

Mike Flores

Thursday, August 11, 2005

Invasion's Block Constructed Pro Tour represented a lot of firsts for Professional **Magic**. Not counting Worlds 1999, Pro Tour Tokyo in 2001 was the first actual Pro Tour to take place in Japan; appropriately, that Pro Tour featured the first Japanese player to make the break to Top 8: today's Resident Genius (and still arguably the world's best deck designer four years later), Tsuyoshi Fujita went all the way to the finals. The *Invasion* Block Pro Tour gave us a look at pure dominance that has not been matched in a constructed format since. One team of eleven players ran essentially the same deck; four of them -- Ryan Fuller, Philip Freneau, Lucas Hager, and Chris Benafel -- made Top 8, with many others finishing in the money. More than that great team or deck accomplishment, front-man Ryan Fuller actually posted a breathtaking *14-0* record in the Swiss, the first player ever to go truly undefeated approaching the elimination rounds; Ryan's juggernaut-like set of wins finally ended in the quarterfinals, where his streak went down in a hotly contested 3-2 mirror match against teammate Chris Benafel... Fuller missed a ton of land drops and declared a lot of mulligans in losing to his cohort.

Ryan Fuller

R/G - PT Tokyo 2001

But amidst all these firsts, the first Japanese Pro Tour (something we take for granted as being on the schedule these days); the first appearance of the now-dominant Japanese in their home country; a clear crack in the format represented by a powerhouse archetype, an ascendant team, and an undefeated record... They all pale compared to the finish, the real finish that everything was all leading up to. In a format where players expected B/R/U Yawgmoth's Agenda to be the most popular deck, where G/R control-killing beatdown ended up being the most consistent and powerful deck across the field, it was a little U/W deck originally dubbed "notasbadasitlooks.dec" that took home the Pro Tour Championship.

Zvi Mowshowitz

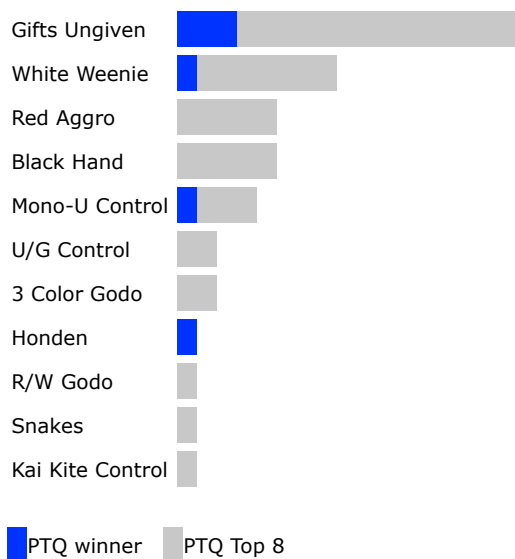
The Solution - PT Tokyo 2001

Eventually called The Solution, the U/W deck played by Champion Zvi Mowshowitz may not have broken *Invasion* Block Constructed... but it did manage to solve the puzzle of the format. The Solution had a little something for everyone. For creature decks, it had Exclude and Repulse. It could do a little beatdown itself with several early drops, many of which had relevant special abilities. The Solution ran a card drawing instant at 3U against which today's gold standard -- Gifts Ungiven -- pales in terms of utility. And to top it all off, the deck had some countermagic, too, for those times when the only reasonable response to a question is, "I think not."

Was the Solution as powerful as some of the other decks out there? No way. It lacked the offensive punch of G/R. It could keep parity with B/U, Fact or Fiction for Fact or Fiction, Absorb for Undermine, and so on... until Yawgmoth's Agenda hit. But somehow, the deck's curious combination of threat/answer hybrid cards, from Stormscape Apprentice (a quick drop who defends), to Meddling

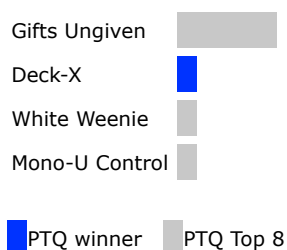
Mage (a sort of walking pre-emptive Counterspell), to the clunky Voice of All (a 2/2 for four mana) came together as exactly the right deck to take on the Tokyo field. The lesson of the Solution is that you don't necessarily have to have the biggest, bluntest, object to brain the opponent when you can present a sufficiently quick, efficient, and *well-aimed* answer. Along with a little card advantage, the tempo of a fast response can go a long way. The Solution, though, was ultimately a metagame deck. Knowing that a lot of the format's removal would be red (don't forget that Flametongue Kavu was then the hip new kid on the block), the Solution's adherents made good use of the seemingly innocuous Crimson Acolyte... to the tune of all four main deck.

