

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

Championship Weekend to Championship Weekend: France to U.S.

Mike Flores
Swimming With Sharks
Thursday, July 27, 2006



This week hundreds of players are preparing for the 2006 United States National Championship, and thousands more are awaiting the results. U.S. Nationals is a storied tournament whose past champions have included some of the biggest names in **Magic**, from technical masters like Eugene "Eugenius" Harvey, Pro Tour *Champions* like Justin Gary, and the **Magic** Hall of Fame's shining star Jon Finkel. Those who have been approaching at least the Constructed portion of U.S. Nationals have quite a firmly established metagame to work with. This format is essentially the same format as the Regional Championships (pre-*Coldsnap* Standard with the Core Set and full *Kamigawa* and full *Ravnica* Blocks), which varied little from the decks coming out of Pro Tour--Honolulu, but for minor injections from the Azorius and Simic.

Even when formats seem to hold constant over extended periods of time, the introduction of sets – specifically *Dissension*, which has to this point had less direct impact in Standard but for the admittedly relevant *Simic Sky Swallower* – leaves room for innovation, given sufficient time. As such, and as with last year, those hundreds of American players preparing for their National Championship look to predecessor *French Nationals* for their cue, and to listen at the door to learn if there will be any drastic changes in the Standard metagame. This year, as with last year, the French forerunners stand to leave a mark on a pre-*Coldsnap* Standard not long for the tournament set.

Last year, French finalist Michel Remlinger was one of two players in his National Championship Top 8 to pioneer a new look at Mono-Blue Control. This version, which utilized main deck *Jushi Apprentices* as the primary draw and *Spire Golem* as the primary attack card (in lieu of the then-more conventional multi-tasking *Thieving Magpie*) was a highly innovative change.

Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
2 <i>Blinkmoth Nexus</i>	3 <i>Annul</i>	1 <i>Annul</i>
19 <i>Island</i>	4 <i>Boomerang</i>	1 <i>Boseiju, Who Shelters All</i>
4 <i>Stalking Stones</i>	2 <i>Echoing Truth</i>	1 <i>Daring Apprentice</i>
25 lands	4 <i>Hinder</i>	3 <i>Hibernation</i>
	4 <i>Mana Leak</i>	1 <i>Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker</i>
	2 <i>Oblivion Stone</i>	4 <i>Sun Droplet</i>
3 <i>Jushi Apprentice</i>	3 <i>Rewind</i>	4 <i>Twincast</i>
3 <i>Spire Golem</i>	3 <i>Thirst for Knowledge</i>	15 sideboard cards
6 creatures	4 <i>Vedalken Shackles</i>	
	29 other spells	

Irrespective of which version was more efficient when dealing with the format as a whole, viz. Tooth and Nail and aggressive Red Decks, the main deck *Jushi Apprentice* version Remlinger played changed the way Blue decks dealt with one another. When faced with this kind of a Blue deck, another Blue deck with an initially more ponderous game plan might start off with his back against the wall, and ran the risk of losing outright on the second turn. You see, a *Thieving Magpie* costs four mana, so dealing with it via permission or even *Vedalken Shackles* was fairly simple; a *Jushi Apprentice*, though, would be nearly inexorable on the play given sufficient mana, and a fine bet even when the Jushi player were going second. If the Apprentice stuck, the opposing Blue player would find himself in a rough battle over *Boomerangs* and *Echoing Truths* that would almost certainly concede card advantage even if the *Jushi Apprentice* were dealt with in the short term.

Moreover, the switch from more nakedly powerful threat cards to the unassuming *Spire Golem* allowed Remlinger's version to play its threat early in beatdown matchups, or deploy *any number* of *Azure Drakes* – say, all of them – without tapping even a single mana in the midgame. Note that in a Blue-on-Blue fight, the opponent might have to wait to pick a fight over *Meloku* or *Keiga*, but the far less powerful *Spire Golem* could



come down leaving the Jushi Blue player eight remaining cards in hand and all his mana untapped, poised to win – or at least not lose, per se – the resulting permission war. Beyond putting Remlinger on the French National Team, the **Jushi Apprentice** version of Mono-Blue Control was highly influential. To wit, two weeks later at the U.S. National Championships, not only did Neil Reeves come packing a Jushi Blue version that seemed heavily influenced by Remlinger's deck, the **Jushi Apprentices** even infected the Blue Tron archetype!

