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A Sliver in Time

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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Quentin Martin went to [Grand Prix-Dallas](#) with high hopes for padding his position in the Player of the Year race. He squeaked into Day Two and had a disappointing finish for the tournament despite playing an identical Affinity deck to Rogier Maaten, who made the Top 8 this past weekend. Of course if you have already read the Dallas coverage you know that Quentin was - in the words of Academy Award nominee Mark Wahlberg - just happy to be there.

Quentin is living in the Netherlands these days with Ruud Warmenhoven. After Quentin put up the second Top 8 of his Pro Tour career in Geneva a couple of weeks back, he,  Quentin Martin was all smiles once he got to Dallas. Ruud, and Rogier decided to play the game and see the world and looked for a reasonable online fare to Dallas.

"We found cheap flights, but I had lost my bank card and almost couldn't book the trip," relayed Quentin of the start to his already well-chronicled journey to Dallas that involved three different airplanes, a midnight swamp buggy ride, an amorous border agent, and a night in a Mexican prison.

Had he not already put up the Sunday finish in Geneva, he might have just given up then and there ... but with a 16-point head start in the season long PoY race, Quentin was able to persuade someone else to spot him the cost of the fares and his Dallas weekend was on. Quentin was not so sure he would have pursued the matter as hard had he picked up one more loss during the Swiss rounds of the Pro Tour - something that came very close to happening for the Limited specialist.

In many of my previous columns, my Top8Magic podcast, and in the webcast booth with Randy, I have underscored the importance of looking past the Top 8 when evaluating performances at an event. The difference between the Sunday spotlight and being relegated to the anonymity of a Top 16 finish can be as small as a decimal place in tiebreakers, one poor series of draws, or even losing the die roll in an incredibly tight matchup - things beyond a player's control.

Given how tough it is to navigate those waters on the way to a Top 8, a player can hardly afford to give away any games due to operational mistakes. And yet that is almost exactly what happened to Quentin in the final draft of the Swiss in Geneva.

"I have to return to my old, original way of registering a pool," Quentin sighed as he explained his close call. "Sit down, register the whole pool, then build deck, and register that. I changed to building deck, registering it, and the registering rest of pool."

Quentin went on to explain that the second method gives him a little bit of a safeguard against running out of time during deck construction since the cards he will be playing are the first thing committed to the sheet. The problem with this method is that you can easily get confused and record the wrong cards in the wrong place. Just as he was about to turn in the decklist, Quentin decided to not only double check his list but triple check it and found out that he had come perilously close to turning in a decklist that listed him as playing 42 cards (with two **Eternity Snares** that he had earmarked for his sideboard). He called over a judge to initial the change as he quickly adjusted his list to reflect the 40 cards that he was actually playing with just seconds to spare before pairings went up for round 13 against Osyp Lebedowicz.

Both players were vying for a Top 8 finish at the time and Quentin knocked the American player out of the running. In the next round he faced off against another American player - Ervin Tormos. Both players knew that this was the round that would determine which of them would advance to the second Top 8 of their respective careers. While the judges took their decks off for a deck check, Ervin squirmed in his seat hoping he would not take a loss for anything that could be amiss on his list. Quentin - who had taken a game loss earlier in the weekend for a decklist error - was perfectly calm knowing that he had caught his error with that last-second check of his list to make sure everything was square.



Quentin had his hands full against Osyp.

Both players' decks were given the green light by the judges and Quentin asked what would have happened had he not caught his own error before turning over the list. The judge explained that not only would Quentin have taken a game loss for the error but he would have been forced to play the next game

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unsideboarded - meaning he would start with a 42-card list complete with two **Eternity Snares**. That's very likely a 2-0 win for Ervin and a berth in the Top 8. Instead, Quentin's slivers took the match in three tight games and the English player earned his second Limited Top 8 in one year.

I asked Quentin about his draft in the Top 8. I have been trying to access it through the Draft Viewer but there seems to be a problem with the tool that prevents me from seeing the reality of the draft. The draft was burned pretty clearly in Quentin's memory though, and he was able to talk me through some of the picks. I don't know if you are able to use the viewer, but you probably recall that Quentin was seated in between Kenji Tsumura and eventual winner Mike Hron.



He opened up a pack that he felt had only one outcome: "**Draining Whelk** all the way! I want blue if it's open to start with, I dislike white so I rule out the Isolation - the Whelk is better anyway - the **Might Sliver** is tempting but Whelk is just that powerful. Its value goes down when they know you have it in a best of 5, but it's powerful enough to pull off all sorts of mind tricks."

"Then **Prodigal Sorcerer** was next as Kenji obviously picked either **Sulfurous Blast** or **Firemaw**, so I didn't want the Gargadon to his left. Then it was **Transmuter** and **Deepwalker** before the crunch pick," continued Quentin, who had drafted slivers quite often over the course of fifteen rounds. "It was either **Watcher Sliver** or **Search for Tomorrow**. **Watcher** is a nice signal but not as powerful as **Search**. I don't like blue-green as much as in TTT because there are fewer good fixers to splash the red, but I like it if **Search** is taken early so I took **Search** there.

"The next pick nearly caused me to 'time out' - **Wurmcalling**, **Nantuko Shaman** or **Spiketail Drakeling**. I took the **Drakeling** just to keep cutting blue and because I had only the one green card and that may have been a freak signal. A sixth-pick **Drakeling** is a strong sign that blue is good."

His second set of packs followed suit with another strong opening card in **Firemaw Kavu** - a card he elected not to pass to Kenji. He followed it with an **Errant Ephemeron**, **Tribal Flames**, **Grapeshot**, and then **Nantuko Shaman** before picking the **Trickbind** that allowed him to steal his quarterfinal match against Shingo Kuriharu.

