

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



The Players Have Spoken

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, September 9, 2005



The results from the Players Committee are in and the first class of the Pro Tour Hall of Fame is now complete. Joining Jon Finkel, Darwin Kastle, Alan Comer, and Tommi Hovi on the dais in Yokohama will be Olle Råde, who finished in the unenviable fifth spot on the Hall of Fame Selection Committee ballot.

Råde received 16 votes, narrowly edging Chris Pikula (who received 15). Rounding out the top five were YMGers Dave Humpherys (9) and Rob Dougherty (7), and Mike Long (5).

"Naturally I feel really, really good about it!" gushed Olle when he heard the news – although he was not expecting the honor. "It is both a great honor and something I consider a big personal accomplishment. Seeing how close I was in the initial voting it would have been very disappointing to miss out on the player's vote as well.

"I was kind of surprised really, seeing how some players (read Pikula) are way more popular characters in the **Magic** community," he said. "I haven't seen the detailed result of the vote, but I assume it was close, there are some players out there who I'm sure will make it eventually."

Råde made a dramatic Pro Tour debut during the first season of the Pro Tour by winning Pro Tour-Columbus with an unlikely spider-based concoction for the *Ice Age* Block Constructed format. The Swede was only 16 years old at the time and was the youngest player to win a Pro Tour for many years. He was also the first European to win a Pro Tour, as North Americans had dominated the first two events.

Olle quickly showed that he was no flash in the pan by reaching the Top 8 once again at that season's World Championships with his ErnhamGeddon deck. He became the fourth member of the two Top 8s club but would soon leave everyone else in his dust and form a much more exclusive club before he was done.

That wasn't the end of his firsts, either. Olle won the first **Magic** Invitational, defeating a field that included Mike Long, Scott Johns, Matt Place, George Baxter, and just about every player who made a name for himself in the first few Pro Tours. Olle's original designs for Invitational cards were either outmoded (an Enchant World that only served to destroy other Enchant Worlds, after such cards were phased out of the game) or simply broken (a counterspell that could go to the top of your library instead of your graveyard when cast). That delay in submitting a playable card meant that when Darwin Kastle won the next Invitational and submitted *Avalanche Riders*, he technically became the first player to appear on a **Magic** card. Eventually, Olle created *Sylvan Safekeeper* to commemorate his victory and immortalize his image in **Magic** lore.

Before the existence of the Pro Tour, the title of "world's best **Magic** player" seemed to belong to Mark Justice. Once the Pro Tour started, a handful of players made a run at the title including Justice, Scott Johns, Hammer Regnier and anyone who posted multiple Top 8s early in the game's history. Over the next two seasons Olle would securely lock down top dog status and become the first consensus "world's best **Magic** player" in Pro Tour history. As a reflection of that status, Olle was the first winner of **Magic**'s Player of the Year award, given for the 1995-96 season.

Olle picked up his third Top 8 the following season in Dallas and became the first player with four Top 8s with his performance in Chicago the season after that. He became the first player to accumulate five Top 8s when he took on Tommi Hovi in the quarterfinals of Pro Tour-Rome in the fourth season. He finished in 68th at Pro Tour Los Angeles later that season and then, as suddenly as he had burst onto the **Magic** scene, he was gone.

At that point, Olle had played in 15 Pro Tours – reaching the Top 8 in exactly one-third of them. Mandatory military service took him away from the game at the height of his power. He made a brief reappearance in 2001 at Pro Tour Tokyo when he finished in 30th place – a spot at which he finished better than in over half of his Pro Tour



Players Committee Vote	
Name	Total
Olle Råde	16
Chris Pikula	15
David Humpherys	9
Robert Dougherty	7
Michael Long	5
Svend Sparre Geertsen	3
Brian Hacker	3
Mark Justice	2
Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz	2
David Price	2
Michael Pustilnik	2
Scott Johns	1
Jakub Slemr	1



Råde shows off *Sylvan Safekeeper*...and his old hairdo.

PRODUCTS

MAGIC ONLINE

MESSAGE BOARDS

RULES

appearances.

With only 18 Pro Tours, Olle's career was dramatically shorter than any of the other members of the first Hall of Fame class. His median finish for those events was 31st place which can only lead one to wonder what would have been had his career continued on as long as the other members of the Yokohama inductees. In the few Pro Tours he played in after his absence he finished in 30th, 40th, and 23rd place.