Neil Reeves		
2005 U.S. Nationals Top 8		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
21 Island	3 Annul	1 Annul
4 Stalking Stones	3 Boomerang	2 Echoing Truth
25 lands	2 Condescend	1 Mephidross Vampire
	4 Hinder	1 Sakashima the Impostor
	4 Mana Leak	4 Threads of Disloyalty
4 Jushi Apprentice	2 Oblivion Stone	1 Triskelion
4 Spire Golem	3 Rewind	4 Twincast
8 creatures	2 Thirst for Knowledge	1 Uyo, Silent Prophet
	4 Vedalken Shackles	15 sideboard cards
	27 other spells	

Jonathan Sonne		
2005 U.S. Nationals Top 8		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
7 Island	4 Chrome Mox	2 Annul
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge	2 Concentrate	4 Jushi Apprentice
1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds	4 Condescend	3 Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch
4 Urza's Mine	3 Echoing Truth	2 Meloku the Clouded Mirror
4 Urza's Power Plant	4 Mana Leak	2 Razormane Masticore
4 Urza's Tower	3 Mindslaver	2 Rewind
21 lands	3 Sensei's Divining Top	15 sideboard cards
	3 Serum Visions	
	4 Thirst for Knowledge	
2 Memnarch	30 other spells	
4 Solemn Simulacrum		
3 Triskelion		
9 creatures		

Neil's deck was extremely similar to the Remlinger version, just built to maximize the unique elements that made it strong to begin with... But in its own way, Sonne's adoption of **Jushi Apprentice** for the sideboard of his deck was an even greater compliment to the success of these innovations. This might seem odd considering the fact that following its success at 2005 Champs, Jushi Blue versions were the most numerous at last year's World Championships... However the card was seldom played prior to French Nationals. By U.S. Nationals less than a month later, 2/3 of the subsequent National Team was packing this card, and half of them were main deck.

As ultimately successful as **Jushi Apprentice** in the Mono-Blue deck was last year, the rogue factor of the 2006 French National Championship Top 8 was far more surprising than a couple of **Spire Golems**. Consider:

WW/u ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Vore ■

Heartbeat ■

Ghost Husk ■

Zoo ■

■ = National Team Member

Guillaume Matignon		
French Nationals Top 8		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
12 Forest	4 Early Harvest	4 Carven Caryatid
9 Island	2 Gigadrowse	1 Crime/Punishment
1 Swamp	4 Heartbeat of Spring	1 Dimir Infiltrator
	4 Kodama's Reach	1 Loaming Shaman

22 lands	4 Muddle the Mixture	1 Mountain
	4 Remand	1 Pyroclasm
4 Drift of Phantasms	4 Sensei's Divining Top	1 Research/Development
1 Maga, Traitor to Mortals	3 Weird Harvest	2 Savage Twister
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	29 other spells	3 Simic Sky Swallower
9 creatures		15 sideboard cards

Jonathan Rispal		
French Nationals Top 8		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Adarkar Wastes	4 Remand	2 Condemn
2 Azorius Chancery	4 Shining Shoal	1 Descendant of Kiyomaro
1 Eiganjo Castle	3 Umezawa's Jitte	1 Ghost Quarter
1 Ghost Quarter	11 other spells	1 Hand of Honor
4 Hallowed Fountain		2 Hokori, Dust Drinker
3 Island		1 Kira, Great Glass-Spinner
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge		3 Mana Leak
6 Plains		1 Manriki-Gusari
22 lands		1 Opal-Eye, Konda's Yojimbo
		1 Umezawa's Jitte
3 Azorius Guildmage		1 Wojek Siren
2 Court Hussar		15 sideboard cards
2 Drowned Rusalka		
2 Grand Arbiter Augustin IV		
2 Hand of Honor		
4 Isamaru, Hound of Konda		
3 Kami of Ancient Law		
2 Paladin en-Vec		
4 Sky Hussar		
3 Weathered Wayfarer		
27 creatures		

Sylvain Lauriol		
French Nationals Top 8		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
1 Adarkar Wastes	1 Charge Across the Araba	2 Azorius Guildmage
1 Eiganjo Castle	4 Glorious Anthem	2 Bathe in Light
4 Hallowed Fountain	4 Shining Shoal	1 Eiganjo Castle
17 Plains	2 Umezawa's Jitte	2 Ghost Quarter
23 lands	11 other spells	1 Hokori, Dust Drinker
		1 Kami of Ancient Law
2 Azorius Guildmage		1 Manriki-Gusari
2 Eight-and-a-Half-Tails		1 Opal-Eye, Konda's Yojimbo
4 Hand of Honor		2 Paladin en-Vec
1 Infantry Veteran		1 Umezawa's Jitte
4 Isamaru, Hound of Konda		1 Wojek Siren
3 Kami of Ancient Law		15 sideboard cards
1 Nagao, Bound by Honor		
1 Paladin en-Vec		
4 Samurai of the Pale Curtain		
4 Savannah Lions		
26 creatures		

