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Setting the Top 8 Table

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The Week That Was
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Another Pro Tour season is upon us. I am writing this with less than 24 hours until Pro Tour–Geneva gets under way, sitting on what will soon be the scorekeeper's stage at one of the few available power sources while the tournament set is assembled around me. Mox-themed metal towers are being erected all throughout the site (they serve as signage for the main event, side events, the artist area, etc.), Serra Angel is being assembled, tablecloths are billowing across bare tables, and Last Chance Qualifier hopefuls are piling up and pawing against the glass to the venue like it's the Monroeville Mall instead of the Palexpo Congress Centre.

I was talking with DCI Program Manager Scott Larabee earlier this afternoon for the latter half of this week's column. He had been working on an update to the Invitation Policy that involved Players Club levels. He attempted to link to the 2007 Players Club standings but quickly realized that page does not exist yet ... but it most certainly will after this weekend when we have thoroughly explored the mysteries of drafting *Time Spiral* with the addition of *Planar Chaos* for three days.

Eight players will surge into the lead, with one of them becoming the front-runner to win the title of Player of the Year. Unlike every other Pro Tour that took place last year, there will be a completely blank slate when the event starts.

This is the first time in many years that a Pro Tour season has commenced with an actual Pro Tour. You have to go back to the 1999-2000 season to find a season where the first event of the season was not a Grand Prix. Up until this year, that was actually the only time since Grand Prix were introduced into the Pro Tour mix that had happened.

So who will those eight players be? I have a couple of guesses. I think it will be at least four players from the following list:

- Tiago Chan
- Kamiel Cornelissen
- Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa
- Makihito Mihara
- Richard Hoan
- Katsuhiro Mori
- Antoine Ruel
- Jelger Wiegersma
- Shouta Yasooka

All nine of those players have at least five different invitations to this tournament – more than anyone else in the tournament. They all have high DCI ratings in the Top 100, are all obviously at least Level 3 or higher, and have a variety of tournament accomplishments that included qualification for Geneva with top performances at events such as Grand Prix in Sydney, Athens, New Jersey, and Yamagata. Most importantly, most of them finished within the Top 50 of Kobe, Worlds, or both.

Two players on that list have six different invites and they are both from – brace yourself because I know this will be startling – Japan. Player of the Year Shouta Yasooka earned an extra invite by virtue of his title. Shockingly he did not finish in the Top 50 of Worlds but did earn berths in an end-of-the-year Pro Points run that took him to back-to-back Top 8s in Sydney and New Jersey and a Top 16 finish in Yamagata. (Rookie of the Year Sebastian Thaler does not get an invite for his title but should not despair since he was invited to this event four other ways despite that.)

The other player is 2005 World Champion Katsuhiro Mori, who took an extra invite from being on the second-place in the team competition at Worlds. He took another invite for his back-to-back Worlds Top 8 finishes. He squeaked into an invite by finishing in 50th place in Kobe and got another in Japan during Grand Prix–Yamagata when he took fourth.

Other players on the list with the rare invite from the team competition include Paulo and Kamiel. Kamiel was a member of the winning Dutch National team, and while he did not make the final table of any Grand Prix events, did post money finishes in Kobe and the individual portion of Worlds.

If I had to be pinned down to four picks to make the Top 8 this weekend from that pool of players, I would have to say it would be:

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- Kamiel Cornelissen
- Richard Hoan
- Shouta Yasooka
- Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa

This is going to be the first big event to feature *Planar Chaos* and it will not be available on *Magic Online* until later this month. Even players who are members of the MTGO Beta test for *Planar Chaos* cannot draft with the format since the Beta test has moved in a less competitive direction that is more suitable for catching bugs than mastering Pro Tour formats (see [Pro Tour-London](#)).

Rich Hoan felt pretty good about his chances despite the fact that the most famous denizen of *Magic Online* was unable to practice in his homeland. Rich is a virtual lock to win money at a Limited Pro Tour. He was 34th in Kobe and 44th in Prague, but he was optimistic about improving his fortunes this weekend.



If Rich is filling out a Limited decklist, watch out.

"I think I am going to do really well for this tournament," smiled Rich as he searched for lands to fill out his practice draft deck. "I have done a lot of practice drafts and I have been winning a lot in those drafts."