Råde's short career could be resuming, thanks to a Hall of Fame induction.

Olle is definitely going to attend the induction ceremony at Worlds and has already begun to make plans – including dining at a Japanese-Swedish restaurant that he has heard about. He is hoping that he will play in the event as well, but when you have as sterling a record as Olle's you don't want to muck it up by being unprepared for an event.

"I'm looking forward to seeing a lot of old faces there, including the other Hall of Fame inductees," he said. "I'm hoping to participate at Worlds, although if I don't have time to prepare at all I might not. I'm a busy man these days with both school and work to worry about and it would be embarrassing to show up back on the Tour and be awful. I will definitely play future Pro Tours, though."

When asked if there was anyone he wanted to thank for his induction in particular and his career in general, Olle answered, "First of all I'd like to send out a big thanks to Raphael Levy. He really helped run the 'Vote Råde' campaign. Also the mandatory thanks to everyone who voted for me of course! As for my rather short, but successful **Magic** career I think the Swedish **Magic** community back then had a lot to do with it and I couldn't thank anyone individually."

Olle Råde - Ice Age/Alliances Constructed		
1st Place - 1997 Pro Tour-Columbus		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
61 cards		
7 Forest	2 Giant Growth	1 Anarchy
4 Karplusan Forest	4 Incinerate	2 Essence Filter
7 Mountain	1 Jokulhaups	1 Icy Manipulator
18 lands	2 Lava Burst	1 Jester's Cap
	2 Lodestone Bauble	1 Jokulhaups
	3 Pillage	1 Monsoon
4 Deadly Insect	1 Pyroclasm	1 Primitive Justice
4 Fyndhorn Elves	3 Stormbind	2 Pyroblast
4 Giant Trap Door Spider	4 Urza's Bauble	2 Pyroclasm
1 Gorilla Shaman	22 other spells	2 Vexing Arcanix
2 Orcish Cannoneers		1 Zuran Orb
2 Storm Shaman		15 sideboard cards
4 Woolly Spider		
21 creatures		

Finkel Findings

Speaking of the world's best players...there was quite a bit of fuss in the forums when the Hall of Fame Selection Committee votes came to light and it turned out that Jon Finkel was not a unanimous selection to the Hall. One of the voters who didn't select Finkel was former Wizards Organized Play Manager Andrea Chiarvesio, who became aware of the hue and cry over his ballot when he attended Italian Nationals. For those who were curious about his reasoning, he sent in the following note to explain his thought process to the magicthegathering.com readership:

*I just want to ensure everyone that I did not meant to be offensive with anyone, Finkel less than anyone else. I saw him playing, as a spectator, as a judge and as a Wizards OP Manager and I have unconditioned admiration for his playing skills. He is one of the best two **Magic** players ever (the other being Budde, imho) and I am so sorry if not including him in my votes for the Hall of Fame has been interpreted by someone as an intentional offense to him.*

Actually, I did not vote for Finkel and [Darwin] Kastle because I felt they did not really needed my vote to enter into the Hall of Fame.

*I was so sure that Finkel and Kastle would have been picked by so many committee members than I tried to give my votes to players that "needed them most." You can call it metagaming the ballot if you want. Maybe being Italian, I am more inclined to weigh my votes to make them really count than to "poetic justice," I don't know. Actually I did not read the post by Gary Wise [about "gaming" the voting system], so I did not realized that many people could have felt "outraged" by what you call strategic voting – if I had, I would have not done it. I don't work for Wizards/Hasbro anymore so I don't follow the MtG scene that closely, so I apologize for not reading articles about **Magic** all the*

time. I still understand something about this game I believe, since three of the players I voted for ended up as third, fourth and fifth at the end of the ballot.

From my point of view, by feeling useless voting for Finkel I was showing him an even higher credit than to the players I voted. I am sorry if that was misunderstood, I did not think unanimity would have made any difference (actually it never came to my mind that unanimity was a potential issue). To my eyes (this may be hard to believe to some of you since all this discussion is going on, but it's true), there was and there is almost no difference by an admission to the Hall of Fame and an unanimous admission. I did not even take that aspect into consideration: after all, here in Italy not even when electing the Pope can you expect unanimity, and that voting is supposed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit... (sorry for the joke, I hope nobody now will accuse me of blasphemy).

