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# Regional Bias

Brian David-Marshall  
The Week That Was  
Friday, May 26, 2006



Last weekend, North American players took the first steps on what has become known as the Road to Worlds. All across the U.S. and Canada – and even as far off as South Korea – players vied for invites to U.S. and Canadian National Championships. The format for Regionals was post-*Dissension* Standard, which made these events the first Constructed tournaments featuring the ultimate expansion in the *Ravnica* block.



I spoke with three different Regional champions about their decks, their expectations, and plans for Nationals. Joe Waller took part in one of the most far-flung events among all the U.S. Regionals, playing in the U.S. Military Regionals event in South Korea. Joe lives in Seoul teaching English as a second language, and it turns out that military Regionals events are open to U.S. citizens living abroad. Albert Ruskey is a 17-year old student from Victoria, British Columbia. Conrad Kolos is a 21-year old student at Temple University in Philadelphia. Thanks to all three of them for taking time away from their victory laps to answer ten questions about their Regionals experiences.

**BDM:** Tell me about the deck you played and why you chose it?

**Joe Waller:** I played Greater Gifts for Regionals. I chose the deck for a number of reasons, but mainly because I knew it really well and most of the players that I expected to play against had not played with it or against it all that much. I played in South Korea, in one of the U.S. Military Regionals so it was easier to predict the field.

**Joe Waller**  
1st Place - Republic of Korea

Main Deck 61 cards	Sideboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 Brushland</li> <li>4 Forest</li> <li>2 Godless Shrine</li> <li>1 Island</li> <li>1 Miren, the Moaning Well</li> <li>3 Plains</li> <li>1 Selesnya Sanctuary</li> <li>3 Swamp</li> <li>2 Temple Garden</li> <li>1 Tendo Ice Bridge</li> <li>1 Watery Grave</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>22 lands</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Kokusho, the Evening Star</li> <li>3 Loxodon Hierarch</li> <li>4 Sakura-Tribe Elder</li> <li>4 Yosei, the Morning Star</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>12 creatures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Farseek</li> <li>3 Gifts Ungiven</li> <li>1 Goryo's Vengeance</li> <li>3 Greater Good</li> <li>2 Kodama's Reach</li> <li>2 Kodama's Reach</li> <li>2 Mortify</li> <li>1 Putrefy</li> <li>1 Reclaim</li> <li>1 Recollect</li> <li>3 Sensei's Divining Top</li> <li>4 Wrath of God</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>27 other spells</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 Carven Caryatid</li> <li>2 Condemn</li> <li>1 Cranial Extraction</li> <li>2 Faith's Fetters</li> <li>1 Grave-Shell Scarab</li> <li>1 Hideous Laughter</li> <li>1 Last Gasp</li> <li>1 Life from the Loam</li> <li>1 Loxodon Hierarch</li> <li>1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror</li> <li>1 Nightmare Void</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>15 sideboard cards</p>

**Albert Ruskey:** I was playing a relatively standard build of the blue-red *Magnivore* deck. The major change was having three *Spell Snares* in the maindeck in the place of two *Demolish* and two *Sleight of Hand*. The *Spell Snares* came up big for me all day countering what I feel are some of the decks biggest problems (*Dark Confidant*, *Sakura-Tribe Elder*, *Umezawa's Jitte*, and then countering many other spells that are speed bumps to the deck such as *Scab-Clan Mauler*, *Watchwolf*, *Remand*, *Mana Leak*).

I chose *Magnivore* because in the current environment it's really hard to predict what anyone else is going to be playing since there are so many decks. I just decided to go with a deck that had a strong control matchup, and could punish poor draws, and opponents who decided to play a lot of colors.

**Albert Ruskey**  
1st Place - British Columbia - Vancouver

Main Deck 60 cards	Sideboard

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60 cards		
9 Island	3 Boomerang	1 Boseiju, Who Shelters All
6 Mountain	4 Compulsive Research	2 Demolish
4 Shivan Reef	2 Demolish	2 Keiga, the Tide Star
4 Steam Vents	4 Eye of Nowhere	2 Pyroclasm
23 lands	1 Genju of the Spires	1 Spell Snare
3 Magnivore	3 Mana Leak	3 Threads of Disloyalty
3 creatures	2 Pyroclasm	4 Volcanic Hammer
	3 Sleight of Hand	
	3 Spell Snare	
	4 Stone Rain	
	2 Tidings	
	3 Wildfire	
	34 other spells	
		15 sideboard cards

**Conrad Kolos:** I played Hand in Hand. From the team PTQ season we were pretty sure Ghost Husk was the best deck in the format. So I wanted to play a black-white aggro deck and was pretty sure that Jittes and pro-black guys were a better plan for winning the mirror.

