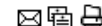


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Knowledge from the Top 16

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, May 4, 2007



Over the past couple of seasons of writing The Week That Was and working in the webcast booth alongside Randy, I have become increasingly aware of the importance of strong finishes outside of the Top 8. Whether they be Virtual Top 8 finishes, top 16 finishes, or even top 32 finishes that were in contention for the Top 8 in the closing rounds, there are compelling stories to be told, lessons to be learned, and decklists to be perused that were not in play on Sunday.

Frank Karsten told the story of his counterless deck, his bucket, and his top 16 finish [earlier this week in his column](#). He also included the metagame breakdown from recent Premier Events which indicated that the **Magic Online** community is also looking outside of the Top 8 for decklists (as Tsuyoshi Fujita's monoblue deck was the second most successful deck in those tournaments).

Tsuyoshi fell out of Top 8 contention during the penultimate Swiss round while Masahiko Morita was still fighting for a Top 8 berth in the final round with the same deck – quite an impressive showing considering they were the only two players with that deck. Tsuyoshi came quite close to joining Morita in the top 16 and had to have felt pretty confident he would get there when his final round opponent mulliganed to four and kept a no-land hand in Game 3.

One land off the top, a [Search for Tomorrow](#), and a couple of [Harmonizes](#) later it was American Dane Young in the top 16 with a bewildered Fujita freefalling to 33rd place. For the 23- year-old Dane, playing in only his third Pro Tour, it was the best finish of his fledgling pro career. The Las Vegas student played a green-red [Stormbind](#) deck that splashed blue for [Aeon Chronicler](#) and the unexpected [Intet](#), the [Dreamer](#), and was the second-highest-finishing American in the tournament.

Dane was kind enough to take some time to participate in a round table discussion about the tournament along with two other players from the top 16. Also in the discussion was Norway's Christian Flaaten – of Gaea's Might Get There fame, as well as an 11th-place finish at 2006 Worlds – who also had some unexpected cards in his deck (such as [Psychotic Episode](#) and [Venarian Glimmer](#)). Rounding out the discussion was 22-year-old student Marijn Lybaert from Oilsjt, Belgium. Marijn was last seen playing in the Top 8 of Pro Tour–Geneva and locked up a Level 3 season with his strong finish playing a mono-red deck in Yokohama.

The first thing I asked of each player was an origin story that led up to their exciting weekend in Japan. I find it fascinating to see the route players take from oohing and aching over [Shivan Dragon](#) in the school cafeteria to playing the game competitively – and from there playing the game successfully. It is interesting to note that there is almost always a time where the players acknowledge the "aha" moment of needing to play tighter or playtest more before they experienced success.

Marijn: I believe friends introduced me to the game in a local store. I believe there were two of the best **Magic** players in Belgium playing in that store at that time. They taught me the basics and told me to play National Qualifiers and such. My first two years of "competitive" **Magic** weren't a big success but after that the PTs kept coming. First Pro Tour–Boston; I qualified by finishing sixth at Grand Prix–Amsterdam, where I was playing for top 4 in the last round. I remember misplaying two rounds and making my friends quite upset but hey, it was my first PT. After that I believe I played seven or eight individual PTs before making a Day Two in Kobe. I ended 54th but my rating – which was pretty high after making it to the finals in GP Toulouse – allowed me to Q for Geneva. And the rest is history!

I'm really happy about being Level 3 after two PTs. It gives me a chance to fight for Level 4 or 5 over the next three PTs. The Player of the Year is nice but I don't think I'm good enough for it yet plus I'm not such a traveler and I won't be playing Grand Prix outside Europe, which makes it very hard to compete with Raphael Levy or Kenji Tsumura. I do believe I can make it to Level 5 though. I've improved a lot in the last year and I'm playing the best **Magic** I ever have – but still there is room for improvement!

