

# Your crash course on the new Team Constructed format. Play the Game, See the World... Bring Your Friends

Mike Flores

Monday, March 27, 2006

- 
- 



- [Mike Flores Archive](#)

## Introduction to the Format

**T**his past weekend marked the beginning of the first Team Constructed season... *ever*.

If you've never heard of Team Constructed, you are not alone; like I just said, it's untested waters for tournament play. Briefly, the format works like "regular" Standard, but instead of bringing one deck, played by one player, rounds are three-on-three battles between *teams* of Planeswalking Wizards. Instead of fighting it out by yourself, you bring two friends and try to beat up not just one guy, but his whole posse, every round.

Essentially, each team has an A, a B, and a C player. Each round, your A Player will play against the opposing team's A Player, and likewise for the B and C players, respectively; unlike team draft (but exactly like Team Rochester), you will only cross wands with one player per team per round. The individual matches will go best of three, per usual, but at the end of the round, the individual matches get tallied, ignoring game scores: With three players per team, the individual match results rack up to a macro match record that works more-or-less like game totals in individual **Magic**, ultimately determining whether or not the whole team wins... or loses.

The PTQs will operate just like "regular" Constructed Qualifier tournaments, with Swiss rounds cutting to elimination rounds (read: even if you lose in the Swiss, your team is not necessarily out of contention). Unlike Individual PTQs, though, Swiss will cut to a Top 4 – four teams with twelve total players – to see which squad walks away with *three* Blue Envelopes.

So Mark Herberholz just won a Standard Pro Tour with Heezy Street, his G/R tempo deck. Easily one of the best format specific beatdown decks in recent memory, full of 2/3 creatures for one mana and 3/3 creatures for two, Mark's deck seems like it would be an ideal choice for any kind of a Standard tournament. So the smart teams are going to bring three copies of Heezy Street and have three times



the opportunities to start on [Kird Ape](#) that Mark had, right? Sorry, but no.

In individual **Magic**, you can play up to four copies of any legal card (but basic lands) per deck; the way *this* format works is that any team can have a total of four copies of any card but basic land *between all three players* (you can play all the basic lands you want, of course)... So no Heezy Street, Heezy Overlook, and Heezy Avenue teams, I'm afraid. Luckily, Pro Tour--Honolulu showed us that the current Standard is one of the most diverse formats ever. So even though you can't play three copies of Mark's deck, you should still have twenty-nine or so additional reasonable options.

## Resolving Team Conflicts

Designing decks for this format is going to be a little different from any Constructed format you've probably played in the past. There are specific incentives and disincentives in Team Constructed that don't exist in other Standard formats. For example, say you think that Heezy Street is the best deck. Normally you will try to play the best deck that you can going into any tournament. Even if you have a copy of Heezy Street on your team, you can't play *three* copies, so 2/3 of your team will automatically be on less-than-the-best decks.

Once you get past that first conceptual item, the most important thing becomes *just not stepping on each other's toes*. Say you like the look of Craig Jones's list... That miracle topdeck to put down Oli in the semifinals was one for the record books! Moreover, Craig was first out of the Swiss and second overall... But obviously, you can't run both Heezy Street *and* Zoo. There are just too many conflicts between the decks. Both run [Kird Ape](#), [Char](#), and [Flames of the Blood Hand](#); both sideboard [Umezawa's Jitte](#). Those problems are obvious... but as you flesh out the decks you want your team to play, you may see additional conflicts appear that you never expected. Let's continue the assumption that Heezy Street is your top deck. You have to pick two more decks. You roll down the [Top 8 list](#) from Honolulu and see something that makes sense to you. We already said that you can't play Craig's Zoo deck, but the *next best* Swiss deck has the makings for something impressive, even if it's not quite life on Heezy Street. After all, Osyp Lebedowicz's