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Caves of Koilos	4 Castigate	3 Cranial Extraction
1 Eiganjo Castle	4 Mortify	1 Descendant of Kiyomaro
4 Godless Shrine	1 Phyrexian Arena	2 Hand of Honor
2 Orzhov Basilica	4 Umezawa's Jitte	1 Okiba-Gang Shinobi
6 Plains	13 other spells	1 Phyrexian Arena
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse		1 Pithing Needle
5 Swamp		1 Seize the Soul
23 lands		2 Shining Shoal
4 Dark Confidant		3 Terashi's Grasp
1 Descendant of Kiyomaro		
1 Eight-and-a-Half-Tails		
3 Ghost Council of Orzhova		
1 Hand of Honor		
3 Isamaru, Hound of Konda		
1 Okiba-Gang Shinobi		
4 Paladin en-Vec		
3 Plagued Rusalka		
3 Shrieking Grottesque		
24 creatures		15 sideboard cards

(Editor's note: Full Regionals Top 8 decklists will be published next week.)

**BDM:** What was the metagame you were expecting coming into Regionals and why?

**Joe Waller:** The metagame was not that difficult to predict. Black-white has been doing well online and the aggro decks are easy to assemble and play. I expected black-white Husk, Gruul, a few discard-based decks, and a few blue-green, aggro/control decks.

**Albert Ruskey:** I was expecting a completely diverse metagame. I suppose if forced to choose I would say that I expected to run into Ghost Husk, *Heartbeat of Spring*, and red-green aggro the most.

**Conrad Kolos:** I thought the top tables would be black-white aggro (especially Husk) and *Steam Vents* decks of all varieties – *Magnivore*, *Wafo Tapa*, etc.

**BDM:** What Dissension cards were influential in your assessment of the metagame and in building your deck?

**Joe Waller:** The discard-based decks worried me a bit so I added a *Grave-Shell Scarab* to my sideboard. I was also worried about the *Early Harvest* combo deck. For that I added *Ivory Mask* to the board and kept *Nightmare Void*. For black-white Husk decks I put *Condemn* and *Hideous Laughter* in the sideboard.

**Albert Ruskey:** *Spell Snare*, *Spell Snare*, *Spell Snare*!

Going in I knew that *Spell Snare* was bad for my deck. If my opponents can counter my first *Eye of Nowhere/Boomerang*, they can break right through my tempo advantage. On the other side, the inclusion of *Spell Snare* in my deck helped greatly as outlined in question 1.

Aside from **Spell Snare**, I didn't expect to see many *Dissension* cards. Cards that I thought might show up were **Voidslime**, **Simic Sky Swallow**, and a bevy of Rakdos meanness. However, **Voidslime** was just another **Hinder**, the Sky Swallower wasn't coming out unless they had seven mana – in which case I had lost the game anyway – and I figured Rakdos wasn't going to be any worse for me than red-green or red-white beatdown.

**Conrad Kolos:** My team decided that none of the *Dissension* cards mattered so we just ignored them, sans **Spell Snare**. We couldn't test against them on **Magic Online** anyway. None of the guilds are strong enough, so just the mono-colored spells mattered. I have no *Dissension* cards in my deck, obviously.

**BDM:** *Have you ever played at Nationals before? If so, how did you do?*

**Joe Waller:** This will be my first Nationals.

**Albert Ruskey:** Nope, this is going to be my first time!

**Conrad Kolos:** I qualified for Nats last year at Regionals. I did well, but lost my last three rounds (all to that **Slith Firewalker** deck) and placed right outside of the money.

**BDM:** *What did the field you faced at Regionals look like? What decks were your best matchups? Your worst matchups?*

**Joe Waller:** The Husk matchup was bad main board, but more solid after side. My best matchups were blue-red **Magnivore**, Gruul, Zoo, and red-white burn. My worst matchups included blue-white control and blue-green control.

**Albert Ruskey:** I got extremely lucky at Regionals playing against what I consider one of my best matchups four times out of seven. I played against three green-white-black Ghazi Glare-style decks, which simply don't have any fast threats to frighten me and no way to disrupt my tempo advantage until I **Wildfire** – at which point they are so far behind they never catch up.

I played against one black-white-green **Greater Good** deck, which was very much the same as the Ghazi Glare decks, except they have even less threats that I need to worry about. I also played one Ghost Husk deck which had poor draws against me, and one **Heartbeat of Spring** deck in the finals where my opponent played out both his Mountain and Swamp. I destroyed both, leaving him with no way to win.

**Conrad Kolos:** I was only surprised by the presence of **Greater Good** decks – which are a pretty bad matchup. **Heartbeat** also showed up, which I thought would be dead. The bad matchups are ones where **Paladin en-Vec** protection is useless, namely against **Watchwolf** and **Hierarch**. The good matchups are against Gruul beatdown and decks that can't deal with **Dark Confidant**.

**BDM:** *What changes would you make to your deck if you had to play the deck again tomorrow?*

**Joe Waller:** I would take out the **Ivory Mask** and move the **Nightmare Void** to sideboard, changing places with a **Loxodon**.

**Albert Ruskey:** Honestly I don't know. I wouldn't make any changes as it ran that smoothly for me at the event. I haven't actually picked up the deck since my win though, so I'm not sure.

