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*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.*



Figuring out my ballot has taken me a lot longer than I expected. I've spent many hours late at night after events arguing with friends about who would belong in a Pro Tour Hall of Fame if ever such a thing were to exist, so it kind of surprised me that this task was so hard.

My problem is that every other time I've had this conversation, I've focused primarily on accomplishments and playing ability. However, now that it's actually time to put five guys up on that pedestal to show off the best that the Pro Tour has to offer, I want them to represent more than just play skill. The titles and the big checks are nice, but the Pro Tour is really all about a lifestyle and there's a lot more to living the life than just getting to the Sunday stage.

I'm going to spend a large chunk of this article arguing the case for what I'm calling "Pro Tour Community Builders." This category includes the guys that, in my mind, have been absolutely essential in creating the Pro Tour and turning it into the amazing institution it has become. They may not have as many Top 8s as some of the other players on the ballot, but I think we should be strongly considering them for the Hall of Fame anyway.

### Contributions to the Game

I started out reading the criterion about "contributions to the game" very broadly. I had Scott Johns on my ballot because of his work on websites, Rob Dougherty because he's such a good tournament organizer, and Alan Comer because he's programming **Magic Online**. However, it's not a **Magic** Hall of Fame ... it's a *Pro Tour* Hall of Fame. Thus, I believe we should be evaluating candidates mostly on their contributions to the Pro Tour and not to **Magic** broadly construed.

All the guys I mentioned are still very worthy candidates, but there are three guys who should score higher on "contributions to the Pro Tour" who aren't getting the credit they deserve: Brian Hacker, David Price, and Chris Pikula. I don't have room on my ballot for all three of them, but I'm going to make the case for each of them anyway and hope that future voters will keep them in mind.

Let's look at Hacker first. His tales of he and his teammates romping through Paris (or even romping through the "Cali" PTQs) really showed off how much fun the Pro Tour lifestyle could be. "Props and Slops" was his creation and he had one of the loudest voices in the early Dojo days by pretty much inventing the tournament report. Hacker's article on "The Pool Halls of Magic" might be the best thing ever written about the Pro Tour and it was certainly one of the most influential things I ever read. He's the guy who painted the picture of the "side draft" circuit so attractively that pros started booking their tickets home for Monday so they could stay up all night Sunday and draft against each other.

Over the years he evolved from blue-haired attention monger into an elder of the tribe, doing commentary for the Sunday broadcasts and ESPN2. His personality was large and colorful, but the man could also play a mean game of **Magic**. Hacker and his teammates unleashed an entirely new way to play Limited on an unsuspecting world during the *Mirage* block. They were the first ones who figured out how good an aggressive attacking style could be in Limited. It may sound crazy now, but before Hacker, Truc Bui, and John Yoo started snatching up all the Top 8 spots during the second Pro Tour season, people just didn't attack each other. They sat behind an increasing wall of creatures, playing defense and hoping to draw into an evasion creature. Hacker and his boys pretty much taught the world how to attack. This vision of how the game works even spilled over into a Constructed Top 8 in Dallas, with a very aggressive Bad Moon-fueled Necro deck.

Yeah, I know, he only has two Top 8s and his reign as one of the best players on Tour was pretty short, but for me one of the most enduring images of life on the Tour will always be Hacker at 3 a.m., surrounded by snow drifts of empty booster pack wrappers and discarded commons, top-decking some god-awful spell that just happens to be perfect for the current situation. He turns to Truc and screams at the top of his lungs, leaping out of his chair for a high-five and a celebratory dance around the room before finally playing the card and carving another notch on his belt. Hacker deserves a lot of credit for showing us how much fun the Pro Tour lifestyle could be.

Another enduring memory that I treasure from my early days on Tour is Chris Pikula holding court. It's late in the round, most people are done playing already, and Chris is telling some story. A crowd gathers and keeps building, just listening to him talk. There has never been a better or more entertaining storyteller on Tour. People talk about Long's charisma, but Chris was the guy people actually wanted to hang out with. He just plain made the Pro Tour more fun. For everybody.

