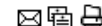


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Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, February 10, 2006



Today's column originally started as a blog item for the [Grand Prix-Richmond](#) coverage. There were a number of player disqualifications at the tournament, and I wanted to talk to Head Judge Sheldon Menery about the situation.

As we tackled the topic of cheating, I realized that this was not going to be a couple of simple paragraphs and decided to make it the focus for this week's installment of TWTV. Along with detailing the infractions his staff caught at the Grand Prix, Sheldon touched on several key points in our conversation applicable for players ranging from the Friday Night **Magic** scene all the way up to the Pro Tour.

BDM: I have heard a couple of players refer to the situation with disqualifications this weekend as something of a bloodbath. Can you tell me what happened?

Sheldon: Saturday was a rough day for the players at Grand Prix-Richmond. We ended up having to disqualify seven different players.

BDM: Is that a large number?

Sheldon: It is the most people I have ever disqualified from an event in the entire 10 or so years that I have been judging.

BDM: What do you attribute the increase to?

Sheldon: We had heard that there were players who might be bringing their own decklists and trying to insert them. We trapped our decklists that we handed the players. I obviously won't go into the details of how we trapped them but it was very clear to us when someone's decklist got inserted into the pile and it wasn't a decklist we gave them. That was a relatively easy catch.

BDM: So all the DQs were of that nature?

Sheldon: We had the whole gamut of disqualifications, from players simply adding cards to their Sealed Deck to players colluding on the outcome of a match. It was the classic things that people get disqualified for – there were just a lot of them here. Maybe they thought they weren't going to get caught.

They were wrong.

The other thing that we have started doing is mid-round deck checks. Players think that once we deck check them they can slide cards into their deck because we are not going to check again. Checking in the middle of the round we actually caught people adding cards. This was a great surprise to some of the players – especially the ones who got caught.

BDM: Do you have any concerns that players at home might be discouraged about attending events in the light of this? Do you think it sends a bad message to players aspiring to play on a higher level?

Sheldon: I think this sends a very, very different message. The message is, "If you cheat, we are going to catch you."

BDM: You are very well-respected by the Pro community and spend a lot of time talking with them. What was their reaction to the DQs and the tougher overall stance on cheating?

Sheldon: The rank-and-file pros are guys that are generally pretty clean. They want a clean game because they are good players. They don't need any kind of underhanded advantage to win. They love the idea. Antonino De Rosa came to me and said "I love the fact that you are taking more aggressive action to catch cheaters. And catching them. You are not just posturing. You are actually catching them."

Hopefully we will send them the message that if you cheat, you will get caught and they won't show up – or we will catch them. One way or the other they will all be gone.

BDM: Talking about trapped decklists for a moment... other TOs have done stuff with carefully inventoried decklists printed on different colored paper to discourage cheating – something that would require



Menery and his staff laid down the law at Grand Prix-Richmond.

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the IMF to pull off. Can you talk about the two different approaches?

Sheldon: My approach is that I know that the players, especially at this level of an event, know they are not supposed to cheat. I don't mind letting players hang themselves. In an ideal world I don't think we shouldn't need to do something like this to prevent it – it just shouldn't happen. But if it is going to happen, I would rather catch the people that are doing it than keep them from doing it. And keep them out of our **Magic** gene pool.

BDM: *So your philosophy is that not only do you keep them out of the Grand Prix but you keep them out of Friday Night **Magic**, Prereleases, and PTQs?*

Sheldon: Exactly. The guys that got disqualified here are most likely facing some suspensions. They willingly, intentionally did things that they know they are not supposed to do. And they planned to do it. Every once in a while you will catch a player in what I call a "cheat of opportunity" – where he will see a situation where he sees his opponent record his life wrong and takes advantage of it. That is just as significant a cheat as planning to cheat –

BDM: *-- but it is very different than packing for it.*

Sheldon: We had guys that brought their own decklists and brought broken decks – of course. We get those guys out of playing the game. They are not going to negatively impact FNM, they are not going to teach a new generation of cheaters because they are not going to be around. If they attempted to cheat at the Grand Prix I am sure they tried it somewhere else.

BDM: *What kind of staff do you need to handle an event like this?*

Sheldon: We are lucky to have, at this event especially, an extremely experienced staff – and an extremely vigilant staff. We have six Level 3s plus myself this weekend and a total of 28 or 29 judges. Our numbers, thanks to Star City Games, were really, really high for judges sponsored to the event. We even had a lot of judges from out of town. One judge came in from Israel, we had one judge from Panama. Jim Shuman – our favorite road warrior – drove all the way from Texas to be here. It was almost a Pro Tour level staff this weekend.