If only I had felt that I was subtracting something to the recognition of Finkel as the great champion that he is, I would absolutely have given to him one of my votes (and another for Kastle, as well). Unfortunately I cannot change my voting now, however, so I hope Jon, Darwin and the **Magic** community will accept the excuses of a humble ex-Wizards employee.

I am sure that Finkel's star won't shine any less because of the missing unanimity in the Hall of Fame ballot, anyway, and he truly deserves to be remembered as one of the greatest **Magic: The Gathering** champions ever.

Sincerely yours.

Andrea Chiarvesio

The Book on Finkel

As unbelievable as it sounds, Jon Finkel was recently the focus of a major book release from Random House called "Jonny Magic and the Cardshark Kids" by David Kushner. The book follows Jon from his primordial elementary school days as Jonny Stinkel through the transformational effects of becoming the world's best **Magic** player into a modern-day millionaire.

I picked up the book last Tuesday and finished it on my flight to Japan. It is an entertaining read, although some of the **Magic** passages can be wince-inducing for those knowledgeable about the game (it is a mass-market book, after all). What makes the book tick is the story of a young, tormented man taking control over his life through the power of his mind – a metamorphosis made possible by **Magic: The Gathering** and the Pro Tour. And if you were wondering what Jon has been doing with himself since he took a step back from **Magic**, this book will fill you in on all the details.

Five Questions with Mike Flores

One of the casualties of my trip to Japan Nationals was an interview with my good friend Mike Flores after his PTQ victory with his blue-green creation Critical Mass. I had planned on writing about it last week, but the travel schedule and a few technical issues kept me from filing my column.

Mike and I can go on and on when we start talking, so I deliberately limited the interview to five questions about his deck, his love-hate relationship with **Sensei's Divining Top**, and details about preparing for PT LA.

BDM: Congratulations on your win, Mike. I have to ask you though, your deck is called Critical Mass and you don't even have any **Gnarled Mass** in the maindeck – and you only have two in the sideboard. How critical can it really be?

MichaelJ: Originally I played one main and three sideboarded but Josh (Ravitz) convinced me to substitute Isao in the main instead because he fights North Tree. If you don't get too attached to keeping Isao alive, he's just very good at the same situations versus the beatdown decks. It doesn't really matter that there are only two since you just want early game action.

The failing of a lot of the powerhouse decks in the format is that they don't have any action and in order to reverse the tempo of the opponent's swarm they have to tap for some insane thing like North Tree or Meloku. Then they are tapped and never get out of Hokori after exposing themselves. With a lot of early drop tempo cards including **Gnarled Mass**, Isao, and Threads you create an environment where the opponent is not at the advantage to play Hokori on the board when you give him that turn.

Furthermore I was only losing to Hokori – ever – so I wanted some Vortexes...at least one of the two Vortexes I used was a **Gnarled Mass** previously. The long-term goal of the deck is not to win with Mass. Mass is there to fight tempo in the early game while you set up for your trumps. I mean, it's better than all the White Weenie and Black Hand creatures on the board but a lone Mass is not going to beat their whole team whereas one Keiga or one Meloku will. The goal of the Mass is to hold the ground so that they don't have overwhelming tempo advantage.

BDM: Earlier in the year you seemed to be at odds with a significant portion of the **Magic** forum community for your perceived bashing of **Sensei's Divining Top**. Suddenly it seems like every deck you design – Ravitz's deck from U.S. Nats and Critical Mass – feature four copies of the Top. Have you changed your tune?



MichaelJ: I don't LIKE the top and never did. The story came out when I was working on **Tooth and Nail**. One of the problems I identified with **Tooth and Nail** was that the deck was incapable of consistently beating a fast **Sliith Firewalker** or **Temporal Adept**, therefore I splashed red in my deck for **Magma Jet**. **Magma Jet** approximates and even improves upon **Sensei's Divining Top's** manipulation in the short term while also fighting key threats to the deck.

I may have overstated my position on Jet versus Top, which is where all the controversy came from. I still don't LIKE the top. We're not friends or anything. We don't have a villa in the mountains of Balduvia where we hang out or anything but it is appropriate to certain decks. When that is the case, it is generally foolhardy not to play all four. Case in point: the Kuroda-style red.

The main thing that has held burn decks in check over the years is the inability to regulate their mana versus threats. You need a critical mass of mana in order to get your burn out before you die to a real aggro deck but because your threats are non-recursive you lose to flood. Top is the first card that has allowed a monored deck to consistently regulate the two resources necessary to dedicated burn.



