

# The 2006 Regionals Wrapup

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At long last, the following are this year's top North American Regionals finishers. The segmentation is a bit tricky because some events invite four to nationals, while others invite eight. The way it works out is that the Top 4 of each U.S. regional event get invites, unless 410 or more players show up, in which case it's Top 8. (As it turned out, no U.S. location gave invitations to the Top 8). Alaska, Hawaii, U.S. military bases, and Puerto Rico give invitations to the Top 2. Lastly, Canada is Top 8, given that they have relatively fewer locations.

The nature of the Top 4 out of eight versus the individual winner of a PTQ or even the Top 4 in teams is quite stark: For instance you can run the Swiss without losing a game and then have your daily manascrew come up in exactly the wrong round and end up with very different statistics than we might see if only one winner were announced at each tournament. Regardless, I think you will see what we have been talking about for the past several weeks, namely that this format is "diverse."

Ghost Husk  
Gruul Beats  
Vore  
U/R/W Firemane  
Zoo  
Tron Wildfire  
Heartbeat  
B/W control  
U/G/W Control variants  
B/W Rats  
Hand in Hand  
B/G/W Control  
Sea StOmPy  
U/R Control  
other B/W beatdown  
U/W Control  
Critical Mass  
Multicolor Ghazi-Chord  
Ghost Dad  
Graft Variants  
OWLing Mine  
Rakdos Aggro  
Greater Gifts  
Dark Zoo  
U/W Weenie  
U/R hybrids  
G/W Ghazi-Chord  
G/W Greater Good  
Jushi Blue  
Boros Deck Wins  
B/U/W Weenie

G/W Ghazi-Glare  
Joshie Green  
B/U/G Aggro  
The Masterpiece  
R/W Control  
B/G/W Aggro  
Aggro Ideal  
R/W Tron  
URzaTron  
G/R Land Destruction  
Three-color Godo  
Legendary Snakes  
Battle of Wits  
White Weenie  
Mono-Black Beatdown  
Good Stuff  
U/W Arbiter  
Rakdos control  
Goblins  
B/U Aggro  
B/G/W Greater Good  
U/G/R Control  
Enduring Ideal

Far and away the best deck of Regionals 2006 was Ghost Husk, sporting the most number of Top 8 appearances and about twice the number of invitations as the next best deck, Gruul Beats. I didn't call this deck "Heezy Street" because the Regionals players showed us a wide variety of G/R decks, sporting everything from Silhana LedgeWalker to Rumbling Slum, with burn suites including Volcanic Hammer or Seal of Fire. Though philosophically similar to Mark Herberholz's deck, many of these versions sport unique elements that change their matchup percentages against the field, gaining and losing key elements of the Hawaii House-influenced Honolulu Pro Tour Champion. That said, our predictions for Regionals held pretty well coming out of the Charleston PTQ season... Vore placed third in both invitations and number of Top 8 appearances; of the "big four" decks, it was ironically the much heralded "best deck" of the PTQ season, Heartbeat of Spring, that failed to finish in the Top 4 while its three brothers rattled off one, two, and three... Does that perhaps settle the question of which is the best deck in Standard, Heartbeat or Ghost Husk? Probably not... Heartbeat still finished pretty well, in seventh place and boasting more than half its Top 8 competitors as Nationals invitees.

The big surprise of Regionals was Tron Wildfire. A dismal deck in the Team PTQ Top 4s, Tron Wildfire came in tied with Vore in number of Blue Envelopes scored, even if it came in with slightly fewer actual Top 8 appearances.

Bruce Calhoun

#### **4th Place - Connecticut - Newington**

The most universal addition Tron Wildfire got out of *Dissension* is Demonfire. Not surprisingly, the format's chief Blaze deck put the strictly better Demonfire straight in... What is interesting is that in this build, Blaze is still included! Think back to Pro Tour--Honolulu and the first availability of Invoke the Firemind. With regular mana development, Invoke the Firemind was far inferior to Blaze. However with the Urzatron in play, the incremental cost of Invoke the Firemind's cost became negligible. Assuming he would not typically point a Blaze (or Invoke the Firemind) before he could do some

serious - if not lethal - damage with it, why did, say, Osyp Lebedowicz run both (i.e. one of each)? It's easy... He wanted two total cards to X his opponent's out... but at the same time, wanted to diversify his threats to escape a possible Cranial Extraction. In this case the incremental value of Demonfire is not insignificant, especially against the kinds of cards and decks that can best defend against a lethal Blaze... but at the same time, Blaze is not bad enough that it can't offer some additional protection against a fairly popular disruption card.

Here is a different look at Tron Wildfire:

Kyle Garelis

### **3rd Place - Connecticut - Newington**

A minority of Tron Wildfire players adopted not just Blaze, but Simic Sky Swallower from *Dissension*. Despite the additional colored mana requirements, I like the direction Garelis went with his version... Not only is Simic Sky Swallower even more gigantic than a *Kamigawa* Dragon - and certainly it fills out the "greater than four toughness" role that Wildfire versions of Izzetron have to consider where other decks just play Meloku - running the Green actually gives Garelis something to do with his extra two Signets. Rather than the fairly pointless Dimir Signets played by decks that many times don't have any Black spells, this version can play Simic Signet profitably. Chalk one more card up for *Dissension's* value to existing decks!

