

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



An Overnight Success (Many Years in the Making)

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, December 8, 2006



I am going to assume that if you are reading my column that you are already aware of the events that transpired this past week in France at the 2006 **Magic World Championships**. If you are not please take a moment to review the coverage [here](#) – there is a buffet of audio, video, and text coverage to satisfy any appetite.

In Frank's column as well as Mike's there has been ample examination (with much more to come no doubt) of the decks that were played. As has become the custom after each Pro Tour this season, I caught up with the winner of the tournament, Makihito Mihara, moments after he **Dragonstormed** his way to victory past Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa, Gabriel Nassif, and Ryo Ogura.



The finals match was a bloodbath, with Mihara taking it in three straight games – including an amazing **Gigadrowse**-fueled win through an in-play Teferi. The Quarter- and Semifinals were both five-game affairs with plenty of dramatic highs and lows against two of the three most recognizable names playing that Sunday.

"Amazing...awesome!" exclaimed Mihara with a smile wider than the \$50,000 check he was holding when asked how he felt to emerge with the win.

"In the very last game of the Semifinals I topdecked **Seething Song** against Gabriel Nassif when Nassif was tapped out," Mihara replied when asked what the most memorable moment was for him in the Top 8. "That was the key moment. Also, I made a terrible mistake in quarterfinals, but eventually the cards I needed were there. That topdeck was one of the key points."

While watching Mihara play from the webcast booth I was struck by how he tried to rein in his disappointment and embarrassment after realizing he was going to come up short of enough mana to cast **Dragonstorm**. Ultimately he needed to **Repeal** into another **Rite of Flame** in order to win the match. It was a topdeck worthy of Craig Jones, but more importantly, it underscored the importance of not becoming derailed by your mistakes. All players make mistakes, but the ones who succeed are the players who don't dwell on them.

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"In my mind I accepted the mistakes and whatever would happen," Mihara recalled of his state of mind during that exciting game. "I had to find a new way to fix them and to beat the opponent."

In Mihara's epic match with Gabriel Nassif, it was unclear to many observers whether or not Nassif had made a mistake by tapping out to forecast **Proclamation of Rebirth** with multiple **Remands** in hand and one **Martyr of Sands** already in play. Nassif did not draw his seventh mana and could not activate his Martyr when Mihara found the mana accelerant he needed to take advantage of his defenseless opponent.

"I think that Nassif had a pretty good average to draw lands on either of those turns," Mihara said. "I think it was the correct play and he got somewhat unlucky. If he could have found that land he would have reset the damage clock...I think it was an acceptable play."

One of the reasons that Nassif may have felt comfortable enough to tap out was that after showing Mihara a **Wrath of God** when he sacrificed a Martyr earlier in the game the Japanese player chose not to cast **Dragonstorm** with his mana accelerants but simply made a lone dragon by casting it.

"I tried to force Nassif to use his **Wrath of God** with that first **Bogardan Hellkite**," he explained when asked if by holding back on the **Dragonstorm** he had lulled Nassif into a false sense of security. "I did not try to play any mindgames. I simply tried to make the correct play at the time. There was no attempt to get a misread from Nassif."

This was the first Pro Tour Top 8 appearance for Mihara, but he is no overnight success story. If you have followed the Japanese **Magic** scene for the past few years you may recognize his name from multiple Japanese Nationals Top 8s. If you have played with or against CAL in an Extended tournament in the past year you are familiar with his deck designs. And if you pay attention to Top 16 and Top 32 finishes, you may have even seen this coming.

Mihara reminisced: "I started playing at the release of the *Weatherlight* expansion. Friends at school showed it to me and I bought some theme decks. Six months later I went to a local tournament for fun. That was the first time I had played **Magic** against someone who was not a friend."

He continued to play on the local tournament scene for three years before winning a PTQ to play at [Pro Tour – Venice](#) and making the trip the Italy.

"I built BeastBidding and played Olivier Ruel in the first round. He defeated me so badly...my deck could not beat Goblins and I did not make Day Two. That day there was a Sealed Deck PTQ for Yokohama that ran from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. of the next day. I made it through to the finals. Every Japanese player was at the venue and I felt so relaxed, but I lost because I was so sleepy."

So what was the turning point for Mihara when he finally felt like he could sustain himself on the Pro Tour?

"It was not a Pro Tour," he answered. "It was Japanese Nationals. In 2003, 2004, and 2005 I made it into the Top 8. Not only that, my deck in 2005 was played by the National Champion Morofuji. I finally realized that I could win at that level with decks that I made myself."

As the alternate on that National team he played at Worlds and finished in the Top 32. He followed that up with a Top 16 finish in Honolulu. While most PTQ players – heck, many PT players as well – would give their left arm for a Top 16 finish, they are often overlooked. It was a Top 4 finish at a Grand Prix in Kitakyuushuu, Japan, that has had the most impact on Mihara's Q rating prior to his winning turn in Paris.

His CAL deck took the dredge mechanic to a new level, fueling **Seismic Assault** and **Solitary Confinement** with three cards per turn from **Life from the Loam**. Mihara played a more or less identical version of the deck for the Extended portion of Worlds.

"Basically the addition of new guild lands between Kitakyuushuu and now creates a different land balance, and **Sakura-Tribe Elder** becomes **Wall of Roots**, but other than that it is the same," summarized Mihara when asked about the changes to the deck. But what about all of the hate that promised to banish it and all graveyard strategies to the sidelines of Extended?

"The presence of **Leyline of the Void** is very scary, but if you keep a **Life from the Loam** in your hand you can recover easily from **Tormod's Crypt**," he explained. Despite the Leyline he still recommends the deck for the impending qualifier season. "In a PTQ where you have to play many rounds CAL is a very good deck that does not get mana-screwed often."

