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Heads and Shoulders

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The Week That Was
Friday, March 24, 2006



I know...I know.

I said I was going to play in the [Two-Headed Giant Championships](#) with Osyp Lebedowicz. I also know that of those two heads that mine would be the one that would be expected to follow through on that plan. As much as I would like to let you believe that Osyp was lying, I cannot. Osyp showed up and I just could not get myself moving on Saturday morning.

I have so few weekends where I am not working, traveling, or playing **Magic** that sometimes it feels like work to go out and play a game. When I found myself loathing the idea of getting up on a Saturday early enough to make it to the venue, I realized that I was not in the proper mindset for Two-Headed Giant. After all, the format is all about fun.

I got to sleep in for a rare Saturday treat and Osyp had no shortage of small children willing to climb on his shoulders for the tournament. Everything worked out until I realized I was left without my topic for the week, which was going to be a first-hand account of my experience at Champs. Fortunately I have a The Week That Was pipeline right into the winner's circle for these events and was able to talk with a couple of heads from two different teams. To see winners and Top 4 decklists from all across North America, check out [this cool map](#) the folks at Wizards put together. More photos and decklists should be coming next week




Is the world better off for not being exposed to this monstrosity? We'll never know.

A few years ago when the TOGIT squad was first making themselves known, Gerard Fabiano, Osyp Lebedowicz, Jon Sonne, Josh Ravitz, Craig Krempels, and too many others to fully list here were the bane of New Jersey State Champion aspirants all across the state. This year saw Sonne, Ravitz, Krempels, and Fabiano all big-head their teams into the Top 4 of 2HG Champs, with Gerard and former NJ Standard State Champion Eric Zeigler hoisting the troph – err – hats.

During Pro Tour-Honolulu I spent some time talking with Nathan Zamora from Texas. Nathan claimed that his **Magic** career was rekindled by the success of fellow Texan Billy Moreno. Billy has been hanging his hat in New York of late but returned home to be win a Champs hat in Texas with his pal Kyle Sanchez. And if you think you know who wears the hat in that partnership, you might be surprised.

I talked with both players about their experience, strategy, and hats. Both players strongly emphasized the desire to play **Magic** for fun as a strong motivation for attending the events.

 "I was actually really excited about getting to play in the tournament," explained Pro Tour-Los Angeles finalist Moreno. "It was 2HG and being a **Magic** fanatic, but also really competitive, it seemed like a fun, meaningful way to play in a more casual event. Plus, while I was visiting friends in Texas and Oklahoma during the last month I went to hang out at a couple of PTQ's and was kinda bummed about not being able to play and share the experience with them. Once again, this was a great chance to do so."

In Honolulu, Fabiano and Antonino De Rosa jumped at the chance to play in a video iPod 2HG tournament after the two players compiled a combined 2-10 record in the main event. While they did not do well in that tournament either, Fabiano stressed that was not why he played in the tournament – or in the overall game of **Magic** for that matter.

"I played with Antonino during Hawaii and it was a lot of fun, and being State champ is nice," laughed Fabiano. "I figured it would be fun to play with Eric.

"Just to have a friend like Antonino to play in it made it all the worth while," he continued. "We didn't care that we went 1-2. Honestly, having good friends is probably the best part of this game. Imagine if you didn't have any friends in **Magic** -- would you even play?"

I have to admit that I would probably have quit after the second mana screw without friends to keep me going, but Gerard claims it is more than that when it comes to Two-Headed Giant.

"Eric and I got along well and I think like the better friends you are with the person the more advantage you have," he continued. "We used to PTQ back in the day, but we remained friends and I was even in his wedding. Eric and I were thinking on the same page for the most part. We were able to pick up on what our opponents had in their

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hands by the way they spoke to each other or what they said to each other.”

Not only did they PTQ together but when the players from that group started to break through into the Pro Tour ranks, Gerard replaced Eric on the successful Pro Tour team Slay Pillage Massacre when it became Slay Pillage Gerard. Despite Eric's past successes, he was still rusty enough that Gerard had to take charge and play the role of big head. Over in Texas, Billy was teaming with young Kyle and you would assume that he too was making the tough decisions.



Fabiano and Zeigler conquered New Jersey.

