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Delving into Year Two

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, August 18, 2006



Following up on [last week's player biographies](#), this week I am providing brief overviews of the players who have become Hall of Fame eligible this year. In order for a player to be make it onto the ballot this year, he needed to have shed his amateur status during the 1996-97 Pro Tour season. Currently that means they had to have played in their first Pro Tour during the 1996-97 season, which included Pro Tours in Atlanta, Paris, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, and Worlds in Seattle. The second season of the Pro Tour also featured the introduction of Grand Prix tournaments, which took place in Tokyo, Washington D.C., and Amsterdam.

I know that I have referred to this as a "voter's guide" and there were a couple of snarky comments about how I was writing this column for roughly 100 people worldwide. The real goal over these two weeks is to take a moment to acknowledge the accomplishments of each player on the ballot.

In preparing my ballot, I was poring over the stats for this year's Hall of Fame class and was struck by the resume of one Benedikt Klauser. Despite four Sunday appearances on the Pro Tour (tied for the second highest total amongst anyone on this year's ballot), I knew very little about the European Pro. Whether or not someone gets into the Hall, it is – as clichéd as it may sound – an honor to be nominated but that doesn't mean you can't also get thrown a paragraph about your career along the way.



I also find it really interesting how many divergent paths there are to reach the 100-career point threshold. Five Pro Tour Top 8s gets you there in a hurry but there are also players on this list with as few as one or zero Pro Tour Top 8s on their resume who have made their mark on the Grand Prix scene. So whether you have a vote or not, here we go...

Trevor Blackwell

Lifetime Winnings: \$86,423 **Lifetime Points:** 114 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 1 **GP Top 8:** 3

Although he did post a Top 32 finish in only his second Pro Tour appearance, Trevor Blackwell was not a regular Pro Tour competitor until three seasons later when he made his only Top 8 finish – a dark horse win against Chris Benafel – in Los Angeles. Trevor also has a team Grand Prix win alongside Alex Shvartsman and Nick Wong at Grand Prix-Nagoya.

Noah Boeken

Lifetime Winnings: \$70,855 **Lifetime Points:** 134 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 0 **GP Top 8:** 7

While Noah's resume is bereft of any Pro Tour Top 8s, he managed to rack up seven GP Top 8s – winning two of them – in addition to winning the 2000 European Championships over Raphaël Lévy. Noah has gone on to become an international poker celebrity and since his retirement from the game.

Sigurd Eskeland

Lifetime Winnings: \$63,955 **Lifetime Points:** 149 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 1 **GP Top 8:** 3

If you are only going to make one Pro Tour Top 8 in your career, you might as well win, am I right? Sigurd not only expertly helmed Rising Waters to an unexpected win at Pro Tour-Rebels in New York, but fine-tuned the final cards in the deck after playing only a handful of games with the Scott Johns/Zvi Mowshowitz creation.

Igor Frayman

Lifetime Winnings: \$24,705 **Lifetime Points:** 109 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 0 **GP Top 8:** 1

Igor had a solid, if not short, **Magic** career without any Sundays to show for his efforts. He racked up seven Top 32 finishes – four of those in the Top 16 – en route to the crossing the 100-point threshold needed to qualify for Hall eligibility. His last Top 16 came long after the bulk of his career had passed and it coincided with his one Grand Prix Top 8 as a member of The Max Fischer Players with Chris Pikula and Josh Ravitz.

Ryan Fuller

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Lifetime Winnings: \$118,430 **Lifetime Points:** 186 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 2 **GP Top 8:** 9

Ryan Fuller's career ended under a dark cloud but along the way he racked up in excess of \$100,000 with only two Pro Tour Top 8s. The highlights of his career include three Grand Prix victories and his win over Dave Humpherys in the finals of the San Diego Masters tournament. Ryan has also been the Canadian National Champion and led his team to a finals showdown at Worlds with Team U.S.A. Ryan's Psychatog deck from the San Diego Masters was an especially interesting build as it was less control-oriented and featured more cantrips and card drawing, with few of the control elements that other decks of similar vintage were featuring.

