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A Bevy of Ballots

Aaron Forsythe
Latest Developments
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I'm on vacation.

At this very moment, I'm writing an article from the den of my wife's parents' home in Erie, Pennsylvania, the buzz of cicadas in the air and the scent of deciduous forests and lake water wafting in through the windows. Lovely.

Sadly, I'm cut off from the Internet while I'm here, which for me is like losing a limb or an eye or a lung. I suppose I'll manage, but it isn't easy. (I expect to send this article in via either a copy shop with Internet access or a coffee shop with wi-fi.)

This article will cover my votes for the 2006 class of the Magic Pro Tour Hall of Fame, and while I can figure out who I'm voting for with just the information stored on my laptop, it would be nice to have access to the slew of Organized Play databases, old event coverage, and other things that would make illustrating my points easier. But I'll manage.



My Top Two

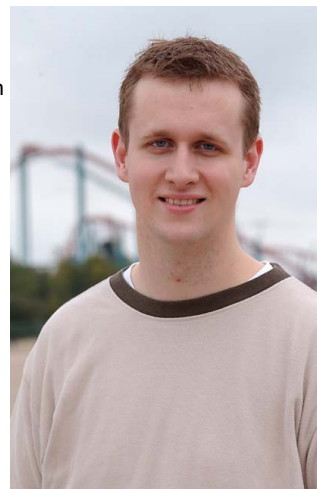
1) Gary Wise. I really wanted to vote for David Price last year based on what he stood for as a player and what he contributed to the game as a writer, editor, and personality, but his stats just didn't back him up as a Hall of Famer. I was happy to see that this wasn't the case for Gary Wise.

Gary has four PT Top 8s, just one short of the hallowed number five, including a win with Potato Nation. He is third in lifetime winnings and fifth in pro points out of the eligible candidates, meaning he'll wind up somewhere in the top five in a lot of people's statistical analyses. But that's only one small piece of who Gary Wise is as a **Magic** player.

To Gary, the Pro Tour was less about cards, decks, and money and more about the people, places, and goings-on. He championed the Pro Tour lifestyle with his "Wise Words" column long before we as a company ever started focusing on it. Additionally, he was a fun guy, a great spokesman, and a real showman in front of the cameras. In other words, exactly what the Pro Tour needs more of.

2) Bob Maher, Jr. Bob did it all. Pro Tour win, Grand Prix win, Player of the Year, Invitational win. Shall I go on? Four PT Top 8s, double-digit Grand Prix Top 8s, highest lifetime winnings of anyone on the ballot. And he was even on the U.S. National team one year, albeit the first year they didn't win the team title.

Yes, Bob was suspended by the DCI for a period of time for tournament fraud. I don't hold that against him; in fact, I'm sorry that he's going to have to hear about it a dozen or more times leading up to what I imagine is his inevitable induction to the Hall. I don't consider a suspension to automatically induce a "no" vote any more than I consider five Top 8s to automatically induce a "yes." I have a line of acceptable behavior that lies somewhere between what Maher did and how Mike Long conducted himself, and I don't look forward to feeling that line out in the years to come.



Bob Maher, Jr.

Now What?

With those two votes out of the way, I needed to step back and decide what I valued in players before casting my other three votes. I started where I assume most people will start, with the statistics compiled on our Hall of Fame Stats page.

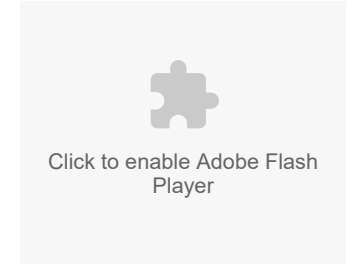
How do I feel about each of these stats? Do I consider them to accurately reflect what I want a Hall of Famer to embody?

PTs. At first glance, this statistic seems almost completely irrelevant, there only to provide a denominator for calculating more meaningful numbers. But my emotional responses to what was in that column were very telling. When I saw Raphael Levy's 51 I smiled and said, "Now *that* is awesome." Similarly, Dave Humpherys' and Bram Sneyvangers' big numbers reminded me of their dedication to the game.

