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Summer Sizzle

*Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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We are finally hitting the stretch of summer where we have some major events on the immediate horizon. While it is fun to write about building decks with snow-covered land (hmmmm...I probably should have saved Tamanoan Meditation Technique for this week, huh?) and playing at the Prerelease, this column is about high-level **Magic** events and the people who excel at them.

And I promise you that next week we will have some of them to talk about. Even as I type this, I am getting ready to head to Missouri for Grand Prix-St. Louis, most of Europe is gearing up for Grand Prix-Malmo, and the French and Australians are fine-tuning their decks for their respective Nationals. The following weekend brings U.S., English, and Italian Nationals in one big Standard-shattering weekend. The U.S. iteration of the event will also include the Junior Super Series Championship, creating one huge **Magic** Weekend for the city of Atlanta.

The double booking of a European Grand Prix against French Nationals has left Olivier Ruel and Pierre Canali with a tough choice to make. It seems almost certain that this year's Player of the Year race is going to be decided by Grand Prix travel (and the handful of points available at those events). Last year's race was one of the most exciting in the 10 years of the Pro Tour, and if any of the three finalists had skipped even one Grand Prix down the stretch, they would have fallen out of the running.

A couple weeks ago, Olivier Ruel recounted the drama of the closing days of the season at Grand Prix-Beijing at Worlds. More than anyone, he understands the value of the 3-6 points a Grand Prix Top 8 finish awards. If you look at this season's [Player of the Year standings](#), you find Olivier perched right near the top once again. His three Top 8s this season are the difference between being in second place and being in eighth. Had he advanced past the quarterfinals and won any of the three tournaments, Olivier would be tied for first.

Grand Prix finishes will be even more crucial this season than they were in the 2005, which included six Pro Tours and Worlds. Two fewer Pro Tours means there are that many fewer opportunities for players to double up on Pro Tour Top 8s (traditionally the quickest route to a Player of the Year title). So far this season we have had 28 different players reach the Top 8 of the three 2006 Pro Tours, with nary a repeat among the bunch.



Heezy's PT win makes up a big chunk of his 2006 Pro Points.

This leads to very similar point totals and a log jam near the top of the standings. There is huge clump of players within 10 points of each other, starting with Shuhei Nakamura's 30 points in sixth place and going down to John Pelcak's 20 in 27th. Among the top five spots are two individual Pro Tour winners in Takuya Osawa and Mark Herberholz (in third and fourth). Fifth place is a testament to the power of the Grand Prix as Helmut Summersberger – winner of two GPs this year – occupies that spot.

With only one Pro Tour Top 8 to his name this season, it is Olivier's three Top 8 Grand Prix finishes that catapult him over the two trophy holders. The only player ahead of Olivier is Shota Yasooka. Shota won Pro Tour-Charleston as a member of Kajiharu80, but with two Grand Prix Top 8 finishes to complement a couple of PT money finishes, Shota has outdistanced teammates Kaji and Saito – who have both crowned him this season's Player of the Year favorite.

Armed with first-hand knowledge of the value of Grand Prix finishes, Olivier is opting out of French Nationals this weekend to attend the Grand Prix in Malmo. Joining him are Pro Tour Columbus winner Pierre Canali and former Worlds Top 8 competitor Raphael Levy (who is apparently eligible to compete in Swedish Nationals).

"There are no Pro Points to win," shrugged Pierre Canali when asked about his decision to forgo his National Championship. "Not even for finishing in the Top 3. Making the Top 32 of a Grand Prix is much easier."

A Top 32 finish is worth one Pro Point, which should give you an idea of what a precious commodity they have become as the 2006 season enters the home stretch. Remember, only one player can win Player of the Year but everyone is concerned about leveling up for next season. Pierre is currently sitting at 17 points which doesn't lock up Level 3 for next season – although merely attending Kobe and Worlds would get him there – but his eyes are on the bigger prize.

SUMMER SCHEDULE

Here are the notable events over the next few weeks:

Weekend of July 22-23

- [Grand Prix-Malmo](#)
- [Grand Prix-St. Louis](#)
- [French Nationals](#)
- [Australian Nationals](#)
- [Amateur Championship](#)

Weekend of July 28-29

- Magic Weekend:** [U.S. Nationals](#), [JSS Championships](#)
- [Italian Nationals](#) (pdf)
- [English Nationals](#)

Weekend of August 5-6

- [Canadian Nationals](#)

Weekend of August 12-13

- [Germany Nationals](#)
- [Vintage Championship](#)
- [Legacy Championship](#)

