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Three Ways to Enjoy Hawaii

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, April 21, 2006



From the Pro Tour-Prague fact sheet:

After and during registration, players will be treated to a traditional Czech Folk evening with music, catered food, and **complementary beer, wine, and soft drinks**. The restaurant will close at 23:00.

"I am going to make them regret that!" – Mark Herberholz

With the Prerelease on the immediate horizon – and Prague brewing just beyond it – this was the last week to catch up with the elusive Mark Herberholz for the obligatory Pro Tour winner interview. That also neatly coincided with two other bits of business from two other people lucky enough to find themselves in Hawaii that weekend.



Herberholz's win in Honolulu put him at the top of the Player of the Year race.

Herberholz is a Michigan-based player who first popped up on the **Magic** radar when he made the Top 8 of Grand Prix-Detroit during the 2002-03 season. That Top 8 featured such luminaries as Alex Shvartsman, Bob Maher, and Eugene Harvey. While there were no player profiles to found in the coverage, they surely would have referred to him as a 'relative new-comer' or another handy euphemistic tool of the coverage trade that we rely on when we don't know the player. In the coverage game people barely exist until they get a Top 8 in some kind of premiere event, but of course Mark had plenty of **Magic** experience before that Sunday in Detroit.

right around Fallen Empires but didn't play in my first PTQ until Urza block. Back then I was still 15 or so and only played in Michigan PTQs for a few years. It wasn't until PT Osaka – Odyssey Block Constructed – that I first qualified."

"I started playing in Boy Scouts because kids would bring the cards on the weekend campouts and eventually I caved and learned how to play," recalled Herberholz. "I started playing

It was not too soon after that Mark put up another Top 8, this time at the Pro Tour level. Once again he was a relative unknown in a field full of luminaries. Only Angel Perez del Pozo had less text on his Pro Tour resume than the then-20 Herberholz at Pro Tour-San Diego 2004. That Pro Tour – the ninth time he played in a PT – was important for Mark as it represented not just his first Top 8 but a key philosophical shift.

"My friends allowed me to become successful at Magic," Mark explained. "They helped me test for all of the Pro Tours and gave me good decks all the time. Really what I think really helped my game though is when I decided to stop taking it so seriously and just have fun. I used to try so hard before every Pro Tour and get disappointed when I wouldn't do well. Finally before one Pro Tour I decided I wouldn't test for it and just have fun. Sure I played a few practice games because **Magic** is fun but I didn't turn it into a chore. That PT happened to be San Diego where I got my first Top 8. My preparation for that was about 20 MODO drafts total. I just went to have fun and it paid off."

Mark's friends continue to play an important role in his Pro Tour decisions. Mark was part of the legendary Hawaii House, the same house where Gabe Walls claimed to have broken the format with their black-green-white control deck. Many people have referred to that collective project as a failure because the main tech didn't post amazing results, but Mark can't help it if he feels differently. To his mind the Heezy Street deck is just as much a product of that month-long lease as the Hawaii house's eponymous deck.

"I would have never won the Pro Tour without the beach house guys – plain and simple," Mark declared. "Those guys had every deck in the format and knew that the format was going to be Zoo and decks tuned to beat Zoo. I took that and put in all these cards to beat the control decks metagamed vs. Zoo – **Giant Solifuge, Flames of the Blood Hand, and Frenzied Goblin**. When Gabe Walls said we broke the format, he lied – what we broke was the metagame.



Herberholz, center, at the Hawaii House the day before Pro Tour-Honolulu.

"It feels amazing," Mark recalled when asked what the experience of winning a PT felt like after playing the game for so long. "I never thought I would be able to win a Pro Tour – that is something out of stories. It honestly didn't

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even hit me until later on that week. I would be sitting at the beach house and just look up and say, 'Guys....I won a Pro Tour!' They probably got pretty sick of hearing that."

Mark's deck carried him not only to the win in Hawaii but has also propelled him into the early lead in the Player of the Year race. With a much shorter season on the docket than last season's filibuster, I asked Mark what it would take for him to maintain his lead.

"I will need at least another Top 8, probably two to lock it up. I wish those Ruel brothers would just forget how to win for once," he laughed. "They keep Top 8ing Grand Prix to catch up to me."

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One of the interesting elements of the upcoming Pro Tour in Prague is that there is such a short lead time for preparation. *Dissension* will not be available for players to practice unless they win/trade for packs from winners at this weekend's Prerelease events. The product does not go on sale until the very day of the Pro Tour. Player reactions to the unusual barriers to normal preparation have been mixed, but given Mark's love of playtesting it is not surprising that he is looking forward to Prague.

"I love that there is a short lead time for Prague," he confirmed. "I am too lazy to test to be honest. This PT will definitely reward raw talent players rather than the people who win because they put a billion hours into testing. I think we might form another colony of sorts and a bunch of us are going down to Gabe Walls' place the weekend before the PT to draft nonstop. I actually did think about hitting up the prerelease but I think I might just get some tickets to see the Pistons womp on some chumps in the first round of the NBA playoffs."