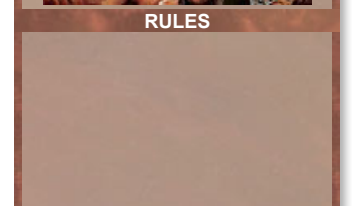
On the flipside, Mark Justice's 18 made me shake my head. So did Tomi Walamies' 26 and Sigurd Eskeland's 27. There have been far more Pro Tours than that in the ten or eleven years since those guys started playing, yet



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA



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they only attended a relative few. Sure, there are reasons. Perhaps they quit playing. Perhaps they couldn't remain qualified. Perhaps they couldn't be bothered to arrange for hotels and transportation. Perhaps they realized the game passed them by, so they moved onto other more lucrative hobbies. Reasons, sure. But which of those are *good* reasons? Which of those behavior patterns should I be rewarding?

Isn't the biggest perk of being inducted into the Hall automatic invitations to every PT for the rest of time? Shouldn't at least some of those bestowed with such powers actually *care*?

PT Top 8s. A nice powerful statistic. Personally, I'd have a hard time voting for someone with fewer than two, and as I mentioned earlier, five seems to be the current benchmark for greatness.

Top 8 Avg. This one is weird. What it tells me is how often a player makes the Top 8 on a per-event basis. It feels analogous to at bats per home run in baseball—something you use to reinforce someone's greatness as opposed to a foundation for said greatness. I'm not a fan of these kinds of statistics, as it punishes players that have continued playing during the valleys of their careers as opposed to walking away. I guess I'd rather see a long career with ups and downs as opposed to a brilliant flash in the pan.

If we just went on averages, Aeo Paquette would be considered the best player of all time. We can't simply use averages—even averages over a threshold—to determine Hall of Famers. One man's Sandy Koufax is another man's J.R. Richard. Look it up.

Median Finish. Another "average" statistic, and a puzzling one at that. I understand what median finish communicates—a given player finished above his own median half the time. So if someone's mean is 64th, that means he finished in the money half the time. But I'm not sure why we're showcasing median to the exclusion of mean (actual "average"). If a player played in five events and finished 1st, 1st, 100th, 101st, and 102nd, which number best describes him: A median finish of 100th, or a mean finish of 61st? I guess I'd prefer to see both numbers.

GP Top 8s. I enjoy Grand Prix and I love what they add to the game, but let's face it. This is the Pro Tour Hall of Fame, not the Grand Prix Hall of Fame. Alex Shvartsman's and Itaru Ishida's gaudy numbers aren't enough to warrant serious consideration. I consider Grand Prix finishes to be icing on the Pro Tour cake.

Career Winnings. A statistic I can get behind. It rewards everything—longevity, good finishes, and recently Pro Club standing. The people with the gaudiest numbers are the ones that leap to mind when you think "Hall of Famer."

Pro Points. Like Career Winnings, this statistic rewards everything I feel is important. Whereas 100 points allows a player to be eligible, I feel that 200 is where the men are separated from the boys. Getting to 200 points says (a) you're pretty darned good, and (b) you're pretty darned dedicated.

Avg. Points. Another one I don't like. This one feels like strike outs per nine innings or some other fabricated baseball stat. It makes for a nice conversation piece, but I'd never call it a metric.

If you couldn't tell, I liken the Magic Hall of Fame to a Lifetime Achievement Award of sorts. As someone who has dedicated all his free time and energy to **Magic: The Gathering**, I feel the need to reward others that have done the same. The professional game at its best is one of passion and commitment.

I mentioned above that I'd like to see mean finish in addition to median. On top of that, the stat that seems to be missing for me is flat-out *wins*. While I'd rather focus on long-term success as opposed to short flashes of brilliance, I'm a total sucker for winning. If you win multiple individual PT's, you're a shoo-in as far as I'm concerned.

Additionally, I'd like to see a median or mean number centered on each player's best 12-month or 24-month period. What if we were all so lucky as Mark Justice, entering the scene just as we hit our peak stride, and leaving before we racked up too many "just-hanging-out-with-friends" poor results? What if all our careers were the kind of blazing supernovae that lead to gaudy averages? Show me what each man was capable *at his very best*, and let's even the playing field.

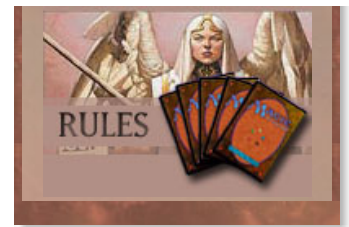
Now that I've looked at the stats, I still need some measuring stick by which to vote for people. Median finish by itself is right out—I will not be rounding out my ballot with Mark Justice, Mike Long, and Ryan Fuller. Those guys aren't Hall of Famers in my eyes. Similarly, longevity as measured by number of Pro Tours is a completely unfair and idiotic way to select people as well. How can I merge the two, rewarding longevity while both recognizing the accomplishment of the low median as well as factoring in the difficulty of maintaining a low median over the course of a decade-long career?