“Hah, you know what happens when you assume,” chided Moreno. “I was playing with 18-year old Kyle Sanchez. He asked me to play as soon as I told him I'd be in Texas at the time. Anyway, he was so excited about the event; he's the real president of my fan club. I've beaten him so often including, in time order: a PTQ Top 8, a PTQ finals, a GP Day 2, and on the next day, an 8-man side draft. I had to give him the chance to knock me out of a tournament. He ran a tight ship and it showed.”

I asked Billy to describe the biggest difference between playing in the Finals of a Pro Tour and playing in the finals of State Championships and whether or not he expected to win this time.

“Besides not having Antoine there to make me look bad?” he laughed. “After all the experience I've had, it was almost impossible to feel any pressure about this event, except that I really and desperately wanted a plaque. I planned on winning, of course. And on having a lot of fun. Both of which I accomplished. I also planned on receiving a plaque, only to find out after a 16-hour day, there were no plaques being handed out. Only packs and hats. That really put a damper on the whole experience.”

There was no disappointment – mock or otherwise – coming from New Jersey. In fact Gerard has some big plans for his hat this weekend in Madison, Wisconsin.

“I'm gonna sign my hat and give it to a fan – whoever is most sportsmanlike at the Grand Prix. People should be nice to each other at the Grand Prix because anyone can win that hat!”

Gerard has other plans for the GP as well should he win the Fan Favorite vote, which doesn't seem like such a stretch for someone who has an actual fan club – The Gerard Fabiano Fan Club. Of course, Gerard did found the Fan Club but perhaps not for the reasons you might suspect.



Who wants cheesecake?

explained Fabiano. “For all the kids in my fan club... I try to give advice to and draft with them. For all my friends like the Pro Tour guys, I try to make things fun like planning the trip to The Price is Right and making stupid shirts and stuff. I just want to have fun playing **Magic**. If I win the fan ballot – which I highly doubt – I'm buying every one in Day 2 of the GP cheesecake and stuff.”

“Basically I realized that I will never win a PT and probably won't play **Magic** forever. I figured in the meantime I'll just try to give back to as many people I can who play **Magic**.”

In the interests of giving something back, Gerard shared some of his thoughts on building for a Sealed Deck card pool for Two-Headed Giant.

“The best way to build decks,” claimed Gerard, “is so that one guy has the card draw and removal and the other has creatures. I had two **Compulsive Research** and I could make Eric draw. I don't like two-drops to begin with in the *Ravnica* Limited format – only Signets and Guildmages for the most part. On turn two I'd rather play a bounce land or Signet than like a stupid 2/2 guy, and in Two-Headed Giant even more so. Creatures don't matter much – it's all about the late game.”

Gerard and Eric relied on Razia as their main kill condition along with **Followed Footsteps** and **Vedalken Dismissal**. If things went awry, Gerard had a pair of **Vedalken Entrancers** as a back-up plan – something they turned to twice in eight rounds of play.

Moreno was pretty much in accord with Fabiano that game was slower with less emphasis on efficient bears.

“I think the toughest thing about building the decks was figuring out the color splits...after that, it was pretty easy, just keep the long game in mind, treat the midgame as the early game, fit in some artifact/enchantment removal, and remember that tempo was just going to be less relevant,” was Billy's advice.

Billy Moreno

1st Place - Texas

Main Deck
41 cards

7 Forest	1 Castigate
2 Orzhov Basilica	1 Chant of Vitu-Ghazi
4 Plains	1 Farseek
3 Swamp	1 Last Gasp
16 lands	1 Necromancer's Magemark
	1 Overwhelm
	1 Pollenbright Wings
1 Blind Hunter	7 other spells
1 Bramble Elemental	
1 Civic Wayfinder	

A photograph of two men, Billy Moreno and Eric, posing together. Billy is on the left, wearing a white shirt and a red cap. Eric is on the right, wearing a colorful Hawaiian shirt. They are both smiling and have their arms crossed.

