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# Introducing City Championships

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The Week That Was  
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2006



If you scoured through the 2007 edition of the [Magic: the Gathering Premier Event Invitation Policy](#), you may have noticed the following section lurking beneath the entries for World Championships, National Championships, and Regional Championships:

## 15. CITY CHAMPIONSHIP TOURNAMENTS

*City Championships are a series of store-based tournaments held in some countries. City Championships are held over the course of a City Championship season. Each designated city culminates with a City Championship Final.*

*Top finishers at City Championship Finals may earn byes to Regional Championships or Invitations to National Championships.*

Earning byes to Regionals? Invites to Nationals? What the heck? What were these new City Championships?

It turns out that City Championships are store-level tournaments that will be the first step on the Road to Worlds. This is actually unprecedented in North America, where events such as Regionals run by Premier Tournament Organizers were the only on-ramp to that aspect of organized play.

The beta season for City Championships starts January 1, 2007 across North America. The plan is to have 250 stores across 44 "cities" (as defined by the DCI) running tournaments for four months, culminating in crowning a City Champion in each city. A store is limited to one tournament per week, and tournaments can be Standard, Booster Draft, Sealed Deck, Extended, Legacy, or even Vintage. Players will accumulate points based on their best finishes to determine who will get to play in the finals of each city (which will be Standard format). Look for an official rules document and a list of participating stores the week of December 4.

While this is all head-spinning new stuff to North American players, it is old hat to Italian players who have been slugging it out at City Championships since 1999.

The program was the brainchild of Andrea Chiarvesio, then Organized Play Manager for Wizards of the Coast Italia, and it actually predates the existence of Friday Night Magic. The Arena program already existed and was an excellent introductory experience for new players, but Andrea was looking for some way to foster a competitive environment at the store level. Additionally the program provided a training ground for players looking to compete in PTQs, Grand Prix, and beyond. The program was such a success that the U.S. office created FNM the following year with similar goals.

In 2000, Ilja Rotelli became the program manager in Italy and picked up the reins of the City Championships, working on the program for three years before coming to the United States to lead the Programs team. Since coming to Renton in 2003, Ilja has been working to bring the City Championships to North America. I spoke with Ilja about the launch of the new North American program to get a better understanding of what the competitive **Magic** landscape will be like in the coming year.

"While the goal of the program is still to multiply the opportunities for players to enjoy **Magic** in the competitive yet friendly environment of their local communities, the reasons for the U.S. launch of the program go beyond that," explained Rotelli.

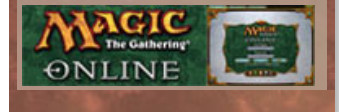
"There are two fundamental reasons that brought me to introduce the City Championships in the U.S. The first is to reconnect the local players to the professional **Magic** scene. If you look at the OP infrastructure we've built so far, the Road to Worlds really starts at the PTQ and Regionals level. I felt that the anonymous, faithful **Magic** players who have played in their stores for years and only got an opportunity to get to the Pro Tour whenever a PTQ came to their town have progressively been disenfranchised from the idea that they could be contenders. The City Championships wants to reward the local heroes and, by giving away invites to Nationals and byes to Regionals, will tell everyone: 'The road to Worlds begins in your store.' After all, Organized Play is not about watching other people being the stars, but about being a star."

***"The City Championships wants to reward the local heroes and, by giving away invites to Nationals and byes to Regionals, will tell everyone: 'The road to Worlds begins in your store.' "- Ilja Rotelli***

Ilja's second reason is ironic considering that City Championships led to the formation of everyone's favorite end-of-the-school/work-week tournament: "FNM is currently victim of its own success. Being the hugely popular and ever-growing program it is, it seems to have suggested to the minds of players and tournament organizers alike that the only weekday to play in a **Magic** tournament is Friday. While we want to continue to support and grow FNM, we want to introduce City Championships to allow total flexibility to the stores to best serve their player base insofar as when to run their weekly **Magic** tournaments."

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The program continues to thrive in Italy all these years later and accounts for roughly one-third of the players in that country. Italy is also the second most active country in terms of tournament play – something Iija attributes to the power of City Championships.