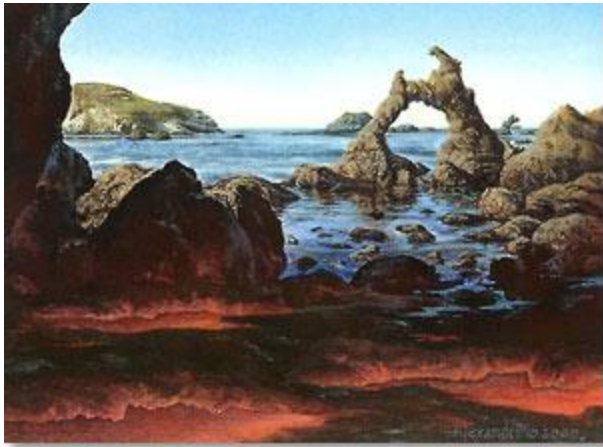
URzaTron deck was the sole 8-0 finisher; on top of that, you are impressed with the Owling Mine archetype, which put two copies in the Top 8 despite being billed as a one trick pony.

You continue to run down the deck lists and see a lot that you like with these choices. There is a conflict on [Giant Solifuge](#) between Mark's deck and Osyp's, but Osyp played the big bug as a sideboard card only... You're willing to overlook the overlap and fidget with different spells, provided you can play both Red powerhouses. Even though Osyp's deck and, say, Antoine's both play [Pyroclasm](#), they both *quite conveniently* play only two copies each – perfect for the “four of” split between three mages. Sure there is a conflict on [Remand](#), but tons of people had [Hinder](#) in



Osyp's [Remand](#) spot... You are willing to dumb down the URzaTron deck a wee little bit to run three powerful Red Decks, each expert in a distinct way.  
... And then you see the conflict.

You get past so many spells – no two decks with [Char](#) – but you've only got so many [Shivan Reefs](#). At the end of the day, your limiting factor is *lands*! Ravnica Block has given us the tools to play the best polychromatic decks since Invasion Block at least, but when it comes to sharing... That can be a source of conflict too. Only one deck can play four [Steam Vents](#)!



## Basic Team Setup and Strategy

Between Grand Prix--Madison and this Saturday's opening salvo of Pro Tour Qualifiers, we will have a much clearer look at what Qualifier players will be up against, but for now, I think that the "default" team is going to come out like so:

1. A "Gruul" deck with [Shock](#) and [Char](#) (either Zoo or Heezy Street)
2. A U/R deck... probably URzaTron
3. A B/W creature deck

A setup like the one proposed here allows for 1) one of the two top finishing decks, 2) arguably the most powerful deck in the format, and 3) a reasonably consistent third option. In sum, the setup shows no conflicts on lands, spells, or guild incentives while offering all three players a synergistic and relatively tuned deck with reasonable game against the rest of the Standard environment. Though I believe this to be the default, I would caution against metagaming *too heavily* just because until Madison and the PTQs start, we have no real data, and can't say for certain how teams will configure - this setup just seems fundamentally sound to me.

Regarding the third deck, specifically, just as many aggressive B/W decks made the Top 8 of Pro Tour Honolulu as U/R [Howling Mines](#). Of the three defaults, B/W aggressive probably leaves the most play... All the competitive decks in Honolulu ran [Dark Confidant](#) (the Japanese had Bob Maher as their #2 card in the format), but a variety of three-drops. [Shrieking Grottesque](#) or [Paladin en-Vec](#)? For that matter, why not the mighty [Hypnotic Specter](#)? Beyond the two discard-heavy B/W decks from Honolulu's Top 8, there is the popular Top 32 option "Ghost Dad."

### Ben Goodman - Ghost Dad



## Main Deck 60 cards

4 [Caves of Koilos](#)

1 [Indomitable Will](#)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 <a href="#">Eiganjo Castle</a>            | 3 <a href="#">Pillory of the Sleepless</a> |
| 4 <a href="#">Godless Shrine</a>            | 4 <a href="#">Shining Shoal</a>            |
| 6 <a href="#">Plains</a>                    | 4 <a href="#">Sickening Shoal</a>          |
| 1 <a href="#">Shizo, Death's Storehouse</a> | 1 <a href="#">Strands of Undeath</a>       |
| 6 <a href="#">Swamp</a>                     |  |
| 1 <a href="#">Tomb of Urami</a>             | 13 other spells                            |

---

23 lands

- 4 [Dark Confidant](#)
- 4 [Ghost Council of Orzhova](#)
- 3 [Kami of Ancient Law](#)
- 3 [Plagued Rusalka](#)
- 4 [Tallowisp](#)
- 2 [Teysa, Orzhov Scion](#)
- 4 [Thief of Hope](#)