Or should I just go by money and points?

In the end, I created my own metric called "Adjusted Median." Adjusted Median is Median Finish divided by what I call the "Longevity Factor." The Longevity Factor is the number of events a player participated in divided by 30, which is the average number of events played by eligible candidates. So anyone that played in over 30 events has a Longevity Factor over 1.00, and anyone who played in fewer than 30 has a Longevity Factor under 1.00.

So if your Longevity Factor > 1, your Adjusted Median will be lower than your real median, and the opposite is true for low Longevity Factors. The top 10 scores in Adjusted Median are as follows:

NAME	PTs	Median	Longevity Factor	Adj Median
Levy	51	55	1.700	32.4
Humpherys	48	52	1.600	32.5
Long	32	39	1.067	36.6
Gary	44	58.5	1.467	39.9



Fuller	27	42	0.900	46.7
Justice	18	28	0.600	46.7
Wise	44	70	1.467	47.7
Geertsen	30	52	1.000	52.0
Dougherty	38	68.5	1.267	54.1
Snepvangers	45	83	1.500	55.3

Seeing as Long is still straight out, that means I'll be rounding out my ballot with:

- **Raphael Levy**
- **Dave Humpherys**
- **Justin Gary**

I'm quite happy with those choices, as the numbers let me communicate logically what I was feeling in my gut. Dedication and longevity are just as important in my mind as high finishes. Each of these candidates embodies playing ability, integrity, and sportsmanship, and each has made valuable contributions to the game.

Humpherys has the magic five Top 8s, a PT win with Your Move Games in Washington DC, the highest point total of anyone on the ballot, and a median finish well within the money.

Justin Gary hits many of the key milestones as well—over 100K in winnings, over 200 points, a Pro Tour win (Houston), and a median finish in the money. He has only three Top 8s, but was so consistent for so long that he earned his way onto my list.



Raphael Levy

The weird one is Levy. Levy ended up with the astronomical numbers he has almost purely by “grinding.” He has only two Top 8s, none in the last five years. He has never played in an Invitational and was nearly cut from the batch of Pro Player cards that appear in tournament packs and theme decks. But his consistency is record-breaking. He has played in every Pro Tour since Worlds '98! That in itself is astonishing. And he has performed admirably, with a median finish better than everyone else I'm voting for except for Humpherys.

In many ways, Levy feels like this year's Alan Comer. His resume is missing something, and he has never been an A-list bona fide star. But when you add everything together and compare his numbers side-by-side with his contemporaries, he manages to stand out somehow. And I take great pleasure

in voting for Levy because I know he'll use those free invitations until he keels over.

Of course, I could have arrived at the same five guys just by choosing the five with the most lifetime Pro Points. Maybe points are a great metric all by themselves.

That's my ballot. For your entertainment, you can read on for more ballots by my distinguished R&D colleagues.

We'll get back to the polls when I'm back from vacation.

Mike Turian

The second year of the Magic Hall of Fame brings with it a new crop of candidates to choose from. This year is probably the best chance for the eligible candidates to get into the Hall.

Voting for the Hall of Fame candidates is a privilege that I take very seriously. Last year I voted for Jon Finkel, Mike Long, Tommi Hovi, Alan Comer, and Scott Johns. Then I voted for Scott again during the player section of the ballot. Fortunately, this year the voting has been reorganized so I will only need to vote for Scott once.

My first vote goes to Scott Johns. When Gary Wise told me that Scott would be our teammate for Pro Tour--New York I doubted Gary's judgment. Sure, Scott had been good “back in the day,” but I was concerned that he wouldn't be able to recapture the skills that took him to three Top 8s in the inaugural season of the Pro Tour. Fortunately for me, it was the right time for Scott to be the man.

Scott exemplifies what a Magic Hall of Famer should be. He has been part of **Magic** since the beginning. 5 Pro Tour Top 8s and a win should alone be enough to get him inducted into the Hall of Fame, but his work on **magicthegathering.com** and other websites have proven his dedication to **Magic**.



