

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Hello from Sunny Honolulu

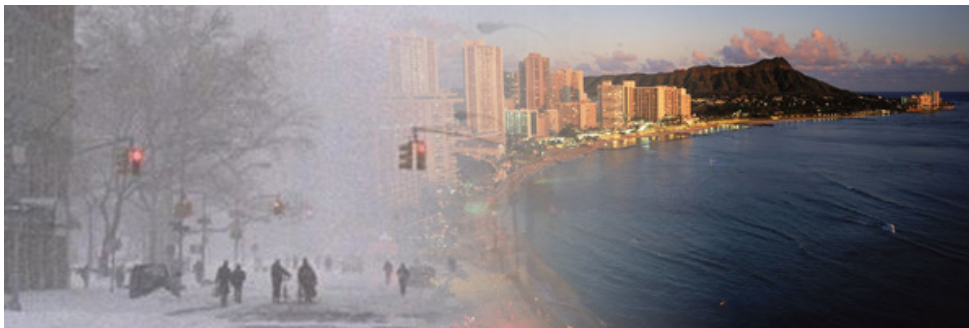
*Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, March 3, 2006*



HONOLULU – I can certainly get used to this.

Funny how my wife had no desire to travel with me to Columbus to kick off last season's Pro Tour but for some reason has chosen to accompany me to Waikiki a week in advance for the opening gun of the 2006 season. The weather has not completely lived up to the advance billing but it will apparently be brilliant all weekend long. (That actually works out well since I am more of a nocturnal beach creature while Karla enjoys it more during the daylight hours.)

We have hiked Diamond Head, made trips to the beach during each other's shifts, eaten plenty of good food, and fulfilled our anecdote quota for the vacation. It is my firmly held belief that every vacation requires at least one outing gone horribly awry to create a story that people actually want to hear. Someone back in snowy cold New York may politely listen to our uneventful climb up to the top of Diamond Head, but what they really want is to know that Hawaii is not all that is cracked up to be and that they really didn't miss much while shoveling out their cars and salting the driveway.



You won a PTQ and didn't use your free ticket? Shame on you.

One of the little excursions that multiple people recommended to us was the Polynesian Cultural Center on the other side of the island. It is a park designed to present the cultures and traditions of the Polynesian islands: Hawaii, Tahiti, Samoa, Fiji, etc. We were a little on the fence about whether or not to go but the weather was a little drizzly out so we figured we would give it a try. I spoke to the concierge and asked if the park was a suitable destination for inclement weather and he assured me that while there were some outdoor activities and demonstrations, there were plenty of indoor features as well.

What he failed to mention is that the other side of the island, over the mountain ranges, gets more than ten times the amount of rain than the Waikiki side. The drizzle we were experiencing became a torrential downpour once we emerged from the tunnel through the mountains. The aforementioned indoor activities were apparently huddling under thatched roofs to stay dry while the outdoor activities involved running from dry cover to dry cover. We ended up leaving early and we just seemed to get out in time as multiple roads were flooding and we could see traffic snarling behind us in our wake.

It was the last day we had together without any of the demands of the Pro Tour – you know, the reason I am in Hawaii – so that was kind of stinky but at least I have something to make the popsicles back home feel a little better.

PRO TOUR-HONOLULU PREVIEW

Is there a deck to beat all decks ready to crash the Honolulu party? BDM scoped out the scene with his [preview of the event](#).

So before I left for my trip, there was a big comic convention in New York City. The organizers were trying to replicate the success of the San Diego Comic-Con on the East Coast. Despite the industry being invented in New York City and thriving here for many years, there has not been a real big comic book convention in almost a decade. This one more than lived up to the advance billing as there were almost twice as many pre-registered people for Friday than they had expected for the whole weekend.

The good folks at Gray Matter Conventions were set up in the gaming area and were running events all weekend. I managed to win an 8-man draft on Friday thanks in no small part to three Skyknight Legionnaires, but the event I was really interested in was the JSS Challenge on Saturday – which was going to be utilizing the same format as this weekend's Pro Tour.

Now the New York area kids are pretty decent players, but I am not going to try to convince you that this is on the same level of relevance as the Extended lists I posted before Pro Tour-Los Angeles, which was the debut appearance of Dredge-a-Tog; especially since that tournament featured competitors on the way to LA. Still, it is an early peek at the format and may reflect some of the decision-making processes the Pros went through in preparation for this weekend.