BDM: *I have been nagging at you for ages to play more Magic against actual opponents as opposed to your theoretical testing on Apprentice where you played out both sides of the matchup. You finally started up on MTGO and shortly thereafter you win your first PTQ in recent memory. Is there any connection?*

MichaelJ: I actually don't think there was any correlation, though I know you do. I tuned my deck before I ever shuffled up on MTGO. It was very affirming that I was playing 2-3 hours per night and never losing with the deck. I ran through all my opponents online and never dropped a sideboarded game.

It positively affected my mental game but I didn't really learn anything I didn't already know. Maybe you're right and I'm just not seeing it. That said; I am quite addicted to MTGO and play for a couple of hours every day now. It's actually funny to me that *Ravnica* will not be on MTGO until the week before the PT and that I have to de-volve and go back to my old testing methodology to run *Ravnica* in Extended. The disadvantage to MTGO is that it takes like an hour to finish a match whereas on Apprentice I can test hundreds of games and learn a lot about matchups very rapidly.

BDM: *What are you going to do to prepare for Pro Tour-Los Angeles? Will you be working with a team?*

MichaelJ: I am working with the extended 7 Kings team. I am very good friends with Josh Ravitz -- he is on 7 Kings - - and Osyp wanted me for the squad so I joined. I've already started testing with them and the quality of opponents and deck is very high. Last night I tested for a while against Jeff Cunningham. He won literally every game versus every deck I played.

BDM (question 4.1): *Since when is Cunningham a member of 7 Kings?*

MichaelJ: I think there are 15 Kings this time around. It's the core of 7 Kings plus three Canadians and some other non-7 Kings/former TOGIT players. Plus me, I guess.



Flores has designed a slew of top decks over the past 12 months.

BDM: *In 2000 you were recognized as one of the game's top deck designers, largely because you built Napster for Jon Finkel. Over the past twelve months you seem to have a hand in any number of successful decks; Kibler's green-white from U.S. Nats last year, Monoblue for Champs, Red Deck Wins for Grand Prix-Boston, Ravitz's Flores Red from this year's Nats, and now Critical Mass. If you had to choose between Mike Flores from 2000 and modern Mike Flores to build your deck for LA, who would you pick?*

MichaelJ: I've won a bunch of PTQs since 2000 but all but one of them was Limited -- and for the Constructed one I won, I didn't attend the PT. So I think that this PT is the first time since Nationals and Worlds 2000 when I actually had personal investment in a constructed premiere format -- IN FIVE YEARS!!

To answer the question I think you'd have to contrast multiple variables. In 2000 my teammate was Jon Finkel. At that point I don't know if it would have mattered who was making Jon's decks. He almost played Magpie at Nationals, and I'm sure he would have done fine if not won the whole thing anyway.

I actually think I'm better now. I have a much better understanding of testing methodology and I have fewer personal attachments to decks. Plus my most recent crop of decks has been statistically outstanding.

All my design success comes from hours and hours of work that is the same between 2000 and now. I put in a ton of tuning work versus real decks and record all the changes I make. Some people think that good decks come out of a hat but actually they come out of playtesting for a long, long time. In 2000 the Dojo was going down and I'd go to work and test all day. Then I'd go to Neutral Ground and test -- for Nationals I was at NG until 2 a.m. every night with Jon and Steve OMS. Now computers allow you to do large volumes of testing without specific geographic ties like that, whether it's getting a game on MTGO at any time or playing 10 games of apprentice before work every day (which is fairly common for me).

Firestarter: What would you have done?

This weekend in Japan I was witness to an unprecedented scenario at a high-level **Magic** tournament. With a \$10,000 difference between the first- and second-place prizes at Japan's National Championship, the tournament staff backed up what would have been the deciding game of the finals to a point where an incorrect ruling by the judge changed the outcome of the game. With the help of video and judge's notes, they recreated the game and let it continue with the correct ruling. The player who had been adversely affected by the ruling went on to win the game and then the National Championship. (You can [read all the details here.](#))

The question I pose to you this week is simply this: If it was your decision, what would you have done? Would you have let the incorrect ruling stand or would you have tried to make things right as the organizers in Japan did? I am especially interested in hearing what you judges out there have to say on the matter.

As always, you can click on the discuss link to go the forums and voice your opinion on the matter.

*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.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Brian David-Marshall](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