“City Championships represent the first entry point into competitive **Magic** play,” Rotelli elaborated on the growth of the Italian tournament scene. “New players come in all the time, but pretty soon the core group of players you meet in a regular-season tournament are the same, and that facilitates the growth of a friendly and familiar play environment. City Championships are the first live test of the metagame that the collective mind of that city will produce, in preparation for PTQs, Grand Prix and Regionals.”

Iija noted how nearly all of the Italian pros started or evolved out of City Championships, and for many of them, the program is still the lab where they test decks every week. That environment helps stir on higher aspirations.

“The need in the competitive scene that is not being currently satisfied by our existing OP programs is what I mentioned before. The Pro Tour, for most **Magic** players, is perceived as far and apart, and sometimes impossible to get to. That is not the case; it takes commitment and a competitive environment that allows you to grow. The City Championships will be there to inspire that commitment and provide that environment.”

With the beta season looming, I asked what would constitute a successful launch.

“The goal of this program is to connect a large number of local **Magic** players to all the rest of the OP offerings at regional, national and eventually international level. Success metrics, apart from the obvious increased participation in DCI sanctioned tournaments, include growth in Regionals and PTQs attendance, as the goal of more and more players will become making their way to the bigger game. Obviously it's going to take time and effort, but a few years from now the City Championships could very well be both our most popular tournament program and the central core of the local **Magic** players community, getting new and old players to play their favorite game, test the metagame, and growing their inspiration to excel. We'll certainly do our best to make it happen.”



Iija did want to emphasize that even though the model runs smoothly in Italy, this is a project of massive scale and some patience will be required on the part of the player base and tournament organizers. There's a reason they're calling it a beta season, after all, and growing pains aren't out of the question.



One of the people doing his individual best to ease those pains will be John Grant, the program manager I went to for an explanation of how the new program will work. Going into my discussion with John, all I knew was that hand-selected stores in each participating city would host a series of events from January 1 to the end of April and the Top 8 players in each city would advance to a city finals where the winner would earn an invite to that country's Nationals. Additionally, players in the Top 8 could receive up to two rounds of byes to their Regional competition.

The big question that loomed for me was how players advanced to the Top 8 in their competitive cityscape.

“Any DCI member in good standing can play in any City Championship regular season tournament. Of course, people can receive a DCI membership card at any City Championship store free of charge. The players in the Top 8 of each city standing at the end of the regular season *who are not already invited to their county's Nationals* will be invited to play in that city's championship,” Grant emphasized. This means that while Level 2 and higher mages can participate in individual events at the store level, they cannot advance to the ultimate Top 8 in each city.

Players advance toward the Top 8 of their city standings by accruing points in their local tournaments. Players are awarded one point for simply participating and then earn three points for each win, one point for each draw, no points for losses, and bonus points for Top 8 finishes (show to the right).

Place	Bonus Points
1	10
2	6
3-4	3
5-8	1

“A 2-1-1 record in the Swiss rounds of a regular season tournament would earn 7 points for the tournament and your City Championship standing: 6 points for the two wins, a point for the draw,” Grant illustrated. “If that 2-1-1 finish earned you fourth place, you would earn 3 Bonus Points. Add it up, it's 11 points for playing in this tournament: 1 (participation) + 7 (Swiss Rounds) + 3 (Bonus Points).”

To avoid a strict point-accumulation standings system, the City Championships standings will only take into account a certain number of your finishes. In the example above, if that 11-point result was among your top X finishes for the season, it would count toward your score for the city standings. The number of tournament finishes used to calculate your standing will vary from city to city (note another handy chart to the right).

Number of Tournaments	Best “X” Results
21	11
22-24	12
25-27	13
28-30	14
31-33	15
34-36	16
37-39	17
40-42	18
43-45	19
46-50	20

“I think the easiest way to understand this is to say first, only your best finishes count. Second, the number of those best finishes used to determine your city standing will count increases as the number of regular season tournaments held that city increases,” Grant said.