Steven Gouin		
French Nationals Top 8		
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard
4 Caves of Koilos	3 Mortify	3 Castigate
1 Eiganjo Castle	4 Promise of Bunrei	4 Descendant of Kiyomaro

4 Godless Shrine
3 Orzhov Basilica
5 Plains
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse
4 Swamp

22 lands

4 Dark Confidant
3 Eight-and-a-Half-Tails
3 Ghost Council of Orzhova
4 Isamaru, Hound of Konda
4 Nantuko Husk
3 Orzhov Pontiff
4 Plagued Rusalka

25 creatures

3 Shining Shoal
3 Umezawa's Jitte

13 other spells

3 Kami of Ancient Law
3 Mindslicer
2 Pithing Needle

15 sideboard cards

Yann Hamon

French Nationals Top 8



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Battlefield Forge
2 Brushland
2 Karplusan Forest
4 Sacred Foundry
4 Stomping Ground
4 Temple Garden

20 lands

4 Isamaru, Hound of Konda
4 Kird Ape
4 Savannah Lions
4 Scab-Clan Mauler
2 Tin Street Hooligan
4 Watchwolf

22 creatures

4 Char
3 Giant Growth
4 Lightning Helix
4 Seal of Fire
3 Volcanic Hammer

18 other spells

Sideboard

2 Bathe in Light
2 Kami of Ancient Law
3 Pacifism
4 Paladin en-Vec
1 Tin Street Hooligan
3 Umezawa's Jitte

15 sideboard cards

Olivier Hauchard

French Nationals Top 8



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Adarkar Wastes
1 Azorius Chancery
1 Eiganjo Castle
1 Ghost Quarter
4 Hallowed Fountain
1 Island
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge
1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds
7 Plains
1 Quicksand

22 lands

2 Azorius Guildmage
2 Court Hussar
2 Grand Arbiter Augustin IV
1 Hand of Honor
1 Hokori, Dust Drinker
4 Isamaru, Hound of Konda
2 Kami of Ancient Law
3 Paladin en-Vec
2 Samurai of the Pale Curtain
3 Sky Hussar
3 Weathered Wayfarer

25 creatures

2 Mana Leak
4 Remand
3 Shining Shoal
4 Umezawa's Jitte

13 other spells

Sideboard

3 Condemn
2 Descendant of Kiyomaro
1 Ghost Quarter
1 Kami of Ancient Law
2 Manriki-Gusari
2 Pithing Needle
1 Shining Shoal
3 Spell Snare

15 sideboard cards

Yannick Lacroix

French Nationals Top 8



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Adarkar Wastes
1 Azorius Chancery
1 Eiganjo Castle
2 Ghost Quarter
4 Hallowed Fountain
2 Island
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge
6 Plains
1 Quicksand

22 lands

2 Azorius Guildmage
1 Court Hussar
1 Eight-and-a-Half-Tails
2 Grand Arbiter Augustin IV
2 Hand of Honor
1 Hokori, Dust Drinker
4 Isamaru, Hound of Konda
2 Kami of Ancient Law
3 Paladin en-Vec
1 Samurai of the Pale Curtain
3 Sky Hussar
3 Weathered Wayfarer

25 creatures

2 Mana Leak
4 Remand
3 Shining Shoal
4 Umezawa's Jitte

13 other spells

Sideboard

2 Condemn
3 Descendant of Kiyomaro
1 Kami of Ancient Law
1 Kira, Great Glass-Spinner
2 Manriki-Gusari
2 Pithing Needle
1 Shining Shoal
3 Spell Snare

15 sideboard cards

Selim Creiche

French Nationals Top 8



Main Deck

60 cards

7 Island
2 Izzet Boilerworks
1 Minamo, School at Water's Edge
5 Mountain
1 Oboro, Palace in the Clouds
4 Shivan Reef
4 Steam Vents

24 lands

4 Magnivore

4 creatures

4 Compulsive Research
3 Demolish
4 Eye of Nowhere
4 Mana Leak
4 Pyroclasm
4 Sleight of Hand
4 Stone Rain
2 Tidings
3 Wildfire

32 other spells

Sideboard

2 Boseiju, Who Shelters All
1 Meloku the Clouded Mirror
4 Remand
2 Steamcore Weird
2 Threads of Disloyalty
4 Volcanic Hammer