**Conrad Kolos:** No idea. Looking at my infinite one-ofs, I obviously had no idea what I was doing before the tournament – and I still don't. So many cards seem fine for the deck. Four **Descendant of Kiyomaro** might be right ... as might four **Arena** ... as might **Ravenous Rats** ... I have no idea.

**BDM:** *Do you play regularly on the PTQ scene? How much success have you had getting to the Pro Tour?*

**Joe Waller:** I have had 4-5 Top 8s at the PTQ scene (some of those may have been Grand Prix Trials but I can't remember). I have won one PTQ and attended Pro Tour-Honolulu.

**Albert Ruskey:** Never played at a PTQ or on the Pro Tour. If I have success at Nationals I might give it a shot, though.

**Conrad Kolos:** Never played on the Pro Tour. I have no lifetime Pro Points.

**BDM:** *What are you expecting/looking forward to from Nationals?*

**Joe Waller:** I am looking forward being there and preparing for the tourney with friends.



**Albert Ruskey:** Realistically I don't consider myself one of the best in Canada so I expect a good time as I have a couple of friends who are willing to make the trek out there with me. As far as **Magic** goes, I haven't even thought about that yet. Testing will start once I confirm my travel plans.

**Conrad Kolos:** I know everyone who qualified in Southeast Pennsylvania, so I have lots of people to go with. I am expecting to do well, honestly, but if I don't I will just hang with TI in the ATL, I guess.

**BDM:** *Who did you test with for the tournament? How did everyone else in your testing sessions fare? Did they play a similar deck to yours or something else?*

**Joe Waller:** I playtested with my team and the team took six of eight Top 8 slots (it was not a big Regionals). One of my teammates played the deck I picked and the rest chose to go different routes.

**Albert Ruskey:** Almost everyone I tested with took a different deck. Basically we each took what we thought were the top decks in the format (one had Heartbeat, one red-white aggro, two red-green aggro) and just ran the gauntlet as preparation. One of my playtest partners, Darryl Paul playing Gruul, came in second. Congrats Darryl!

**Conrad Kolos:** My teammate Rob LeFevre did very well with Ghost Husk. Unfortunately, we got paired against one another in the last round (since when does x-1-1 not make it?) and had to play. We had no idea what to do. I think we both offered to concede to the other about a thousand times. I got two stupid pro-black guys into Jitte draws and he didn't draw needle, so I won. I am just glad I didn't lose in the top 4.

**BDM:** *Was there any deck you saw this weekend that really impressed you besides your own?*

**Joe Waller:** I was impressed with a mono-black discard deck that showed up, as well as a blue-green aggro control deck that was piloted by a new player.

**Albert Ruskey:** I saw one deck that I quite liked this weekend. It involved **Protean Hulk** and **Footsteps of the Goryo** to bring out large dragons on turn three. I spent most of my time between rounds reading *1984* though, so I didn't do much scouting around.

**Conrad Kolos:** Scott Landis brought this pretty rad blue-green deck with four Birds, four Elves, four **Ninja of the Deep Hours**, and 10,000 counterspells, which I thought was pretty awesome. But again, besides the **Plaxcaster Frogling** guy and **Voidslime**, the deck doesn't really play mana-guild cards. It certainly doesn't feel like a guild deck the way Gruul decks or Orzhov decks do.

Thanks again to Joe, Albert and Conrad for sharing their Regionals experiences. For Conrad, his Regionals did not end when the tournament came to a close. He was in first place at the end of the tournament and was awarded the title of Regional Champion. He was given a plaque to commemorate the title and took it with him to a party later that Saturday evening.

"The party ended up getting pretty insane," Conrad recalled. "Despite a fire, a car accident, a fist fight and a police report, nothing got damaged or destroyed permanently – except someone stole my **Magic** plaque! I really miss it, I wanted to show my mom. I think the fact that a non-**Magic** player thought it was funny to steal a **Magic** award is pretty awesome. If anyone has this, please return it so it can go on my mantle for all time and so I can bring in to Regionals next year to defend its honor."



## No One Puts Olivier in The Corner

Olivier Ruel is coming out of his corner to [answer your questions](#). Some of you may have seen Olivier's Corner, which was a feature on the European version of the site leading up to Pro Tour-Prague. His column is morphing into a new feature where readers ask questions for him to answer from a Pro perspective – and really, there are not many better Pros to be fielding questions for an "Ask the Pro" feature than Mr. Road Warrior.

The feature will be modeled after Ask Wizards and will run three times a week starting June 6. If you have ever had any questions about what it is like to trot the globe all year long, prepare for the highest levels of competition, or about the secret initiation ritual of Level 6 mages, you should send your questions by clicking on this [email form](#).



*Ask and he'll answer.*

## Firestarter: Tiering up the Metagame

With the first week of the *Dissension*-added metagame under our collective belts, we should have a better idea of what to expect as National Championships loom over the summer. What do you think the top-tier decks of Standard are? Tier two? Use the forums and share your thoughts on the strata of Standard.

*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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