

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



# My Top 10 of 2005

Brian David-Marshall  
The Week That Was  
Friday, December 16, 2005



W<sup>hew!</sup>

As this is the last Week That Was for 2005, it's time to look back on a heck of a year. The next couple of weeks will be reruns on the column front, although there will be a couple of Grand Prix events to follow over this weekend before we close up shop entirely for the holidays. Before I go, I wanted to look back at the year that was and share my Top 10 memories of the 2005 season with you.

## 10. What Happens in Japan Stays in Japan

It took the Japanese almost nine seasons before they finally won a Pro Tour. The Japanese have always performed well on their home turf, and that's where they finally put a player through into a Top 8 when Tsuyoshi Fujita went into the record books in [Tokyo 2001](#). They put a pair of players into the Top 8 of [Yokohama of 2003](#) but it was not until Masashiro Kuroda's win in [Kobe 2004](#) that they finally hoisted a trophy.

The Pro Tour returned to Japan this past January for the first time since Kuroda's historic win. Once again the Japanese feasted on home cooking at [Pro Tour-Nagoya](#). Kuroda returned to the Top 8 in his first Pro Tour appearance since his win but it was little-known local Shu Komuro who won the last individual Rochester Draft to be run at high-level events.

Pro Tour-Nagoya was also notable for [Terry Soh's famous bluff](#) against Frank Karsten in the quarterfinals where the Malaysian player pretended that he had misunderstood his own life total after failing to block a potentially lethal attack.

## 9. Deck the Hall

2005 marked the inaugural class of the [Magic Pro Tour Hall of Fame](#). The Hall of Fame began with a teaser by Randy Buehler, was announced formally by Chris Galvin, and culminated just a few weeks ago with Olle Råde, Alan Comer, Tommi Hovi, Darwin Kastle, and Jon Finkel showing off their rings.



The first class shows off their hardware.

One of the perks of membership in the Hall of Fame is a standing invite to play in every Pro Tour. Three of the five players chose to take advantage of their newfound benefits at Worlds. A disappointed Tommi Hovi would have played but could not secure decks in time while Jon Finkel jetted in for the ceremony and had to head home immediately afterward. Jon did tease that his Pro Tour days may not be over, suggesting an appearance at the Limited Pro Tour in Prague could be a possibility.

Of the three players who did show up to play, Olle Råde was the highest finisher. While 149th is not especially exciting for someone who has finished well in the money for more than half of the Pro Tours in his career, he did finish strong with a 5-1 record in Extended playing with his trademark [Savannah Lions](#).

## 8. Membership Has Its Privileges

There were several big shakeups on the Pro Tour in 2005 but none affected professional magicians as much as Randy Buehler's announcement of the [Pro Players Club](#). The Players Club introduced a tiered system of benefits that players could earn by accumulating Pro Points. Things start to get good at Level 3 when players lock up invites throughout the following season. Also introduced at that level are appearance fees which replace the end-of-year payout starting in 2006.

Level 3 mages receive \$500 for each Pro Tour they attend. As they move up through the levels, appearance fees go up and free trips get thrown into the mix. The Holy Grail for players on the Tour is Level 6 where they get free trips, hotel accommodations, \$2,000 per Pro Tour, and \$500 for each Grand Prix.

Five players reached the pinnacle of membership after Worlds. Four of those five are from Japan and you can expect to see them fighting hard to not have to pay for their own flights 12 months from now. While Players Club benefits

Level 6 Mages		
Kenji Tsumura	Japan	84
Olivier Ruel	France	83
Masashi Oiso	Japan	80
Katsuhiro Mori	Japan	69

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last throughout the entire season, the five 6's will need to rack up at least 50 Pro Points next season if they want to keep that status in 2007 (remember, only four Pro Tours plus Worlds next year, so there will be fewer points available). Membership has its privileges but it also comes with a few demands.

Shuhei Nakamura	Japan	67
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## 7. The One That Didn't Get Away



Nassif shown in Atlanta (left) and way back from New York in '01.

Gabriel Nassif has been successful on the Pro Tour in ways that most players dream about. Yet until this season, Nassif and his five Top 8 appearances could only dream about matching the accomplishments of one-time Top 8ers Dave Price, Shu Komuro, and Randy Buehler, who all made the most of their only Top 8 appearances by winning the whole she-bang.

