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The Field is Set

*Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, March 31, 2006*

All that jingoistic nonsense on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean surrounding the [Fan Favorite ballot](#) for the **Magic** Invitational ended up being the proverbial much ado about nothing due to Mark Rosewater's system for pass-downs. For those of you who have not been glued to the Invitational forums all week long like I have, the Fan Favorite vote turned into an ugly, acrimonious affair with many of the game's biggest names chiming in with their thoughts on the Invitational, the voting process, and the various personalities bobbing near the top of the polls.

The four players near the top were Jeff Cunningham, Dave Williams, Pierre Canali, and Geoffrey Siron. Early on, the leaders – the voting results were visible since they were done via the forums – were Dave and Jeff and this led to an outcry of blatant North American favoritism from the other side of the Atlantic. The point of contention was that the forums are in English and used predominantly by North Americans – a clear indication to some that there was a conspiracy to keep additional European and Asian players from the Invitational.

Mobilized by this "outrage," the European **Magic** scene rallied behind Pierre Canali and Geoffrey Siron via **Magic** fan sites in Europe. Now the outrage made the trans-Atlantic journey back to North America as allegations of impropriety began to spring up as the beneficiaries of that campaign suddenly surged into the lead.

All of the parties were heard from, with other voices such as Olivier Ruel, Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz, and even Mike Long chiming in. Jeff Cunningham and Dave Williams made lengthy posts defending their high position in the poll. Pierre and Geoffrey did the same. Then, inevitably as all things on the Internet eventually seem to do, things went to hell. There was name calling, country bashing, and much assignment of blame as it became apparent that there had been duplicate votes by partisans for each candidate near the top.

When the ballot closed Wednesday, Scott Johns announced that the forum was being locked and that the results would be available Thursday after Wizards had a chance to investigate the results. The Online Media team scrubbed the votes of duplicate IP addresses and Dave Williams and Pierre Canali ended up with the most individuals supporting them. While all of this was going on, it turned out that Masashi Oiso and Katsuhiko Mori would both be forgoing their invites to the event – which follows immediately on the heels of Pro Tour-Prague – due to school commitments.



Oiso and Mori are unable to attend the Invitational.

There is a specific timestamp order on the ballots that is looked at when determining pass-down invites. In the case of titled invites such as the reigning winner, World Champion or Player of the Year, their spots go to the next player in the Fan Favorite. That meant that there would be three players taken this year from that ballot, which is exactly what happened when World Champion Mori passed.

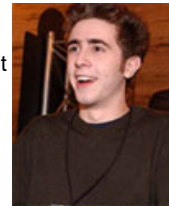
That would have bumped Jeff Cunningham into that spot, but he was already going to earn the North American invite due to Oiso passing on the APAC spot which – because the Players' Vote had not happened when the APAC vote was determined – meant that Tsuyoshi Fujita would be the APAC representative. This created a void in the Player Vote category and bumped De Rosa up as the second-highest vote-getter on that ballot. De Rosa was on tap to take the North American mantle on his shoulders but with that spot now opened, Jeff Cunningham would be representing for our land mass.

All of which put fourth-place vote-getter Geoffrey Siron into the third spot on the Fan Favorite Ballot and filled out the roster of Invitationalists. So in the end, all the mud-slinging was for naught and all four players with muddy mitts ended up with a much-coveted chance to play in this year's Invitational.

In talking with Randy Buehler, he reiterated what Scott Johns posted on the forums on Wednesday. Buehler wanted to make it clear that the fault for this whole scenario lay with the flawed voting system and not the players themselves. He wanted to assure everyone that measures will be taken to ensure the integrity of the vote when it comes time to do this again.

"I feel bad for the players that were involved," said Randy. "We put them in a really awkward situation and that is unfortunate. We will definitely overhaul the voting system by the time the Invitational rolls around next year.

"The good news is that we are really happy with how passionate people are about attending this event and the slate this year looks awesome and the event itself promises to be a lot of fun."



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You can find a complete recap of the pass-downs and the Fan Favorite ballot by visiting the [Magic Invitational main page](#).

The 2006 Magic Invitational: The Formats

Looking forward to the event itself, I spoke with Invitational Godfather Mark Rosewater about which formats the now-settled roster of players would be facing. There are always five formats and three rounds of each format so that the 16 players can face off against each other in true round-robin fashion.

In no particular order, this year's formats are:

- **Duplicate Limited**

"After a long departure Duplicate Limited is coming back," beamed Rosewater. "All 16 players will receive a card pool of an identical 90-100 cards. We go a smidgeon over normal limited because we try to build in some quirky things.

"We did this format every single Invitational up until we started doing them on *Magic Online*. Because we are on MTGO I can't do the types of things I done in the past," Mark lamented.

In the past when the format was played live Mark would often create brand new cards specifically for the event or alter the casting cost on existing cards.

"We are trying to move the Invitational back in the direction of its weird fun roots. The Invitational was always a tournament designed first and foremost for the spectators. Part of this is skill testing but first and foremost it will be entertaining; one of the things that the Invitational tests is how quickly players can adapt to a new situation. You don't get to see the game's biggest names have these skills tested on the Pro Tour. When you are building your deck you know the environment so knowing how to build for this specific environment is the skill that is tested here. You have to build your deck taking into account what cards other players will use."

- **Auction of the Geniuses**

The Auction of the _____ has become a staple at the Invitational with the bidding frenzy being almost as much fun as the actual competition. This year's Auction is a new twist on that theme. "Originally we did Auction of the Champions," recalled Mark. Players bid on an array of Pro Tour winning decks from the game's history. "Then we did Auction of the People where we provided the public with some quirky deck constraints and asked them to submit their deck designs.