Scott Johns, Gary Wise, and Mike Turian at PT NY 2000

Please don't stop reading my article after my next vote, Mike Long. Like Scott, I voted for Mike last year and I am voting for him again this year. I first met Mike at Pro Tour--New York 1997 (or PT Rye as it was called at the time). It was 2 a.m. the night after Day 1. We were both in a 5th-Visions booster draft. At the time, I hadn't played in a single Pro Tour, but I knew Mike Long. He was the

greatest **Magic** player in the world. When I beat him (thanks to **Snake Basket**), that was the moment when I realized that maybe I could be on the Pro Tour.

So many people try to discredit Mike for his alleged shadiness, but never acknowledge his success on the Pro Tour level. Until Jon Finkel came into his own, Mike Long was the greatest **Magic** player on the planet. Mike Long deserves to be in the Magic Hall of Fame and that is why I am voting for him.

Gary Wise gets my vote for the Hall of Fame. Simply put, Gary is a winner. Often I would hear people belittle Gary's playing ability or his persona. When I defended Gary, I'm sure people would attribute that to the fact that we were teammates for so long. However, they couldn't be more wrong. Gary brought his confidence to the table, and with a strong force of will, he made four Top 8 appearances.

Gary has all of the intangibles that the Magic Hall of Fame should be about. He played the game with integrity and passion. That passion carried over into his writing. Even as Gary would try to maintain the fairness that journalism requires, you could see in his writing a passion for what he believed in. His column served as the best way to publicize and criticize what was happening in the Pro Tour community.

My next vote goes to the man with the highest career earnings of the eligible candidates, Bob Maher Jr. With four Top 8 appearances, Bob earned his nickname of "The Great One." Bob brought class to the game of **Magic**. He was always a cordial opponent and rarely had a bad word to say about anyone in the game.

Having never been Bob's teammate, he was always on the other side of the table and that wasn't the place you wanted to see him. Bob participated in one of the greatest final matches in history when he defeated Brian Davis at Pro Tour--Chicago. The only thing to stand in Bob's way of being the World Champion was Jon Finkel, and being second to Jon certainly shouldn't keep anybody out of the Hall of Fame.

My last vote was the toughest decision I had to make in this process. Right now as I write this I am still going back and forth between Steve O'Mahoney-Schwartz and Dave Humpherys. Both guys were never the loudest or most self-publicizing players, they let their accomplishments speak for themselves. I think that Dave Humpherys accomplishments are slightly better than Steve OMS's. I'd also regret not getting a chance to vote for any of the three main Your Move Game players before they all get inducted into the Hall of Fame. Therefore my final vote goes to Dave Humpherys.

My 2006 Hall of Fame Ballot:

- Dave Humpherys
- Scott Johns
- Mike Long
- Bob Maher Jr.
- Gary Wise

Thank you,
Mike Turian

Scott Johns

As so many voters have pointed out, the open-endedness of the Hall of Fame criteria can make choosing very difficult. Though I weighed many different factors this year, in the end I went mostly with good ol' professional respect. Back in my pre-Wizards days, when I was still making my living actually slinging Magic cards, I had the opportunity to interact repeatedly with most of the people on the list of candidates. In the end, my first three slots went to Bob Maher, Robert Dougherty, and David Humpherys all for the single reason that I would least want to have to play against them with everything on the line. The two YMG veterans boast ten Top 8s between them, and Bob "The Great One" Maher has done almost everything, winning an Invitational, Pro Tour, Grand Prix, and even getting second at Worlds behind Jon Finkel. Each of those guys is a fierce competitor and phenomenal **Magic** player and I feel they all embody a degree of mastery that deserves recognition in the Hall of Fame.

In addition to that list, I had to add Gary Wise. Without the final couple years in his career, this might have been a tougher choice, though his extensive writing on the game would almost have been enough for me in combination with his record to that point. However, once he started making team Top 8s with all sorts of different players, it became clear Gary was one of the very best team players of all time. With four Top 8s and probably the best team record of all time for a non-Phoenix Foundation player, years of writing on many facets of the game, and also being a repeat fan favorite at the Magic Invitational, there wasn't any way I was leaving Gary off my list.

My last slot was the tough one. Coming into this, I'd pretty much known those first four guys were going to make my list. But this last slot was very tough. There are very reasonable arguments to be made for so many of the remaining people. Justin Gary, Chris Pikula, and Mike Pustilnik all came very close for me, but in the end I decided to go with Itaru Ishida for his combination of outstanding performance (including *seventeen* GP Top 8s) and having done so much for the Japanese **Magic** community. Much as Randy has talked about wanting to acknowledge someone with a kind of "community-building" vote, I decided to use my final slot to honor Ishida for his accomplishments and everything he's done for **Magic**, Japanese or otherwise.

