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Change Reaction

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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Thursday morning was a sobering reminder of the state of the world in which we live. Anxiety levels ran high early in the day as people worried about the players and personnel that were still unaccounted for as the horrible news of the London bombings began to sift through the various news outlets. While there were flight delays, three-hour taxi rides, and long walks across great expanses of city to make it to player registration, we're all thankful that there were no injuries within our small corner of the world.

By the afternoon, everyone was ready to put the nastiness behind them and get down to the business they came here for in the first place – playing **Magic**. At the Last Chance Qualifier, 119 players registered for four remaining opportunities to qualify for this weekend's Booster Draft Pro Tour. Players already qualified for the event found other ways to occupy their time, since most sight-seeing was out of the question.

It is unusual to see Pro players taking part in side event drafts, but when Jason Howlett announced that all the drafts Thursday would only cost one pound (approximately \$2) there was a nonstop queue for an opportunity to get in some meaningful practice drafts.

You thought the Top 8 draft from Grand Prix-Detroit was a doozy? You should have seen some of these side drafts, with the likes of World Champion Julien Nuijten, PT Seattle winner Jeroen Remie, Pro Tour Columbus winner Pierre Canali, Pro Tour Philadelphia winner Gadiel Szliefer, Limited monster Rich Hoen, Pro Tour Venice winner Osyp Lebedowicz, and many more of the game's top names all taking part.

Player excitement was very high in regard to [Randy Buehler's announcement](#) about the 2006 Pro Tour schedule as well. They were given a sneak peek at the highlights of the announcement which went public Friday. From word that the first Pro Tour of the next season be in Honolulu, Hawaii to the change in the payout to the announcement of Constructed team events, the reaction by the players was extremely positive.



Top pros matched up for a final warm-up.

Players were the most excited about Hawaii and did not even seem to notice the part of the announcement about that event being a Standard Pro Tour – a format that has not seen play apart from Worlds on the Tour in many years. Despite the format, Hawaii even caught the eye of Nicolai Herzog. Nico was qualified for Pro Tour-London on rating and was looking to follow up on his two Limited Pro Tour wins from last season. Notoriously indifferent to Constructed formats, he had to concede that he was feeling differently in light of the announcement. "I might care about Constructed suddenly," he noted.

Gadiel was excited about most of the announcement, although he had mixed feelings about dropping a Pro Tour. He fully expects to be Level 6 for next season and taking away a Pro Tour costs him a \$1,500 appearance fee. Despite that, there was still plenty of upside to the announcement.



Gadiel Szliefer was excited about Pro Tour-Honolulu.

"Honolulu seems nice," Gadiel said. "I will be looking forward to going there. I guess fewer Pro Tours is good as long as they maintain the amount of money they are giving away – which it looks like they are doing. Every time I go to a Pro Tour I have to miss school; which is annoying because I have to make stuff up."

It's not clear if Gadiel was talking about making up classes or making up excuses for missing them.

"It eliminates that problem – well at least makes it better," he concluded.

Of course the addition of cool sites on the Pro Tour might cramp the young PT player's style as his parents – who came over on the trip to London with him – will certainly want to avail themselves of exciting travel opportunities such as Hawaii and Paris. Gadiel rolled his eyes and wanted to make sure to point out that, "This is actually the first time that I have traveled to a Pro Tour with my parents."

PRO TOUR-LONDON PREVIEW

Brian David-Marshall scans the *Champions-Betrayers-Saviors* Limited scene for a [look at what to expect at Pro Tour-London](#), where the complete *Kamigawa* block will be in action for the Booster Draft event.

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One aspect of the announcement had little impact for the majority of the gravy-trained players in the room, but its impact certainly will be felt among regular PTQ players. Starting with the qualifier season for Pro Tour-Honolulu, PTQ winners will be awarded plane tickets to the PT instead of cash travel awards.

When you are qualified for every event and getting paid just to be there like many top Pros, the change in how PTQ winners are rewarded is of little consequence. That was not true for Gadiel, who was impressed that PTQ winners would now be getting airfare.

"It seems pretty nice for them," he said. "It actually has not been that long since I was playing in PTQs. It has only been about a year. I can remember and it would have been nice to have back then. I didn't go to Japan twice because of the expense. It didn't seem worth it to me to spend a grand on a ticket. I would definitely have gone with a free ticket."

