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Who in the Worlds?

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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The marathon of 2006 is turning into an all-out sprint. Grand Prix–New Jersey is in the books, Grand Prix–Yamagata is this weekend and then all eyes turn to Paris and the World Championships.

But before we lift the lid on the big Worlds surprise I hyped last week, the events of the past weekend demand review. [Grand Prix–New Jersey](#) lived up to the hype and then some this past weekend. The 900-plus competitors ended up being the highest turnout for a North American Grand Prix since the last Grand Prix–New Jersey and set a new record for individual Limited attendance on the continent. The previous record was set in pre-Kamigawa Columbus, Ohio during the *Mirrodin* Block season.

In my preview of the event for last week's column, much was made of all the players traveling from all around the world to attend the event. In the end, only one Japanese player cracked the Top 8. I am sure that was more than fine for Shouta Yasooka, who despite losing in the quarterfinals managed to create some more distance between himself and the rest of the Player of the Year pack by picking up four valuable Pro points.



Guillaume Cardin topped a field of 914 players to win Grand Prix–New Jersey.

I talked with many of the players in attendance about their goals for the Players Club and most of them admitted that they came to New Jersey looking for a nice soft field where they could roll out of bed and land in Day Two with a bright shiny Pro Point. When they got there on Saturday, many realized they had woken up on the wrong side of the bed. With such a large field the cut to Day Two was extended from 64 to 128, meaning that playing on Sunday was not automatically worth a point.

In the final round of Day One I found myself at 7-1 with terrible tiebreakers courtesy of having only one bye. I had hurried to my table without time to look at the standings. With such poor 'breakers I was concerned about not making Day Two with two losses. (I had gone 6-2 at Grand Prix–Philadelphia a few years back only to finish Day One in 65th place.) My opponent for round nine was Bernardo Da Costa Cabral. When I broached the topic of drawing into Day Two, he balked immediately. For one thing, he explained, all the x-2 records were going to make it in, and secondly, he felt he needed to put himself in as strong a position as possible for Day Two to make the trip worthwhile.

I felt a twinge of guilt as I beat him but I am happy to report that Bernardo did manage to acquire the precious point he was seeking. Normally a Top 64 finish outside of the money would be disappointing for the likes of Bernardo, Antonino De Rosa, Julien Nuijten, Pierre Canali, and Tiago Chan, but they had to feel some sense of triumph emerging from that huge scrum with a precious point in their clutches.

Jelger Wieggersma had another quietly solid finish at 21st and inched another two points up the Player of the Year ladder. He has two more chances to put up a major performance that could propel him right near the top of the standings. He will be one of a handful of European players – and one Canadian – who will be playing this weekend in Grand Prix–Yamagata. Ted Knutson's on the scene ready to bring you action from the last Grand Prix of the season.

Which brings us to the [2006 World Championships](#).

With the North American Thanksgiving holiday dictating reprints here next week, this is my last opportunity to spill the beans about Worlds. I promised big news for my Worlds preview and I am pretty sure that this measures up as big news. (It also qualifies as burying the lead, I am sure.)



This has been a pretty exciting year for Germany on the **Magic** scene with multiple players making Top 8 appearances, Jan-Moritz Merkel's win in Kobe, and a handful of players very much in the Rookie and Player of the Year races. On top of all of that, the game's most famous player – Kai Budde, the German Juggernaut – is going to be sitting down to play when the first-round pairings for the 2006 **Magic** the Gathering World Championships are posted.

Kai is going to be playing at Worlds. That's right, on top of the second Hall of Fame induction, another gripping Player of the Year race, and five exciting days of **Magic** in the Louvre, the winningest player in the

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history of the game is returning to action after more than a year's absence.

Kai has over \$350,000 in lifetime winnings, has seven wins in nine Pro Tour Top 8 appearances, has won Pro Tours in Constructed, Limited, and team formats, and if you look up first-ballot Hall of Famer in the dictionary you will find his picture. His return to the ranks of competitive play will surely be one of the great stories that unfold in Paris less than two weeks from now.

While it will be fun for Germans to watch where Jan-Moritz Merkel, Sebastian Aljjaj, and Wesimo Al-Bacha finish in the rookie race or where David Brucker posts in the Player of the Year race, or how Kai fares in his return to competition, one of the most intriguing storylines will be the dysfunctional German National team which features Pro Tour–Honolulu quarterfinalist Max Bracht and his arch-nemesis Amiel Tenenbaum.



Kai returns to Magic at the 2006 World Championships.

Teams is always an entertaining element of the week long tournament but rarely does it provide such soap operatic elements. The team competition is also an excellent arena for players on their National teams to access Pro Points that players not on national teams can't receive. This has to come as a huge relief to breakout star Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa, who is also the Brazilian National Champion. He leads a team that includes Elton Fior and former World Champion Carlos Romão. Paulo is right in the middle of the Player of the Year chase but airfare from Brazil to New Jersey or Yamagata precluded him from chasing after points these past two weekends. Depending on where Paulo ends up finishing in the competition – and his team has to be among the favorites coming into the event – the payout for winning Brazilian Nationals could turn out to be far greater than anyone imagined at the time.



Kamiel's Team Rochester experience should come in handy for the Dutch National team.

The Dutch squad heads to Worlds as one of the clear favorites, as it features 2004 World Champion Julien Nuijten and Pro Tour–Seattle winner Kamiel Cornelissen. What was the format for Seattle? Team Rochester, the same that will be utilized this year for the team competition. Julien and Kamiel are just past the mark for Level 3 in the Players Club and this will also be an excellent opportunity to secure bigger money throughout the coming season if they can amass nine or ten points in Yamagata and Paris.

Another team to keep a close eye on is the Norwegian squad and Nicolai Herzog. Like his year-three Hall of Fame-eligible brethren Kai, Nico is working his way back into the game that saw him win back-to-back Limited Pro Tours in 2004. Nico took a break from the game prior to the switchover to the Pro Players Club and has had some stumbles in his attempts to return. Nico has one Pro Point this year and will have his work cut out for him if he is going to accumulate 19 points

between the main and team events at Worlds to get back on the gravy train.

Other names to keep an eye out for during the clash of nations include Hall of Fame-eligible Benedikt Klauser leading the Austrian team, Grand Prix–New Jersey champion Guillaume Cardin leading the Canadian squad, and starcitygames.com editor Craig Stevenson leading the English National team and looking to put to bed the aspersions on his country's Limited skills. Don't count out the Malaysian squad featuring Terry Soh and Albertus Law, and reigning individual World Champion Katsuhiko Mori anchors the Japanese team with hopes of defending his nation's team championship from 2005.

On top of all the action, there will also be the second induction ceremony for the Pro Tour Hall of Fame when Bob Maher, Dave Humpherys, Raphaël Lévy, Gary Wise, and Rob Dougherty will be given their Hall of Fame rings and honored for their tremendous contributions to the game.

I will have the privilege of introducing these five great players as they are enshrined, which will take place Wednesday prior to Day One action – less than two weeks from now. On Sunday I will be in the booth alongside Randy Buehler bringing you all the play-by-play as it unfolds starting December 3 at 2:45 a.m. ET. Join us starting November 29 for all the action from Paris. Will a legend of **Magic's** past rise again to glory, or will a new star be born in the City of Lights?



Firestarter: How High for Kai?

Where will Kai finish in the standings for the World Championships? Does he have what it takes to post his tenth Top 8? Can he win it all again? What expectations do you have for one of the top two players ever to play the game?

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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