Rich did not believe there were any major fluctuations in color valuations due to the new set – certainly there was nothing as dramatic from *Time Spiral* to *Planar Chaos* as there was from one *Ravnica* expansion to the next.

"It doesn't chance very much," Rich shrugged. "All the black creatures still suck. Basically I like combinations of blue, green, and red and I think black and white are pretty bad."

That said...the lands Rich needed to fill out his draft deck? **Swamps**.

So that brings us to the halfway point in my Top 8 picks. Don't get me wrong – I am practically throwing darts at a board here. Nary an eyebrow would be raised at any of these nine names when Randy Buehler announces Top 8 players on Sunday. But things are never that tidy. Besides, if life were tidy there would only be eight players on that list. I imagine that at least one the players will be taking part in his first Pro Tour ever – not unlike Jan-Moritz Merkel and Thomas Didierjean at Kobe – which brings our Top 8 table to:

- Kamiel Cornelissen
- Richard Hoan
- Shouta Yasooka
- Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa
- Rookie McRookerson

So that gives us one Dutch player, one Japanese, one Canadian, and one Brazilian with one country to be named later. We obviously need to add one French player to this list, as well as one Portuguese if recent trends are to continue. Plus there is only one Japanese player so far. I am not going to add another to my predictions because – let's face it – if there is going to be a rookie winner there is a pretty good chance he will be Japanese.

Instead I am making a bold prediction and bumping Kenji down to a mere Top 16 finish in favor of America's own Mark Herberholz. The Pro Tour-Honolulu winner is not exactly known for tearing it up in the 40-card competitions but Mark has the intangibles on his side this weekend. Of course Mark did not exactly fill me with confidence in my prediction when he laid out his training regimen for the event.

"I did two practice drafts at the hobby shop that I apparently own – I did not know this but it is nice to know that I have a business to fall back upon," laughed Mark referring to a recent profile by our own Rich Hagon that mistakenly believed Mark had some other revenue stream besides his



Yasooka got to Geneva six different ways.



Herberholz started off 2006 with a PT win – will

dwindling winnings.

2007 be the same?

"I am definitely going to Top 8 this weekend," Mark declared. "I gotta win so I can afford the bar for the next couple of months. I think fate is just going to let me win it. The world just knows that I need it."

- Kamiel Cornelissen
- Richard Hoan
- Shouta Yasooka
- Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa
- Rookie McRookerson
- Mark Herberholz

There are always a plethora of players to choose from when you are picking a player from France to Top 8 an event. Either Ruel, Gabriel Nassif, and Raphael Levy are just a few of the names that go on any short list. But my pick for this event is another player – like Mark – who is better known for having won a Constructed Pro Tour.

Pierre Canali made an ill-advised handshake with his final round opponent at Pro Tour–Prague and drew himself down into 10th place in a virtual tie for the last spot at the draft table. If not for that handshake (and assuming he would have won, of course) people would realize that Pierre has become quite a formidable opponent at the draft table.

Canali seems to be at his best when he has something to prove and has had something of a chip on his shoulder when it comes to improving his play. While many players would find a Top 16 finish at Pro Tour to be the highlight of their season, Prague only seems to have fueled Pierre's desire to be recognized as a complete player.

My final pick for the Top 8 is from Portugal but isn't Tiago Chan, although as I mentioned earlier my eyebrows will remain firmly in place if Randy were to announce his name on Sunday. My pick for this weekend hails not from Lisbon but from Porto. Andre Coimbra has piled up quite an impressive resume in his brief time on the Pro Tour. I interviewed him earlier this year for my column and I was impressed with both his resume and approach to the game.

Andre seems completely immersed in the game of **Magic**, networking with players all over the world – he recently went on a PE-winning streak with the latest Mori creation – and has quite simply been a dominant Limited player for a stretch of 18 months. He is 11-1 at two World Championships, finished 12th at Pro Tour–Kobe, and has finished in the money at five straight Limited Grand Prix with three Top 8 appearances.

"I have done something like two or three drafts a day for the weeks leading up to the Pro Tour," explained Andre when asked about his playtesting for this event. "I played with guys with Pro Tour experience and guys who are qualified for the Pro Tour. That and the Prerelease."



If practice makes perfect, Andre Coimbra is in good shape for Geneva.

