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Calm Before the Storm

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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As you read this, I'm preparing for an exciting **Magic** weekend covering Grand Prix-Richmond – and the debut of *Guildpact* on the tournament scene. Not only is a cadre of Japan's finest currently flying toward Richmond, but there is going to be a car coming straight from Origins 1997 to the venue.



Player of the Year Kenji Tsumura will be looking to shake off his limited Limited reputation with a strong U.S. showing this weekend. Joining him on the flight from Japan are World Champion Katsuhiko Mori, as well as two-time Top 8 competitors Shuhei Nakamura and Tomohiro Kaji. They will be looking for a repeat of last year's Grand Prix-Boston when three Japanese players made the Top 8 and Masashi Oiso hoisted the trophy.

Not content with how the young turks have been defending the home turf of late, a group of time travelers are heading to Richmond to show the kids how they did it back in the '90s. Grand Prix-Washington D.C. winner Ben Farkas leads a pack of '90s all-stars that includes Worlds '99 Top 8 competitor Jamie Parke (both former members of Team Sped), the Type II King himself Jason Opalka, Mark Le Pine, and Dan and Steve OMS. Dave Williams and Ken Krouner will also be helping the weary travelers adjust to customs and mores of the future (and no doubt lining up some late night drafts).

But before we can know what the spoils of *Guildpact* have in store for drafting, I wanted to do a little house-cleaning on items rolling around the **Magic** world.

Landslide Victory in Road Warrior

I don't think anyone is going to be particularly surprised to learn that Olivier Ruel won the [Road Warrior ballot](#) for the 2006 **Magic** Invitational. Not only did more than half of the votes get cast for Oli, only one other player cracked the 10 percent mark – Antonino De Rosa, at 10.3%

Anyone else going to Invitational as the Road Warrior would have seemed as wrong as a Mad Max sequel with Rick Moranis in the title role. As Olivier entered the final stretch of the Player of the Year race last year, he reminded me of a marathon runner stumbling across the finish line only to fall a few seconds short of breaking the tape. I am sure Olivier would rather have the title, but his efforts did go completely unrewarded – if you want to call his season total of more than \$50,000 unrewarding.



Ruel repeated as the Road Warrior.

A Genius By Any Other Name

[This week's ballot](#) is much more contentious and even has a pretty big surprise in store among the candidates. Resident Genius is a broad category that has been used to showcase the minds behind the **Magic** – historically great players, Limited experts, and the game's best deckbuilders.

Over the past year, there has been little discussion of the game's top deckbuilders that did not include Mike Flores. Despite a dearth of high-level action for Mike, he still managed to define the Standard metagame with his Big Red build, Jushi Control, and Critical Mass and its subsequent update.

The question of whether or not someone belonged on an Invitational ballot without Pro Tour success consumed much bandwidth in the past week among the Wizards crowd. In the end, Mike was added to the ballot because the Invitational is not just about posting Pro Tour results – it's about **Magic**, and Mike certainly is an elite thinker when it comes to the game we all love.

Now that he is on the ballot, it is up to you decide if he can go toe to toe with the likes of Tsuyoshi Fujita (who not only built format-defining decks but played them to multiple Sunday finishes), Frank Karsten (who posted Top 8s



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with 40- and 60-card concoctions), Pro Tour winner Gabriel Nassif, Itaru Ishida (who built decks for Player of the Year Kenji Tsumura), or any of the players on this ballot with more impressive Pro Tour resumes.

Found and Lost

Pro Tour-Hawaii is the first event on the 2006 Pro Tour schedule where Wizards' PTQ-winning travel award of paid airfare to the event kicks in. The deadline for filing the necessary paperwork is 30 days before the event, meaning that as of this Friday, if you won a PTQ and you have not filled out the necessary forms, you have missed out on a free trip to Hawaii.

That's right, you left a free ticket – round-trip, even – sitting on the table. If you still want to play in the event, you are going to have to pay for the ticket yourself and that ain't gonna be cheap at this late stage...

...did I scare you? Good, because that scenario would be 100 percent accurate if the deadline hadn't been moved back a week for all you slackers out there (you know who you are). Almost three-quarters of the PTQ winners have yet to claim their tickets. If you won a PTQ, you have until February 8 to get everything pulled together for your Hawaiian vacation. For more information, click [here](#).

Suddenly Sam

Congratulations to Sam Gomersall on winning his first Grand Prix title this past weekend. His victory also broke a 93-year drought by British players on the Grand Prix circuit – a monkey on England's collective back that was surgically removed with Sam's razor-sharp Boros deck in the Top 8 draft – a draft that he had to wade through over 1,000 players to get to.



[Grand Prix-Hasselt](#) was the last GP to feature triple-*Ravnica*. I caught up with Sam and asked him what he was hoping for when he opened his Sealed Deck card pool in order to outlast the tremendous field.

"I wanted to be going some sort of four-colour deck hopefully using all of the double mana lands I opened," Sam recalled. "I wanted two *Civic Wayfinders* over most rares to be in my pool – just to have as few lands as possible but still have a good mana base."

He ended up with the two *Civic Wayfinders* and a *Farseek* – no doubt prompting the same joy that opening Meloku in the previous block inspired – but did not have any of the coveted bounce lands, a.k.a. Karoos.

Gomersall's Boros build wrecked the Top 8.

Despite the green tools, Sam still felt "my mana was quite bad." He ended up losing his match with Antoine Ruel to mana-screw and felt lucky to escape Day One without similar misfortune.