“Let's say your city has seven stores, and they each hold nine regular season tournaments. This means that your city is holding 63 tournaments. On the chart under “Number of Tournaments,” 63 falls in the 61-65 bracket; this means that each players' best 23 tournament results will count toward their city standing. If you were to play in 20 tournaments during the season in this city, all your

finishes would be counted. If you played in 24 tournaments, your one worst finish would not be counted."

Grant was especially excited about this element of the City Championships when he looked back upon his own experiences as a Pro Tour aspirant.

"It can be frustrating having an off-day at a PTQ," he recalled. "You've worked hard, playtested like mad, pored over the Top 8 decklists from other PTQs, and you are READY. But come Saturday morning, you get hit with a sinus headache, or, because your ride drives like he's qualifying for the Indy 500, you lose the first two rounds with carsickness. You're done, stick a fork – no Q for you, all because of one bad day."

Grant felt there would be considerable excitement over this tournament structure because you aren't evaluated on a one- or two-day performance.

"Tournament consistency is rewarded unlike any other tournament structure we offer," he said. "You get to stay close to home, play against your friends, make lots of new ones, and if you have an off-night, no biggie – just find another regular season tournament in your city and push that bad night off your Top X."

Once the regular season ends April 29, a final standings will be run and the Top 8 players in each city will be invited to their city finals. If one of those players can't attend, the invite will pass down. Win your city final and you've got yourself an invitation to Nationals. For more active cities, second place could also result in a Nationals invite, and byes will be given out based on city activity (either one or two byes).

"I think we've raised the bar in terms of the competitive nature of Regionals in the U.S. and Canada," Grant explained about the addition of Regional byes to the invitation policy. "Regionals in both countries have experienced huge growth over the last four years. Given this growth, it made sense to for City Championships to provide a bye system similar to the one we've used for Grand Prix events for years. We think byes at Regionals are a great way to acknowledge local tournament success."

Store owners are welcome to schedule City Championship events on any day with the exception of Fridays (so as not to conflict with FNM). They are obligated to run at least 25 percent of their events as Standard events and another 25 percent as Limited events, they are also able to run some number of their events as Extended, Legacy, or even Vintage events. That's right, players can partially qualify for Nationals by playing in formats that have traditionally not factored into premier-event Organized Play.

Grant explained the thought that went into the format selection as well as how the local store owners will avoid scheduling conflicts.

"We are strongly encouraging all the stores selected for the beta season to work with each other so as to minimize scheduling conflicts. This cooperation between the local stores will be important to the success of the program. There is a two-week period for the DCI to review all proposed regular season schedules and resolve conflicts. In larger cities, this may be unavoidable, but we can work so if conflicts do exist, the stores involved are relatively far apart. We want players to attend as many regular season tournaments in as many stores as they want, and we're confident the stores we've picked for this beta season will work to achieve that goal."

By mandating a wide range of formats, the program should mean that each City Championship final is represented by the best overall players in each city. The ratios are also flexible enough to satisfy the format preferences of the customers in each store.

Personally I have not been this excited about the launch of an Organized Play program since the announcement of Grand Prix tournaments. I used to run a local series of tournaments called The Grudge Match which pitted players from Neutral Ground against players from Your Move Games after a series of weekly events. The tournaments were hugely successful for both stores and the decklists we generated each week actually helped to shape the Standard metagame in much the same way that PE's do on MTGO. I can't wait to see meaningful Standard, Extended, Legacy, and even Vintage tournaments taking place all over North America on a weekly basis.

## Five Questions with Osyp Lebedowicz

One of the players to emerge from the Neutral Ground Grudge Match was Osyp Lebedowicz. While Osyp is rightfully associated with TOGIT as his base of operations, it was at the weekly Grudge Match qualifiers where he honed his tournament chops. Osyp quickly moved from the Grudge Match ranks to the Pro ranks and has the big trophy from Pro Tour–Venice sitting on his proverbial mantle.

Last week in my column I pointed out that under the new Invitation Policy, players who are not yet at Level 3 status for next season would be eligible to participate in PTQs for next season's Pro Tours. Once Kobe rolls around, a large segment of that eligible participation will advance to Level

51-55	21
56-60	22
61-65	23
66-70	24
71+	25

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3 but for last week it meant that Osyp was able to win himself a free trip to Geneva when he won the PTQ in Philadelphia.