Where Rich Hoan felt that *Planar Chaos* had little effect on how he approached the draft, Andre did not start winning his drafts until he took the impact of the new set's planeshifted colors into account.

"I started out doing quite badly because I had no idea how much different the new format was," Andre admitted. "When I realized that the format was much faster and that there had been some color shifting in terms of power I started to do much better. I have won most of my drafts in the last few days. We have tried lots of archetypes and have some nice statistics about each archetype."

That brings my fantasy picks for this tournament to a full table, which looks like this:

- Kamiel Cornelissen
- Richard Hoan
- Shouta Yasooka
- Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa
- Rookie McRookerson
- Mark Herberholz
- Pierre Canali
- Andre Coimbra

Obviously there are dozens of other players I wanted to include and are all players to watch out for this weekend. Some of the less obvious choices that I am going to be watching out for include Helmut Summersberger, David Brucker, and Billy Moreno.

You can follow all the action from Geneva here on Magicthegathering.com all weekend. The action will be coming to you from more directions than ever too! There will now be embedded video right on the front of the coverage page with regular updates from me and Randy on the spanking new – and appropriately capitalized – Tournament Center. Check it out.

Five Questions with Scott Larabee: Heads Up!

Scott may be the most interviewed person in my run on this column, but that's only because he is the primary source for information that my readers need to know about Pro Tours, Grand Prix, and how to get there. He took

some of his very valuable time Thursday to sit down with me for five questions about Two-Headed Giant and the invitation policy regarding the format.

1. *How do players get invited on rating to Pro Tour–San Diego?*

Scott: Last year we used an averaging system that said if your team members had an average rating of X, then you were invited. We did this with a number of different ratings for Charleston and ended up with 525 players and 180 got there on rating. Normally we aim for 100 people to get there on rating. I was looking for a system that would get us 100 players and no more. I was about to set the rating average for 2HG Limited Rating at 1775 – which is really high – but unlike three-person teams, Two-Headed Giant is a format that is actually played in the real world. I thought we would be hosed.

We came up with the idea of inviting exactly 100 people. We are going to take the Top 50 players by Limited Two-Headed Giant rating and invite them – and they can bring whomever they want. Exactly 100 invited.

2. *How did you settle on this idea?*

Scott: It comes from the Hall of Fame. We had tried to figure out how Hall of Famers could find someone with enough levels to play on the team Pro Tours and decided that the Hall of Famers could bring whatever team they wanted. When Andy Heckt suggested the same idea be used for ratings invites we said, "Bingo! Done."

3. *So ratings averages and plateaus are a thing of the past?*

Scott: We have never used plateaus for any individual events so they are now done with but we still use averaging for byes at Grand Prix. You take the two Two-Headed Giant limited ratings and average them together. For Grand Prix–Amsterdam and Grand Prix–Massachusetts a 1650 rating will get you one bye and 1700 will get you two.

4. *1700 seems a little on the high side for two byes, no?*

Scott: There are not a lot of people with a 1700 rating right now so that might look a little bad but you have to remember that Grand Prix–Massachusetts is about halfway through the PTQ system and weeks after 2HG Champs, although the bar will still be a little high for Amsterdam.

5. *What about Two-Headed Giant at Worlds?*

Scott: We are going to run 2HG at Worlds. National teams will now be four people big, not three. If you actually make Top 4 at Nationals, you are on the team. We are not going to play off the 3/4 anymore – you don't have to. Every National team is going to be composed of two teams. With draft in this format you draft and play two rounds. For the team competition there will be three drafts and six rounds as opposed to four.

Every draft we will change the iteration of the National team. For the first draft Player A and B will play together and C and D will play together. For the second draft A and C and B and D will play together. For the last draft A will play with D and B will play with C. It is much more team-like. You won't play with the same guy each time.

We are going to cut to the Top 2 teams and the way that is going to work is as follows: Pretend the USA and Germany are in the finals. When you draft 2HG you sit four teams to a table. The U.S. teams would sit across from each other and the German teams would do the same. After the draft, one German team would play one U.S. team and the other two would play as well. If the same country wins both of those matches then the tournament is over. If they split then the winning teams play one more round.

Firestarter: Set Your Own Table

Share your picks for the Top 8 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.*



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