Donald Gallitz

Lifetime Winnings: \$34,125 **Lifetime Points:** 117 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 1 **GP Top 8:** 0

Donnie had a solid career that ended on his high note. He started off with Top 32 finishes in three of his first four Pro Tour events – and two of those were Top 16s. He was seemingly in the money throughout his career but never seemed to have that last win or solid tiebreakers he needed to put a Sunday seating on his list of accomplishments. At Pro Tour-San Diego 2002, the feel-good story of the weekend was when Donnie finally had his Sunday appearance after announcing early on in the tournament that he would be retiring.

Justin Gary

Lifetime Winnings: \$128,815 **Lifetime Points:** 249 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 3 **GP Top 8:** 3

In last week's column there was a link to a piece by Randy that introduced peak median finish as a way to measure player's careers – Justin's in particular. The idea was that Justin's median finish was hurt by him enjoying **Magic** too much and continuing to play on the tour while entering law school. When you examine the sweet spot of Justin's career when he was making U.S. National teams, winning Pro Tour-Houston, and racking up his six-digit stack of dollars, it reveals the second highest peak median finish on the ballot and Top 32 finishes every other time he stepped up to the plate. Justin also has the hardware on his mantle to back up the numbers – he won Pro Tour-Houston and was a part of the 2003 U.S. National team that won the team competition that year.



Justin Gary and Tomi Walamies battle at Pro Tour-New York. Is a Hall of Fame induction in their futures?

Yann Hamon

Lifetime Winnings: \$47,910 **Lifetime Points:** 108 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 1 **GP Top 8:** 3

Yann is a well-regarded French player who had posted a handful of Top 16 finishes in his career before making it as far as the Top 4 of Pro Tour-New Orleans when he and Nicolas Labarre piloted their identical Charbelcher combo decks to a quarterfinal showdown that never quite took place. Hamon went on a ridiculous Grand Prix run during the 2003-2004 season when he accumulated all three of his elimination round finishes – one second and two victories.

Itaru Ishida

Lifetime Winnings: \$123,620 **Lifetime Points:** 221 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 1 **GP Top 8:** 17

It is easy to just focus on Itaru's ridiculous success on the Grand Prix level but that would be to the detriment of his contributions to the Pro Tour in general and professional Japanese **Magic** specifically. Itaru is the longest-standing active Japanese Pro and is only the second from that nation to be eligible for the Hall of Fame. He debuted in Paris with little fanfare and did not return to high-level action until 1998 when he put up back-to-back Top 32 finishes. His greatest success came in Seattle alongside Jin Okamoto and Tsuyoshi Ikeda when they got as far as the Finals as team www.shop-fireBall.com2. His influence mentoring young players in his area is where Itaru's intangibles really shine – just look at how many decks Kenji Tsumura credits to Ishida on the way to his 2005 Player of the Year title.

Mattias Jorstedt

Lifetime Winnings: \$71,845 **Lifetime Points:** 176 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 3 **GP Top 8:** 2

Mattias began his career by going three-for-three in Top 64 finishes at his first three Pro Tour events despite large gaps of inactivity. While he never played on the tour consistently enough to generate a peak median finish, Mattias had a terrific 2003 season that saw him reach the Top 8 three times, capped with a 40-card win in Yokohama against a Top 8 with the likes of Jon Finkel, Masashi Oiso, and Richard Hoaen.

Benedikt Klauser

Lifetime Winnings: \$64,810 **Lifetime Points:** 125 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 4 **GP Top 8:** 1

Klauser seemed to play in one Pro Tour per season up until his Top 4 finish at Chicago 1999. His median and peak median finishes are not really worth noting because it seems like it was all or nothing for the Austrian player in terms of reaching the Top 8. Of the players on this year's ballot, only Mark Justice has a better career batting average of making it into the Top 8 than Klauser. His last such appearance was at New Orleans 2001 when he and Kai piloted identical blue-red Illusions/Donate decks to Sunday berths.



Klauser racked up impressive numbers in only 22 Pro Tours.