That's right. Despite being one of the game's greatest players, Nassif had never won a Pro Tour prior to [Atlanta 2005](#) as a member of Nova. His first Top 8 came in [2001 in New York](#) as a member of Les Plus Class with Nicholas Olivieri and Amiel Tannenbaum. In 2005 he joined forces with Gab Tsang and David Rood and the veteran trio calmly dispatched all comers.

The win was a long time coming for all three players. For Tsang, the win came seven years after a remarkable 1996-97 season that saw him reach the Top 8 twice. Like Nassif, Rood had come close before as a member of 2020 when his squad fell to Phoenix Foundation in Boston 2002.

Player of the Year Kenji Tsumura first popped up on the radar at this event when he reached the Top 4 as a member of One Spin, along with Tomoharu Saito and World's Top 8 competitor Tomohiro Kaji.

## 6. Japan Conquers Boston

Historically some of Japan's best players have not traveled beyond the Pacific Rim for Pro Tour events they were qualified for, and even rarer to Grand Prix events. Exhibits 1 and 1A are Masashiro Kuroda and Masahiko Morita, who hold a combined 22 GP Top 8s between them, almost exclusively in the APAC region. I wish I could have been at [Grand Prix-Boston](#) to capture the dumbstruck look on the faces of the American players as Morita, Masashi Oiso, Tsuyoshi Fujita, and Osamu Fujita came through the door. Oiso and Morita both reached the Top 8 and Oiso eventually won.

The same players and a couple more would also show up at [Grand Prix-Seattle](#) a month later with Fujita and Shuhei Nakamura reaching the Top 8. This was all before the Players Club was ever announced. With four Japanese players reaching Level 6 and points at a premium in the coming year with fewer Pro Tours, don't be surprised to see more Japanese players at foreign GPs.

## 5. Sunday Taken

[Pro Tour-Philadelphia](#) featured a radical new triple-elimination format with money on the line in each and every round. It also featured a new American team called Taking Back Sunday. Many of the members were originally part of a Dutch/North American superteam centered around TOGIT. When personalities clashed, the splinter team that included Tim Aten, John Pelcak, Gadiel Szeifer (of :B fame) was formed. Armed with T-shirts from an indie band by the same name, the team set out to show the world that American players still had what it takes to win a Pro Tour.



There were four Americans in the Top 8 including TOGIT's Mark Herberholz, but it was the prophetic Szeifer who made his second Top 8 of the season and got to square off against Kenji Tsumura in the finals. This Top 8 also foreshadowed the Player of the Year race when Kenji and Olivier Ruel played in the semifinals. Both players were in their second Top 8 of the season. Perhaps sensing how the year would play out, Olivier called Kenji "the best player in the world" at the event, throwing the spotlight on the rising Japanese star.

Szeifer showed that the U.S. wasn't off the Magic map at all.

## 4. How Sweep It Is

[Pro Tour-London](#) was a great event that saw the return of an old favorite when Tomi Walamies reached the Top 8. Masashi Oiso reached the Top 8 for the fifth time in his career, putting his career Top 8 average at just around .333. It seemed like it was going to be his chance to finally hold up the trophy ... but the day belonged to Geoffrey Siron.



Geoffrey ended up being the only red drafter at the Top 8 table and managed to pull off the unprecedented 9-0 Sunday sweep. The sweep would be remarkable in and of itself, but just look at the players he swept: Masashi Oiso, Johan Sadeghpour, and Tsuyoshi Fujita. Maybe he got lucky. If you want to see how the historic draft played out, you can experience Siron's picks first hand by using the [draft viewer tool](#) that debuted that weekend.

### 3. Antoine At Last

Siron's sweep was his second Top 8 of the season.

"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."

That was how Antoine Ruel described his straight-forward Tog deck's success in the Top 8 of [Pro Tour-Los Angeles](#) over more tricked-out dredge-based Tog decks. Like Nassif's win earlier in the season, this was Antoine's first victory after a long and illustrious career on the Pro Tour.

## 2. Team Rush Wins Triple Crown

They call themselves Team Rush. Masashi Oiso, Kenji Tsumura, and Katsuhiko Mori rushed the stage in Tokyo just a couple of weeks ago and took all the hardware that Wizards had to give away at the [2005 World Championships](#). Oiso was part of the Japanese National team that won the team competition (along with Ichirou Shimura and Takuma Morofuji), Kenji held on to win the Player of the Year title, and Mori was crowned the World Champion.