As for his **Dragonstorm** deck in Standard he urges that players put in the work to learn the deck. "It is very important to practice the deck against control. The practice is very important against control."

In closing I asked Mihara what he had taken out to make room for the three crucial storage lands from his sideboard. He had so much time against control decks that he was able to actually **Gigadrowse** out a Teferi player at sorcery speed – he sided out basic lands.

Next up for Mihara? Geneva with the all the benefits of a Level 5 mage!

Firestarter: What to play in PTQs?

Is graveyard hate overrated? Do decks like **Ichorid**, The CAL, and 'Tog have a realistic shot in the new Extended metagame that will lurch to life as PTQs get underway? What do you think the Top 8 decklist pages will look like in the coming weeks? Sound off in the forums.



Confinement, Assault, Loam

Razor Tron – Makihito Mihara		
Japanese Nationals 2005 – Top 8		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
4 Forest	4 Sensei's Divining Top	1 Plains
1 Island	3 Talisman of Unity	3 Circle of Protection: Red
4 Urza's Power Plant	4 Sylvan Scrying	2 Dosan the Falling Leaf
4 Urza's Mine	4 Reap and Sow	1 Duplicant
4 Urza's Tower	4 Tooth and Nail	1 Pithing Needle

4 Yavimaya Coast	3 Condescend	1 Tel-Jilad Justice
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	2 Oblivion Stone	2 Naturalize
1 Boseiju, Who Shelters All	2 Mindslaver	1 Defense Grid
23 lands	26 other spells	2 Shifting Borders
		1 Mindslaver
		15 sideboard cards
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
2 Eternal Witness		
1 Viridian Shaman		
1 Darksteel Colossus		
1 Sundering Titan		
1 Triskelion		
1 Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker		
11 creatures		

Ga-Vex GobB – Makihito Mihara

2004 Japanese Nationals – Top 8



Main Deck 60 cards

10 Mountain	3 Patriarch's Bidding
3 Swamp	4 Skullclamp
4 Bloodstained Mire	2 Detonate
3 City of Brass	1 Shatter
20 lands	2 Chrome Mox
	12 other spells
4 Skirk Prospector	
4 Goblin Sledder	
4 Goblin Piledriver	
4 Gempalm Incinerator	
4 Goblin Warchief	
4 Goblin Sharpshooter	
4 Siege-Gang Commander	
28 creatures	

Sideboard

2 Sparksmith
2 Electrostatic Bolt
2 Dwarven Blastminer
2 Terror
2 Oversold Cemetery
1 Detonate
1 Shatter
1 Starstorm
1 Tendrils of Agony
1 Swamp
15 sideboard cards

Tog – Makihito Mihara

2003 Japan Nationals – Top 8



Main Deck 60 cards

6 Island	4 Counterspell
3 Swamp	4 Circular Logic
4 Polluted Delta	4 Smother
4 Lonely Sandbar	3 Force Spike
3 Underground River	3 Chainer's Edict
3 Darkwater Catacombs	4 Deep Analysis
2 Cephalid Coliseum	2 Upheaval
25 lands	2 Duress
	2 Cunning Wish
	28 other spells
3 Psychatog	
4 Shadowmage Infiltrator	
7 creatures	

Sideboard

1 Hibernation
1 Flash of Insight
2 Duress
2 Engineered Plague
1 Mana Short
1 Coffin Purge
2 Ghastly Demise
2 Callous Oppressor
2 Persuasion
1 Read the Runes
15 sideboard cards

Greater Good Gift (GGG) – Makihito Mihara

Pro Tour Honolulu – 13th Place



Main Deck 60 cards

4 Forest	1 Recollect
2 Plains	1 Reclaim
2 Swamp	4 Gifts Ungiven
1 Island	2 Goryo's Vengeance
1 Watery Grave	1 Putrefy
1 Temple Garden	1 Mortify

Sideboard

1 Life from the Loam
2 Mortify
1 Myojin of Night's Reach
1 Cranial Extraction
1 Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni
1 Nightmare Void

1 Overgrown Tomb	4 Wrath of God	2 Ghostly Prison
1 Godless Shrine	3 Sensei's Divining Top	3 Loxodon Hierarch
1 Golgari Rot Farm	3 Greater Good	1 Hana Kami
1 Selesnya Sanctuary	4 Kodama's Reach	1 Soulless Revival
1 Orzhov Basilica	2 Farseek	1 Wear Away
2 Tendo Ice Bridge		
3 Brushland	26 other spells	15 sideboard cards
1 Miren, the Moaning Well		
1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse		
<hr/>		
23 lands		
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4 Yosei, the Morning Star		
2 Kokusho, the Evening Star		
1 Kagemaro, First to Suffer		
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
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11 creatures		

The "CAL" – Makihiro Mihara		
Grand Prix Kitakyuushuu 2005 – Top 8		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
4 Tranquil Thicket	3 Life from the Loam	2 Putrefy
4 Barren Moor	4 Burning Wish	1 Sickening Dreams
4 Forgotten Cave	4 Cabal Therapy	1 Chainer's Edict
4 Wooded Foothills	2 Solitary Confinement	1 Hull Breach
3 Bloodstained Mire	3 Sensei's Divining Top	2 Duress
2 Forest	3 Seismic Assault	1 Nostalgic Dreams
2 Mountain	2 Zombie Infestation	1 Life from the Loam
1 Swamp		1 Pyroclasm
1 Plains	21 other spells	2 Cranial Extraction
1 Overgrown Tomb		2 Moment's Peace
1 Sacred Foundry		1 Solitary Confinement
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27 lands		15 sideboard cards
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4 Birds of Paradise		
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder		
4 Eternal Witness		
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12 creatures		

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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