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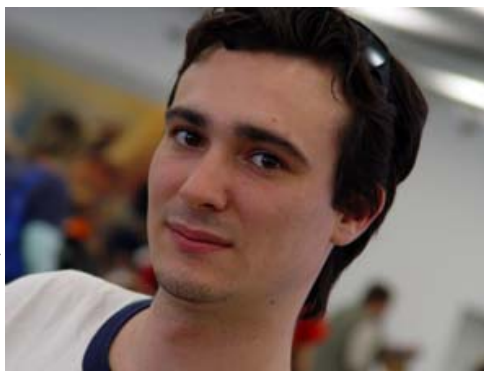
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Current Level 5 mage Masahiko Morita got his elite status largely on the basis of his Grand Prix travel schedule – almost literally a frequent flier reward. He did not have a single Top 8 finish on the Pro Tour in 2005 but regularly played in the elimination rounds of Grand Prix events in such far-flung locales as Kitakyuushu, Taipei, and Boston. The lesson was not lost on Canali.

"I want to be Player of the Year like every single player on Earth," explained Pierre with a grin. "But I don't think I will. Kenji Tsumura, the Ruels and four or five other players are far better than me. But the thing is that I think I can be Level 4 at the very least for next year and maybe Level 5."

While Pierre has the luxury of improving his level from a virtual Level 3 to something more lucrative, others are going to be scrambling to keep themselves out of the PTQ ranks for the 2007 season. Two of this year's Level 6 mages could not even pool their Pro Points to qualify as a Level 3 player for next year. Masashi Oiso is foundering with 10 points, as is Katsuhiko Mori with 9.



Canali's quest for Pro Points is leading him away from his country's national championship.



Kenji's two GP titles have greatly helped his POY standing.

Akira Asahara, Tsuyoshi Fujita, and Masahiko Morita are doing little better. The three Level 5 mages have 13, 8, and 11 points respectively. Player of the Year Kenji Tsumura would be in similar straits if not for back-to-back wins at Limited (!) Grand Prix events in Kuala Lumpur and Toulouse pushing him past the Level 3 threshold. Rumor has it that Kenji will be making an appearance in St. Louis along with some other Japanese players. Kenji has clearly demonstrated his skills with the guilds and it will be interesting to see how he fares with the snow permanents. It should be noted that Japan has not had its Pro Tour this year, and there are still three Grand Prix scheduled on that side of the world later in '06.

There will certainly be plenty of action to keep an eye out for this weekend. Players gearing up for Nationals in the U.S., England, and Italy will no doubt be refreshing their browsers all day on Monday looking to glean Standard tech for next week's triple-header. Of course they will also be watching the Day Two coverage from Malmo and St. Louis for tech on drafting with Coldsnap – something which could be the difference-maker at those three events during Limited play.

Keep your browsers pointed toward the Tournament Center all weekend as we will be bringing you the action as it unfolds. I will be in St. Louis, no doubt covering Kenji's draft on Day Two; Tim Willoughby will be reporting from Malmo; and a team of top reporters will be bringing the news from French Nationals.

A Magic Weekend

Speaking of **Magic** Weekend, there's a lot more going on there than just crowning the U.S. and JSS champions come July 30. You probably saw the [Contest of the Year](#) earlier this week on [magicthegathering.com](#), but there's another contest for everyone 15 and under. The "[Create Your Own Magic](#)" Contest lets you take your shot at game design, fantasy art, fiction writing, and strategy/tournament report writing. Each entry will be judged by noted Wizards of the Coast employees in each field, with feedback sessions given to the winners.

As a final bonus, if you've ever been to Atlanta in the summer, you know a little about the horrid combination of heat and humidity. Well, in honor of *Coldsnap*, there will be free snow cones at the event hall all weekend, in the five colors of mana. See you in Atlanta!

STATS UPDATE

In preparation for August's Hall of Fame voting, Wizards of the Coast recently audited its list of [lifetime Pro Points](#) and errors were found for the top two finishers at Pro Tours in 2005 and 2006. The totals have been adjusted – the erroneous data only showed up on this page, and did not have any effect on players' Pro Club Levels for 2005 or 2006, nor for eligibility or voting eligibility for the Hall of Fame. Wizards apologizes for the mistake.

Firestarter: Worst by a Best

Maybe you can help me settle an argument I have been having on one of my draft mailing lists. It does not have anything to do with **Magic** but I still am curious about your opinions. What is the worst movie made by an actor after winning an Academy Award in one of the Best Acting categories?

I had thought the argument had been narrowed down to Halle Berry in Catwoman, Charlize Theron in Aeon Flux, or Jamie Foxx in Stealth but was recently pointed in the direction of Chill Factor featuring Cuba Gooding Jr. Share your thoughts on the subject in the forums and don't forget to check back all weekend long for the latest Grand Prix action!

*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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