but Watts uses his card advantage to set up Hinder, Oppressive Will, and even Disrupting Shoal starting... with six more counters in his sideboard. This strategy works well at collapsing some of the ponderous threat setups of the *Kamigawa* Block, and benefits from the relatively weak beatdown wing of the format to date. Though the deck occupies a position of power because of its ability to answer threats, there are some odd interactions between Kira and the equipment. Thought it can draw lots of extra cards, Watts's list lacks the positional speed of the typical green mage, and does not seek to break Sensei's Divining Top. It will be interesting to see if Mono-Blue catches on as the format progresses.



The second thing that surprised me was the complete absence of Sosuke's Summons. Gifts Ungiven may have been the most successful deck of PT Philadelphia, but Snakes was the most populous... Neither deck made a splash in the qualifiers we looked at, this week at least.

## Inheritors of Kamigawa

The most important decks to watch according to these statistics -- making up more than half the Top 8 positions -- are TOGIT-style Three-color control and White Weenie; both are "old" archetypes more-or-less available pre-*Saviors of Kamigawa*. Consider William Postlethwait's winning deck from Orlando:

**William Postlethwait**



Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
1 Eiganjo Castle	3 Final Judgment	3 Cleanfall
10 Forest	4 Kodama's Reach	3 Empty-Shrine Kannushi
1 Island	4 Sensei's Divining Top	3 Ghostly Prison
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	3 Time of Need	4 Hisoka's Defiance
7 Plains	4 Umezawa's Jitte	1 Hokori, Dust Drinker
2 Tendo Ice Bridge	2 Wear Away	1 Wear Away
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
22 lands	20 other spells	15 sideboard cards
2 Hokori, Dust Drinker		
2 Kodama of the North Tree		
1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror		
1 Myojin of Cleansing Fire		
3 Orochi Sustainer		
1 Patron of the Kitsune		
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
4 Yosei, the Morning Star		
<hr/>		
18 creatures		

This deck differs from the main of a Philadelphia TOGIT list thusly:

- 1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror
- 2 Genju of the Cedars
- +1 Hokori, Dust Drinker
- +2 Wear Away




Hokori was one of the strongest Time of Need threats that the TOGIT-style decks could grab against a slower deck such as Cranial Extraction-based control or Sway of the Stars, and could constrict those trying to gain card advantage with repeated Sosuke's Summons as well as those trying to lock down the game with Gifts Ungiven. The opponent could have more cards, could better finesse his library, but without the mana to use these better resources, that advantage could fall beneath a North Tree or Yosei assault. Yosei the Morning Star holds a special position in the *Kamigawa* Block metagame; everyone plays cards like Meloku the Clouded Mirror and half a dozen other Legendary creatures; Yosei is a potent threat that actually avoids the wrong side of the new Legend Rule; though the Orlando Top 8 looks stacked with White Dragon Legends due to the dominance of TOGIT-style 3 Color Control at that particular tournament, there is essentially no other archetype that runs Yosei, making for a "safer" threat in a format where everyone is playing Legendary cards like Umezawa's Jitte just to run over the other guy's copy, already in play.

to run over the other guy's copy, already in play.

Tony Menzer's deck from Little Rock is a *four*-color control deck reminiscent of the TOGIT build, but adding Swamps and four Cranial Extractions – and it ironically plays more copies of that *Champions of Kamigawa* chase rare than most of the straight black decks. Hybridizing the best elements of the TOGIT list, and even incorporating late game Honden and Myojin action, Menzer's deck seems to give up nothing to add its black cards... until we realize that he has cut what some considered to be the defining card of the format pre-Philadelphia, Umezawa's Jitte itself; Andre Mueller played a similar deck in the PT Philadelphia Top 8.

The White Weenie decks that showed up this week were relatively straightforward. As in Philadelphia, they duelled well, but none has taken a first place so far.