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The two black-white decks at the top of the field represent two different plans that players can use to attack the format. Winner Harrison Tietze took a more straightforward approach with two colors and abundant discard. He chose to also exploit the synergy between discard, Descendant of Kiyomaro, and Dark Confidant to create a nice little card-drawing machine.

Runner-up Julian Auveung opted for a more powerful three-color strategy built around Debtors' Knell, although he doesn't have his sacrifice outlets in the main deck (preferring to bring Ghost Council in for Game 2). To be fair his Hierarchs have a handy self-sacrifice mechanism built in, and while that feature is not present in Kokusho, if you return two of them to play in successive turns you tend to win.

Harrison Tietze - First place

JSS Challenge, 2/25/06 New York City

Main Deck <i>60 cards</i>	Sideboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Caves of Koilos 1 Eiganjo Castle 2 Godless Shrine 7 Plains 1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse 8 Swamp <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Dark Confidant 2 Descendant of Kiyomaro 2 Ghost Council of Orzhova 2 Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni 4 Ravenous Rats 4 Shrieking Grottesque <p style="margin: 0;">23 lands</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">18 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Castigate 4 Cry of Contrition 4 Faith's Fetters 4 Mortify 3 Umezawa's Jitte <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">19 other spells</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Blinking Spirit 2 Cranial Extraction 2 Darkblast 1 Ghostway 3 Kami of Ancient Law 3 Nokrataal 2 Slay <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">15 sideboard cards</p>

Julian Auveung - Finalist

JSS Challenge, 2/25/06 New York City

Main Deck <i>60 cards</i>	Sideboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Forest 2 Godless Shrine 4 Overgrown Tomb 2 Plains 4 Temple Garden 2 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">19 lands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Debtors' Knell 3 Faith's Fetters 3 Farseek 2 Moonlight Bargain 4 Putrefy 4 Sensei's Divining Top 4 Unknown Cards 4 Wrath of God <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">26 other spells</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Grave-Shell Scarab 3 Kokusho, the Evening Star 4 Loxodon Hierarch 4 Sakura-Tribe Elder <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">15 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Angel of Despair 3 Ghost Council of Orzhova 2 Ghost-Lit Stalker 4 Mortify 2 Plague Boiler 2 Sacred Ground <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">15 sideboard cards</p>

Spencer Assiff - Semifinalist

JSS Challenge, 2/25/06 New York City

Main Deck <i>60 cards</i>	Sideboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Brushland 4 Forest 8 Plains 4 Temple Garden 4 Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">24 lands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Devouring Light 3 Faith's Fetters 3 Final Judgment 3 Genju of the Fields 3 Kodama's Reach 3 Sensei's Divining Top 2 Shining Shoal 4 Wrath of God <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">25 other spells</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Loxodon Hierarch 3 Myojin of Cleansing Fire 4 Sakura-Tribe Elder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Defense Grid 3 Ivory Mask 2 Moratorium Stone 3 Naturalize 3 Sacred Ground 2 Serra Angel <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">15 sideboard cards</p>

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
7 Forest	4 Char	15 Unknown Cards
4 Karplusan Forest	2 Might of Oaks	15 sideboard cards
5 Mountain	4 Moldervine Cloak	
3 Skarrg, the Rage Pits	3 Umezawa's Jitte	
4 Stomping Ground	13 other spells	
23 lands		
4 Burning-Tree Shaman		
4 Dryad Sophisticate		
4 Kird Ape		
4 Llanowar Elves		
4 Rumbling Slum		
4 Silhana Ledgewalker		
24 creatures		

Invitational Writers' Ballot

For last year's Writers' Ballot I came up with a rating system that ranked players by entertainment value and play value and assigned point values in both categories. Facing the same question this year, I have revamped my system to create a more streamlined, easy-to-understand method of voting.

I winged it.

That is not to say I did not take it seriously. I just went with my gut and voted for five guys not named Osyp Lebedowicz or Masashi Oiso, assuming both of them would win their Regional ballots. I did not rely on the players being writers in order to make my list, either. (It's a special vote given to all us writers, but the candidates don't have to be writers to be eligible). I just looked for players with big personalities who make tournaments more fun for me to attend.

