

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



# Grudge Match Victory

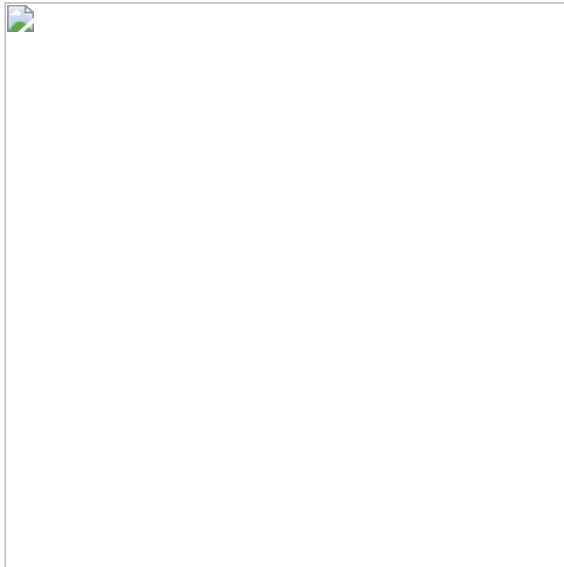
Brian David-Marshall  
The Week That Was  
Friday, April 6, 2007



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Back when I still owned Neutral Ground, there was nothing sweeter than piling into a car for a road trip to New England with an eye toward stealing PTQ slots from our YMG rivals. You'll have to forgive the breach of my objective exterior if there was a huge smile on my face as Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz (literally the first customer to walk through the doors of Neutral Ground when we opened) and Matt Wang (my partner over at Top8Magic.com and perhaps the third customer to walk through the door of NG) ran the tables at Grand Prix-Massachusetts and hoisted the first [North American Two-Headed Giant Grand Prix trophy](#).

Steve O'Mahoney-Schwartz (hereafter simply Steve OMS) may not be the most famous player to wear the Neutral Ground t-shirt back in the early days of the Pro Tour, but to my mind he was certainly one of the most influential. I remember when I first wanted to open the store I found Steve on instant messenger and asked for his feedback about what would make the store desirable for area gamers. I am certain that Neutral Ground would have been a shadow of what it became without the support of Steve, who at the time was organizing play sessions for the local players after school at local sandwich shops and in his basement.



Steve quickly established himself on the East Coast tournament scene at the \$1,000 and Power Nine events that were the staple tournament format prior to the invention of the Pro Tour and subsequent PTQs. Once Wizards set up that first pro event in the Puck Building, Steve was right there slugging it out in the Junior Division (alongside Jon Finkel, his brother Dan, and his eventual Massachusetts partner's sister, Michele).

He quickly made the jump to the big leagues and it was not long before he was one of the most feared players in the game. He won [Grand Prix-Madrid](#) during the Pro Tour's second season and the following year he fell one (Matt) place short of the title at [Pro Tour-Mainz](#). He got his win the next season in [Los Angeles](#) (giving him back-to-back final appearances in Rochester Draft Pro Tours), beating Mike Long and Jon Finkel en route to winning out the Top 8.

*Steve O'Mahoney Schwartz and Matt Wang.*

If you had to give Steve an area of specialty, it would clearly be in Limited where all three of his Top 8 finishes came before he retired as the No. 3 money-winner at the time. Looking through the teams from Massachusetts, I noticed a lot of old time names and I asked Steve what he thought contributed to the veteran turnout.

"Limited – and team formats in general – bring back players who always loved to game and want a chance to go out it again," posited Steve. "Regardless of the format or testing, gamers who are good and understand the game can always be competitive and dangerous opponents – even out of practice."

Steve balked at the term retirement when we discussed his time away from the game.

"I never retired from playing **Magic** completely, although I did retire from competitive **Magic**," he clarified. "I still loved the game, but all the travel time and testing time just overloaded me and I got burnt out. Balancing competitive **Magic** with school, life and work just didn't mesh at the time anymore and I needed a break. I also felt like I had accomplished a lot and it was time to focus on something else."

While Steve continued to keep a toe in the game, he had moved away from his familiar New York playgroup (to live in Boston of all places!). For Steve, getting back into that New York state of mind and a chaffing sixth-place finish have a lot to do with him playing a whole lot more of late.

