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Auctions, Cubes, and Winstons...Oh My!

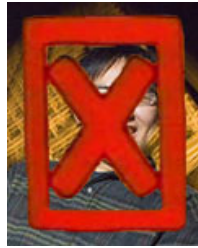
*Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, September 14,
2007*



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

The Invitational field for Essen has finally been settled...yeah, yeah...I know you thought it had already been settled, but a funny thing happened on the way to the world's largest gaming convention. Every year there is a little bit of a shuffle as some players cannot make the tournament for various reasons and slots then pass down. Reigning World Champion Makihito Mihara can barely find time to attend Pro Tours due to the demands of his job, so the invitation to play one weekend after Valencia was politely declined.

When a player passes on an invite within a voted upon category, the spot passes down to the next highest vote-getter. When a title holder passes on the invite, the slot gets passed down the Fan Favorite ballot. That should be good news for Olivier Ruel...if not for a Grand Prix scheduled opposite the Invitational in Brisbane, Australia. Oliver has 35 points in the Player of the Year race and has Level 5 just within his reach (not to mention a reasonable shot at Level 6). Plus, he had already booked his ticket to Australia.



Final Wrap-up
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So...congratulations Craig Jones! I look forward to reading your Field Journal from the Invitational.

If you read my coverage from Japanese Nationals, you already know that Tomoharu Saito is a man on a mission. As much as Saito would love to attend the Invitational, he wants to be the Player of the Year much more dearly. No longer content with being the PoY-maker, Saito saw Brisbane as an opportunity to put some distance between him and Kenji Tsumura (who currently sits two points behind PoY leader Saito). His invitation passes down to the runner-up on the APAC ballot, Shuhei Nakamura.

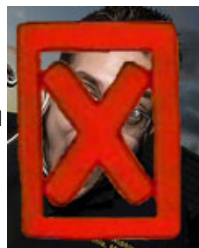
But would Shuhei take the invitation? After back-to-back Level 6 seasons, Shuhei is running way behind schedule this year if wants to three-peat. As much as it pained Shuhei to pass on the possibility of winning Grand Prix Pro Points, he wanted the chance to play in the Invitational far more and is going to make the trip from Valencia to Essen.



Could there be any question that Kenji would use his invitation? Common sense would tell you that Kenji could not afford to attend the Invitational with Saito headed down under. We have seen Player of the Year races come down to the points earned at a single Grand Prix year in and year out. Throw in the strain of constant travel and it is hard to imagine any player dedicated to the PoY race skipping a Grand Prix without actually taking a week off from globe-trotting competition. There was some question it turns out, even for Kenji, but in the end he accepted his chance to be immortalized on a **Magic** card. It will be fun to keep an eye on his and Saito's performances that weekend to see if any distance gets put between them in the Sprint to the Title...and if Kenji can make up that distance over the remainder of the season.

The remaining invite flux for Essen happened in the North America category. Mark Herberholz is trying to complete his degree while drawing up Valencia decklists on the back of his bottomed-out bank statements. Plus, he felt that Richard Hoaen was unfairly left off the Limited Master ballot and was all too happy to send the grumpy Canadian to Germany in his stead.

With Rich's confirmation that he would attend, the field of 16 Invitationalists was firmed up. The only question that remained was what formats they would be playing. I caught up with Invitational mastermind Mark Rosewater and got the lowdown on what formats these players would be battling in. Two of them were already revealed but Mark pulled the curtain back on the remaining three and discussed the possibilities that were opened up by having the Invitational not take place on **Magic Online** for the first time in years.



Auction of the People

The Auction of the (noun) format has been around for years, going back to before the move to holding the Invitational online and right up through last year's Auction of the Geniuses. That moved the act of taking deck

submissions from this site's readers to prominent deck builders (including this year's R&D pick Stephen Menendian), who were asked to submit decks for players to bid on.

"This year we have returned the Auction to the People," declared Mark. Readers have already submitted decks and the 17 decks for the auction will be announced in Chris Millar's House of Cards next week. The hook behind this year's decks is that they must feature 26 unique cards starting with each letter of the alphabet (excluding basic lands).

Competitors will bid on the decks by offering to start each with the deck with a lower life total or starting hand size. All bidding begins at 8 cards and 25 life, with cards in hand trumping life total for the purposes of bidding. For example, if I bid 8 cards and 15 life for a deck, I could be outbid by anyone willing to bid 7 cards and 25 life. With 16 gamers this is a fascinating process to watch. Players will feint at decks they don't want in order to get players to start with lower life totals and—more importantly—fewer cards.

Of course sometimes it backfires—or is even a trap—and the person trying to spur the bidding gets stuck with a deck they don't want at a price they were not prepared to play the deck at. The one time I got to watch this firsthand was in 2005 when Bob Maher and Gabriel Nassif—two of the very best to ever play the game—[jostled, cajoled, and taunted players into paying more than they wanted for decks](#). It was as almost more fun that watching any of the actual matches play out with a highlight moment being when Osyp tried to get people to bid on the deck nobody wanted.

Special thanks go out to Pete Hoefling and [StarCityGames.com](#), which will be supplying the physical cards for each deck.

Vintage

"The reason we are doing Vintage as a format is a return to having the Invitational offline," explained Mark. "We used to play a lot more Vintage at the Invitational and have not been able to feature the format for years."