André Konstanczer

Lifetime Winnings: \$29,550 **Lifetime Points:** 120 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 1 **GP Top 8:** 2

Before there was Kai there was Andre – one of Germany's brightest stars. While the former German National Champion had only one Pro Tour Top 8 on his resume he has a haughty peak median finish of 29 that puts him in right in the same ballpark as the likes of fellow candidates Gary, Long, Fuller, Wise, and Rose – all finishing in the Top 32 half the time during their strongest run. It is not hard to see where that run falls in his career as he had four Top 16 finishes in the seasons leading up to his Top 8 in Rome 1999.

Janosch Kühn

Lifetime Winnings: \$42,285 **Lifetime Points:** 104 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 2 **GP Top 8:** 2

Janosch Kühn set the stage for future **Magic** dominance in Germany when he made his stunning debut during the 1997 World Championships with a second-place finish. World Championships was the tournament that he always did best in, posting Top 64 finishes in his first four such competitions. He concluded that streak with his second Top 8 in 2000.

John Larkin

Lifetime Winnings: \$50,645 **Lifetime Points:** 120 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 3 **GP Top 8:** 0

Easily the most successful Irish player in the game's history, Larkin kicked off his career at 1997 World Championships with a Top 32 finish. His career is relatively brief with a Top 8 average that is in the top 10 on the ballot. The best stretch on Larkin's resume saw him follow up his Top 8 at the 2002 World Championships with a Top 8 finish the next season at Pro Tour-Houston.

Raphaël Lévy

Lifetime Winnings: \$96,793 **Lifetime Points:** 276 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 2 **GP Top 8:** 10

Lévy has played in a staggering 51 Pro Tours and has an active streak of 47 consecutive Pro Tours. Despite playing in more Pro Tours than anyone on the ballot – something which should adversely affect his median finish – Raph has finished 55th or higher in half of those events. That is 10th overall on this year's ballot and takes into account twice as many events as anyone but Dave Humpherys ahead of him in that category. He is also second on the ballot – also behind Humpherys – if you sort by career Pro Points.

Mark Le Pine

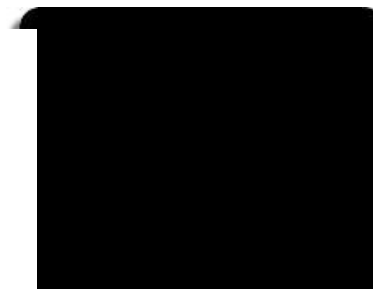
Lifetime Winnings: \$48,865 **Lifetime Points:** 121 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 3 **GP Top 8:** 2

Le Pine is yet another one of the players who started their career on the Junior circuit at the inception of the Pro Tour. He quickly cashed in his junior status to play with the big boys at Los Angeles and Paris but it was not until the Pro Tour swung back to New York that Le Pine displayed the prowess that made him such a feared competitor on the eastern seaboard \$1,000 tournament scene. His first Top 8 came in Mainz and was followed by two Top 4s, which included a third-place finish in Rome and a loss to Kai in the finals of the 1999 World Championships.

Bob Maher

Lifetime Winnings: \$157,402 **Lifetime Points:** 262 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 4 **GP Top 8:** 10

No only does Bob have the nickname – The Great One – but he has the stats to back it up. Maher started out upstairs at Pro Tour number one in the Juniors room but was quickly playing the big room by the time Los Angeles and Paris rolled around in Year Two. He was an "unknown" quantity on the U.S. National team that season and ended up posting a



10th-place finish in the individual competition at Worlds. Bob continued to post money finishes for the next couple of seasons before his breakout win in Chicago 2000 over Brian Davis. It was the only Pro Tour win of his career and he would go on to edge out Darwin Kastle and Jon Finkel for Player of the Year. He would go on to post three more Pro Tour Top 8s, double-digit Grand Prix Top 8s, win a Masters over Gabriel Nassif, and win the Invitational in his final year of serious competition (giving the world **Dark Confidant**).

Neil Reeves

Lifetime Winnings: \$72,503 **Lifetime Points:** 126 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 2 **GP Top 8:** 2

One lone Pro Tour appearance in 1997 renders Neil eligible for this year's ballot despite not playing **Magic** for several years afterward. He sporadically returned to the Pro Tour with a minimum of success before hitting his stride over the 2001 and 2002 seasons with three straight Top 64s before his first Top 8 in San Diego. Neil would return to play on Sunday along with fellow Hall candidates Bob Maher and Gary Wise as Courtney's Boys at Pro Tour-Boston 2002. Most recently Neil was a member of the U.S. National team that finished second at the 2005 World Championships.