BDM: *If you have all these judges coming in from all over and seeing this level of enforcement, you have to hope that they take it back home with them and infect their local community with these ideas.*

Sheldon: Exactly. Unlike at many GPs where we have an entirely local staff, now we can send all these judges home with new ideas about how to prevent and catch the people – the very few people – who step outside the lines. Hopefully people getting caught is a preventative measure.

BDM: *To be fair that is part of why we are discussing this here – to serve as a cautionary tale for anyone who might want to cheat or is scared that not enough is being done to protect them from cheating.*

Sheldon: This is a significant event and I hope this is a very clear sign to anyone who would try anything sketchy at one of our events.

BDM: *You talked about collusion earlier – I believe you mentioned two players rolling a die to determine the outcome of a match. Can you explain to some less tournament experienced readers why this is not allowed and worthy of disqualification.*

Sheldon: First thing is that it is clearly spelled out in the universal tournament rules that no random method of determining the outcome of a match will be used. The reason is that we want a level of purity of the game where matches are decided on player's **Magic** playing skills – and nothing else. If you go to time and you naturally draw – you naturally draw. Colluding to determine the outcome of a match means you are stealing from someone who legitimately won. And we simply can't have that happen.

BDM: *For the players who are thinking about going to a higher level of competition – be it a PTQ or GP – what advice would you give them in terms of player/judge interaction?*

Sheldon: The first thing you need to know is to be prepared. Bring all the stuff you need to bring; pens, a method of recording your life total, and if it is a Constructed event, bring a deck. The one thing I see a lot of new players get caught up in is trying to build a deck at the event. They will arrive the morning of the event and try to decide what they are going to play. Decide what you are going to play the night before. Type it up on your computer and print it out. You will end up with fewer deck registration errors that way.

BDM: *What percentage of deck registration errors are attributable to last-minute deckbuilding decisions, in your estimation?*

Sheldon: Nearly all of them. If you asked me to stick a number of them I would say 90 or 95 percent are just sloppy things from being in a rush and not knowing what you are going to play. Or deciding at the last minute to play this vs. that and taking card A out and putting card B in but forgetting to change your decklist.

BDM: *So you think that you are more likely to cost yourself a game by that error than gain advantage by making that last-minute change?*

Sheldon: I would also tell first-time Grand Prix players that when you are at the event to pay attention. I see a lot of **Magic** players, especially younger players, sort of have their heads down while they are playing their match. They are paying attention to what they themselves are doing but not paying attention to what other players are doing. I have to tell you, the most important people in catching someone cheating are players. If players aren't

KNOW YOUR RULES

Need to brush up on your universal tournament rules? Want to find the answer on that tricky card interaction? Here are some key links to check out when preparing for a tournament or even your home game:

- [Comprehensive Rules](#)
- [Oracle Reference](#)
- [Banned/Restricted Lists](#)
- [Rules Team Releases](#)
- [DCI Floor Rules/Magic Tournament Rules](#)
- [Recent FAQs](#)

telling a judge that something fishy is going on, there are times when we are not going to know. So pay attention to your opponent and what your opponent is doing.

Also when someone makes an announcement on the microphone you should probably pay attention to what they are saying. We try not to make too many announcements and flood you with information. The stuff that we do tell you like what to do at the end of the match with your results entry slip is pretty important.

BDM: *I am sure this can all seem pretty intimidating...*

Sheldon: Come with the perspective that you are going to have a good time. I don't think people need to be intimidated by their first major event experience. Randy Buehler won the first Pro Tour he played in. Good things can happen if you come, if you playtest the format, if you know the rules...

BDM: *How can a player know if their rules proficiency is up to snuff?*

Sheldon: If you don't think that you know the rules well enough to play at this level... ask your local judge. He will help you out. Go to your Friday Night **Magic** or your PTQ and ask the local judge. I am sure he is willing to give you help on the rules, card interactions –

BDM: *I know personally I have built many of my best decks after talking to our local Level 3, Eric Smith, about card interactions.*

Sheldon: Use the resource of your local guys. They have to be pretty sharp to pass the Level 1 test. They can give you ideas like "equipment is really good with **Riptide Mangler** because..."

BDM: *Plus these guys rarely, if ever get to play. They are busting at the seams to talk about their **Magic** ideas.*

Sheldon: They have just as many crazy ideas as anyone. You and I both know that outside-the-box thinking wins events and judges have as many crazy ideas as anyone else without a real opportunity to put them into practice. Listen to what they have to say – they may help you design the next great deck.