"Moving back to NYC got me back into drafting a lot and old gaming habits. I draft at Finkel's a couple of times a week and it's always competitive – we even


Final Wrap-up  
[Top 8 Video Archives](#)



have our own stats and ratings – and that got me hooked again," he explained. "Gaming for me has always been about spending time with friends and having fun as well as about being competitive and winning. Another factor was the Hall of Fame, which is a new goal that I can work towards."

Steve felt confident he would not embarrass himself at the event despite not having extensive experience actually playing the format. One of the things that made Steve such a good player was his eagerness to learn and a willingness to ask questions of just about anyone. For that he turned to some familiar haunts.

"I felt my game was at least somewhat up to par after all the drafting we do in NYC," Steve continued. "My only worry was that I had never played 2HG before and would need to play catch-up to everyone else. I actually didn't mind that we didn't have any byes as it gave us time early on in the tournament to get used to playing the format. Thankfully, talking to the Neutral Ground players about 2HG and listening to the Top8Magic podcasts I was able to glean some draft strategy. It mostly just agreed with my first gut feeling about the format with a few added bonus ideas about certain cards."




*Steve knew that Matt would be able to listen to his suggestions and communicate well.*

With the all-star team of drafters available to Steve at the Finkel drafts (not to mention his immediate family), I was curious why he chose to play with Matt Wang. Not that Matt is unaccomplished; he finished 21st at Pro Tour–Columbus and 41st in Dallas way back when. Steve admitted that his first inclination was to play with some permutation of Antarctica, but that Jon was not available and already qualified for the Pro Tour.

"I couldn't convince my brother to go because he had too much going on at work to go away for the weekend," Steve said of his brother Dan's absence. "I was considering not going at all but then two weeks before the event I heard Matt was going to go and just do coverage for Top8Magic and not play. I decided that was a shame and told him he should play with me. Matt and I have been friends for a LONG time and I knew we'd be able to work well together. Matt would be able to listen to my decisions as the dominant head and go with it, but have enough knowledge about the game to be able to present other choices sometimes and defend them, without us arguing over plays constantly and tipping our hand to opponents."

If you want to hear more about the event from Matt Wang, Steve OMS, and a host of other players you should listen to the [Top8Magic podcasts](#) from the event. They provide a firsthand account of a winning team from start to finish as Matt pulled off the twin killing of playing and podcasting.

For those of you heading to PTQs in the format over the coming weeks, Matt has provided me with the card pool that he and Steve used to build their 7-0, we-don't-need-no-stinking-byes, decks. You can see if you would have made the same decisions as a Pro Tour winner. I also have included their Top 4 Draft decks.



*Here's to winning ... and a little free publicity.*

## Sealed Deck Card Pool

### WHITE

1 Amrou Scout  
1 Cavalry Master  
1 Cloudchaser Kestrel  
1 Duskrider Peregrine  
1 Flickering Spirit  
2 Gaze of Justice  
1 Jedit's Dragoons  
1 Pentarch Ward  
1 Plated Pegasus  
2 Watcher Sliver  
1 Aven Riftwatcher  
1 Sunlance  
1 Malach of the Dawn

### BLUE

1 Dream Stalker  
1 Eternity Snare  
1 Fledgling Mawcor  
1 Magus of the Jar  
1 Riftwing Cloudskate  
1 Slipstream Serpent  
1 Snapback  
1 Truth or Tale  
1 Willbender  
1 Wipe Away  
1 Braids, Conjurer Adept  
1 Dismal Failure  
1 Shaper Parasite

### BLACK

1 Call to the Netherworld  
1 Mindstab  
1 Skittering Monstrosity  
1 Skulking Knight  
2 Strangling Soot  
1 Traitor's Clutch  
1 Trespasser il-Vec  
1 Urborg Syphon-Mage  
1 Cradle to Grave  
1 Dash Hopes  
1 Deadly Grub  
1 Melancholy  
2 Midnight Charm

2 Mana Tithe  
 1 Mycologist  
 1 Pallid Mycoderm  
 1 Poultice Sliver  
 1 Riftmarked Knight  
 1 Saltfield Recluse  
 1 Whitemane Lion