Dane: I don't remember the year, but dad took me to one of the local card shops and bought me a starter and four boosters of Revised. I tore open the packs on the way home and was immediately in love with the cool pictures (of course I had no idea what the cards did, being a small child and all) of [Hill Giant](#), [Fireball](#), [Craw Wurm](#), [Lightning Bolt](#), etc. I

PRO TOUR–YOKOHAMA TOP 16

1. Wafo-tapa, Guillaume [FRA]
2. Mitamura, Kazuya [JPN]
3. Herberholz, Mark [USA]
4. Saitou, Tomoharu [JPN]
5. Carvalho, Paulo [PRT]
6. Levy, Raphael [FRA]
7. Oiso, Masashi [JPN]
8. Thaler, Sebastian [DEU]
9. Echeverría Paredes, Jo [CHL]
10. Karsten, Frank [NLD]
11. Morita, Masahiko [JPN]
12. Tenenbaum, Amiel [DEU]
13. Lybaert, Marijn [BEL]
14. Flaaten, Christian [NOR]
15. Young, Dane [USA]
16. Künzler, Matthias [CHE]



Lybaert's last two Pro Tour finishes prove he's a

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RULES

learned to play by the real rules years later and have never *major player*. really stopped playing since, even though my dad hated that I spent so much time on the game.



How that got me to playing for a Top 8 spot in a Pro Tour, I have no idea. My first PTQ was *Mercadian Masques* Block Constructed, where I took my homemade mono-white control deck to a 2-2-2 finish. I had cards like *Wave of Reckoning*, *Mageta*, *Blinding Angel*, and a rebel chain that went all the way up to *Jhovall Queen* in that deck (what a masterpiece). I learned later through reading internet articles that the same archetype was the best in the format, so I was pretty happy about the fact that I had found the best deck on my own, even though I didn't do well with it.

My parents wanted me to spend more time on school so I threw all my cards on eBay (what a mistake) after *Prophecy*, only to get back into the game during *Planeshift*. My first PTQ Top 8 was *Invasion* Block Constructed with *Goblin Trenches*. I punted a game in the semifinals due to being nervous, but the

matchup was not in my favor anyways. I amateur cashed at Grand Prix—Los Angeles (*Onslaught* Rochester Draft), going 0-3 in my last pod to knock myself out of a good finish.

The first Pro Tour I went to was Seattle (*Mirrodin* teams) and we went 1-5 no thanks to me (I won zero matches on the day). After doing so badly in Seattle I took a break from the game and didn't win another PTQ until Kobe right before I moved to Las Vegas. I went 3-3 at the Pro Tour to miss Day Two. I punted the semifinals of a Geneva PTQ in Arizona, so I didn't go to that one, but I think that punt helped me to get better by making me play tighter and look for the correct play in each situation. I qualified for Yokohama in a week-one PTQ with *Scepter-Chant* while I was home for winter break.

Christian: I learned the game from friends around Fourth Edition. I saw them playing some fantasy card game and noticed how cool Beasts of Bogardan looked and that was it, really. I started playing tournaments around *Masques*, after returning from a "Magic Break." During the *Masques/Invasion* Nationals I was a judge and noticed how horrible people were playing, so I decided to take the game more seriously so I could win neat things. I made Top 8 at Nationals the next year – the next two actually.

Although I played seriously, I tended to throw decks together the day before, either on a whim or from net decks, so I never really tested, and usually, I didn't have well-tested decks either. That finally changed in 2006, when I tested a decent bit with *Heartbeat* before Nationals and made top 4 there and thus played in Worlds.

For Worlds I did test Standard, but didn't find any decks other than a mono-white control deck which seemed to roll over to 'Tron. However, Øyvind W. Andersen tested a ton and let me use his decklist and also gave me the full strategy guide to all known matchups. I went 4-2 in Standard and then 5-1 in Extended with a "last-minute thrown-together version" (OK, old habits die hard) of Eivind Nitter's Domain Zoo from Worlds 2005. I had done virtually no testing of Extended and was looking to play blue-green *Heartbeat*, riding on my Standard experience with the deck, but when I heard that deck performed miserably in the PTQ at Worlds I had to rethink. So, I basically tuned the Domain Zoo deck to stand a better chance against Boros which was rumored to be heavily played (cut Bob for *Watchwolfs*, more *Armadillo Cloaks*) and made a completely new sideboard. Ironically my only loss came to Boros, although I would like to say I lost to Jitte and not Boros. However, those results helped me qualify for Yokohama on rating.