This weekend in Richmond players will have two fewer chances to crack open green mana-fixing and many players have already commented on how much more challenging it is to get the mana right in this new Limited environment. Even a Limited expert such as Sam seemed daunted by the new format.

"I have so little clue its unreal," laughed Sam. He was quick to point out that despite the potential loss of Wayfinders, players would "get more double lands per pack." When asked why the Karoos seemed so important he simply stated, "They are card advantage...in a land...so ridiculous."

One thing he was certain about was the demise of the Boros draft strategy with the addition of the third pack. "It must be dead," Sam lamented. "It was pretty bad before but now ... I guess it's just white-green-red."

New Team Ratings

Gulp!

I used to have a pretty good team rating. The permutation of me, Eric Kesselman, and Brook North (a.k.a. Monkey Dog) was ranked 45th in the world at a hair under 1800 in Team Limited. My rating with Tim McKenna and Paul Jordan (secretly one of the most successful team Limited players in North America) at 1709 was enough to keep us within the top 350 teams.

I say "used to have" because in late March, Team ratings are going to be replaced with Individual Team ratings in both Constructed and Limited. The new Individual Team rating will compare each individual player's Team rating to the average of the opposing player's Individual Team rating. The match result will then determine which player's ratings will increase and decrease.

For the official announcement, click [here](#).



The real beauty of this is that Wizards is going to travel back in time (perhaps borrowing the Farkas/Parke/Opalka vessel) and rerun all the team events to determine each player's Individual Team rating. That should bode well for me as far as my Monkey Dog matches go. I am a little wary of my Monkey Mutt and Shanghai matches since I don't know who I played with and we apparently didn't do too well.

This overhaul is in anticipation of the upcoming Team Constructed season of Pro Tour Qualifiers, Grand Prix, and the eventual Team Constructed Pro Tour in Charleston. All three-person Team Constructed format qualifiers will affect the Individual Team Constructed rating.

The three-person Team Constructed Grand Prix will take an average of the team members' *Individual Constructed* rating on February 8, 2006 to determine byes. For teams with an average rating of 2000 or higher, two byes will be awarded. A single bye will be earned for teams with an average of 1900-1999.

Ratings invites to Pro Tour-Charleston will use both this *Individual Team Constructed* rating and *Individual Constructed* ratings in the following manner:

- Teams whose three members have an average *Individual Team Constructed* rating equal to 1700 or higher on May 3, 2006 will receive an invitation.
- Teams whose three members have an average *Individual Constructed* rating equal to 2000 or higher on May 3, 2006 will receive an invitation.

The Team Constructed PTQ season starts March 25. Gentlemen, start your mana engines.

Firestarter: Guildpact Sealed Deck Preview

Ravnica certainly has players excited about playing **Magic** and I am looking forward to an enormous turnout this weekend when *Guildpact* makes its debut. I did a couple of Sealed Deck builds with Jon Becker on the Beta in preparation for the event and I saved a particularly interesting card pool to share with you. It is fairly challenging and I invite your comments and builds in the forums in lieu of a traditional Firestarter.

There is plenty of synergy with green-black-white thanks to tokens, Rotwurm, and the Wrath effect, but there is also the temptation to go blue-black-red with *Invoke the Firemind*, plenty of flying, double *Last Gasp*, and *Electrolyze*.

Sealed Deck Card Pool		
Main Deck		
75 cards		
1 Gruul Turf	1 Absolver Thrull	1 Castigate
1 Sacred Foundry	1 Barbarian Riftcutter	1 Conjurer's Ban
1 Selesnya Sanctuary	1 Burning-Tree Bloodscale	1 Consult the Necrosages
3 lands	1 Caregiver	1 Cremate
	1 Carven Caryatid	1 Dogpile
	1 Dimir Cutpurse	1 Douse in Gloom
	1 Drake Familiar	1 Dryad's Caress
	1 Dromad Purebred	1 Electrolyze
	1 Ghor-Clan Savage	1 Festival of the Guildpact
	1 Golgari Rotwurm	1 Fists of Ironwood
	1 Grayscaled Gharial	1 Flash Conscription
	1 Greater Mossdog	1 Flight of Fancy
	1 Gruul Nodorog	2 Gigadrowse
	1 Gruul Scrapper	1 Golgari Germination
	1 Izzet Chronarch	1 Golgari Signet
	1 Leashling	1 Guardian's Magemark
	1 Mortipede	1 Hour of Reckoning
	1 Petrahydrox	1 Incite Hysteria
	1 Root-Kin Ally	1 Invoke the Firemind
	1 Screeching Griffin	1 Izzet Signet
	1 Shrieking Grottesque	2 Last Gasp
	1 Skarrgan Pit-Skulk	1 Mizzium Transreliquat
	1 Snapping Drake	1 Necromantic Thirst
	1 Starved Rusalka	1 Perplex
	1 Stoneshaker Shaman	1 Pillory of the Sleepless
	1 Stratozeppelin	1 Rally the Righteous
	1 Streetbreaker Wurm	1 Recollect
	1 Tattered Drake	1 Scatter the Seeds
	1 Terraformer	1 Seeds of Strength
	1 Thoughtpicker Witch	1 Shattering Spree
	2 Torch Drake	1 Sinstriker's Will
	1 Vedalken Entrancer	1 Vigor Mortis
	1 Veteran Armorer	1 Wojek Siren
	1 Viashino Fangtail	
	1 Wild Cantor	35 other spells
	1 Wojek Apothecary	
	37 creatures	

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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