Kyle Rose

Lifetime Winnings: \$117,465 **Lifetime Points:** 176 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 4 **GP Top 8:** 2

During the 1999 season U.S. National Champion Kyle Rose stood in way of Germany completing the sweep of World Champion, Player of the Year, and Team Championship winner – something that would not be accomplished by a non-American team until Japan did it in 2005. Kyle defeated German champion Marco Blume and built his burgeoning legend. Kyle had racked up two Top 8 finishes the previous year and – after his star turn at Worlds – would go on to win Pro Tour-London the following season with one more Top 8 to follow. Kyle was certainly one of the dominating players in the game for some time and if you use the recently created [peak median finish](#) stat you will see that he has the seventh-best peak performance on this year's ballot.

Alex Shvartsman

Lifetime Winnings: \$90,735 **Lifetime Points:** 232 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 1 **GP Top 8:** 21

The lone Pro Tour Top 8 of Alex's career came as a member of Illuminati alongside Justin Gary and Zvi Mowshowitz. Alex's claim to Pro Tour fame is his astounding Grand Prix record, which has him three lengths ahead of his next closest pursuer. Alex completely changed the way players looked at Grand Prix competition. Once thought to be regional competitions, Alex showed players their true value by trotting the globe and piling up Top 8 finishes. He set the stage for modern competitions, which now regularly feature Japanese players in St. Louis, Frenchmen in Tokyo, and Americans in China. In addition to his singular achievements in Grand Prix play, Alex was an early coverage reporter and regular writer for the precursor to this site.

Bram Snepvangers

Lifetime Winnings: \$74,960 **Lifetime Points:** 216 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 2 **GP Top 8:** 7

Bram foretold the rise of Dutch **Magic** long before many of Amsterdam's current top players were old enough to even play the game – and he is still going strong. Bram recently made the Top 4 of Grand Prix-Torino, almost a decade after his Pro debut. When you sort the ballot by Pro Tours played, only two players have played in more than Bram. His best finish was second at Pro Tour-Nice, which was overshadowed by the more impressive accomplishment of ending Kai's streak of Pro Tour wins when Bram sent him to the rail in the quarters.

Trey Van Cleave

Lifetime Winnings: \$29,800 **Lifetime Points:** 100 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 0 **GP Top 8:** 7

Sigh. The eyes have it.

Tomi Walamies

Lifetime Winnings: \$116,610 **Lifetime Points:** 168 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 3 **GP Top 8:** 1

Tomi is a fascinating player and excellent writer who has long dormant stages on his resume nestled between solid money finishes. He quietly started out his career with a 10th-place finish at the second Pro Tour-New York. After sprinkling in a few so-so finishes and skipping a handful of events, he finished 11th at Worlds '98. Then he has a couple of years with minimal Pro Tour activity before running off three straight Top 64 finishes during the 2001 season. Tomi has never played in enough consecutive Pro Tours to generate a peak median finish statistic, but from 2001 to 2003 he just missed the cut to Sunday at Pro Tour-New York, finished second at New Orleans to

Kai, and finished second at Pro Tour-Venice to Osyp. Most recently he came back after a protracted absence to Top 8 at London in 2005 AND bring down the house at a SRO comedy show that Sunday evening.

Gary Wise

Lifetime Winnings: \$133,773 **Lifetime Points:** 238 **Pro Tour Top 8:** 4 **GP Top 8:** 0

So you like your intangibles? Before we get to Gary's impressive off-the-field accomplishments, let's lay our hands on something solid – like his record. Gary has one win and two other Sunday finishes in three-person team formats – with three different teams. He also has a Top 8 at World Championships in 1999, is the third highest money winner on the ballot, fifth highest in terms of total points, and tied for second with four Top 8s. When you scratch the surface of his career you see someone who laid the groundwork for so much of what we take for granted in terms of online **Magic** coverage. He was one of the first players to write about Limited formats, wrote a weekly column celebrating the Professional **Magic** lifestyle, was hyping Japanese Pros before it was cool, and typing up coverage in the feature match area before many of today's Pros could even read yet.

