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Back to the Grind

Brian David-Marshall
 The Week That Was
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Last weekend it was dumplings at the night market in Taipei and this weekend it is crab cakes from the Inner Harbor in Maryland. Hot on the heels of [Grand Prix-Taipei](#), I am working this weekend as part of the coverage team for U.S. Nationals in Baltimore. So what should you be expecting to see this weekend?



The stage is set for U.S. Nationals 2005.

It is easy to think of U.S. Nationals as the All-Star Game of American **Magic**, but that has never been an apt label. If you look back at the U.S. National teams over the past decade you will see that Nats is more like a Future Stars showcase than the Mid-summer classic.

If you took me literally and went over to the newly revamped Tournament Center and strolled through past National teams, you will probably think I am insane as the teams are liberally sprinkled with the likes of Mark Justice, Mike Long, Jon Finkel, Bob Maher, Jr., Justin Gary, Aaron Forsythe, Eugene Harvey, Kyle Rose, and so on. But if you go back and look at all of those players' respective careers, you will see that their first Nationals team appearances marked the beginning of the ascendancy of their careers.

Historically if there is a big name and "some guy" in the Top 8 of U.S. Nationals, you should lay money on Mr. Guy. Past actors playing the role of Mr. Guy include Maher, Gary, Forsythe, Harvey, and Gabe Walls. Of course the person who originated that role was Hall of Fame Inductee Jon Finkel – the only member of the inaugural class to represent the United States at the World Championships.

That is not entirely true... by the time Jon was part of the winning U.S. National team at Worlds 1998, he had already accomplished quite a bit. It was during the previous year's Nationals that Jon first drew attention as a serious future star, even though he fell one match shy of making the Top 8 that year.

Jon got into Nationals that year via the "meatgrinders" – the unpleasant name for the single-elimination tournaments that take place on-site the day before each National Championship. After grinding in with his blue-white deck Jon went on to sweep the draft portion of the competition.

I think that might have been the first year that Grinders were incorporated into the Nationals schedule, which makes Jon one of the first players to ever accomplish that feat. One of the most recent players to accomplish that is Mike McGee, who was one of four players to earn a berth at this year's event via the midnight meat grinder Wednesday night.

McGee is a former JSS star who received press two years ago when he played in Day One of Nationals despite being eligible for the JSS Championships that would commence the following day. McGee got off to a torrid 6-0 start and the room was abuzz about the undefeated player who was going to drop to play in the JSS.



Eugene Harvey was once a 'some guy' at U.S. Nationals.

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In the end, McGee skipped the JSS and went on to finish 22nd, winning \$350. He was playing for the Top 8 with two rounds to go when his Top 8 chances were derailed by eventual National Team member Gabe Walls.

"I don't regret it all," recalled McGee when asked if ever regretted passing up the ostensibly easier money of the JSS. "The experience was really valuable – I mean, the money was fine too – but I don't regret it at all."

McGee has not played much **Magic** over the past year as he prepared to graduate High School. With school behind him he has turned his focus back toward **Magic** and was ready and raring to go at Midnight for the first chance at a last chance qualifier. It was not a long trip for the McGee household as they live only a couple of hours away in New Jersey.

"Now that school is over I want to get back into it. I came here because, well...it's a tournament and event," McGee explained with a chuckle. "Even if I didn't grind in, I figured there would still be PTQs and stuff to do."



Mike McGee braved the Midnight grinder to qualify for Nationals.

"I played a mono-red list that I got from one of the European Nationals Top 8s – actually a friend gave me the list," McGee said, referring to Justin Morcate who also qualified in the same grinder. "The deck looked like it would be good against red agro and rats with a favorable 60/40 matchup against Tooth. "

Although McGee said that there were plenty of Mountains at the top tables in his tournament, he is not expecting that to be the most prevalent deck when Nationals kicks off.

"There will be more Tooth and Blue Tron than there are red decks – but those are the three best decks for Standard."

