

Gary Wise, Former Pro Tour Player

Editor's note: Over the course of the voting, we will occasionally 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](#).

While I didn't ignore the criteria laid out on the ballot, my votes weighed longevity and community contribution heavily, which shouldn't be too surprising. Here's my ballot, followed by some thoughts on things:



Jon Finkel

While I reserve the title of "Best Pro Tour Player" for Kai Budde, I'd call Jon the best Magic player ever. We all know about the good stuff, so I don't need to rehash it here.

Jon's image loaned itself as an emblem to the game. He gave everyone who played something to aspire to. When a kid plays baseball in the street, they want to be their favorite player. I have to think that some aspects of that relationship can be found in Jon's place in the game.

Magic and Jon grew together. The game went from frontier beginnings to being an international maker of hobby history. Jon went from being an awkward kid to a better man. I like to think the two helped one another through their respective transitions. There's no better-qualified candidate, and there may never be.

Alan Comer

To my mind, Alan Comer is representative of every good thing about the game. Sportsmanship. Integrity. Friendship. Fun. Creativity. Skill. For most pro players, the game is about taking a deck and playing it well. Alan took a deck through the entire process: building, testing, analyzing and playing, performing each task with excellence.

I can't stress enough how important Alan's community contributions have been. In this regard, I don't care about the decks so much, but it speaks volumes about his love of the game that he quit a far more lucrative job to help develop Magic as he has. He made a big sacrifice, giving up his sanctioned eligibility -- a big deal for a guy like Alan, for whom I think the camaraderie of the Pro Tour offered so much.

I'm proud to have had him as a teammate, and to have the opportunity to help the community make up for the wrong dealt to him in the past. Alan is Mike Long's antithesis. Whereas Mike's vulgar behavior got him fame, Alan's integrity hid him from it. Alan is arguably the best player of all time to not be given the chance to play the Invitational. I'm not making this vote because of that, but I hope it can help to rectify that wrongdoing.

Rob Dougherty

If my criteria were based on just PT play, I don't know that Rob would have made my list. Is he a great player? Definitely, but if you compare him to his teammates on this year's ballot, despite a stretch as the most dominant Constructed player on the planet, he has to come out third. What cinched Rob's place on my ballot was the fact he scores so highly in all areas. He's contributed to the game as a writer, player, deck builder, tournament organizer, store owner, token entrepreneur and an all-around pillar of the community.

One thing that's gone unmentioned with regard to Rob is my belief that without him, neither Darwin nor the Hump would have had the careers they had. Rob provided the home base and in my visits to YMG country, it was obvious to me that he was the driving force behind the team as a whole. Every community needs that motivator, and in New England, Rob's been it. Many on the ballot have contributed to Magic. None have done so in as many ways or for as long.

Tommi Hovi

When I started looking at my ballot, I knew I wanted to include at least one European, mostly due to a belief that an all-American class would not be indicative of the International feel the Pro Tour had even in its first season. Many would reply that the U.S. was the dominant nation at the time, and that's definitely true, but the foreign players were good enough that their exclusion from this class, in my view, would taint it.

After Kai Budde, I think Tommi was the best European player ever. Yes, Olle was spectacular for a short period, but if the Pro Tour lasts for 10 or 20 more years (and I believe it will), we're going to start seeing that his career was far too short to compare to the true greats of the game. Jakub Slemr, a personal favorite, also made my short list, but Tommi was the only guy who I felt had the resume to warrant inclusion regardless of nationality.

I remember talking with Tommi on Sunday afternoon at Pro Tour-Rome, just after he'd won his second PT -- the first to accomplish that feat. He told me that he'd almost fallen off the gravy train, how he thought his career was coming to an end, and I remember thinking it was the first sign of mortality I'd ever seen from the man. Tommi always came off as being indestructible: He was the guy who could tell you exactly what the best players in the world were doing wrong, with a self-assuredness that made you know he was right. The importance of his second PT win has been lost in Kai's wake, but at the time, it was huge -- it gave Magic credibility. Until then, it was a game of luck that anyone could win. When Tommi repeated, we finally knew for sure that it was more.

Darwin Kastle

Jon was first on my ballot, the other three found their way there pretty quickly, and I agonized about the fifth vote for weeks. I finally decided on Darwin, who makes it in almost solely on his playing and deck building. Darwin's had a remarkable career, one I couldn't justifiably ignore in light of my attitudes on longevity. That said, he was far from an easy choice for me.

Darwin's career, while obviously great, is devoid of the peaks of SteveO, Olle and Mark Justice, his contributions to the community don't approach those of Scott Johns and Dave Price and he didn't have the charisma Brian Hacker and Chris Pikula brought to the table. He ignored convention, shunned conventional advice and was often arrogant in doing so, but look at the numbers. The man could just play.

I wanted to avoid voting for two YMGers for the same reason I wanted to vote for a European: I wanted to diversify. In the end though, it just wasn't feasible. All three have been too good for too long, and all three are deserving of enshrinement. If this vote plays out the way my ballot did, Hump will get my vote next year.

The Long Debate

As for Mike Long, he was originally number two on my ballot. I've been very active in the debates concerning his candidacy, seeking as many opinions as possible before finally submitting my votes. Two things changed my mind:

The first was his attitude toward the entire process. Mike's answers to BDM's questions showed a lack of remorse for his mercenary attitudes toward the game. There's no doubt in my mind that Mike contributed to the building of the Pro Tour as much as anyone not employed by Wizards, and there's no doubt that he was a great player and competitor. When you watched Mike play, you knew you were seeing something special, but unlike Justice, he hasn't repented in the slightest.

To this day, he presents himself as the unfortunate victim of Wizards' machinations when many who were there would tell you that instead he was the beneficiary of them. That Mike saw this as an opportunity to advance a business that has tried to discredit so many people who have put so much into promoting Magic disgusts me. I'm all for second chances, but Mike has spurned them, and as such, has shown a lot of disrespect toward everyone in the game. I don't think he's deserving of the honor inherent in a vote for the Hall.

The second turning point came in our ongoing comparison of the Hall to baseball's similar institution. In baseball, the honor is the benefit, but Wizards has seen fit to reward entrance with the gift of ongoing qualification and \$500 for each tour a member sees fit to attend, and I think that changes the equation. Long's enshrinement would inevitably lead to his return to the tour, which I believe would inevitably lead to new instances of people being cheated out of matches. As a voter, I don't want to be a part of that.

Before I sign off, I want to thank Mark Rosewater for the article he wrote about his ballot. Mark's taken a lot of abuse from readers for it, a lot of it unjust and uneducated. He was selected as a voter because of his insights to Pro Tour play, and in the end, he made the selections he thought to be the right ones. I think a lot of people have said a lot of stupid things in the aftermath, and I for one respect his right to do as he sees fit. I think he's earned that.

I hope this has proven enlightening. Thanks to Wizards of the Coast for including me in the process. I've thoroughly enjoyed it.

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