In addition, Chris combined that gift for gab with a strong moral sensibility. Team Deadguy, with he and Dave Price as its leaders called out all the cheaters for being the bastards that they were. They made sure the rest of us knew how to stop anybody from cheating us and in the end they pretty much won the fight for the soul of Pro Tour. Nowadays the cheaters have mostly been run out of the game through a combination of better judging and peer pressure.

I've always found Dave Price to be one of the most interesting icons ever to grace the Tour. He has not one, but two kingdoms on his resume -- he's known as both the "King of Beatdown" and the "King of Qualifiers." Dave deserves a large chunk of credit for inventing the mono-red beatdown deck. I can still remember the Origins that hosted U.S. Nationals in 1997. I was a month away from qualifying for my first Pro Tour so I was there playing side events, including a pair of PTQs.

I distinctly remember this buzz going through the room ... "Have you heard what Dave Price is running" ... "Dwarven Soldier? Isn't that the 2/1 guy from *Fallen Empires*!?" Price ran the table in Constructed with an unabashedly aggressive red deck unlike anything anyone had really ever seen before. Sure, it had its roots in the "Sligh" deck that invented the concept of a mana curve, but Sligh was really more of a utility deck. It used cards like Orcish Artillery to remove your blockers and then tried to hit you with Ironclaw Orcs ten turns in a row. Price eschewed all the control elements and replaced them with cards like Lava Hounds. Fast, aggressive, and effective.

<b>Deadguy Red</b>		
Dave Price		
	<b>Main Deck</b>	<b>Sideboard</b>
	60 cards	
4 Dwarven Ruins	4 Fireblast	4 Anarchy
		4 Detonate

18 Mountain

22 lands

- 4 Ball Lightning
- 2 Dwarven Soldier
- 3 Goblin Digging Team
- 4 Goblin Vandal
- 4 Ironclaw Orcs
- 4 Lava Hounds
- 2 Viashino Sandstalker

23 creatures

4 Hammer of Bogardan

4 Incinerate

3 Kaervek's Torch

15 other spells

3 Pyrokinesis

4 Straw Golem

15 sideboard cards

I'm sure my younger readers are having a hard time understanding what the big deal is about. "Red Deck Wins" has been such a constant presence over the years that it's now a cliché, but someone really did have to think of it first. I had a philosophy professor in grad school who liked to refer to truly original thinking as being "like a deep-sea fish discovering salt water." Price always loved to say about his decks that "there are no wrong threats." It was that kind of outside-the-box thinking that helped move the entire game forward at a time when all the other good players just wanted a control deck in their hands that would allow them the opportunity to outplay their opponents.

After Nationals, Price wrote about his deck in a tourney report called "The Town of Red House" that had one of the better openings I have read. A couple months later, Wizards of the Coast demonstrated how little it understood the true power and potential of beatdown decks and released *Tempest*. All of a sudden Price's "Deadguy Red" decks got a lot better. He had been winning with Goblin Digging Team and Goblin Vandal as his one-drops, so Jackal Pup and Mogg Fanatic were "a bit" of an upgrade. Price's career peaked when he won the *Tempest* Block Constructed Pro Tour and he did it by innovating once again -- everyone else was running Bottle Gnomes so they could block Jackal Pup, but Price found an answer threat in the form of Giant Strength and the rest is history.

## Dave Price

Pro Tour-Los Angeles 1998



### Main Deck

60 cards

16 Mountain

4 Wasteland

20 lands

- 4 Canyon Wildcat
- 4 Fireslinger
- 4 Jackal Pup
- 4 Mogg Conscripts
- 4 Mogg Fanatic

4 Cursed Scroll

4 Giant Strength

4 Kindle

2 Scalding Tongues

14 other spells

### Sideboard

1 Apocalypse

2 Jinxed Idol

1 Rathi Dragon

2 Scalding Tongues

4 Shatter

4 Stone Rain

1 Torture Chamber

15 sideboard cards

4 Mogg Raider  
2 Rathi Dragon

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26 creatures

So on one hand Price embodies the kind of community building and innovative thinking that show off **Magic** at its best, but on the other hand there's that whole "King of the Qualifiers" thing. Dave had a lot of trouble staying on Tour. He qualified for each and every one of them, but almost every time he would come up short and be forced back to the PTQs. He always managed to win another PTQ, and he always managed to write about his adventures in very compelling prose, but other than that one win at Pro Tour-Los Angeles '98, he just didn't put up many results.

