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Golden Ruel

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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It was no small task to pry [Pro Tour-Los Angeles](#) Champion Antoine Ruel from his well-wishers on Sunday. You don't play as long as Antoine has on the Pro Tour without making a lot of friends. The inevitable winner's celebration (paid for by the winner, natch) was getting larger by the minute and threatening to take a hefty bite out of the French Pro's earnings.

"It would be minus \$4,000, I think," laughed a happy Antoine when asked what his profit on the weekend would be if he took all his supporters to dinner. "I was surprised that so many people wanted me to win and not the American guy. I was supported by a lot of people. It was great."

After playing on the Pro Tour for seven years, Antoine's reaction to winning his first Pro Tour was truly a joy to witness. He vacillated between sheer joy, sobbing with relief, and stunned disbelief. As far as I can tell, only Gab Tsang has experienced a longer gap from first Pro Tour appearance to first Pro Tour trophy. I have rarely seen a player appreciate the accomplishment as much as Antoine seemed to be enjoying it this past Sunday. He knows far better than most how difficult it was for him to reach this pinnacle of a **Magic** player's career.



A horde of fellow players descended on Antoine after he won.

"I have played in so many Pro Tours – so many," he said afterward. "I was hoping that I would just make the Top 8 a few more times. I could barely hope to win once. It is very hard to win. People are so good. You need to be lucky. You need the right deck. You need everything to go the right way. It was one of my dreams and this dream came true."

Antoine has been playing on the Pro Tour since the 1999 season, and playing the game even longer than that. He reached the Top 8 of Worlds to cap off the 2001 season and did not play on Sunday again until San Diego in 2004. Over the course of seven seasons, his approach to the game has softened and he has become much more attentive to the process of playing – as opposed to what was once a far more goal-oriented approach.



Ruel showed tremendous joy after winning.

"When I first started it was just a game like it is for everyone. Then I started playing tournaments. I have always played a lot of sports and loved competition. At first I was trying to win, win, and win. Now I am trying more to enjoy the game – to enjoy the places and the people. It is weird maybe but I don't have the same will to win that I used to and now I win – weird."

I remember a few years back in Berlin, talking to the Top 8 competitors. Several of them made similar assertions about approaching the game from a new less trophy-driven perspective. Antoine claimed to see no connection between his change in perspective and his change in fortune. To my eyes, he seemed supremely confident in the tournament and not affected by nerves. He assured me that he was indeed very nervous.

"Maybe not during the Top 8," he admitted. "Once you get to the Top 8 everything is just bonus. You are trying to reach the Top 8 and then you see what happens. You try to do your best. Yesterday in the 15th round when I was playing for Top 8 I was soooooo nervous. Benjamin Peebles-Mundy was playing red-white and lost the last three rounds to miss Top 8. It was hard for him. I was so stressed even if it was a good matchup."

One of the juicier stories once Antoine reached the Top 8 was the debate over his choice of a more traditional **Psychatog** deck, as opposed to the teched-out Dredgeatog versions using **Life from the Loam**. Antoine bristled at Randy's comments during the pregame webcast and it seemed to fuel him throughout the Top 8.

"People came and told me that he was insulting my deck. That it was bad choice...that I didn't test...that it looked random...that I should have played Loam. Whereas I just didn't want to play it. It looked slow. I wanted my **Psychatog** to be effective. Whenever I played a **Psychatog**, one or two turns later my opponent would be dead. I didn't play all these..." Antoine fumbled for an English equivalent of the French term he was thinking of.

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- Finals: [101 MB zip](#) | [BT](#)
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"You say it 'bouiboui' in French. You draw, you are doing all these beautiful things, it's cool, it's funny but it is not efficient. With my deck I am just drawing, countering, and killing my opponent. It is more than enough."

"It is the deck I played with my friends in Sydney three or four years ago in Standard – almost exactly with **Mental Notes** and **Logics**. When I saw all these fetch lands and all these new dual lands I wanted to play a **Psychatog** deck that could kill my opponent – something that could kill them in one turn."

Antoine Ruel		
2002 Worlds (Type 2): UB Psychatog		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Cephalid Coliseum	4 Aether Burst	4 Duress
12 Island	4 Circular Logic	2 Gainsay
4 Swamp	4 Counterspell	4 Ghastly Demise
4 Underground River	2 Deep Analysis	1 Lobotomy
24 lands	4 Fact or Fiction	2 Skeletal Scrying
	4 Force Spike	2 Slay
	3 Memory Lapse	15 sideboard cards
4 Psychatog	4 Mental Note	
4 creatures	3 Repulse	
	32 other spells	

Antoine Ruel – Psychatog		
Pro Tour-Los Angeles 2005 Top 8		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
2 Cephalid Coliseum	3 Boomerang	2 Darkblast
7 Island	4 Circular Logic	4 Duress
1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds	4 Counterspell	3 Ghastly Demise
4 Polluted Delta	1 Deep Analysis	1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror
2 Seat of the Synod	3 Fact or Fiction	2 Razormane Masticore
2 Stalking Stones	4 Force Spike	1 Skeletal Scrying
1 Swamp	1 Gifts Ungiven	1 Smother
1 Vault of Whispers	2 Mana Leak	1 Stalking Stones
3 Watery Grave	4 Mental Note	15 sideboard cards
23 lands	2 Opt	
	2 Smother	
4 Psychatog	2 Thirst for Knowledge	
1 Wonder	32 other spells	
5 creatures		

"I was not playing Wish – I was not playing any of the slow cards. I was not playing **Upheaval**. I was not playing **Loam**. I just wanted to have an aggressive **Psychatog** deck. That's why I played **Mental Note**. That's why I played **Logic**."