1 Timebender  
 2 Veiling Oddity  
 2 Wistful Thinking

1 Shrouded Lore  
 1 Vampiric Link

**RED**

1 Ancient Grudge  
 1 Bonesplitter Sliver  
 1 Coal Stoker  
 1 Conflagrate  
 1 Goblin Snowman  
 1 Grapeshot  
 1 Orcish Librarian  
 2 Plunder  
 1 Rift Bolt  
 1 Undying Rage  
 1 Battering Sliver  
 1 Dead // Gone  
 2 Fireflight Mage  
 2 Keldon Marauders  
 1 Simian Spirit Guide  
 1 Skirk Shaman  
 1 Stingscourger

**GREEN**

1 Gemhide Sliver  
 1 Aspect of Mongoose  
 1 Craw Giant  
 1 Glass Asp  
 1 Herd Gnarr  
 1 Molder  
 1 Savage Thallid  
 1 Scarwood Treefolk  
 1 Squall Line  
 1 Thallid Germinator  
 1 Ana Battlemage  
 1 Essence Warden  
 1 Healing Leaves  
 1 Hunting Wilds  
 1 Magus of the Library  
 1 Psychotrope Thallid  
 1 Reflex Sliver  
 1 Uktabi Drake

**ARTIFACT/LAND/GOLD**

1 Assembly-Worker  
 1 Brass Gnat  
 1 Venser's Sliver  
 1 Vorosh, the Hunter  
 1 Flagstones of Trokair  
 1 Swarmyard  
 1 Terramorphic Expanse  
 1 Urza's Factory


**Team Wang/O'Mahoney-Schwartz - Matt Wang - Player A** 

GP Massachusetts 07, Day One Sealed Deck

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**Main Deck**  
40 cards

<p>8 Forest        8 Plains        2 Swamp</p> <hr/> <p>18 lands</p>	<p>1 Dream Stalker        1 Fledgling Mawcor        1 Magus of the Jar        1 Riftwing Cloudskate        1 Slipstream Serpent        1 Willbender        1 Gemhide Sliver        1 Herd Gnarr        1 Thallid Germinator        1 Vorosh, the Hunter        1 Shaper Parasite        1 Timebender        1 Ana Battlemage        1 Essence Warden        1 Magus of the Library</p> <hr/> <p>15 creatures</p>	<p>1 Snapback        1 Wipe Away        1 Squall Line        1 Dismal Failure        2 Veiling Oddity        1 Healing Leaves</p> <hr/> <p>7 other spells</p>
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**Team Wang/O'Mahoney-Schwartz - Steve O'Mahoney-Schwartz - Player B** 

GP Massachusetts 07, Day One Sealed Deck

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**Main Deck**  
40 cards

<p>1 Flagstones of Trokair        1 Terramorphic Expanse        5 Mountain        8 Plains        3 Swamp</p> <hr/> <p>18 lands</p>	<p>1 Urborg syphon Mage        1 Cavalry Master        1 Jedit's Dragoons        1 Amrou Scout        1 Cloudchaser Kestrel        1 Duskrider Peregrine        1 Flickering Spirit        1 Aven Riftwatcher        1 Malach of the Dawn        1 Riftmarked Knight        1 Saltfield Recluse        1 Whitemane Lion        1 Stingscourger</p>	<p>2 Strangling Soot        1 Conflagrate        1 Grapeshot        1 Rift Bolt        2 Mana Tithe        1 Sunlance        1 Dead // Gone</p> <hr/> <p>9 other spells</p>
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13 creatures

## Wang / O'Mahoney-Schwartz, Top 4 Draft

Matt Wang



### Main Deck 40 cards

1 Forest  
9 Island  
7 Plains

17 lands

1 Clockwork Hydra  
2 Coral Trickster  
1 Crookclaw Transmuter  
1 Draining Whelk  
1 Magus of the Jar  
2 Slipstream Serpent  
1 Spiketail Drakeling  
1 Magus of the Tabernacle  
1 Malach of the Dawn  
2 Shade of Trokair  
1 Dreamscape Artist  
1 Jodah's Avenger  
2 Aquamorph Entity

