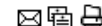


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Form of the New Standard

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, August 26, 2005



So what do you want first? I have news of changes to the **Magic: The Gathering** Premier Event Invitation Policy and a decklist from Norwegian Nationals that is powered by the *Ninth Edition* rotation.

I am pretty excited about the changes to the Invitation Policy but I sense that a decklist is going to make for the stronger lead-in. This past weekend was the first weekend that National Championships incorporated *Ninth Edition* into the Standard mix. There has been a lot of anticipation about what the loss of **Plow Under** and the addition of **Hypnotic Specter** would mean for the format. Players have been looking forward to some of the more high-profile National events, such as this weekend's Canadian National Championship and next weekend's headliner, the Japanese National Championship, to gauge the impact of the new base set.

There has been a lot of talk about which of the freshly reprinted cards would make the biggest crater with most of the talk centered on the pain lands, **Hypnotic Specter**, and **Wildfire**. At this past weekend's Norwegian National Championship, the National team emerged playing the usual suspects. Congratulations to Nikolas Nygaard (Monored), Eivind Nitter (Bluetooth), and Tommy Hammer (Tooth with **Cranial Extraction** board) who will be representing Norway this November in Yokohama.

But if you scratch the surface of the Top 8, a new deck archetype took 5th, 6th, and 9th place at that event. The deck is called Good Form, an **Enduring Ideal** deck capable of plopping the still-warm-from-the-Core-Set-oven **Form of the Dragon** onto the table within the first few turns of the game.

But What About Gen Con?

Last weekend, Wizards of the Coast crowned new champions in both the Legacy and Vintage formats at Gen Con. However, I have no intentions of scooping fellow coverage writers Zvi Mowshowitz and Ted Knutson, who were on the scene at Indianapolis. All I will say is you should come back to the site Monday for full recaps of each event, Top 8 decklists, and metagame analysis.

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RULES

RULES

Thomas Gundersen, Alexander Dahl, and Tarjei Kvalø – Good Form		
5th, 6th, and 9th Place – Norwegian Nationals		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Adarkar Wastes	4 Chrome Mox	3 Boiling Seas
4 Battlefield Forge	3 Confiscate	3 Boseiju, Who Shelters All
3 Island	4 Enduring Ideal	3 Mana Leak
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	3 Form of the Dragon	3 Sowing Salt
1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds	1 Genju of the Realm	3 Wrath of God
2 Shivan Reef	1 Ivory Mask	
4 Tendo Ice Bridge	1 Meishin, the Mind Cage	15 sideboard cards
19 lands	4 Pentad Prism	
	4 Seething Song	
	4 Serum Visions	
	4 Sleight of Hand	
0 creatures	4 Talisman of Progress	
	3 Thirst for Knowledge	
	1 Zur's Weirding	
	41 other spells	

"The deck was initially designed by Tarjei Kvalø, but Alexander Dahl and I helped tune it," explained fifth-place finisher Thomas Gundersen, who may have a tournament report posted on one of the major strategy sites as early as today. According to Gundersen, the first couple of passes at the deck occurred before the release of *Ninth Edition* and was a hybridization of back to back block decks with *Mirrodin's* **Krark-Clan Ironworks** powering out the *Kamigawa* **Enduring Ideal**.

While the deck was capable of casting its eponymous spell on the fourth turn, about two-thirds of the time they were intrigued by its power but wary of artifact removal. When *Ninth Edition* was released they were able to forgo their reliance on the Ironworks for acceleration and turn to the source all good red mages have relied upon for their **Arc-Sloggers** since Pro Tour-Kobe – **Seething Song**.

The addition of **Seething Song** was made possible by the entrance of red painlands into Standard but the real innovation that *Ninth* offered the deck



was the flavorful enchantment.

"The main change in *Ninth* that allowed this deck to work was probably the addition of **Form of the Dragon**," Gundersen said. "The great synergy with **Zur's Weirding** and **Ivory Mask**, as well as it being a kill card really helped the deck."

The trio began running the deck through its paces a few weeks before their National Championship. Their main concern during testing was to be able to beat monored decks and **Tooth and Nail**. Counterspells were not a big concern for them originally as they felt that monoblue decks were not the fashion and BlueTooth had not become the Tier 1 deck it is today. Then U.S. Nationals took place and the entire format tipped away from **Tooth and Nail** toward blue-based control decks.

"We then added **Boiling Seas** to compensate for this. This also made us add the two non-basic 'islands' to avoid **Boiling Seas** backfiring," explained Gundersen, who also had a message for the

R&D denizens responsible for the inclusion of the blue hoser in *Ninth Edition*. "Please stop reprinting *Portal* cards in the core sets! **Boiling Seas** was infinitely hard to get hold of." They ended up buying the cards through mail order and having them shipped via an express carrier at the last minute.

Good **Form** fares much better against aggressive creature decks because it can simply shut down an offense with a **Form of the Dragon** on the fourth or fifth turn – something Gundersen claims happens in about two-thirds of his games. As for the control decks, Gundersen liked his matchups against black discard decks due to having seven cards – the **Forms** and **Enduring Ideal** – which are "I win" cards.

"They have to have a **Specter** and a **Jitte** with counters already to give you a run for your money with **Form** in play," he said.

The secret to winning the **Tooth and Nail** matchup involves fetching **Zur's Weirding** to prevent the **Tooth** player from assembling his **Urzaatron**. Gundersen said that they get the **Tron**, **Oblivion Stone** can open the door to get them back into the game.