He only made the Top 32 of one other Pro Tour, and had a high finish of 25th at Worlds. In 39 tries. If this were a PTQ Hall of Fame, he'd be inducted in a heartbeat. If it were a **Magic** Writers Hall of Fame he would also be first-ballot material, but it's the Pro Tour Hall of Fame. Are we really supposed to vote in the guy whose biggest claim to fame is that he was really good at writing about the experience of the Everyman? I say yes. Dave Price helped define what the Pro Tour is and he helped show us what the Pro Tour could be. Maybe not this year, but that should be good enough to get him in eventually.

Returning to Pikula, I think the case for him is actually stronger than for his Deadguy compatriot. They both wore the white hats and together led the campaign against the cheaters, so we'll call that a push. Price wrote more, but I think Pikula's influence was just as strong through a combination of some writing, some Sunday Top 8 color commentary, and just sheer force of personality.

His ability to understand a situation and summarize it in one entertaining line (that would get repeated and passed down from everyone who was listening to him hold court to all of *their* friends to all of their friends) was legendary. Faced with the *Urza's Saga*-fueled brokenness that was Pro Tour-Rome, Pikula went straight to Mark Rosewater and sent the message back to R&D: "Ban everything until Necro is good again, then ban Necro and you're done."

The bargain with Humpherys at the Invitational that helped Chris win the right to make Meddling Mage ... "I came to play" ... "Holy Pikula" ... I don't think these are just inside jokes that friends like to repeat, I think stories like these *are* the Pro Tour. The fan votes for the Invitational would seem to back me up on this, too -- no one in the history of the game has been invited to the "All-Star Game" more times than Chris Pikula. For me, Pikula combines the best elements of both Dave Price and Brian Hacker. He has all the personality of Hacker plus all the popularity and influence of Price, and he combines that with as many Top 8s as the two of them combined. (He's also the only one of the three still playing, having missed Top 8 No. 4 by one turn last summer at Pro Tour-Seattle.)

So that's my case for three "Pro Tour Community Builders." They are by no means the only ones who deserve credit for making the Pro Tour a better place, but hopefully they illustrate the kind of contributions that I think we should be honoring.

## On to the Ballot

As you can probably tell, I've spent a fair amount of time thinking about what exactly this Hall of Fame is supposed to stand for. I think it's clear that we shouldn't just enshrine the guys with the best accomplishments, but on the other hand I think accomplishments do have to count pretty heavily. In my mind, there are going to be at least a dozen members of this class who eventually make it into

the Pro Tour Hall of Fame. That changes how I see the my task with this ballot – it's not just who deserves to be in the Hall, but who deserves to be forever immortalized as part of the first class.

## Jon Finkel

Obviously, I'm voting for Jon Finkel. If I had to have one person play a game of **Magic** with my life on the line, there is no question I would pick Finkel in his prime. Kai is a tremendous player and Kai in his prime rattled off an incredible series of results, but when I watched Kai play I could always understand what he was doing. "Jonny Magic" made plays that no one else even thought of for reasons that weren't even obvious after he made them. Finkel also has more Top 8s than Kai. Kai does have the admittedly unprecedented seven wins, but Sunday matches are an awfully small sample size to use to determine the best **Magic** player of all time. In my heart of hearts, I believe that if both players had gotten equal amounts of luck over the course of their Sunday careers, Jon would have more wins (and thus more lifetime winnings as well).

I think it would be great if getting voted in unanimously becomes a rare, cool way to acknowledge who the true superstars are. Hopefully no one plays any funky games with their ballot this year and Jon gets that honor.