So there you have it. Balloting runs until August 31, with the five-member Class of 2006 announced in this very column on September 8.

2007 Pro Tour Schedule

Last weekend as I was hurrying through the magicthegathering.com pressroom to hand in my weekly column, [a story came in over the transom](#). There was barely time to cobble together a sidebar to highlight the fact that the 2007 Pro Tour would be heading to such far-flung new locations as Valencia and Geneva while returning to old favorites like Yokohama and San Diego. And of course there was the little nugget that San Diego would feature the groundbreaking Two-Headed Giant format. The whole burst of information required some follow-up and I am here to oblige.

I quickly lined up Randy Buehler to talk formats and Pro Tour show manager Renee Roub to discuss the locations, but I also wanted a player to look at both halves of the Pro Tour pie. I could think of no one better qualified than aspiring Road Warrior Billy Moreno. Billy is just two points from securing Level 3 status for next season (which he'll achieve upon registering at Kobe) and is also the reigning Texas Two-Headed Giant State Champion. Since getting locked in for the Pro Tour with his finals finish in Los Angeles, Billy has made the most of the new Pro Tour philosophy that mixes in old favorites with exotic new locales.

Billy travels with his fiancée Amber – in fact, he proposed to her on an extended trip home after Prague – and the two of them were already eyeballing the upcoming season.

"Amber and I sat down to look at the schedule because the first thing we wanted to figure out was what events she would want to come to," said Moreno. "Both of the European stops stand out. I could definitely see staying in the Swiss Alps for an extra week in the middle of winter while we celebrate Valentine's Day and her birthday with plenty of world-class chocolate. I'm sure the wine and beer are pretty high quality as well. We spent a night in Geneva on the way back from Prague and it definitely seems like another one of those warm, comfortable, easy-to-navigate European cities."

The idea behind an event in Geneva came from a little market research, explained Renee.

"When we did an informal survey asking PT players what they really wanted as far as where a Pro Tour should be, the first thing that everyone said was in the tropics but a close second was skiing," she said. "It's very difficult to get hotel space and event space during ski season but Geneva works out perfectly because it is a big city and a half-hour away from skiing. Much like Hawaii was all themed out with tropical dressing, we will also theme Geneva with a ski theme."

And so the seeds of Pro Tour-Skiing were planted.



Moreno has enjoyed the locations of the past few Pro Tours.



Valencia's a surprising mix of old-world and ultra-modern architecture, like the new opera house.

"Of course if people aren't fond of skiing, then there is Valencia," Renee continued, looking forward to a trip to the Mediterranean in October. "Valencia is very warm especially when we are there in early fall. Their version of Paella is amazing and the space we are in is amazing new space-age architecture. The opera house next to us looks like something out of Battlestar Galactica – part of a city cultural center designed by a favorite-son architect of Valencia. If you like old-world architecture there is plenty to see of that as well – including one of the oldest open-air markets in the world. The building that it is housed in was built in 900 A.D."

Moreno was equally excited about a trip to Spain.

"I've had a bunch of college friends spend summers in Spain and they absolutely loved it," Billy said. "From everything they shared, Spain seems like the perfect place to wander around...maybe travel for a few hours, end up in some

sleepy village and eat and drink late into the night. I told Amber that Pierre (Canali) would probably try to get a bunch of people together for salsa. Hopefully, we'd get to go to a dance club at some point as well."

Japan and San Diego are both return engagements from previous successful Pro Tour stops – not a problem for Billy: "Obviously, a lot of us were in Yokohama just last year for Worlds but that's not really an issue. Personally, I love Japan. I've been taking some Japanese lessons and Amber and I even talked about moving there for a year to teach English. I'm really looking forward to this event.

"As far as American sites go," Billy continued, "San Diego is about as exciting as you can get. It's apparently got the best climate in the world, a hockey team, and easy access to both beaches and Mexico. For someone living in New York City, a trip to southern California is like an international vacation without the language barrier...for the most part."