While many of the pundits were dismissing Ruel's ThrowbackTog list, he was looking at the brackets and saw a clear path through to the finals.

"I felt it was going to go very well for me against [Kenji] Tsumura and Tsuyoshi [Fujita]. I was less confident in the last match. It was not such a good matchup. Almost a bad one. I think. Maybe 50/50. Your best matchup is basically against any deck that is slow. Gifts is a very good matchup. Tsumura's Tog is a good matchup as well. So is Domain. I think I would have won vs. [Chris] McDaniel's Heartbeat deck, but Zvi says I would have lost. I will test it for Worlds and I will let you know then."

Coming into this event, the two Ruel brothers had tested with the Dutchies and Alexander Peset – the Level Up team, named for baby brother Olivier's new French language magazine. Leveling up was very much on everyone's mind this weekend. Peset needed to reach the Top 32 in order to do so, Antoine reached Level 5, and the deck also brought a familiar face back into the Magical fold.



Antoine Ruel finally captured Pro Tour glory.

"Last week one of my best friends played it in a PTQ and lost in the quarterfinals to the Affinity deck Olivier played in the Pro Tour (and ended up 11th)," Antoine said. "There were two of us who played my deck at this Pro Tour. I won and Alexander Peset came in 20th. After Day One I was very sure that the deck was good and I emailed a

friend with the decklist and the changes he had to make – as well as all the ins and outs – for him to play in the PTQ. It was Frank Canu. He is not playing **Magic** right now but would like to come back to the train and travel and see the world. He won a PTQ with one slot today – I am very happy."

Even without Level 5 status, Antoine would have still traveled to as many GPs as possible. He just purchased his ticket to Grand Prix-Beijing. While he knows which events he will be attending, he is not sure which decks he will be there with.



Fellow PT winner Pierre Canali congratulates Antoine.

"I am going to Grand Prix-Copenhagen next weekend. I don't know what I am going to play. Maybe this one, maybe something else just for fun. Just to play some fast games, I might play this white-red deck Tsuyoshi Fujita played. It looks very good and efficient as well."

Another deck Ruel was considering was the deck he beat in the finals, Billy Moreno's Madness 'Tog. "The deck looks more than interesting. It might be the deck I play in Copenhagen. The deck may have been the deck of the tournament. Maybe he should have won because his deck was probably the best."

Antoine advised anyone considering the deck to make the necessary tweaks to get it down to the minimum allowed by DCI rule, as Moreno was running a 61-card version.

"Of course you have to play 60 cards. If you want to have your Mongrel on turn two you have to play sixty cards. The difference is not huge but sometimes you need to draw the good card. If you draw the card that shouldn't be there, that can change everything. It probably doesn't change anything to be honest, but it CAN change something. If you think a card is good enough to be in the deck, you want to draw it."

As for what Antoine expects to see at the Grand Prix, "There is going to be a **Psychatog** deck – either mine or the Japanese, I don't know. The white-red will be very popular. It is beatdown. It is good and efficient. You will see a lot of white-red I think. Then maybe Madness 'Tog, depending on how good it is."

You can follow Antoine all weekend in the coverage from Grand Prix-Copenhagen. And if you're really into events, you can read about them non-stop this coming weekend. In addition to Copenhagen, Melbourne, Australia and Kitakyuushuu, Japan hosting events in what is sure to be one of the busiest weekends of the year.

(Two-Headed) Giant News

The *Ravnica* fun is just getting started. Next weekend, players will have the chance to partake in [Ravnica Two-Headed Giant release tournaments](#) at local stores around the world. There will be a cool participation prize in the form of foil **Underworld Dreams** to the first 16 players at each location. If both players on a team are new to tournament play, they will also get a pair of matching beanies. And first place nets you a special **Two-Headed Dragon** deckbox.

In my *Ravnica* preview article, I mentioned the Two-Headed Giant format as being ideal for introducing new players to the game. I have a friend who has been playing for years and has taught several of his co-workers how to play. None of his pupils have ever stepped foot inside a tournament site for fear of losing. He will be bringing at least one of these tenderfoots to a Release event, since my friend can talk his teammate through all the decisions.

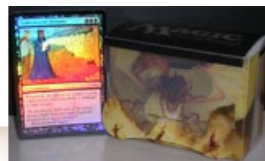
This also makes it ideal for anyone wanting to show the tournament side of things off to a significant other. Because one dominant head is responsible for making all the final decisions, this is the ideal format to play with someone you love who wants to share the **Magic** experience with you, but might not be able to go it alone.

Firestarter: Tog Talk

Which version of Tog will you be taking to the Grand Prix/PTQ scene? Antoine's version won the event and dominated Tsumura's Dredgeatog build. Can the Japanese version be made more powerful? What about MadTog 2020, the hybridized Madness Tog list that carried Billy Moreno to the finals?

If you are not bringing Tog, what are you bringing to deal with it? It will surely become a force to be reckoned with on the local level. As always, the forums are your oyster and you can dispense your pearls by clicking on the discuss button below.

*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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