Japan became the only country besides the U.S. to pull off the Triple Crown. The U.S. National team had a chance to keep that from happening as they faced Oiso and company in the finals. Two years earlier in Berlin, Kai Budde was crowned Player of the Year and Daniel Zink was the World Champion, but the U.S. team stymied Germany in the team event to wreck the last leg of the trifecta.

*Oiso gets the celebratory toss from his countrymen.*



*The Japanese dominated the trophy presentation at Worlds.*

## 1. Player of the Year Race

For me the highlight of the 2005 season was watching the [Player of the Year race](#) unfold. Olivier Ruel was an early favorite but Kenji Tsumura was not going to be denied and seemed to keep pace with the French player every step of the way. [Kenji ended up edging Olivier by a single point](#), with the results hanging in the balance until the last day of the Swiss at Worlds. Even more fascinating was the fact that Oiso inserted himself into the race and came within four points of forcing a tie despite skipping Pro Tour-Philadelphia.

I caught up with the winner after the event via email and spoke to him about his remarkable season (thanks to Ron Foster for the translation). The six-year veteran was still stunned by his accomplishment and amazingly feels that he needs to improve his game for the coming year to live up to the title. He also hoped that he would inspire more Japanese players to attend events.

**BDM:** *Since you decided to be a Pro, who has influenced you the most?*

**Kenji:** I think the people who influenced me the most are Kai Budde, Masashi Oiso, and the Ruel brothers. I started thinking seriously about profession **Magic** around the time Budde was at his best. I remember he won the first Pro Tour I ever attended ([Chicago '02](#)). I myself didn't make Day Two, but instead of playing in the QT or other side events, I spent both days following Kai around and watching him play.



*Tsumura finally managed to relax*

Oiso is to me a closer-to-home Kai. He's also like a big brother to me – he's *at the end of Day Three.*

gone with me to just about every overseas tournament I've ever gone to. I remember thinking when he became Rookie of the Year how amazing it was that someone who was close to me, a friend of mine, could make the Top 8 at a PT and even get a title like that. I had never imagined something like that ever happening.

The Ruel brothers are obviously talented at **Magic**. They're also my first non-Japanese friends. I first met them at Grand Prix-Sendai, and I was so happy when they remembered me the next time we met at Pro Tour-San Diego. Before I met them, I had never really thought about being friends with foreigners – my English isn't that good, and I didn't have many opportunities to talk to non-Japanese. Antoine and Olivier showed me that it's easy to make friends, and that encouraged me to study English.

**BDM:** *Do you wish to thank anyone?*

**Kenji:** I would like to thank my family, who in spite of all the troubles and inconvenience I've caused them, have been supportive of my **Magic** career. I can't think of the right words to describe how grateful I am to them. I would also like to thank everyone who has played **Magic** with me. I truly believe that I was only able to get this Player of the Year title because so many people helped me come this far. So, again, I would like to express my thanks to my family and everyone around the world who's played **Magic** with me and helped me get better.

**BDM:** *You've said you want to become a better player, but is that even possible? What do you think you need to improve?*

**Kenji:** I think I still have a lot to learn about Limited. I don't know how to draft, and I don't know how to play a Limited game. I think even deciding when I should mulligan is harder than it is in Constructed. I really need to practice. Maybe next year I should apprentice myself to Richard Hoan or Anton Jonsson! =)

**BDM:** *This year was one of the most contested Player of the Year races in a long time. What do you think about Oiso's and Olivier's season? What do you think about them as players?*

**Kenji:** I think both Oiso and Olivier are truly great players. I respect them for not just their play skill, but for things outside the game as well. Oiso managed to have a great season while still going to school, which must have been hard. I admire Olivier as a person. On Day Three of Worlds, I was upset about something, but Olivier came up to me – his rival – and did his best to listen to me and tried to cheer me up. I was impressed that he would take the time to talk with me and try to support me like that. He's just a great human being. I look up to both him and Oiso, and I hope that someday I can be like them.

**BDM:** *Tell us about your season. What was the best thing?*

**Kenji:** This was a really long year. I was away from home a lot. It was a wild year, but a fun one. I think the best event was Pro Tour-Atlanta. It was a team event, and the first time any of us had ever made Top 4. Winning felt so good, and I got to share that experience with my friends.