I asked Quentin about the famous **Trickbind** play. He has talked about how much he loves the card in the days following the Pro Tour and I was curious why he elected not to play it maindeck.

"Normally I maindeck it," he grinned. "I decided to hide it in the sideboard for the Top 8 because of the surprise factor in a five-game match."

The third pack was rather thin for Quentin and he ended up having to play three colors to make the deck work. Frank Karsten apparently advised him that he could have taken the sliver back in that first pack and ended up with a sick blue-white deck. Quentin could only look back at the **Watcher Sliver** and imagine "What if?"



[What is 'What if?' Week?](#)

One-and-one-quarter Giant

I was barely able to squeeze in the last-minute announcement about **Two-Headed Giant** into last week's column and I wanted to take a moment and make sure everyone heading to this weekend's [Two-Headed Giant State Championships](#) - not to mention the Pro Tour Qualifiers that start the weekend of March 17 or the Grand Prix in Amsterdam and Massachusetts - was aware of the pretty dramatic change to the format.

You only needed to look at the bedraggled judge staff the morning after the PTQ for San Diego that took place during Pro Tour-Geneva to realize that something needed to happen to speed up the format. Rounds were taking on average 85 minutes and the event was chasing the sunrise when it concluded.

It is unclear if the change from 40 life per team to 30 life is enough to get uber-bear **Benalish Cavalry** off the bench, but flying becomes as important as storm or slivers now. I went to Neutral Ground the other day to look in on my regular Tuesday night playgroup. From the buzz on our mailing list it sounded like there were going to be eight players doing a draft to get a handle on the new format. I could not get there in time for the start of the affair but promised to step in for a player who had to leave early and could not finish what he started.

When I got to the store I was taken aback because I did not recognize a single person in the draft - which is pretty strange since I am one of the administrators of the list for our group. It turns out that the players I observed when I got to the store were from another playgroup altogether and were doing their own playtesting for the new format. Sixteen players



under one roof playing a Limited team format under their own volition? If you have ever tried to organize a Team Rochester practice for the old three-player team format, you already know how much more successful this format is than any team format that has preceded it. I suspect that attendance this weekend is going to come as a surprise to many, but hopefully not to Tournament Organizers (* hint * hint * guys, get more tables!).

I did end up sitting in for two matches and got to see at least two of the top draft strategies in action. My team played two matches against local Two-Headed specialist Paul Allison and he rolled over myself and Keith Walter with a curvaceous sliver draw that included such bombs as [Sedge Sliver](#) and [Pulmonic Sliver](#).

In the second match I was able to cripple Paul's offense with a well-timed [Ixidron](#) and then a second even-more-well-timed [Ixidron](#) before making more goblins with [Empty the Warrens](#) than Paul's team has life points. Storm has to be the top strategy in the format because you and your teammate take a unified turn. It is quite easy to get a storm count up to seven or eight on turn five or six making almost every storm card - including [Volcanic Awakening](#) - a first-pick bomb.

And should you successfully pilot one of those strategies - or something completely different - to the top of the States heap, you'll get yourself [one of these pretties](#) as a prize.



Amsterdam Party

Next weekend marks the 10th anniversary of the first Grand Prix tournament in Amsterdam. Fittingly it will be celebrated with a [Grand Prix back where the whole circuit started](#). On top of that, the good people are throwing a party on Friday evening before the event. Here is the announcement I received in my email box this morning with the party details from events marketing manager Matthieu Poujade of the European office:

Party in Amsterdam!

So what will happen during that much-talked about party? Everyone mutters about anniversary surprises, and never-before happenings, so what is it? Well, here you go...

The site will open at 4 p.m. on Friday. Everyone knows that by now. But what you might not know is that the following stuff will take place:

- There will be an actual, proper party, where registered players will be able to enjoy music from an Amsterdam DJ, with a complimentary drink on the house!
- There will be two raffles (one at 10 p.m., and one at 12 a.m.) with unbelievable prizes to be won. Check this out: 20 Beta boosters. 14 *Arabian Nights* boosters. 8 Limited Edition **Magic: The Gathering** prints (from the Wizards of the Coast collection). And more... When registering for the GP, each player will be given a raffle ticket. But there will also be opportunities to get more... that's right, with gunslinging!
- All previous Grand Prix winners have been invited to gunslinging in Amsterdam on Friday. By winning against them, you will get a second raffle ticket, hence increasing your chances of winning one of these fabulous prizes.

- Last but not least, there will be a talk show hosted by Brian David-Marshall himself, with Tiago Chan, Jelger Wiegersma, Rich Hoan, Raphael Levy, Gabriel Nassif, Julien Nuijten, and Frank Karsten. They will talk about Constructed and Limited **Magic**, about their lives as pros, but also... about the Grand Prix format: Two-Headed Giant Limited. Yes, they'll give their views on some of the issues everyone is eager to hear about!

Now you know. You have no excuse anymore. See you next week.

The Verdict is In!

Gerrard's Verdict that is. While you are making your opponents discard, you can blind them with the foil-y goodness of March's Friday Night **Magic** prize which you can win this very evening if you hurry down to your [local FNM store](#).



Firestarter: Two-Headed Strategy

States / Champs is less than 24 hours away...have you put in your homework? **Volcanic Awakening** goes from 15th pick chaff to a potential first-round pick in this format. What other cards have you found to have wildly divergent valuations from Individual Limited to 2HG Limited? Head to the forums and share your thoughts about what cards change the most in play value.

*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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