17 creatures

1 Prismatic Lens  
1 Griffin Guide  
1 Temporal Isolation  
1 Cancel  
1 Think Twice  
1 Strength in Numbers

6 other spells

## Wang / O'Mahoney-Schwartz, Top 4 Draft

Steven O'Mahoney Schwartz



### Main Deck 40 cards

8 Mountain  
9 Swamp

17 lands

1 Viscid Lemures  
2 Flowstone Shambler  
1 Brain Gorgers  
1 Muck Drubb  
1 Hammerheim Deadeye  
1 Needlepeak Spider  
1 Prodigal Pyromancer  
1 Torchling

9 creatures

1 Foriysian Totem  
1 Phyrexian Totem  
1 Dark Withering  
1 Feebleness  
2 Tendrils of Corruption  
1 Lightning Axe  
1 Rift Bolt  
1 Fiery Temper  
1 Kor Dirge  
1 Rough // Tumble  
2 Conflagrate  
1 Sarpadian Empires, Vol. VII

14 other spells

## For the Kids...

There were a handful of exciting plays on Day Two that got lost in the shuffle. I poked fun at Kyle Sanchez and Talyor Webb for taking a match point penalty due to a deck registration error but the plan was to give them something back. Late in Day Two Kyle announced triumphantly, "We did it! We lived the dream!"



They had drafted both Akroma's – you know, the ones featured on the super-cool GP–Massachusetts playmat – in the same draft and got them into play at the same time. Of course they did still need **Tromp the Domains** and a couple of **Strength in Numbers** to secure the win.



U.S. National Champion Paul Cheon and his teammate Sam Stein got a turn-five kill with their utterly absurd Sliver deck that featured multiple Sedge, Sinew, and **Bonesplitter Slivers**. That's a **Pulmonic Sliver** hiding underneath the **Battering Sliver** on the end. Seriously, the "bad" cards in this deck are the ones on top. And there were more slivers in the other deck.



The game they won on turn five featured Sidewinder into Sinew into Sedge (with Swamp, natch) into Bonesplitter, and finished the job with Pulmonic. There may have been a green sliver on the other side of the board but this deck might be able to play One-Headed Giant quite successfully in Yokohama.

One of the surprising things for me about covering the GP was enjoying how much I watched players communicate, bluff, and try to obscure information from getting to the other team. You can understand that if you [look at the semifinal coverage](#) where Matt Rubin's team squabbled about **Damnation** in one player's hand and

tipped the eventual champions to its existence. The words, "I am not playing any more creatures if you are going to play that spell" may have been uttered.



Other teams, such as the Quentin Martin-Ruud Warmenhoven duo, took the opposite approach. They tended to point, argue, and gesticulate about cards that were not in either player's hands to make the opponent play into the cards they did have.



Others just chose to speak softly and carry anything to obscure the mouths from their opponents a la a baseball infielder talking behind their mitt. I first noticed it with the team of Brian Siu and Jim Dyke when they fittingly talked behind Dyke's baseball cap.



Old-schooler Mark LePine chose to use his hand to keep his secrets. After starting the tournament with a 7-0, Mark and Mitch Tamblin had a terrible Day Two which included only one win and a match point loss. Under the new penalty guidelines for single game matches players can be penalized one point – a match win is worth three points in the standings – for what would have otherwise been a game loss. There was actually the possibility that LePine's squad could have registered a negative point total on Day Two, which certainly presents some interesting scenarios.



The best image of a team using an object to hide their discussion was Gerard Fabiano and Eric Ziegler, who put Gerard's infamous towel to an intriguing new use.

## Friday Night Madness

I have to say that the FNM foils that I have been previewing every month for the last half a year have me pretty excited about playing [Friday Night Magic](#). [Basking Rootwalla](#) has been a staple card for me in both my Madness and Threshold decks – not to mention my Madness/Threshold hybrids – for years. You can get to work on foiling up your own version of the archetypes – perhaps a Basking Survival deck?



## Firestarter: You and (fill in the blank)

If you could pick one player to play Two-Giant with at Pro Tour–San Diego, who would it be? Head to the forums and let the Jon vs. Kai (vs. Kenji?) debate begin!

*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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