For Renee, the return to San Diego was a simple decision: "The show managers can only go so long without good fish tacos."

Along with selecting the interesting locations for each Pro Tour, Wizards has the challenge of fitting together formats for each event. A fine balance of Limited and Constructed needs to be struck, with concerns such as team formats, set release dates, and back-to-back qualifier season types all being taken into account.

"We hand-roll the schedule each year now and that sometimes leads to some quirkiness," Randy said. "The way I look at it is that each year should have two Limited PTs and two Constructed PTs and that's what we've got. The weirdness comes because 2006 is ending with a Limited Pro Tour (Kobe) and then 2007 is starting with a Limited Pro Tour (Geneva), thus the back-to-back Limited PTQ rounds. In theory we could have required each and every season to always start with one format and end with the other, but I just don't think that's worth it. By being willing to mix things up, it allows us to sometimes have formats at more optimal times."

Randy said similar reasoning explains why there was no Block Constructed qualifier season this year.

"With only four Pro Tours to work with, it's hard to optimize each and every year. The way we look at it is that over the course of 3-5 years there are some formats that should get a lot of support and some formats that should get a little. For Constructed we think we should usually have a Block Constructed Pro Tour and an Extended Pro Tour and that we should use Standard for the Regionals/Nationals/Worlds season.

"However, we also like the idea of having a Standard Pro Tour every once in a while. We thought 2006 (and Hawaii) was a good time to do a Standard Pro Tour plus a Standard PTQ season, but that means that we had to skip one of the other formats for a year."

More than the locales, Billy was looking forward to formats he has shown the most aptitude for in the past – Two Headed Giant and, of course, Constructed: "I think one of the best things about the upcoming season is that there are more Constructed events, at least it feels that way. I know there were two this year but team events just aren't the same. You have to do so much better at a team event to pick up any meaningful amount of points. Also, it's just a lot harder to test for. This year, with the apparent emphasis on limited PT's I felt like I was at a disadvantage.

"Not that I think I'm a terrible Limited player," he added quickly. "I actually do think I'm above average. But now I find myself in a position where I need to pick up two extra points to stay on the train with only a Limited event and Worlds to look forward to. I'll be fine though – I mean Star Wars Kid made money in Prague.

"In all honesty," he laughed, "Chris is awesome. In general, he's just a much tighter player than me, and that translates well to playing Limited. Obviously, the event that sticks out to everyone is the Two-Headed Giant Pro Tour. I've been hearing buzzing for a while so it wasn't shocking news to me. I would've been surprised if it didn't happen."

The move away from three-person Team Rochester has been going on for some time, with Randy and the other folks at Wizards recognizing the growing gap in what was being played around the world.

"The sad truth is that three-person Team Rochester draft simply failed to catch on anywhere other than the Pro Tour," he said. "Of the one-million-and-change sanctioned tournaments that have ever happened, I believe the number that were Team Rochester and were not PTs or PTQs is a single-digit number. Even amongst Pro Tour competitors it's not really considered 'fun.' I know the format is widely respected as very skill-testing, but I have also seen lots of times when people get together to practice and just say 'ah, forget it, let's just Booster Draft.' The is the same basic reason we stopped doing individual Rochester draft as well – it both takes a lot longer and just isn't as much fun as the alternatives."

But because Wizards is looking for a variety of formats each year (and between years), the search for other team formats was on. Any veteran of drafting knows that three-person team Booster Draft is a lot of fun, but there were concerns about the ease of cheating.

"There is a gigantic incentive to find a way to convey information to your teammates about what colors you're drafting," Randy said. "If we used that format to give away a quarter million dollars, I just don't think we could create an environment where honest players could compete on a level footing. You'd have to put players in different rooms or draft on *Magic Online* or something. It's sad, but the only reason this format is so much fun is the gentleman's agreement that everyone tacitly agrees not to cheat. The money (and Pro Points) at stake in a PT would lead people to break that, I think."