I do have to say that I wish Gadiel Szeifer was on this ballot and while I don't know where he would have ranked, he certainly would have been on my short list. Gadiel had one of the finest years by any American player, and although he tends to ruffle feathers when he writes a tournament report, I would rather see that than bland round-by-round reportage.

On to my ballot:

5. Sam Gomersall

Sam beat out Mark Herberholz for the fifth nod on my ballot. I rank the two players around the same in terms of talent. Sam has more of an edge in Limited while Mark tends to do better with the 60-card decks. Mostly I gave this to Sam because he reminds me of Dave Price and his grind-it-out approach to the game.



4. Neil Reeves

Neil is simply my favorite **Magic** player. I learn something every time I watch him play and am entertained while doing so. Neil came back to **Magic** late in last season and could have easily moved way up on this list had he a few more 2005 Pro Tours under his belt. One of my favorite moments on the Pro Tour last year happened in matches Neil was playing. In one match Neil put his opponent, Oiso, on a stone cold bluff when the Japanese player cast **Orim's Chant**. Neil just shrugged and let it resolve despite a grip full of counterspells. Oiso, who had nothing and was just trying to bait out a counter, just smiled sheepishly and passed the turn. Not only was it an excellent read, but it was amazing to watch someone play not just the cards in his hand or the cards in his opponent's hand but the opponent himself.



3. Jeroen Remie

I wish Jeroen had had a better season. I always enjoy events more when Remie is around and he is also a consistently solid read to boot. What I especially enjoy about Jeroen is how passionate he is about the game of Magic – a passion he makes no secret of. He loves the Invitational, the Player Cards, and the Pro Tour lifestyle. He was part of a group of six players who came to Hawaii a month in advance and rented a beach house – an idea they had about 30 seconds after this Pro Tour was first announced. Not only is he excited about the game

but he raises the excitement level of the players around him.

2. Tsuyoshi Fujita

When I am covering a Constructed Grand Prix or a Pro Tour, Tsuyoshi is the first person I look for to fan through his deck. I always want to know what deck he is playing and I am rarely disappointed in what he shows me. When he reached the finals of last year's Invitational, he did so with a rat deck that was made up of only commons and uncommons for the benefit of the **Magic Online** audience – the hallmark of a true entertainer.



1. Antonino De Rosa

I mentioned earlier that Jeroen raises the excitement level of the players around him. Antonino raises the happiness. De Rosa was the second-highest finishing American in last year's Player of the Year race and is also the U.S. National Champion. He made me excited about American **Magic** and while he, Neil, and Jon Sonne fell just short of the team title at this year's World Championships, they had me on the edge of my seat the whole time. What makes De Rosa especially entertaining to me is the fact that so many people buy into his buffoon act – an act many people believe he puts on to disarm his opponents.



He has worked very hard and tested very seriously to put up the impressive numbers he posted last season and is redoubling his efforts to show people that the results were a product of the work he put in and not just a fluke. I think having De Rosa at the Invitational will make my job of covering the event easier and much more enjoyable to read. I hope he gets an invite.

More Invitational Stuff

We still have a week to wait until we learn who wins the Writers' Pick. But I do have two [2006 Magic Invitational](#) slots to announce right now – Argentina's Jose Barbero earned a ticket on the [Latin America ballot](#) and Antoine Ruel won the Judges' Pick. Jose edged Edgar Leiva and Carlos Romao in a tight three-man race. Ruel, a Fan Favorite pick last year, joins his brother Olivier the Road Warrior once again for this year's event.

This week we turn to one of Magic's powerhouses, [Europe](#). Even with both Ruels and Frank Karsten already earning slots, the 10 names on this list comprise some of the finest minds in the game.

Also this weekend, we'll get the Players' Pick. Voted on by the attendees of Pro Tour-Honolulu, this year's Players' Pick question is "Which player would you most like to work with to prepare for a Pro Tour?". The winner will be announced Sunday during the webcast, so tune in! The action gets under way at 3:45 p.m. ET.



Firestarter: Keep it Simple

We're making this week an easy one, folks. Not counting the day at Worlds, this is the first Standard Pro Tour since 2000. Who do you think will win?

*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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