Scott Johns' ballot



Itaru Ishida winning GP Singapore '05

- Bob Maher
 - Robert Dougherty
 - David Humpherys
 - Gary Wise
 - Itaru Ishida
-

Henry Stern

For me, I put a lot of value on Pro Tour Top 8s earned as well as total number of Pro Points earned. I also value people who have had long careers, so total number of Pro Tours is meaningful as well. Outside contributions also should be considered (I did vote for Pikula last year, after all), but they mean much less to me overall than how you did once you sat down at the table.

David Humpherys - A crushing 48 Pro Tour appearances with 5 Top 8s and the most Pro Points of any person on this year's ballot. An easy choice.

Robert Dougherty - Again 5 Pro Tour Top 8s speaks volumes to me. Also, I think he was the most qualified person on my ballot last year who did not make it in.

Bob Maher - 4 Pro Tour Top 8s and third in this year's class of number of Pro Points earned.

After these three, it gets tougher. But, after long thought I am going with:

Raphel Levy - I don't know how anyone can look at 51 Pro Tours attended and not be impressed. He is the Carl Yastrzemski of **Magic**, this record should be *celebrated*, not dismissed. Yes, he only Top 8'd in two of those Pro Tours, but he was consistently near the top. He has the second most Pro Points earned of anyone on the ballot, as well as a very impressive 10 Grand Prix Top 8 finishes.

Justin Gary - Again, lets look at the stats. No. 4 in Pro Points earned. No. 4 in Pro Tours attended (with a very impressive 3 Top 8s). He also was U.S. National Champ one year, and on the team one other year. No one thing pushes this candidate forward, but all of these together earn him my vote:



David Humpherys

Next on my list, I will not be disappointed if any of these people make it in:

- Gary Wise
 - Itaru Ishida
 - Scott Johns
 - Mark Justice
 - Mike Long
 - Chris Pikula
 - Steve OMS
 - Svend Geertsen
 - Jakub Slemr
-

Frank Gilson

I remember my first game of **Magic: The Gathering**. It was at a friend's house in Rochester, NY in October of 1993. Someone had purchased a couple of decks and introduced me to the game. I enjoyed it and wanted to play more. I had a strong interest in competition gaming, having done well in various events over the years. I turned that focus toward **Magic**.

Many others did as well. **Magic** tournaments were quickly part of the gaming schedule at most events. When Wizards of the Coast began holding U.S. Nationals and World Championships, I was an enthusiastic participant.

With hindsight, the announcement of a Pro Tour for **Magic** seems momentous. At the time, however, it was an uncertain thing from my perspective. Would there be more of these? Why should I fly to New York from Los Angeles for one event? Will the event be well run? The idea of playing **Magic** seriously and competitively for financial reward was new.

A number of players have made the commitment to raise their level of play as high as possible. I played with and against many. My Hall of Fame vote is in large part informed by personal experience. My votes are, in no particular order.

Rob Dougherty

I enjoyed listening to what he had to say about the events at hand, and **Magic** game play. Attending 38 Pro Tours, making 5 Top 8s, and achieving over twice the needed points to qualify are certainly a very firm foundation for Hall of Fame membership. His involvement in his local **Magic** community through Your Move Games is a big plus.

Gary Wise

Gary has strong words about being a committed player and maintaining a positive attitude. I wish I had heard those words earlier in my playing career, because they're very important. His performance statistics are also great. Gary's frequent online writing was always interesting.

Bob Maher

Certainly Bob's stats are high. He's also a pleasure to play and an all-around nice guy. Whatever the controversy surrounding his six-month ban, he did confess and help shed light on a serious cheating incident.

Dave Humpherys

Dave possesses some of the strongest **Magic** playing skills I've ever seen. Sure, you might call him "methodical" if polite, but don't doubt his results. Merely watching him play elevated my **Magic** ability.

Scott Johns

Here I have the greatest personal connection. Scott and I were on the Pacific Coast Legends **Magic** team in the early days of the Pro Tour. Playing with him made me play better. He helped us build better decks. He was a gracious and strongly contributing team member.

There are 47 candidates this time around. There were 28 for the first ballot. It's hard to make these choices, and that's why I let personal details inform me.

Frank Gilson

*Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D, and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.*



Rob Dougherty



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