Jeroen Remie had a similarly positive reaction and was drooling over the payout for next year's ultimate tournament. "Worlds is \$50,000? That is ridiculous. This looks pretty awesome."

Jeroen was also impressed with how responsive the Pro Tour team was to what the players wanted.

"It's funny because they asked me where I wanted to have a PT if I could choose and I said Hawaii, and they added PT Honolulu. I am pretty happy about that. I got my wish, I can't complain."

Jeroen was already making plans for Hawaii. When he and the TOGIT guys arrived in London this past weekend, they were sorely disappointed with the hotel arrangements they had made. Antonino DeRosa went to an Internet café and found an apartment for rent and 12 players took two flats between them . . . something the players are looking to do for future PTs as well.



This man may be sunbathing in Hawaii next March.

"After Worlds this year, we are going straight to Hawaii and staying there until the Pro Tour," laughed Jeroen.

Gerard Fabiano was especially looking forward to the changes in the Team event – you would be too if you had his teammate.

"Team Constructed is going to be awesome," Gerard said. "Osyp is pretty good at Limited but he is a master at Constructed and he is on my team."

Antonino was of two minds about the change from Team Limited to Constructed and offered a suggestion to the decision makers for the 2007 season.

"Can you imagine me, Gabe Walls, and Jeroen Remie running on the beach in Honolulu?" -- Antonino De Rosa

"I think it is very good for Day One because they got rid of Sealed Deck," De Rosa said. "In Sealed Deck there is that luck factor where you can get cards that are really bad. I think it is pretty good but I would have preferred to have seen something like Constructed on Day One and Team Rochester on Day Two."

"I like Honolulu," added DeRosa. "Can you imagine me, Gabe Walls, and Jeroen Remie running on the beach in Honolulu?"

Pro Tour-Philadelphia Top 8 alum Mark Herberholz shared people's excitement about Hawaii but had misgivings about the change in PTQ payouts. "Giving the airfare to PTQ winners instead of cash does not seem good to me. I know a lot of people who just go to PTQs and split in the finals for the money. A lot of my friends don't think they are going to do well on the Pro Tour – even if they win airfare they still need to pay for a hotel. I don't think they will want airfare. PTQs are more like \$250 or \$500 cash tournaments to them."

Jokingly referred to as the Pro Tour's Eeyore, draft specialist Anton Jonsson approved of the changes.

"I guess it depends on how many Pro Tours you want to go to in a year," he said. "I don't really have a need for as many Pro Tours as there have been. It is a fine change because each of the Pro Tours will become much more exciting. Players who want to play in a lot of events will feel more inclined to play in Grand Prix events. I don't really see anything bad about any of it except that in some respects it will be more random in regard to the player of the year race."



Even Anton Jonsson was excited about the changes.

The prospect of staying in Hawaii had Anton smiling, but the prospect of getting there erased that smile from the Swedish player's face. "I think the locations are a good change but only if I can get to Honolulu for a few weeks. If it ends up that I can only go there for like five or six days then it is probably going to be a bad place because of all the time I will spend traveling back and forth. But I think it is cool that they are trying to put the Pro Tour back in hot spots –

"– The Louvre?" exclaimed an incredulous Jonsson as he looked down the list of sites fully for the first time, coming to the bullet point about the location for 2006 Worlds in Paris.

"I have been looking for them to do that for years –"said Jeff Cunningham approvingly before being cut off. He was talking about Hawaii, the site almost everyone on the Pro Tour has seemingly been waiting for – almost everyone.

"They need to put more tournaments in Amsterdam! I honestly have to go to the next Prerelease there if they don't run any other big tournaments in Amsterdam," exclaimed Mark Zadjner while his teammate waited patiently to finish his thoughts about the announcement.

"Paris is another great location," continued Jeff. "Team Constructed is a brilliant idea. Fewer Pro Tours but the same money is good stuff. I have nothing bad to say and I am usually pretty critical. All around great changes; no negative comments."

Like Randy said in his announcement, this is a continuation of the Pro Tour revitalization. But what do you think about the changes? Sound off on our message boards and let us know what you think of the new schedule, PTQ travel awards, and even take a guess at where the three other 2006 Pro Tour stops might be in this new Pro Tour world.

*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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