BDM: *While we are talking about local judges . . . what comfort level should players have in regards to attending a local Sealed Deck PTQ? Should they be concerned?*

Sheldon: We are really infusing the judge community with a lot of situational awareness. We know that there are organizers right now using trapped decklists. From a program perspective we are giving judges the training that they need to identify and crack down on the things that shouldn't be happening. The theme of the judge program for 2006 is building a community – that is not just building a judge community. It is building a **Magic** community.

The players can stop cheating at the grassroots level. Stop associating with players who you know are sketchy.

BDM: *What is the message you want to players to take away from the events of Grand Prix-Richmond?*

Sheldon: The big message for anyone at home and is thinking about trying anything sketchy is that the penalty for getting caught is a lot worse than the reward for cheating. People might think the measures are a little harsher and the punishments are a little draconian...

...they are right.



These people are here to help you. Don't be afraid to ask questions and get to know your judges.

Is There a Genius in the House?

The results from the [Resident Genius](#) ballot are in, and while there were many worthy candidates I am excited to announce that our very own Mike Flores has won. Mike's nomination was not without controversy, as he does not have the player resume of any of the other nominees. Mike was clearly voted in because of the profound effect he has on the Standard format through his various columns about **Magic**. I would love to bring you Mike's reaction – I can't imagine that any of the other Invitationalists will be as thrilled as Mike is sure to be – but I have been forbidden from sharing the good news with him until this column goes live.

This week's ballot introduces a new category – [The Fanatic](#). Like last week's category, it is about more than just Pro Tour results. This is about the way the game consumes a player's every waking hour. Do you want to vote for

"The most important people in catching someone cheating are players. If players aren't telling a judge that something fishy is going on, there are times when we are not going to know." – Sheldon Menery

the person who spends the most time playing *Magic Online*? How about a player who plays in another tournament while their Top 8 is pending? What about the player who need to be pulled away from his screen and reminded to eat? What about the one who has the most tricked-out card collection? Of course you could always just choose to vote for the best tournament results, but where would the fun be in that?



Playing for Money

Playing for money is usually discouraged at PTQs, but not when it is all for a good cause. There was a gunslinging event at last weekend's Denver PTQ to benefit the health care costs of Billy Massingale. Billy is a 21-year-old player from the Denver area who was injured in a roll-over traffic accident over the Christmas holiday. Due to complications from the surgery, Billy had to have one leg amputated and requires regular kidney dialysis.

Nick Bonham, another local player, organized the gunslinging event where players would put up \$1 to try their PTQ Sealed Deck against a gamut of local Pros including Nick, Patrick Miller, Terry Welty, two-time Colorado State Champion Alex Smith, and Regional Champ Russell Yakupov. Regardless of the game's outcome, the challenger would receive a random rare and if he or she won the match, the bounty went up to two rares. All the rare cards given away as prizes were donated by local players. There was also a raffle spearheaded by head judge Scott Marshall, including a foil *Balance* that he donated.



Denver players got together for a good cause.

In the end the players raised almost \$600 for the Massingale family. Thanks to local TO Eric Smith for the heads up on this story. Nick Bonham also wanted to thank everyone involved in making the event a reality.

"I'd like to offer my special thanks to the following people for making this fundraiser a possibility:

- Daniel Lemier and Valhallas Game Center: Daniel is one of the nicest guys, and VGC is a great gaming venue. Thanks for letting us hold the fundraiser!
- Eric Smith (Tournament Organizer): For letting us do something special during a rather large event as well as getting involved yourself!
- Scott Marshall (Head Judge): Your generosity is overwhelming! Thank you for accommodating us during such a hectic day with a 100-plus competitors at the event.
- The Gunslingers: For the hours of non-stop play, I applaud you. I think I've finally grasped what 'haunt' does.
- Joel Barnes: He knows why.
- Russell Harris: for donating the bulk of the rare pool.
- And to all the people and players who gave to the cause via card donations and monetary donations: you were the ones who made this possible. Thank You, Thank You, Thank You."

Firestarter: Comparing Sealed Deck Formats

Multiple players this past weekend cited the *Ravnica Guildpact* Sealed Deck format as one of the most skilltesting ever. Frank Karsten went so far as to say, "Anyone who claims they built their Sealed Deck correctly is either lying or wrong." How does this format stack up with full-on *Invasion* Block Sealed Deck? What about *Champions of Kamigawa*?

Go to the forums below and let us know what you think!

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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