---

24 creatures

---

**Sideboard**

- 2 [Blessed Breath](#)
- 3 [Cranial Extraction](#)
- 1 [Enfeeblement](#)
- 1 [Kami of Ancient Law](#)
- 1 [Miren, the Moaning Well](#)
- 2 [Persecute](#)
- 1 [Pillory of the Sleepless](#)
- 2 [Pithing Needle](#)
- 2 [Umezawa's Jitte](#)

---

15 sideboard cards



One of the more popular decks on **Magic** Online at present, Ghost Dad takes a totally different look at B/W aggression, opting for proactive card drawing via [Tallowisp](#) rather than dedicated hand destruction. One of the only B/W lists to eschew [Mortify](#), Ghost Dad's three-mana anti-creature element is [Pillory of the Sleepless](#) (conveniently available, bullet style, following one of its many Spirits or eight Shoals); believe it or not, Ghost Dad intends to kill you one point at a time. I am not certain, but if I had to hazard a guess, it would be that Ghost Dad, rather than one of the Top 8 decks, will be the most common B/W aggressor in the first week of qualifiers. Some people

just/love this deck! Others really don't love it, but because there is room on most teams for a B/W creature player, not every member of the team has to buy in to Ghost Dad for the unusual build to fill a productive role.

Knowing that, just make sure you know how [Shining Shoal](#) works against [Pyroclasm](#).

## The Hard Sell

I know that a new format that you've never practiced probably seems daunting, but *trust me*, you want to participate in this round of qualifiers, even if you've never attended a PTQ before. Team tournaments are, by nature, more social than others... After all, you're never alone. You're slugging it out with the guys from your local store or your kitchen table at your right and left. I have a pretty good network of players and friends that I play and work with... but Teams has always been my favorite for this reason... and the next one.

Here's the dirty little secret: *It's insanely easy to qualify for a Team Pro Tour.*

You can march into Madison and take one of the many spots, or you can win a Team PTQ, which will ultimately send three times as many players to the big show. For a skilled player – cadre of three for our purposes – either one is much less difficult than posting an individual Top 16 or PTQ win. The reason is simple: While there is just as much luck in any individual one-on-one game in Teams as there is in “regular” **Magic**, because you can lean on two teammates, it is much less likely that you will miss on random manascrew. Unlike an ordinary PTQ - where your deck can let you down in the critical second-to-last Swiss round - even if that occurs in the three-man format, one of your teammates will *also* have to lose for you to fail to make the elimination rounds.

*...But that's not all.*

Because Team Constructed is essentially an uncharted format, no teams have any ratings. That's right, you – yes *you* – probably have the same Team Constructed rating as Kai Budde, Jon Finkel, Bob Maher, or any number of players who have actually competed in a sanctioned event in the last several months. I have missed both Constructed and Limited Pro Tour invitations on 2000+ ratings in the past, but for Team Constructed? You need a paltry 1700 rating to get your invitation to Charleston! That's right: Seventeen. Hundred.

Recently, the DCI has re-engineered how Team ratings work, both for Team Constructed and Team Limited. Now each *individual* **Magic** player has his or her own DCI rating for Teams. That means that if one of your crew can't make a tournament, you can mix-and-match and face much less severe ratings consequences. For Team Limited Pro Tours, the same three guys often played in as many tournaments as possible to hit the low ratings threshold, across not just PTQs but local tournaments wherever they could. This was great in terms of the opportunity to get qualified, but there are obviously a host of logistical problems that can arise, from player availability to falling outs between friends. Under the new system, though, if you can cobble together three guys with average Team ratings of 1700 or above, it ultimately doesn't matter if you've ever played together before!

All-in-all, I expect this Saturday to catapult the tournament scene to a new level of fun and, more importantly, metagame complexity (and really, isn't that what **Magic** is all about?). For the first time ever, solving the format will be a challenge of several moving parts, every round, all at the same time. Which deck gets the Jittes? Can this archetype survive without Wrath of God? *What are the other teams going to do?* It should be a format for the history books.  
Play the game.

See the world.

... And this time, bring a couple of friends!