1. Why did you decide to play in the PTQ and when was the last individual PTQ you played in, much less won?

**Osyp:** The last PTQ I played in was during the IBC block season for the first Pro Tour—New Orleans back in 2001. It was the only PTQ I had ever won. I decided to play in this PTQ because most of my friends were driving down and they let me barn along. I am already technically qualified for Geneva because I will be going to both Kobe and Worlds, so I'll have at least 21 points by season's end, but I thought it would be fun and I could get some practice in.

2. What were the key cards in your Sealed pool that allowed you to win and how did you build your deck?

**Osyp:** The main card that won me all of my games was **Stuffy Doll**. That card is especially good in sealed and it pretty much allowed me to control the game long enough so that my larger creatures could do some damage. I started to build a blue-white base deck but those are always bad regardless of how they look in this format so I quickly abandoned it. I really like slivers in sealed and I was fortunate enough to have almost all of the awesome green and red slivers, so I ended up with a green-black splash red deck that had a solid sliver chain and all of my good removal.



3. What are the keys to Sealed Deck in this format and how is it different from previous Sealed formats?

**Osyp:** I think this format is easier than *Ravnica* for building and drafting purposes because there are so many playables. But I think it's actually tougher to play because there are a lot more decisions to make and all of the games seem so close to me. I've seen many come-from-behind wins and you can't really afford to make a mistake even when you're far ahead. Slivers are really good in sealed so if you have the good ones try and incorporate as many as you can and stay away from blue and white as a combination.

4. What was your strategy for the draft and how did you execute on that strategy?

**Osyp:** I wanted to stay away from white because although I find most of the commons playable, the color on a whole is not as strong as the rest. I also didn't want to be tempted to go into blue-white since I don't think you can do better than a 1-2 with that combination. I didn't do anything special, most of the people at the table just didn't know what to do and shipped me a lot of really strong black and blue cards late, and I had already first-picked a **Phthisis**, so my draft went pretty easily.



Osyp shared his thoughts on the new Limited environment.

Osyp Lebedowicz -- Top 8 Booster Draft deck		
1st Place - Pennsylvania - Philadelphia - 10/7		
Main Deck		Sideboard
40 cards		
6 Island	1 Assassinate	1 Aspect of Mongoose
1 Molten Slagheap	1 Careful Consideration	1 Calciform Pools
1 Mountain	1 Conflagrate	1 Demonic Collusion
7 Swamp	2 Dark Withering	1 Dream Stalker
2 Terramorphic Expanse	1 Dread Return	1 Eternity Snare
17 lands	1 Lightning Axe	1 Feldon's Cane
	1 Mindstab	1 Jhoira's Timebug
1 Basal Sliver	1 Phthisis	1 Mwonvuli Acid-Moss
1 Coral Trickster	1 Premature Burial	2 Mystical Teachings
1 Corpulent Corpse	1 Rift Bolt	1 Savage Thallid
1 Cyclopean Giant	1 Unknown Card	1 Spell Burst
1 Errant Ephemeron	12 other spells	1 Squire
2 Fathom Seer		1 Stupor
1 Ghost Ship		1 Traitor's Clutch
1 Slipstream Serpent		1 Voidmage Husher
1 Subterranean Shambler		1 Wormwood Dryad
1 Urborg Syphon-Mage		17 sideboard cards

5. Do you feel confident in this format heading into Kobe?

**Osyp:** Yeah, I actually feel more confident going into this event than I have going into Booster Draft Pro Tours in the past. I generally don't do well at Booster Draft PTs but I feel like I have a better handle on this format than I did previous formats. I was able to draft at Finkel's house several times and everyone involved in those drafts are really good at this format and I learned a lot from them. I think I should be able to do well.

## Firestarter: Will you play in City Championships?

The title of the Firestarter says it all. I am really excited about the opportunity to play meaningful tournament **Magic** on a store level without the intensity and crowds of a PTQ or Regionals. I am curious what my readership thinks about these new events. Go to the forums and tell me what you think.

*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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