In *Kamigawa* Block, White Weenie takes one of two shapes: straightforward attack with efficient drops, or a slightly de-emphasized offense that incorporates Tallowisp components. Consider Matthew Jones's take on the Tallowisp deck:

Matthew Jones			
Main Deck		Sideboard	
60 cards			
1 Eiganjo Castle	3 Blessed Breath	4 Empty-Shrine Kannushi	
1 Miren, the Moaning Well	2 Cage of Hands	4 Hokori, Dust Drinker	
19 Plains	3 Indomitable Will	4 Orb of Dreams	
-----	3 Shining Shoal	3 Reverence	
21 lands	2 Terashi's Grasp	15 sideboard cards	
	4 Umezawa's Jitte		
	-----		
4 Eight-and-a-Half-Tails	17 other spells		
3 Isamaru, Hound of Konda			
4 Kami of Ancient Law			
4 Lantern Kami			
4 Samurai of the Pale Curtain			
3 Tallowisp			
-----			
22 creatures			

Jones uses Tallowisp to tutor up Indomitable Will or Cage of Hands using Lantern Kami, Kami of Ancient Law, Terashi's Grasp, or one of his Arcane combat tricks. He doesn't need to play the maximum number of any of these cards to generate an advantage; often it is sufficient to slow down one of the slow control decks with a single Cage of Hands or save a threat from lethal combat damage or Hideous Laughter with a carefully placed Indomitable Will. Because the Tallowisp is often being set up with a lethal effect on the stack, a single Blessed Breath or Shining Shoal will often save more than one creature, anyway.

A new weapon that some of the White Weenie players have embraced is Charge Across the Araba. Better in the offensive swarm decks than the Tallowisp finesse White Weenie despite being Arcane, Charge Across the Araba trades land drops for a potential Overrun. Though not reach per se, Charge Across the Araba is a finisher that White Weenie has been waiting for, allowing the deck to bust

through board positions that would be impossible to breach otherwise, even after long exhaustion wars, as well as pre-empt Ethereal Haze locks in the absence of the Dust Drinker.

## The New Blood

The most important new deck has to be Mono-Black Aggro. In just one week's worth of results, this deck has posted three Top 8s and a victory already. The three decks that showed up all had different features, but all seem enabled by the new *Saviors of Kamigawa* card Hand of Cruelty. Put aside for a moment the strength that a disruptive attack deck has against ponderous faux control decks and consider just the next best contender in this format. Hand of Cruelty single-handedly shuts down White Weenie. That deck's options are pretty narrow against a single Hand of Cruelty, with typically just Lantern Kami to get through. Hand of Cruelty doesn't step aside for Eight-and-a-Half Tails, doesn't accept a Tallowisp's Cage of Hands, and always knows which incoming attacker is wearing Umezawa's Jitte.

Hand of Cruelty is just miles better than his White counterpart in the Black-on-White Weenie matchup. Black creatures like Takenuma Bleeder and even Ogre Marauder can provide some resistance to Hand of Honor, and cards like Distress and Cranial Extraction can pre-empt the Protection from Black version much more effectively than White can answer Hand of Cruelty. To a lesser extent, this card's low cost and sometimes evasion can also set up ninjutsu, an important element given that all of this week's Black decks sported Ninja cards.



## Brett Reason



### Main Deck

60 cards

- 1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse
  - 21 Swamp
  - 1 Tomb of Urami
- 
- 23 lands
- 
- 3 Hand of Cruelty
  - 1 Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni
  - 4 Ogre Marauder
  - 4 Raving Oni-Slave
  - 3 Scourge of Numai
  - 4 Takenuma Bleeder
  - 4 Yukora, the Prisoner
- 

23 creatures

- 1 Cranial Extraction
  - 1 Death Denied
  - 2 Distress
  - 2 Mark of the Oni
  - 4 O-Naginata
  - 4 Umezawa's Jitte
- 

14 other spells

### Sideboard

- 2 Cranial Extraction
  - 1 Distress
  - 2 Eradicate
  - 1 Hand of Cruelty
  - 1 Hero's Demise
  - 3 Manriki-Gusari
  - 4 Nezumi Graverobber
  - 1 Pithing Needle
- 

15 sideboard cards

---

Of the three decks that did well this week, Brett Reason's most closely resembles a traditional Suicide Black deck. He has undercosted creatures and big guys for low costs... that all come packing dangerous prices. If Black Hand decks catch on, Reason's route may be the preferred one... 3/3s and 5/5s might have some downsides... but they sure match up well against a similarly minded opponent sporting Wicked Akuba and Throat Slitter.

With the diversity and surprises that have come out in just the first week, this summer's Block season looks to be pregnant with opportunity and possibilities. Swimming with Sharks will bring you the Top 8 decks to come out each week. Good luck!

---

© 1995-2009 Wizards of the Coast LLC, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