The first really interesting new archetype is U/G/W control. Enabled by the *Dissension* tandem of the Hallowed Fountain and the beautiful Breeding Pool, U/G/W boasts both new strategies and shiny new dual lands to enable these decks. The majority of U/G/W decks look something like this:

Nick Eisel

### **2nd Place - Pennsylvania - Pittsburgh**

As you can see, this version of U/G/W is basically an updated Ghazi-Glare deck with a Blue splash. The value of Blue comes in two major flavors: 1) Grand Arbiter Augustin IV, and 2) Supply // Demand. Grand Arbiter Augustin IV is just stupid... I'm not going to get into all the ways you might wreck someone by playing him on turn 3 because I'm sure you already keep the proprietors of the local cafe or perhaps Denny's up all night, chatting with your friends talking about how badly you might wreck your friend absent from the said culinary sleepover with the mighty Grand Arbiter ("His Signets will cost three! Can you believe it?"). Instead I am going to talk about Supply // Demand economics, and why this card is so powerful in a deck like Nick's.

Notice that although this is basically an updated Ghazi-Glare deck, Eisel plays only a lone Glare of Subdual, and interestingly given how decks have evolved recently, only one Congregation at Dawn (and no Chord of Calling). Supply // Demand does all of Nick's tutoring for him. Notice that one Congregation at Dawn... It is a gold card. With one Supply // Demand, Nick can get the Congregation at Dawn... and then probably set up Three Stupid Elephants (tm) against aggro. Between the two instants, Nick's deck can tutor for almost any card.

Patron of the Kitsune is very nice in this deck. Notice that this is a token deck... With lots of tokens in play, it can actually play offense without having to worry about its life total because the Patron not only defends against ENEMIES in the Red Zone, it also gives you a life every time YOU attack. As a Dovescape deck, Patron of the Kitsune can "turn off" the opponent's offensive capabilities with the tokens you give him, breaking the symmetry on that card even as the deck is designed to play for a series of non-symmetrical advantages. At a burly six mana, the Patron is also a fine creature to throw away to Shining Shoal.

The details on this deck are all very cute. For example, Grand Arbiter + Supply + Dovescape is just a much better, um, Supply. Usually Supply gives you x-2 1/1 creatures for x mana, but with Augustin in play with Dovescape, you actually get x+1 1/1 creatures... and all of a sudden they fly!

By stark contrast, look at Christopher Otwell's U/G/W build:

Christopher E. Otwell

#### **4th Place - Colorado - Sheridan**

Rather than looking like a Ghazi-Glare deck splashing Blue, Christopher's almost evokes a classic Counter-post. Condemn is his Swords to Plowshares, and he tries very hard to make VoidslimeCounterspell... But alas, even with the unusually high land count (for 2006, that is... remember when we routinely saw 26-28 land decks?), all those great creatures break the illusion that it is 1996 somewhat. One thing is for sure... Creatures are not safe against Otwell's many White cards. He played as many Wraths, Final Judgments, and Faith's Fetters as he could before stuffing in the first Condemn. As if Otwell didn't have enough token generation, his deck plays a single Pride of the Clouds main; Christopher can fetch this with Supply // Demand and have a slightly less expensive 1/1 engine than Vitu-Ghazi, the City-Tree, the deck's default.

Though North American Regionals put more than 50 archetypes into the various Top 8s, we have seen most of them, or at least variants on them, in the past. One of the new decks that I noticed in this crop is a hybrid Boros and Rakdos beatdown deck that some people have been calling "Dark Zoo."

Shane Mason

#### **7th Place - California - San Jose**

Shane Mason is a man after my own heart. He played a (nearly) 20/20/20 split of lands, creatures, and removal cards. His concession to Black (made possible by the new-fangled Rakdos lands in *Dissension*) are Dark Confidant and Mortify. To my mind, splashing Robert Maher, Jr. seems a bit scary in a deck full of *Ravnica* duals (painfully, there is not a basic in the bunch), but ultimately Lightning Helix is there to save the day, sort of how it keeps regular Zoo alive despite that deck's wacky lands. Shane's sideboard also makes fine use of the set... He had the foresight to play Rain of Gore in a format where the White decks would have access to a lot of powerful sideboard options.

Zack Wolff

#### **3rd Place - Nebraska - Lincoln**

Unlike Mason, Zack Wolff was actually lucky enough to qualify for Nationals with his own version of the B/R/W. Instead of playing a Boros deck with a tiny Black splash, Wolf had a Black deck - an Orzhov almost - that touched for Lightning Helix and Rise // Fall! Between the three colors, these decks almost become hybrids of olde tyme Sligh and Suicide attack decks... Notice how they can play the best beatdown and burn cards, and/or play crazy amounts of disruption. Mason's deck has a Boros Deck Wins-like burn suite, but also has a good bit of enchantment removal and sideboards Castigate. Wolff on the other hand keeps the Lightning Helixes but goes crazy on Terry Soh and other disruptive elements... The "suicide" bit comes from their land bases, which would make even the Flesh Reavers and Carnophages of late 1999 cringe.

You can read Regionals 2006 two different ways. One of them is "the field's wide open." With more than 50 distinct types of decks sending their masters into the elimination rounds, any other way of looking at it would be bunk. On the other hand, the format is still at least somewhat predictable. We have talked at length about four big decks coming out of the PTQ season, and three of those (if,

ironically not the one with the most Blue Envelopes) finished at the lead. My opinion on this one is that the decks have gotten better, but in many cases, the mana has gotten worse. The opponents have more options... But you'd have to be blind to miss the fact that this trend is one that can be exploited, with Blood Moon, burn cards, or honestly, just a Remand or two. The message of full block *Ravnica* Standard seems to be "You can play whatever you want... but if you stay sharp, you can get an edge at the same time."

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