Next up was a discussion about where their decks came from and what their preparation method was like. In addition to wondering how much pull the gravity of White Weenie exerted, I was also curious about the individual card choices from Dane's Intet to Christian's Episodes to Marijn's *Greater Gargadons*. I was curious if the idiosyncrasies of their lists had a positive or negative effect on their performance.

Dane: My friends in Las Vegas got away from playing Magic, so I didn't really have anyone to test with. I played a lot of Apprentice against myself, but couldn't find anything I liked until I talked to Adam Prosak. I had a deck that ran a lot of mana acceleration with *Yavimaya Dryad*, *Mwonvuli Acid-Moss*, *Search for Tomorrow*, and just killed with *Hellkites* and *Disintegrates*. Adam was in love with *Hunting Wilds* at the time, so we worked on improving the deck and killing with red *Akroma*, *Hellkites*, *Triskelavus*, *Jedit*, and *Disintegrates*, but it was just no good so I chalked up another wasted Pro Tour thanks to all the time spent working on a bad deck.

Two weeks before the Pro Tour, my friend Hunter Burton from Texas sent me the deck he had been winning with on **Magic Online**. It was a green-blue-red deck with *Spectral Forces*, *Intets*, and *Stormbinds*. It was pretty close to the deck I played at the Pro Tour, but had three Intet, four *Scryb Ranger*, and a shaky mana base including *Fungal Reaches* and *Urza's Factory*. He also had *Call of the Herd* in the deck. I don't really think *Call of the Herd* is good in the block format, especially in a White Weenie/Teferi metagame. Elephants just aren't big enough to fight against *Calciderns* and Teferi

so I cut those for **Sulfur Elementals** to improve the White Weenie matchup, and eventually cut the Rangers for Dead/Gone and another **Forest**. I tested a bit in the queues and a little in the casual room, and my results against White Weenie and Teferi decks were positive, so I figured I'd run it and pray since I didn't get much testing in.

Apparently the deck lined up well against the field minus the other base red-green midrange decks, which I dodged the entire first day. Day Two I unfortunately ran into a bunch of red-green decks, edging out Matthias Kunzler but losing to [eventual Top 8 members] Paulo Carvalho and Sebastian Thaler. I gave up a lot of edge in those matchups because I was focused on beating White Weenie and Teferi decks, so my deck was configured badly for the mirror-type matchups. The land destruction definitely should have been in the maindeck (most of it at least).



Young finished 15th in just his third career Pro Tour.

Hunter's list had three Intet, and like everyone else, I thought it was a joke. He told me they had been very good, but I didn't like having so many of them, so I cut one for a fourth **Stormbind** in the main and went to the 8-mans. I'm pretty sure that every single game I connected with Intet was a win, since no matter what you draw off of his ability, it's a free card. Aside from the **Mind's Desire** ability, he's a 6/6 flyer. I asked Hunter why Intet and not Hellkite, and he said that Intet had just been better, and Intet wins in a straight-up fight.

After a few more games, I was willing to believe it. On Day One of the Pro Tour, I mised at least one free **Harmonize** through Intet against Olivier Ruel. And no, I didn't lose those games. Even though Intet seems like a laughable creature, he's insane and I would never play the deck without him, though I might add some Hellkites if I had to play the deck again. Just being able to play turn-three **Spectral Force**, turn four Intet is ridiculous, as the dragon will refill all of your cards sooner or later. Devin Low even sat down to watch one of my games on Day Two because I had Intet in play but my opponent conceded before I got to attack with it. Sorry Devin!