- 1 Divebomber Griffin
- 2 Dryad Sophisticate
- 1 Elves of Deep Shadow
- 1 Orzhov Guildmage
- 1 Restless Bones
- 1 Selesnya Evangel
- 1 Sewerdreg
- 1 Shambling Shell
- 2 Shrieking Grotosque
- 1 Siege Wurm
- 1 Smogsteed Rider
- 1 Thoughtpicker Witch
- 1 Watchwolf

18 creatures

Kyle Sanchez

1st Place - Texas



Main Deck

40 cards

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Dimir Aqueduct | 1 Fiery Conclusion |
| 6 Island | 1 Followed Footsteps |
| 7 Mountain | 1 Galvanic Arc |
| 2 Plains | 1 Gruul Signet |
| | 1 Incite Hysteria |
| 16 lands | 1 Lightning Helix |
| | 1 Muddle the Mixture |
| 1 Belltower Sphinx | 1 Peel from Reality |
| 1 Drake Familiar | 1 Pyromatics |
| 1 Goblin Spelunkers | 1 Repeal |
| 1 Izzet Chronarch | 1 Train of Thought |
| 1 Lurking Informant | |
| 1 Skarrgan Firebird | |
| 2 Steamcore Weird | |
| 1 Surveilling Sprite | |
| 1 Vedalken Dismissor | |
| 1 Vedalken Plotter | |
| 2 Wee Dragonauts | |

11 other spells

13 creatures



"The Swiss was the trickier of our two builds because our bombs were black-green and red-white cards but the two base decks were red-green and black-white with very little blue worth running at all," Moreno recalled. "Fortunately, the mana fixers worked out so that we had a consistent red-green deck splashing black and white for 2 Rotwurms, a **Vulturous Zombie**, 2 **Lightning Helixes**, and a **Brightflame**. I got to play that one. Kyle was stuck with a BWu deck that had a ton of fliers and discard. Interestingly, our 80-card stack played out fairly aggressively, winning by burying the opponent under piles of fat and fliers starting turns 3 and 4. Aside from the **Brightflames**, we didn't have any of the real 2HG bombs (at one point, all the top decks had Glares), but I think it's a skill-intensive enough format that you can win without them."

Both players found there were edges to be gained outside of the actual cards that they received. Gerard explained that he and Eric had an advantage because they could communicate effectively without tipping their cards to their opponents – in fact they were able to trick their opponents a couple of times by talking about cards that were not actually in their hands. Billy and Kyle were able to use another aspect of the game to gain an incremental advantage during deck construction.

"Another interesting factor in building was the free mulligan," Moreno said. "Taking that rule into account, I felt comfortable cheating on mana sources. Nothing drastic really, but I didn't feel like I had to stretch my mana to take the length of the games into account, and I was able to cheat to my splashes more, running a basic Swamp when I didn't actually need one."

One thing that I was wondering about was the impact that Pros playing and succeeding on the Champs level would have on the more casual player base that Champs attracts. To be fair, it is usually an audience that has some aspirations toward playing at a higher level.

"For the most part, I think it's good," suggested Moreno. "It means Pros are playing in these events, which means the more casual players get a chance to beat them or even just to meet them and see we're all playing the same game. It also gives more credibility to an event that hasn't always had that. On the other hand, my mom asked me multiple times if I was taking States away from the children. Mom...Billy Moreno is for the children."

Magic Invitational Results

Leave it to a bunch of gamers to game the system. Due to widespread voting irregularities, the two Fan Favorites spots for the 2006 Invitational will not be announced today as scheduled. Instead, Wizards decided to run the poll

again, this time with more security measures. The new poll is open – go to the [Fan Favorites page](#) to cast your vote.

The added security requires you to have an account for the Wizards of the Coast forums. If you don't have an account, go [here](#) to register. It's free and easy, so don't let that stop you from casting your vote and sending who you want to the Invitational.

We do know the R&D pick, however. Congratulations to Julien Nuijten, who certainly hopes to follow in the footsteps of last year's R&D pick (and 2005 Invitational champion) Terry Soh. Read [Aaron Forsythe's column](#) for R&D's explanation of their selection.

Firestarter: Pros and Cons

Billy thinks giving the player base at Champs a chance to kick his butt is a good thing. Gerard also agreed with that assessment. What do you think? Are the players at Champs aspiring to play at a higher level and therefore benefiting from the exposure to name Pros like Moreno and Fabiano? Or does it send the wrong message to see Pro Tour finalists taking the 2HG hat off of the head of some small child?

The forums... you know 'em, you love 'em... now use them and share your opinions. I have been making a concerted effort to become more involved in the forums so there is a good chance I will respond if you post.

*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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