I asked Mark if he had any other plans for his prize money, besides pricey playoff tickets.

"I don't know," shrugged the hard-partying Mark. "The East Lansing bars have it all now. Any ideas on how I can pay off my splits?"

Tyler Jones had a pretty good time in Hawaii despite not playing in the Pro Tour. Tyler is a college freshman who won the sweepstakes – from among nearly 6000 entrants – for a free trip for two to Hawaii that also included a goodie-bag, 12 free side event entries, and the priceless joy of being able to lord over his friend Stefan Janiszewski's head the fact that he was providing his friend an escape from New York's blizzard covered streets for the sun and surf of Hawaii.

"This was my first Pro Tour, and I was really surprised by, well, everything," marveled Tyler as he recalled the experience. "Being there reminded me that, although thousands of dollars are on the line, everyone is really there to play and have fun. Players were friendly and outgoing, and I was able to meet a lot of people, from first-timers to high level pros. The Pro Tour really is a great event with a great atmosphere, and I'm sure many would jump at the chance to have the opportunity we had.

"The tournament itself was incredibly well-run," he continued. "Spaces never seemed to be overcrowded nor too large (though there was the occasional mob of players in the Pro Players Lounge). The organizers were friendly, accommodating, and got us settled in without a hitch. The sweepstakes was even more gracious than needed; at the end of the weekend we hadn't used even close to the allotted 12 free side-events.

"The city itself was more than I expected: temperate, warm climate, good food, nice beaches, beautiful women... Stefan and I were content at times when we were not playing **Magic** to just wander around the streets, enjoying the sights and sounds. Special for me was the thought that I was experiencing a city and a culture that I most likely never would have experienced had it not been for the sweepstakes. Sure, I might possibly have gone there in later years after my student loans are paid off, but the fact that I was able to enjoy a nice leisurely weekend there as a freshman in college was sincerely rewarding."

Of course not only players and sweepstakes winners get to enjoy the new high-end locales of the Pro Tour. No one could possibly be happier about a PT being in Hawaii than an overworked judge. Hayden-William Courtland is a New York-area judge who had the opportunity to expand his judging resume in Hawaii. Perhaps not so shockingly, he had nothing bad to say about the experience – especially since he didn't have to pay the full postage to get there. While judges will often get full sponsorship to go to Pro Tours, Hayden-William wanted to ensure that he got to go and shared some of the secrets of the judge sponsorship program.

"As with any of the Pro Tours you have the option of applying for sponsorship, either full or partial," Hayden-William explained. "The actual selection process is somewhat of a mystery, but if you need the experience because say, you're working towards your Level 3 (which I am), then they definitely consider that. Also, if you apply and mention specific areas you are looking to work on/gain experience with, that can be an assist as well. Since I was able to afford the cost of the flight myself, I decided to apply only for the room sponsorship. The folks at WotC appreciate that kind of consideration as it allows them to sponsor judges that literally cannot afford to make the trip without full sponsorship."

Hayden-William made sure to get into Hawaii early so he could enjoy the local scene before getting down to the hard work of impressing the higher-ups.



*This plus **Magic** all weekend? Tough to beat.*

"I got some beach time and some time swimming in the ocean, which was great. I also took some time to just walk around Waikiki and see the local community in terms of parks, stores, restaurants and so on. If I had had more time to spend I would have been more daring and seen Pearl Harbor and the north side of the island."

While it was not Hayden-William's first trip to Hawaii, he had not been there since he was eight years old when his parents were the sponsors of that trip.

"It was great to be able to go there again and see it through the eyes of an adult and it was very exciting to go for a judging experience," Hayden-William continued. "When I told my friends that I was going to Hawaii to judge they were all astonished and the notion that a company would pay for you to go to such a place was outright bewildering to them. So, that was always very fun, though not as fun as actually being in Hawaii!"



Customized shirts for judges, players and staff made Honolulu a memorable event.

Hayden-William seemed pretty much in awe of the whole experience and could not identify a single highlight of the trip. When asked to pin something down he focused on the unusual judge shirts from the event – much better than the standard T-shirt.

"In reality, the whole experience was a highlight for me," Hayden-William explained as he looked back on the event. "However, the Hawaiian judge shirts were particularly exciting to me. I just thought they brought such a great feel to the event and they helped show people that judging can be a lot of fun. Other highlights for me were getting to see a number of my local players playing in the event. It's nice to see firsthand how the work I do locally feeds into something greater. It was also amazing to talk with other judges from around the US and from other countries to learn about their communities and experiences. I was able to accumulate a great deal of information and feedback which I have brought

back to my local judging community in the hopes of making it even better. The fact that my local community can benefit from my experience at the Pro Tour is very rewarding to me."

Firestarter: Skill Testing

What do you think the effect of *Dissension's* unavailability will have on Pro Tour-Prague? Will it reward a different skill set than most other Pro Tours, which traditionally favor the most prepared players? Share your thoughts and 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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