Dane Young		Pro Tour-Yokohama 2007	
Main Deck 60 cards		Sideboard	
4 Terramorphic Expanse	4 Stormbind	4 Avalanche Riders	
10 Forest	4 Harmonize	4 Mwonvuli Acid-Moss	
6 Mountain	4 Search for Tomorrow	4 Krosan Grip	
4 Island	3 Dead // Gone	1 Dead // Gone	
24 lands	15 other spells	2 Call of the Herd	
4 Spectral Force		15 sideboard cards	
4 Wall of Roots			
4 Vesuvan Shapeshifter			
4 Sulfur Elemental			
3 Aeon Chronicler			
2 Intet, the Dreamer			
21 creatures			

Christian: I playtested mostly with Øyvind Andersen but also some other Norwegians – both online and in person. I tried playing a wide range of decks including White Weenie, blue-red, Teferi in several shapes, slivers and also a little with the "black" deck Øyvind made. We had contact with some fellow Nordic people and some Americans going to Yokohama to pool tech, but it didn't really have an impact. Everyone on the "team" was either dedicated to a deck early – Shaheen Soorani, Øyvind Andersen – or had seemingly no idea what to play until very, very late.

I finally chose Øyvind's deck because I knew it was well-tested, I knew its gameplan after having played with it a little and played against it – a lot – and also because I knew it had a solid chance against White Weenie. It should also have a decent shot against any Weenie hate, as the way to hate White Weenie seemed to be playing weak red creatures.

The discard spells were there to make sure Teferi didn't have the chance to go broken. If they play their creatures as they get them, they will just die to the massive amount of removal and thus they will lose. Their game plan needed to be more defensive, trying to collect as much brokenness as they could and then have a massive turn. The discard tried to punch holes in this gameplan. **Psychotic Episode** is often quite useful against other decks too, as you get a lot of information and get to remove their best card (even a land). Glimmer was there in place of the fourth Episode because you can play **Mystical Teachings** to get it. The information I got from



Flaaten followed up an 11th-place finish at Worlds by finishing 14th at Yokohama.

the discard spells helped me a fair bit during the weekend, but a weakness with discard is that it can't deal with what's coming next off the opponent's deck. I died to topdecked burn two turns after an Episode had cleared the way in Round 1 and Gabriel Nassif had a tendency to draw the most powerful spell possible the turn after Glimmer.

Christian Flaaten		Pro Tour-Yokohama 2007			
Main Deck		Sideboard			
60 cards					
10 Swamp	4 Damnation	4 Plague Sliver			
3 Dreadship Reef	4 Sudden Death	3 Sengir Nosferatu			
3 Urza's Factory	3 Tendrils of Corruption	3 Enslave			
2 Urborg, Tomb of Yawgmoth	3 Psychotic Episode	1 Haunting Hymn			
1 Plains	3 Mystical Teachings	1 Tendrils of Corruption			
1 Island	1 Pull from Eternity	1 Island			
4 Terramorphic Expanse	1 Spell Burst	1 Imp's Mischief			
	1 Disenchant	1 Psychotic Episode			
24 lands	1 Extirpate				
	1 Venarian Glimmer				
4 Aeon Chronicler	4 Prismatic Lens	15 sideboard cards			
3 Twisted Abomination	2 Phyrexian Totem				
1 Draining Whelk					
8 creatures	28 other spells				

Marijn: Together with Jan Doise, Fried Meulders and Christophe Gregoir we mainly tested online in the 8-man queues or against each other. I tested a lot of decks but it was only until two days before the tournament that I made this mono-red build.

Why? I like playing aggro and White Weenie wasn't an option. Before I left to Tokyo, where we went sightseeing for one week, I was planning on playing White Weenie. In the next four or five days I didn't manage to find one single good matchup against our other decks. So back to Plan B – build another aggro deck that has a good matchup against White Weenie and does well against the other decks. So I ended up with mono-red. If played well, the deck has good matchups against White Weenie and blue-black.