"We always like to shake up the Invitational," Mark continued. This year we decided it might be fun to show off a variety of people known for deck building. We definitely picked up people from all areas and ended up with 18 decks."

Geniuses range from the Resident one Mike Flores to the Mad Genius of Mark Gottlieb and his successor Chris Millar, so you can expect to see some pretty outrageous designs.

The format that the deck designers were given to work with was Online Vintage with Vanguard. Each player had to build with an Avatar in mind. When it comes time to bid, the players bid based on their starting life totals and hand size. Everyone starts with a base of 8/25 then the starting bid is modified by the stats of the Avatar associated with the deck up for bid.

Interestingly, four of the players in the tournament are also contributing decks for the Auction: Karsten, Flores, Ruel, and Fujita.

- **Decadent Sealed**

Decadent Sealed is a fascinating format that harkens back to everyone's earliest experiences with trying to construct a deck from a pool of cards straight out of booster packs. Players will get one booster pack of every single set available on MTGO as their card pool. With more than 300 cards to work with, this is not your normal Limited format – hence the adjective.

"It is definitely Limited but it is like a mini-Constructed," Mark explained. The power level is sky-high compared to normal Limited. As much as it is Limited it is also Constructed – call it poor man's Constructed. It is very reminiscent of when we all first started playing and had to build decks with the packs we purchased."

- **Mirage-Visions draft**

One of the highlights of last year's Invitational was watching the younger players grapple with the power level and mana requirement of *Invasion-Planeshift-Apocalypse* draft – a format many of the competitors had never faced before. The advent of *Visions* on MTGO means that the powers that be can turn the clock back even further this year.

"It is unique in the fact that it is a format no one has played in a long time," Mark explained. "There will definitely be people playing in this event who have never drafted the format before. We think draft is an important part of *Magic* and it also has an historical aspect as these two sets were used at Pro Tour-LA II. It will be interesting to see how drafting has changed since then."

- **Block Party**

The final Constructed format for this event will be a real head-scratcher as the players try to choose not only the best decks within a block but the best decks from any block. They will be pitting block against block. If your first thought was, "Uh-oh, Affinity" you have nothing to fear.

"Any block deck that is legal in any block online you can play but it follows all the banned and restricted lists for each individual block,"

GENIUSES AT WORK

Here are the deck builders Wizards used for the Auction of the Geniuses format, and the Avatar assigned to each:

Mark Gottlieb: Seshiro the Anointed
Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar: Maro
Friggin Rizzo: Fallen Angel
Frank Karsten: Bosh, Iron Golem
Steven Menendian: Eight-and-a-Half-Tails
Andrew Cuneo: Serra Angel
Michael Flores: Hell's Caretaker
Adrian Sullivan: Birds of Paradise
Alan Comer: Flametongue Kavu
Akira Asahara: Loxodon Hierarch
Itaru Ishida: Frenetic Efreet
Dan Paskins: Goblin Warchief
Chris Pikula: Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni
Chris Millar: Stalking Tiger
Jamie Wakefield: Akroma, Angel of Wrath
Masashiro Kuroda: Etched Oracle
Olivier Ruel: Arcbound Overseer
Tsuyoshi Fujita: Teysa, Orzhov Scion



assured Mark. "The nice thing about block party is that it allows people to dust off the decks they enjoy from past sets.

"I am very happy with the formats this year because I feel we are returning to the spirit of the original Invitational and making it more fan friendly. Who wants to see these guys play Standard again?" Mark explained. "The Invitational has taken some hits in recent years for drifting away from its original spirit. Part of that is due to the restrictions of MTGO as well as other factors but we are trying to rectify that with formats that are fun.

"I actually think that formats like this are very skill testing requiring skills that the regular PT never tests. This will not only be a fun format to watch but it will be extremely skill testing."

1,000,000 Tournaments Later...

Something pretty amazing is happening on the day this article goes live. The ONE MILLIONTH sanctioned **Magic** tournament in the game's history will be taking place at Hobby Shop Lotus Kotesashi, a core hobby store in Tokorozawa, Japan when they run that evening's Friday Night **Magic** tournament.

Takeki Uyama, the tournament organizer, will receive a plaque denoting his achievement and also will receive a sheet of all the Friday Night **Magic** promotional cards ever printed (which is in excess of 70 cards).

Fun Facts about the Million Sanctioned Tournaments, courtesy of Decksperter Jake Theis:

1. Over the course of the million sanctioned events, Wizards of the Coast has given away more than \$28 million dollars in cash and scholarships.
2. There have been sanctioned **Magic** tournaments held on every continent (including Antarctica, where it was played by U.S. soldiers).
3. **Magic** has had tournaments played with 10 different languages of cards (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese-Simplified, German, Italian, French, Russian, and Korean)
4. There have been sanctioned **Magic** tournaments held in more than 120 nations, islands, and principalities
5. The top money earners in **Magic** tournament history are Kai Budde (\$348,595) and Jon Finkel (\$291,869).

I had a funny conversation with Olivier Ruel this week that ties to fun fact No. 5. Olivier was interviewing me for the European version of this site and was asking me how I, as a reporter, prepare for a Pro Tour. He asked me if I practiced the format. I responded by explaining that I regularly played in drafts at Jon Finkel's.

There was virtual silence on Olivier's end for some time and then he asked me if the rumor that Jon Finkel was going to play in Prague was actually a fact. While it is not set in stone – and Jon could easily change his mind – I informed Oli that I thought Jon would be attending. Another protracted silence followed until finally Olivier sighed:

"Oh well, I had some notion about catching up to Jon on the all-time money winner's list," Ruel said. "Maybe I can catch Kai instead."

Firestarter: Five Formats One Fave

Which of the five formats outlined above are you the most interested in watching? Which one appeals to you the least? What would you like to see next year? Share your opinions in the forums.

*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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