## Alan Comer

I was initially tempted to vote for Mike Long. He really was "The Man" back in the day. I still remember the first Grand Prix I ever attended and when Mike walked in, a hush fell over the room as everyone just stared at him and elbowed their friends to point and say "that's Mike Long." However, in light of my previously established logic, it's clear to me that I shouldn't vote for him this year. I want this first class to show off everything that is good about **Magic** and the Pro Tour. Mike was important and innovative and talented enough that I believe his accomplishments would warrant consideration even if he had never cheated, but he did cheat. The Pro Tour has left behind its wild west days and is much better for it – it's that new, better Pro Tour that I want this Hall to reflect.

Once I came to that conclusion, I quickly realized that I was going to be voting for Alan Comer. I was a little surprised to find myself voting for someone without a Pro Tour win, but Alan does have five Top 8s (tied for fifth all time and tied for third among those eligible this year). Alan also has the fifth-highest median finish on the ballot and no one above him comes anywhere close to Alan in terms of sportsmanship or integrity. I've seen Alan signal judges over to call penalties on himself multiple times. Other players engage in a life-or-death struggle where they're constantly looking for every edge they need to win. Alan, on the other hand, was always smiling and having fun – he played just for the sheer joy of playing. If Alan's opponent pulled off a clever play to beat him, Alan's the kind of guy who would enjoy just getting to see it and then between rounds he'd tell everyone else about the cool thing that just happened.

Being the anti-Long and having a reasonably impressive resume of accomplishments is nice, but the real reason I'm voting for Alan is that he's also one of the most influential deckbuilders of all time. He's clearly the best constructor of decks in this class, and clearly in the all-time top five, and when you consider how long his career as a deckbuilder lasted you can certainly make a case for him as the best ever. For starters, Alan invented the idea of filling your deck with cantrips so you can cheat on land and had a lot of luck with his "Turbo Xerox" design:

### Turbo Xerox

Alan Comer



Main Deck

61 cards

17 Island

17 lands

4 Man-o'-War

4 Suq'Ata Firewalker

4 Waterspout Djinn

12 creatures

4 Counterspell

3 Dissipate

1 Dream Tides

4 Force of Will

4 Foreshadow

4 Impulse

4 Memory Lapse

4 Portent

4 Power Sink

32 other spells

Alan was also the first guy to have real success at a high-profile tournament with a Reanimator deck. Casual players had been having fun with the archetype for years, of course, but in Alan's hands it left the kitchen table and headed for Nationals.

## Comer-Zilla (Standard)

Alan Comer - Regionals 1997



### Main Deck

61 cards

4 City of Brass  
4 Gemstone Mine  
1 Island  
2 Reflecting Pool  
3 Sulfurous Springs  
1 Swamp  
3 Underground River  
2 Undiscovered Paradise

20 lands

4 Hidden Horror  
4 Merfolk Traders  
2 Necrosavant  
3 Shivan Dragon  
2 Sliver Queen  
4 Verdant Force

19 creatures

4 Animate Dead  
4 Dark Ritual  
4 Firestorm  
2 Living Death  
4 Mana Leak  
4 Necromancy

22 other spells


### Sideboard

2 Disenchant  
4 Dread of Night  
1 Extinction  
2 Hydroblast  
4 Pyroblast  
2 Tranquil Domain

15 sideboard cards

Another famous Comer design totally rocked the Extended format (no pun intended). Alan started out playing "just for fun" trying to see how big he could grow a Quirion Dryad and the next thing you

know he had unleashed yet another totally new archetype on the world:

<b>Miracle Gro</b>			
Alan Comer			
<b>Main Deck</b>	<b>Sideboard</b>		
<i>60 cards</i>			
6 Island	4 Brainstorm	2 Boomerang	
4 Tropical Island	4 Curiosity	4 Chill	
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10 lands	4 Daze	3 Emerald Charm	
	3 Foil	2 Misdirection	
	4 Force of Will	4 Submerge	
	4 Gush	<hr/>	
	4 Land Grant	15 sideboard cards	
3 Gaea's Skyfolk	4 Sleight of Hand		
4 Lord of Atlantis	4 Winter Orb		
4 Merfolk Looter	<hr/>		
4 Quirion Dryad	35 other spells		
<hr/>			
15 creatures			

Alan was the only person running this deck at Grand Prix Las Vegas (in 2001) and finished ninth. Less than a month later at Grand Prix Houston the deck was played by fully 25 of the 64 players left on Day Two (and Alan took 10th). That's the kind of format-defining power that Alan Comer wielded.