I haven't read Raphael's story about the Pro Tour, but it wouldn't surprise me if he said, "If I had to play this deck again I would certainly add those **Greater Gargadons** to the maindeck." This card is just so powerful. It lets you resolve big **Disintegrates** because if people tap, out there might be a 9/7 coming your way and it's also a very good answer to game-winning **Tendrils of Corruption**.

Marijn Lybaert		Pro Tour-Yokohama 2007			
Main Deck		Sideboard			
60 cards					
4 Desert	4 Rift Bolt	4 Avalanche Riders			
1 Pendelhaven	3 Dead // Gone	4 Serrated Arrows			
19 Mountain	4 Disintegrate	3 Wildfire Emissary			
24 lands	11 other spells	1 Dead // Gone			
		3 Word of Seizing			
2 Jaya Ballard, Task Mage		15 sideboard cards			
4 Magus of the Scroll					
4 Blood Knight					
4 Greater Gargadon					
4 Sulfur Elemental					
3 Mogg War Marshal					
4 Keldon Marauders					
25 creatures					

As players from around the world look over these decklists and begin choosing their weapons for the upcoming PTQ battles, I was curious what these three players thought of their own decks. If they woke up this morning to find out that the entire Pro Tour had been a prophetic dream, would they still play the deck they chose?

Christian: I think I would have played the Nassif/Herberholz deck, which is pretty much the same deck just with counterspells over discard and thus more **Islands**. I had suggested that option for the deck we played too, but the loss of **Swamps** made the matchup against White Weenie worse. However, White Weenie didn't show up in full force, really, so that point was rendered fairly moot.

Marijn: Yep, most certainly. I might change three or four cards though.

Dane: I probably wouldn't play the same deck again but it would be a close second to what I would play. I would either play something similar to Thaler or some kind of mono-red Aggro deck – maybe even a take on Tomoharu Saito's deck with Gargadons so that I could have a combo **Timbermare** plus Gargadon endgame. Gargadon also makes Mogg War-Marshall a real creature. Of course, if I had a better list, my deck would have been very good. I think.

For players without a lot of Pro Tour experience, knowing when it went wrong is a key skill, so I wanted to know where each player felt that their Top 8 chances were derailed. Was there some crucial play, card decision, or matchup that was the difference between a top 16 finish and a shot at hoisting the trophy and fitting the novelty check into the overhead bins on the flight home?

Christian: I started Day Two with two losses then had a draw against Rob Dougherty in the fourth round of the day. I won the last four rounds to place in the top 16 and I'm very happy about that. The two losses I started the day with were both due to taking very calculated risks with **Phyrexian Totem** only to have a blue-red deck show me a surprise **Lightning Axe** after board. Normally that is a card you'd take out, but he had some previous experience against my exact decklist so he knew **Plague Slivers** came in and then see Nassif show me the third Tendrils for eleven a couple of turns after an Episode.

Dane: I didn't test nearly enough, so I configured my deck poorly, and basically played the entire Pro Tour with a nine-card sideboard. I definitely should have had land destruction in the main, with **Sulfur Elemental** and/or **Fortune Thief** in the sideboard. I would play some number of Hellkites in the main, and not have the full amount of Shapeshifters in the main deck. The six blanks in my sideboard were four **Krosan Grip** and two **Call of the Herd**.

The night before the PT I moved three Dead/Gone to the main and had no clue what to add to the board. I figured **Call of the Herd** would be fine against most decks and that I didn't want to lose to some crazy **Null Profusion** or **Wild Pair** deck, so I added a fourth **Krosan Grip**. I figured the Grips would be all right in the mirror and against **Griffin Guide**, but **Stormbind** is not even close to the key card, and I played against zero White Weenie, so the Grips were terrible. Also, having moved those three Dead/Gone to the maindeck threw off my sideboard plans, so I was forced to wing it the whole time. That probably cost me a game or two.