15 sideboard cards

Guillaume Matignon's Heartbeat deck was a very interesting variation. Most **Heartbeat of Spring** decks we have seen since Pro Tour--Honolulu – certainly the dominant deck of the Charleston PTQ season – followed the 10 + 10 + 1 + 1 mana base and four color configuration that Max Bracht used to score Top 8 in Hawaii. Come U.S. Regionals, we saw a version of the deck that cut main deck Black, running *just Invoke the Firemind* as its kill spell, but preserving the Red sweep main deck that had become popular over the PTQ season. In the present case we see Matignon reversing the removal of the third color, choosing instead to run no Mountain (main) instead of no Swamp. Another variation shown by this deck is the change in number of basic Forest and basic Island, emphasizing early game Green mana despite the ostensible increase in Blue mana requirements due to main deck **Gigadrowse**.



It is important to note that Matignon did not actually cut out the Red... he just moved it to the sideboard. The typical Red cards – the most iconic of which is **Savage Twister** – are still present along with the singleton Mountain; they just don't start. An exciting new look at his take on the Heartbeat transformation is **Simic Sky**

Swallow - is this a logical leap that was just slow to surface? The big bad of the hour just happens to be Blue and Green.

With six dedicated White decks in the Top 8 – one of which packs **Lightning Helix** and five of which play the card that makes **Lightning Helix** wilt – it may be safe, finally, to concur with Jeroen Remie at this point that **Shining Shoal** is the strongest card in Standard. Five decks in the French Nationals Top 8 ran it main, including the first place deck... and even the Ghost Husk version present moved **Shining Shoal** from its usual spot in the sideboard to a position of main deck hate.

The real story of this Top 8, which featured five different macro archetypes, is that it had only one repeat deck. That is not so remarkable, except that the single repeat deck made up fully *half* of the French Top 8, and was played by both Champion Sylvain Lauriol and National Team member Jonathan Rispal: White Weenie splashing Blue.

There seemed to be two distinct camps of WW/U decks in the Top 8. Unlike the other three decks in the Top 8, Champion Sylvain Lauriol's deck played neither **Mana Leak** nor **Remand**; Lauriol's Blue was focused on the activation fee on **Azorius Guildmage** almost exclusively. Instead of permission spells and card drawing, Sylvain peppered his deck with singleton copies of really unusual cards, including **Nagao, Bound by Honor**, **Infantry Veteran**, and **Charge Across the Araba**. It is too early to call which version, if either, will be the dominant iteration of this archetype for Standard, but you can bet there are a couple hundred American players trying to figure that question out right now.

The other version of WW/U, which was played in broad steps by three members of the Top 8 and one member of the National Team, ran a much more dedicated Blue element. All three decks played two copies of **Grand Arbiter Augustin IV** and a light permission suite. Besides IV, these decks all ran dedicated Azorius cards like **Court Hussar** and **Sky Hussar** in addition to Lauriol's splashed Guildmages. A very interesting sub-theme of these decks was the inclusion of **Weathered Wayfarer**. The seldom seen, if potent, one-drop could exploit **Azorius Chancery** to stay "behind" on lands against a control deck, and, once online, can fire for **Quicksand**, **Ghost Quarter**, or one of the innumerable Blue and White **Kamigawa** Block Legendary Lands, which themselves could play [better than] **Ghost Quarter** in the right matchups.

More even than just last year's violent injection of **Jushi Apprentice** into the U.S. National Team, this year's French Nationals Top 8 and its new deck may have an even greater impact on the pre-**Coldsnap** Standard metagame. It just so happens that White Weenie variants are the most successful decks in the history of U.S. Nationals. In 1999, eventual Pro Tour Champion Kyle Rose rode "White Lightning" **Waylay** past a metagame full of combo decks to take top honors; the previous year, Matt Linde earned thunderous applause by just having a key **Abeyance** when his finals opponent Mike Long threatened to win it all with hated combo deck **Cadaverous Bloom**... and this doesn't even take into account Steve McArthur's White Lightning, Elliot Fung's Rebels, last year's strong finish by Mike Patnik, or other White Weenie representatives over the years.



Will history repeat itself just before **Coldsnap** changes everything for many of the remaining National Championships? Check back here at magicthegathering.com starting tomorrow to find out!

*Mike has been a leading voice in the game's strategy for as long as there has been a **Magic** Internet. He is the former editor of *The Magic Dojo* and a sometime Pro player. *Michael J. Flores: Deckade*, is a compilation of Mike's first ten years of strategy and theory (i.e. before he joined magicthegathering.com), and is available at <http://www.top8magic.com>.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Mike Flores](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