In fact, the last time Vintage was used to determine an Invitational winner was in 2000 when the [Shadowmage Infiltrator](#) was born. It was long enough ago that the format was still called Type 1 and [the decks](#) bear little resemblance to the oxymoronic modern Vintage format.

All eyes will no doubt be on Stephen Menendian, who is the reigning Vintage Champion. There is always a small cloud of controversy whenever people discuss Vintage in the context of **Magic** pros. Three rounds of play is admittedly a small sample size but I will certainly be eager to see if any of the Pros can bring something new and innovative to the table or if they will be taught the ins and outs of the format by one its top players.

Cube Draft

The first time I ever played in a Cube Draft was at Grand Prix–Pittsburgh, not too long after Aaron Forsythe won a spot on the U.S. National team. I had never met Aaron before but he came up and invited me to play in what was then called Big Box. Aaron's box contained one copy of every good card that had been printed to date and was distributed in three piles of 15 to each player in the draft. Every pack contained 15 cards, each of which could easily be a first pick in any ordinary booster.

I earned an approving nod from Aaron when he found out that I had taken an early Sol Ring over some more flashy options. Aaron's love for the format has never waned and he fought really hard to bring Cube Draft to the Invitational. His Cube will contain 720 cards hand-picked by Aaron and his fellow cube-connoisseur Paul Sottosanti. He promised that array of cards—which is 48 packs of 15 cards—will be "the best of all time including everything from Moxes to Planeswalkers."

For more information about Cube Drafts, click [here](#).

Mark said he incorporated the format as one of the two Limited formats for this tournament because "it features all the fun of drafting with card valuations put into a historical perspective."

Make Your Own Standard

This is an interesting twist on Build Your Own Block that will not only pit the great Standard decks from the past decade against each other, but also allow for fantasy Standard formats. Players can choose any base set from *Fifth Edition* forward and pair it with any two block formats to build a deck.

You want your Standard to be *Tenth-Ravnica-Invasion*? Done. *Mirrodin-Urza-Eighth*? No problem. One can see where a creative deckbuilder could spend days trying to come up with the broken-est combination of blocks.

Any cards that appear on the Legacy banned list or a Block Constructed banned list will be banned in this format. If *Ice Age* is one of the blocks, then a player would not be able to play with *Necropotence* but would be able to play *Counterspell* and pair it with *Counterbalance* from *Coldsnap*. Sorry *Homelands*—there is no home for you in this format.

Mark said this format was born from the question: "What if we gave you access to everything but didn't allow you to use it all? Players will be able to choose almost any of the great Standard decks from throughout the years.



They can also play any of the great block decks and shore them up with cards from a base set and another block."

Winston Draft

"We have very few opportunities to showcase fun formats," Mark prefaced as he introduced me to the concept of Winston Draft, the final format for this year's tournament. "This is a fun, skill testing format that allows people to draft one on one."

The format was invented many years ago by Richard Garfield and it was originally called "Let's Make a Deal." It's a two-player draft format in which each player opens up the contents of three boosters without looking at them. The players then shuffle the 90 cards together and place them in the center of the table in one stack. One card each is dealt face down into three positions—A, B, and C—and the player who is going first has to make a decision at each pile starting with A.

The first player looks at the contents of pile A and then can either select that pile or move onto the B pile. If the player chooses to move to B, a card is added facedown to pile A and the player looks at what's in pile B. If the player chooses not to take the B pile, a card is added to it and he moves on to pile C (again looking at its contents). If the player chooses to pass on pile C, he gets the top card from the deck. Anytime a player selects a pile, that pile is started anew with a fresh card from the deck. Every time a pile is passed over, it continues to accumulate cards until a player decides to cash in on the quantity (if not the quality).

"We have been playing this format for a very long time," said Mark. "It is something we have always wanted to expose people to—Winston Draft is a great way to one-on-one draft."

The Winston Draft at the Invitational will use three packs of *Lorwyn* per player. It will also be interesting to see what kind of grasp the players have on card valuations in the new *Lorwyn* Limited formats.

So how did the format's name change to Winston draft? Apparently Richard demonstrated the format using a deck of promotional playing cards that advertised Winston cigarettes and somehow that name was the one that stuck.

"People have missed the wacky formats and because of the move to playing the Invitational offline we can embrace our roots," said Mark. "I believe all five formats this year are very skill testing—and skill test very different skills!"

Friday Night Magic: Can't Afford the Original Art?

If you have a several hundred dollars just lying around you can pick up the original artwork to *Wing Shards* by Daren Bader, who is pictured to the right showing off some of his original art. (Sorry, the *Deep Analysis* is off the market...I bought it at Japanese Nationals.)

If you are looking for a less expensive way to show your love for the storm removal spell, you can head to your local store all month and win the tricked out foil version at [Friday Night Magic](#).



Firestarter: Can Kenji Catch Up?

Kenji Tsumura, despite being two points behind Tomoharu Saito in the Sprint to the Title for Player of the Year, is not attending Grand Prix–Brisbane in order to play in the Invitational. What do you think of Saito's decision to skip in order to get a leg up in the race? Do you think Kenji can make up the lost ground in the remaining events? Head to the forums and share your thoughts on this. (Feel free to comment on the Invitational formats as well.)

*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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