Mike McGee - Mono-Red		
Top 4 Midnight Meatgrinder		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards	15 sideboard cards	
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Chrome Mox	3 Flamebreak
14 Mountain	4 Magma Jet	3 Pithing Needle
1 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep	4 Molten Rain	4 Shatter
19 lands	4 Seething Song	1 Shrapnel Blast
	3 Shrapnel Blast	4 Stone Rain
	3 Sword of Fire and Ice	
4 Arc-Slogger	22 other spells	
4 Frostling		
4 Hearth Kami		
4 Slith Firewalker		
3 Vulshok Sorcerer		
19 creatures		

Justin Morcate - Mono-Red		
Top 4 Midnight Meatgrinder		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards	15 sideboard cards	
4 Blinkmoth Nexus	4 Chrome Mox	3 Flamebreak
14 Mountain	4 Magma Jet	3 Pithing Needle
1 Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep	4 Molten Rain	4 Shatter
19 lands	4 Seething Song	1 Shrapnel Blast
	3 Shrapnel Blast	4 Stone Rain
	3 Sword of Fire and Ice	
4 Arc-Slogger	22 other spells	
4 Frostling		
4 Hearth Kami		
4 Slith Firewalker		
3 Vulshok Sorcerer		
19 creatures		

David Sharfman - Tooth and Nail		
Top 4 Midnight Meatgrinder		
Main Deck	Sideboard	

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
9 Forest	2 Chrome Mox	1 Boseiju, Who Shelters All
4 Urza's Mine	2 Mindslaver	4 Creeping Mold
4 Urza's Power Plant	3 Plow Under	1 Darksteel Colossus
4 Urza's Tower	4 Reap and Sow	1 Mephidross Vampire
21 lands	4 Sensei's Divining Top	1 Mindslaver
1 Duplicant	4 Sylvan Scrying	1 Plow Under
3 Eternal Witness	4 Tooth and Nail	1 Sundering Titan
1 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker	23 other spells	3 Triskelion
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		2 Viridian Shaman
1 Sundering Titan		15 sideboard cards
1 Triskelion		
3 Vine Trellis		
2 Viridian Shaman		
16 creatures		

Semion Bezrukov - Medium Green Top 4 Midnight Meatgrinder		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
19 Forest	4 Blanchwood Armor	4 Arashi, the Sky Asunder
1 Swamp	3 Chrome Mox	1 Beacon of Creation
20 lands	4 Cranial Extraction	2 Naturalize
4 Birds of Paradise	3 Oxidize	1 Plains
3 Eternal Witness	4 Plow Under	3 Umezawa's Jitte
4 Iwamori of the Open Fist	3 Sword of Fire and Ice	4 Worship
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	21 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 Troll Ascetic		
19 creatures		

There were plenty of familiar faces around the hall, ranging from the expected Regionals winners to past National team members like Walls. One of the most unexpected faces belonged to a member of last year's National Team – the Dutch National Team, that is. Jeroen Remie has started laying the groundwork for his 2006 Invitational campaign for the Road Warrior ballot by hanging out in Baltimore this weekend, and joked with Randy Buehler about trying to find a way to play this weekend.

"Hey Randy, can I play as William Jensen?"

Draw One Card...

That was artist Mark Poole's job for this year's Vintage Championship. The text on the card he was hired to draw? Target player draws three cards. That's right, the prize for this year's [Gen Con Vintage Championship](#) will be a piece of original art that re-imagines the best card-drawing spell ever printed, *Ancestral Recall*. Past prizes have included a newly painted Chris Rush *Black Lotus* and a fresh Mark Tedin take on *Time Walk*.

Scott Larabee took this year's prize one step beyond merely crafting a new piece of art.

"I took the original painting and had our graphic designer Matt Stevens – in proportion – mock up a new card frame so it would look like a current card that is about 15 inches by 12 inches. The flavor text says '2005 Vintage Champion', the collector number is 1 of 9, and the expansion symbol is the Vintage Championships logo. It's pretty cool."

The event is next week at Gen Con alongside a host of other cool events like Two-Headed Giant Championship and [Legacy Championship](#). Keep your eyes peeled for feature articles breaking down the two Eternal Championships in the Tournament Center in the near future. Ted "Type 1" Knutson will be covering Vintage while Zvi Mowshowitz will be playing in the Legacy event – his last sanctioned event before taking his R&D position – and writing about his experience.



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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