So what does an archaic format that lives fondly only in the memories of incumbent R&D member Zvi Mowshowitz or perhaps his then-collaborator, our editor Scott Johns, mean to us? Just check out the week's unofficial tally for Kamigawa Block PTQs:



This doesn't tell us much, does it? Gifts Ungiven continues to dominate. Sure we have a rogue combo deck doing well, and Mono-Blue, the deck designed to wallop the slow to develop Gifts picked up a slot in the hands of Mouth in Connecticut, but Gifts posted three times the Blue Envelopes and many times the overall Top 8 finishes of any other deck... yet again. What's the story?

If we hop across the Pacific to Grand Prix Taipei, something Solution-wonderful happens:



Even though there were *five* Gifts Ungiven decks in the Top 8, wielded by some of the best players on the planet, including Grand Prix superstars and greater champions yet, the big win went to Osamu Fujita's Deck-X.

Fujita, Osamu
Deck-X

GP Taipei 05 Top 8

What do you get when you take a White Weenie deck, add some counters and Meloku? Apparently you get a Grand Prix Championship-winning list!

More than "just" a White Weenie deck, Deck-X breaks Honor-Worn Shaku, "the paddle," in much the same way Tsuyoshi Fujita did back at Pro Tour Philadelphia. Consider even a simple execution with this card:

Turn 1: Isamaru, Hound of Konda

Turn 2: Umezawa's Jitte

Turn 3: Honor-Worn Shaku; tap Shaku, tap Jitte to untap Shaku, tap Shaku; equip Hound of Konda

With a "regular" White Weenie draw, you could end up with a stray mana and one less the next turn. Scarier for a Gifts Ungiven deck are the games where Deck-X can play turn four Yosei. Consider the above draw. Without even making a fourth land drop, Fujita could tap his three lands, tap and untap his Shaku for Isamaru and Jitte, and have six mana of Yosei. With a fourth land, Fujita would be threatening Blessed Breath.

"I don't think the Gifts Ungiven deck can win even 30% of games," said Brian David-Marshall, magicthegathering.com Tournament Center reporter on-site in Taipei. "They have to kill the Yosei... and then they're tapped out for Hokori."

Deck-X was not designed to purely race aggressive decks, but it can still get a nice beat going with Konda's Banner. Attaching Konda's Banner to Meloku allows the deck to go Glorious Anthem with his team of Illusion tokens. Because every creature in Deck-X is Legendary, Fujita could attach Konda's Banner to any of his White Weenies, setting up a Crusade- or even Death Pit Offering- level boost for his Foxes, Spirits, and Samurai. Most people might not play Kentaro, the Smiling Cat or Sensei Golden-Tail *at all*, but with Konda's Banner, those Samurai can be pretty good together.

Like the Solution in Tokyo, Deck-X looks a little under-powered. It doesn't have the complete lockdown capability or massive card advantage engine of Gifts Ungiven. It doesn't have the robust mana acceleration of Kamigawa's green decks. With no Charge Across the Arba, it doesn't even have the pure rush capability of a "real" White Weenie deck. What Deck-X does have is a curious combination of answers and tempo that make it a powerful metagame foil, ideal for the three bye metagame of a Gifts Ungiven-dominated Grand Prix.

Like the Solution in Tokyo, Deck-X looks a little under-powered. Deck-X might not be able to loop infinite Fogs or Mutilates, but it can hold a lead against a tapped out opponent with Hokori and Blessed Breath. Though it lacks access to the rock solid Sakura-Tribe Elder and Kodama's Reach suite played by every green deck, Deck-X's combination of Honor-Worn Shaku and Hokori expresses a classic "Prison" synergy, allowing Fujita tons of operable mana while the opponent – even one with Forests in play – is stuck untapping only one land per turn. Though it doesn't have all the efficacy of a pure rush White Weenie or Black Hand deck, Deck-X can post a Counter-Sliver offense, protecting its board with cards like Hisoka's Defiance, holding small leads instead of giving them up against sweepers like Hideous Laughter or Kagemaro.

Will Deck-X lose some potency now that it's out of the bag? Of course! The fact that this week was probably the first time you had heard of it is a testament to its surprise value... but that doesn't mean an unprepared Gifts Ungiven deck will be any better able to beat it.

All season we have followed the dominant decks of Kamigawa Block. First it was Umezawa's Jitte in beatdown decks. Tech quickly evolved such that the White Weenie decks made better use of *Saviors*

of *Kamigawa* and the Black Hand decks -- just beginning to grab at that title of best deck in the format -- began to move away from purely suicidal, if effective, drops. Then all of a sudden the champion -- the real thing as it were -- from the Pro Tour came back and said "Don't you forget about me," retook the reins of Kamigawa Block and hasn't let go. Sure, there have been some decks trying to compete. Mono-Blue, Blue/Green, and others have cropped up, challenging "the best deck." Deck-X doesn't try to do that. Deck-X knows that it isn't the best deck. It doesn't have to break the format... Gifts Ungiven already did that. But maybe, just maybe, Deck-X can be the Solution to what we have seen thus far... Osamu Fujita can't be disappointed with how it ran. Now let's see how Deck-X handles in a wider field.

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