## Darwin Kastle

One guy whose accomplishments are simply too good to leave off the ballot is Darwin Kastle. In the history of the Pro Tour, only four men have appeared in more than five Top 8s. Finkel has 11, Budde has 9, Darwin has 8, and some upstart named Gabriel Nassif has 6. Darwin also has 11 Grand Prix Top 8s, which is more than anyone else in this entire illustrious class. In addition, if you look just at North American Grand Prix, he is No. 1 all time with nine Top 8s stateside.

I also believe Darwin is underrated as a player. That bar is actually really low, as many of his peers think more than a few of Darwin's play decisions are terrible, but I'm of the opinion that Darwin's eccentricity actually helped him more than it hurt him. I think he just sees the game a little differently than most players, and when you rarely make the expected play it often confuses your opponent and can allow you to find wins conventional thinking would have missed. Yes, he sometimes made obvious blunders that a young child wouldn't have made, but at the end of the day you just can't argue with his results.

## Tommi Hovi

Even as I type this and try to talk myself into voting for the community builders, I can't help but be impressed by what Tommi Hovi accomplished: The list of players who have won two individual Pro Tours still only has four names on it: Finkel, Budde, Herzog ... and Hovi. Hovi was the first one to pull it off, demonstrating once and for all how skill-testing **Magic** really was. In addition, Hovi's median finish is actually the best in this entire impressive class. Half the time he went to the Pro Tour, he finished 28th or better, and it's not like he had a short career either. The only other two people with a

median finish better than 39th are Olle Rade and Mark Justice, who each attended just 18 events to Hovi's 30. Mike Long is the guy in fourth place with a median finish of 39th (and 33 PTs attended) and then after that it drops *another* ten spots before you find Comer in fifth place with a median finish of 49th (across 32 PTs).

At first I was going to put Hovi on my ballot just because I wanted to have a non-American. However, I don't actually buy the whole "show off the international nature of the game" argument ... am I supposed to vote *for* an American seven years from now when we should be inducting five Japanese players? I don't think so, thus I shouldn't feel obligated to vote for a European now. I'll settle for feeling good about the fact that a European wound up on my ballot because his accomplishments are so good that I just can't keep him off.

## The Last Spot

So after much internal and external debate, Finkel, Kastle, Comer, and Hovi are on my ballot. The best player left in terms of accomplishments and ability is probably Dave Humpherys, but I feel like my ballot is already skewed heavily in favor of accomplishments so I definitely want to acknowledge a community builder with my last spot. The fifth guy I think should be immortalized as part of the first class inducted into the Pro Tour Hall of Fame is Chris Pikula. The Tour would be an even more amazing place if there were more guys like him.

1. Jon Finkel
2. Darwin Kastle
3. Alan Comer
4. Tommi Hovi
5. Chris Pikula

I actually think Pikula doesn't have a great shot at getting in based on this vote, but hopefully this article will lead future voters to think more about what the Hackers and Pikulas of the world have meant to the Pro Tour when they fill out ballots. In particular, the Players Ballot is coming up in August after the announcement of the first four members of the Hall. Everyone with 100 or more lifetime Pro Points gets to vote on the fifth and final member of this class. I get to vote in that election too, and I think the Players Vote is actually the perfect place to acknowledge the kind of hard-to-quantify contributions to the community made by guys like Price, Pikula, and Hacker.

So I call on all my fellow "Hall-eligible" players: The guys with the most impressive accomplishments are going to get voted in by the regular Selection Committee every year. Let's use our Players Vote on the community builders whose accomplishments can't be measured with statistics. Vote Chris Pikula!

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