*Look out, Kenji – that trophy's almost as big as you!*



*Kenji congratulates new World Champion Katsuhiko Mori.*

**BDM:** *The worst thing?*

**Kenji:** The worst event? Any non-team Limited event. I have yet to make Day Two of a Limited Pro Tour. =(

**BDM:** *What do you think was the most important occurrence over the year?*

**Kenji:** As for the most important event in the season, I think I'd have to say Pro Tour-Columbus. I was able to hook up with Katsuhiko Mori before the event, and it was the first Pro Tour I made Day Two, which was a big confidence-booster for me. Also, the Pro Points I earned at that event were enough to put me on the gravy train, which helped me for the rest of the season.

**BDM:** *To most people outside Japan, you were someone who just popped onto the scene at Nationals one year. Who do you think is the next big "undiscovered" Japanese player?*

**Kenji:** Masashi Teramoto. He played at Pro Tour-Los Angeles, even though he didn't make Day two. He goes to all the QTs in Japan, trying to get onto the Pro Tour.

**BDM:** *What did you think of the Hall of Fame induction ceremony at Worlds? Who do you think will be the first Japanese player in the Hall?*

**Kenji:** I thought the rings were really cool. =) I'd like to be able to join the Hall of Fame myself someday – I hope my results are good enough to let me do so. I think the first Japanese player to get in will be either Itaru Ishida or Tsuyoshi Fujita.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Finish</u>	<u>Prize</u>	<u>Cum. Prize</u>	<u>Pro Points</u>	<u>Cum. Points</u>	<u>Deck Played</u>	<u>Designer</u>
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2004 Oct	PT Columbus (Extended)	21	2250	\$2,250	7	7	Black Desire	Mori
2004 Nov	GP Yokohama (Booster Draft)	420	0	\$2,250	0	7		
2005 Jan	GP Osaka (Team Limited)	4	667	\$2,917	2	9		
2005 Jan	PT Nagoya (Rochester Draft)	177	0	\$2,917	2	11		
2005 Feb	GP Boston (Extended)	27	250	\$3,167	1	12	ScepterChant	Tsumura
2005 Mar	GP Seattle (Extended)	62	0	\$3,167	0	12	Black Desire	Mori
2005 Mar	PT Atlanta (Team Limited)	4	5400	\$8,567	12	24		
2005 Mar	GP Singapore (Extended)	54	0	\$8,567	0	24	Black Desire	Mori
2005 May	PT Philadelphia	2	12275	\$20,842	20	44	Myojin Deck	Ishida
2005 May	GP Matsuyama (Booster Draft)	19	250	\$21,092	1	45		
2005 July	PT London (Booster Draft)	160	0	\$21,092	2	47		
2005 July	GP Niigata (Kamigawa Block)	6	800	\$21,892	3	50	Godo Gifts	Mori
2005 Oct	GP Taipei (Kamigawa Block)	14	500	\$22,392	2	52	Godo Gifts	Mori
2005 Oct	GP Salt Lake City (Kamigawa Block)	3	1200	\$23,592	4	56	Godo Gifts	Mori
2005 Nov	PT Las Angeles (Extended)	3	15000	\$38,592	16	72	Dredatog	Ishida
2005 Nov	GP Kitakyushu (Extended)	12	500	\$39,092	2	74	ScepterChant	Mori
2005 Nov	GP Beijing (Extended)	8	800	\$39,892	3	77	Dredatog	Ishida
2005 Nov-Dec	Worlds (Standard/Draft/Extended)	21	2250	\$42,142	7	84	Glare/Dredgatog	Mori/Ishida
2005 Dec	2005 Player of the Year Prize !	1	12000	\$54,142	7	84		

## Firestarter: Magic Resolutions

Now that we've looked back, it's time to look forward. With [magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com) going on the regular two-week hiatus over the holidays, you won't see a shiny new Week That Was until 2006. With the New Year comes your typical New Year's resolutions...so break out those **Magic** resolutions! Head to the forums with promises and declarations you're sure to keep...here's mine, to get you started: I want to make more time to play **Magic**, and I hope to get to enough upcoming Limited PTQs to give myself a reasonable shot to qualify for Prague.

*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](http://Top8Magic.com), the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.*



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