2007 PRO TOUR SEASON

Pro Tour-Geneva

Feb. 9-11 / Time Spiral Booster Draft
Qualifying round: Oct. 7-Dec. 31,
Time Spiral Sealed with Booster Draft Top 8

Pro Tour-Yokohama

April 20-22 / Time Spiral Block Constructed
Qualifying round: Jan. 6-March 11, Extended

Pro Tour-San Diego

June 29-July 1 / Two-Headed Giant Limited
Qualifying round: March 17-May 20, Two-Headed Giant Limited

Pro-Tour Valencia

Oct. 12-14 / Extended
Qualifying round: June 23-Aug. 26, Time Spiral Block Constructed

With all of that on the table, R&D began investigating Two-Headed Giant *Booster Draft*. It didn't take long to discover it was "an awesome format," according to Randy.

"We spent a fair amount of time in R&D playtesting it and I also gathered some groups together at Pro Tour-Charleston to test it as well," he said.

Here's how it works: You and your teammate sit next to each other, opening six packs over the course of the draft. When you open a pack, your team selects two cards from it, adding them to your collective pile.

"You get to talk all you want and debate each pick and that element makes the format really fun," he added.

There are four teams at each draft table, which adds up to the same 24 packs that get opened in an eight-person individual draft. After the draft you and your teammate build two decks out of your shared pile of cards, and then you play the games out using the new Two-Headed Giant format.

The initial reaction to the shift in team formats has been mixed, with a predictable amount of skepticism, but Billy remained optimistic.

"A lot of people are down on 2HG as a competitive format and I really don't think that's fair," he said. "The exciting thing about competition is that it gives people a chance to excel. And the best games encourage consistent excellence. **Magic** is obviously one of those games and I don't think 2HG messes with the formula. All the same restrictions and tensions that make winning challenging remain. You just get someone else (actually two more people) to talk to while you battle."

Randy described the format as plenty skill-testing, similar to *Booster Draft* in his opinion.

"Technically, one player could make all the decisions and win even though one of the two heads is effectively an empty chair," he said. "However, I'm pretty sure that's a horrible strategy. Two good players debating how to play should do significantly better than one player running both sides."

The other good news about the format is there will be drafting on Day One. Drafts are quicker than *Team Rochester*, and you'll get to play two rounds with the same decks since pods will still be made up of eight people (four teams). Randy said the number of rounds for the actual Pro Tour was still to be determined, but it will all be draft.

I asked Billy if he has made any decisions about which head would be sharing his side of the table come San Diego.

"I haven't figured out who I want to play with yet," he answered. "Or what I want the deciding factor to be. J. Evan Dean has already made the hard sell. Kyle Sanchez, who has been doing very well at the Grand Prix lately, has mentioned the possibility – after all, we are the first-ever 2HG Texas State Champs. And it's not a pride thing for me. I'm not consumed with playing with someone everyone knows and knows is good. But I do want to give myself the best chance to win. A lot of people say that for events like this it's important to team up with people that you get along with, that you work well with even as the pressure mounts. And I agree. But if you know me, you know that I enjoy everybody, and that the only time I'm not having fun is when I'm fighting a lagging connection during an 8-man on MTGO. Anyway, I'm not really worried about finding the right set of shoulders to put my head on."



Will Kyle and Billy team up again?

"I am, however, really looking forward to my second year on the Tour," he concluded on a characteristically upbeat note. "As always, I expect big things from myself."

Firestarter: Team Formats

The 2006 season saw *Team Block Constructed* hit the Pro Tour, and the 2007 season sees the debut of Two-Headed Giant at the premier level. What sort of team formats do you play at the local level? What do you think about Two-Headed Giant *Booster Draft*? Share your thoughts on team play in the forums!

*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*.*

TWO-HEADED GIANT PRIMER

If you haven't played Two-Headed Giant before, here's a quick summary.

- You and your teammates sit next to each other and take your turns together.
- You share a life total (which starts at 40), you share phases, and you attack and block together.
- You also get to talk over each move together, showing each other your cards in hand.

One of you is the dominant head, which only means that you get final say-so if the two of you refuse to make a decision which is required of the team in order for the game to advance.

Also, the dominant head does not get to draw a card if the team plays first, a new modification to the play-draw rule for 2HG. (R&D determined that having both playing heads skip their first draw step was too harsh.)

Games tend to take longer than individual duels, so matches are a one-game, winner-take-all affair.



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