While the deck is the first exciting development for the new Standard format its poor matchups against monoblue and BlueTooth may relegate the deck to Tier 2 status in the coming weeks if Islands continue to be a popular strategy.

"The deck obviously had a lot of surprise value – for instance, I managed to beat monoblue once because he tapped out on turn five for **Thieving Magpie**," Gundersen explained. "Losing this surprise value will weaken the deck against the control decks. However, the deck is really good and consistent, and if you're expecting a lot of aggro, I would definitely recommend it. It's also a lot of fun! Having **Zur's Weirding** in play and knowing there is no way for your opponent to win, even though he doesn't know it himself, is definitely very satisfying.

"One change we would probably make was to take out the **Wraths** and put in **COP: Red** instead. **Wraths** are mainly there against **WW**, but are also good against some forms of red. Since red decks are your worst aggressive matchup (but still good), I would rather shore up that matchup, since it seems like a really popular deck, and seemed to constitute about one-third of the field at our Nationals," concluded Gundersen.

The new Standard will continue to take form (and possibly **Form**) this weekend in Calgary when Canadian Nationals take place. I will be providing the coverage and keeping my eyes peeled for any interesting deck developments. If **Block Constructed** is more your cup of tea, Ted Knutson will be at Grand Prix-Salt Lake City as the **Kamigawa Block Constructed** season begins to wind down. Nationals coverage kicks off on Friday and the Grand Prix updates will commence on Saturday.

Ratings, Rankings, and no more Arithmetic

Wizards of the Coast has just made some pretty major changes to their Premier Event Invitation Policy that will affect any players who aspire to be invited to the Pro Tour, their National Championships, or Worlds. It also affects the way byes are given out for Grand Prix tournaments and changes the rating level needed for byes, as well as how byes at a Grand Prix Trials are handled. You can find the complete policy as a Word doc or a PDF [here](#), down in the "Rules for **Magic: The Gathering** Tournaments" but I'll sum up the high points here.

Among the changes (which take effect for any tournament that feeds invitations to an event in 2006), the biggest development is the absence of the term "previously uninvited" from the invite policy. In that past, a Pro Tour would invite the Top 50 previously uninvited players based on a specific rating criteria. There was usually an uneasy

waiting period as players within shooting distance of a ratings invite tried to figure out how far down slots would be passing down and trying to account for every player invited through some other means.

That is now a thing of the past as ratings invites to Pro Tours will be given to the Top 100 ranked players. There will be no pass-down invitations – if a player in the Top 100 is already invited via some other method, the ratings invite will be moot.

The main advantage of this is that it allows players to know immediately if they are invited based on rating. Players would not have to wait for Andy Heckt to do the pass downs. In fact, pass downs in almost all forms have been eliminated under the new document, with invites doubling in each case. For example, the 2006 World Championships will be changing from the Top 25 previously uninvited to the Top 50 composite players.

"We looked at scenarios," explained DCI Program Manager Scott Larabee when asked about the decision-making process behind the change and how it would affect the number of players who ultimately receive invites. "We based it on how far down invites went at this year's events. The pass-down invites generally were not going down below the Top 100. I think we have erred on the side of inviting more people rather than less."

According to Larabee, the team responsible for making the decisions was looking to strike a balance between the value of a Pro Tour invitation and the value of having a simple streamlined policy that everyone could understand.

"We review this stuff every year," he said. "We don't make arbitrary decisions. We very much want it to be fair. We don't want to make it too hard to get on the Pro Tour but at the same time we certainly don't want to make it too easy but if we have to invite a few more people to make it less confusing that's fine."

The most interesting result of these changes will take place on the Grand Prix level. There will no longer be pass-down invites for Grand Prix events. If a player is already qualified for a Pro Tour event, the GP invite will lay fallow. To compensate for this, the invites awarded at Grand Prix have been doubled from eight to 16 at individual events and from four to eight at team events.

There will be a number of developments forthcoming regarding team events in light of this year's switch over to Team Constructed, and as soon as I find out more I will bring them to you.

The document does reveal that teams looking to qualify for the Team Pro Tour based on Players Club levels will need to assemble a team with at least seven ratings levels between them in order to be invited. Four Club levels will earn a team one bye at a team Grand Prix, and it will take eight levels to earn two byes.

There will also be no more pass-down invites to National Championships with the number of people being invited getting increased in that area as well. The number of players invited will vary from country to country and will be determined for each individual country on January 1, 2006 and published in the policy document no later than January 31, 2006.

Another effect of the "no pass down" policy regards byes at Grand Prix Trials. In the past, players with three byes could play in a Trial and the byes would pass down to the first player without the full complement of free rounds. That will no longer happen. If a player with three byes wins a GP Trial, the byes will simply disappear in a puff of smoke.

The rating level required for players to be eligible for one-, two-, or three-round byes has finally been increased after two years without change. "We had a surge in players eligible for byes in the last season and we want to make sure that not too many people at an event have byes," Larabee said.

Like the Pro Tour invites, the policy team wants the byes to be something special. For North American and European Grand Prix events, the three levels of byes have been raised to 1850 for one round, 1925 for two rounds, and 2025 for three rounds of byes. For Asia-Pacific and Latin America, the bye levels have increased to 1800, 1900, and 2000.

Firestarter: Good Form, or Bad Choice?

Is Good Form a good choice in upcoming Standard tournaments? Can it beat Mono-Blue and BlueTooth? We'll find out in the coming weeks but in the meantime let us know what you think about the first new offering from Ninth-powered Standard.

*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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