The dream ended when I had to play against Heezy, Masahiko Morita, and Sebastian Thaler consecutively in the second half of Day Two. Heezy is a master and his deck was really good so I got crushed, I boarded poorly against Morita, bringing in the LD when I shouldn't have, and lost to his infinite **Riftwing Cloudskates**, and lost to Thaler's huge endgame spells after drawing a ton of land for most of the match. I'm almost positive I boarded incorrectly against Thaler too, but he stole Game 1 with an early Acid-Moss to set me way back and he just took over from there.

Marijn: In Round 7 I lost to Masashi Oiso and his red-green deck. The matchup was bad and I didn't sideboard very well. If I had tested a little bit more with this deck I could have figured out how to beat red-green. I was pretty clueless in that round about how to sideboard.

Still with an eye toward the upcoming PTQ season, I asked the players what other decks stood out for them from the event. I also wanted to get their take on what impact **Future Sight** will have on the format.

Marijn: Maybe the mono-blue deck or the **Wild Pair** deck. I believe the guy piloting the **Wild Pair** deck was playing for top 16 in the last round. [Shohei Yamamoto finished 31st, losing to Flaaten in the final round.]

I hope it will be **Magus of the Vineyard**. I remember that one of my first Constructed decks had four **Eladamri's Vineyard** (from *Tempest*) and I so love this card. If not that guy I can see how the new lands will allow a lot of new color combinations.

Christian: A deck that always stood out for me *except* from the event is White Weenie. I still think White Weenie is *really* good, actually. If people dismiss it after the Pro Tour, I think they are doing themselves a disfavor. I couldn't beat it consistently even with a blue-red deck with four **Sulfur Elementals** and four Shapeshifters on top of lots of removal.

I haven't had a chance to really study the full **Future Sight** list yet, but mono-green aggro seems like it will have all the tools it needs now: efficient small creatures with utility against everything, huge fat threats, and lots of card drawing.

Dane: I liked the mono-red decks a lot, both the Rubin/De Rosa and Pelcak versions. I had a list on **Magic Online** similar to what Cak played with **Wildfire Emissary** main, and it was pretty good, but I didn't think it was very good against the control decks so I didn't worry too much about it. However, I don't know if the format is good for the mono-red deck anymore, as I would guess there will be very few White Weenie decks to prey on.



I don't know all of the cards from *Future Sight*, but I assume **Centaur Omenreader** (with **Grinning Ignus**) will create good Storm decks, **Keldon Megaliths** looks useful for red decks, **Thunderblade Charge** is insane for red decks, **Imperiosaur** is a solid guy for decks like the one I played at the Pro Tour, and **Magus of the Moon** seems really good against the multicolor control decks relying on storage lands and Urborg. **Delay** is ridiculously good. **Tombstalker** could be the best card with a casting cost in the set. **Venser** and **Take Possession** are both very good for blue control decks, and all four of these cards could cause a shift from four colors back to a more blue-black base for control. **Tolaria West** might be good, but block might be too narrow a format to abuse it in ... same with **Cloud Key**.

The Grandeur creatures seem good, with Korlash being the most insane one by himself. Linessa's Grandeur ability is very good, but I doubt she has a home in any deck. Oriss makes for Block Constructed scepter-chant (however fragile) with **Teferi** and **Undertaker**. Tarox seems like a solid guy, with the ability to just kill the opponent out of nowhere. Baru doesn't seem like he has a home in the format.

We'll have to see what happens with the Pact cycle. The blue one is obviously insane, but definitely best in combo decks (even better in bigger formats). I can see the red and green ones being good in combo decks, but not much else.

Friday Night Flights!

We have seen **Aquamoeba**, **Wild Mongrel**, and **Circular Logic** tricked out for Friday Night Magic foilliness, but what Madness deck would you be able to build without a little **Wonder**? Starting tonight you can win this bad boy at your local store and all month long!



Firestarter: Self Improvement

I have continually noticed that successful players can cite a moment where they discovered an area of their game that needed improving prior to making a leap to the next level. Take a moment to review your personal game and where you could be improving your play. Feel free to share your introspection 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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