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On Top of His Game

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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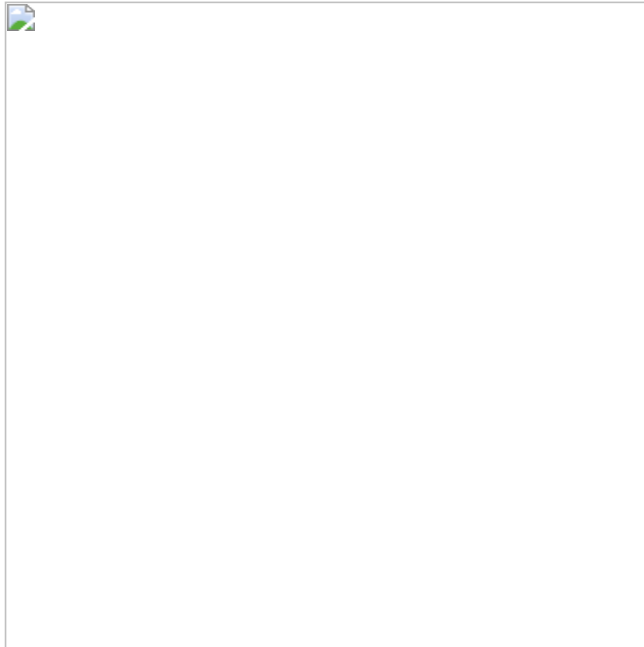


Remi Fortier knew his life was about to change as he activated his **Sensei's Divining Top** in the soon-to-be final game of **Pro Tour-Valencia**.

"When I used my Top and saw Venser..." said Remi with a fleeting smile. The smile may have come and gone very quickly but it was more than he allowed himself to do throughout the Top 8. "I knew I was about to win \$40,000."

His opponent at the time was Germany's Andre Mueller, who had zeroed in on those Vensers when looking over the 16 year-old's decklist. Mueller was playing an **Enduring Ideal** deck that allowed him to power out the eponymous epic spell by sacrificing his **Invasion** lands. Under quick pressure from Remi, Andre had to hope that Remi did not have the Venser in hand or within the top three cards of his deck, but there was virtually no way for Andre to win the game.

A few minutes later Remi was wandering around in a daze looking for his socks and shoes. As soon as the match was finished he was twirled away into a whirlwind of photo opportunities and interviews and congratulatory high-fives. First up for Remi was the trophy shot with Pro Tour photographer extraordinaire Craig Gibson. In an effort to frame the shot correctly both Craig and Remi shucked their shoes and socks and waded out into the reflecting pool by the Ciudad De Las Artes Y Las Ciencias (the very pools that flooded the venue during Thursday's downpour). His feet barely had time to dry before Remi was facing an army of reporters including me, Rich Hagon, and Evan Erwin wielding an assortment of recording devices.



Fortier was the toast of Valencia, thanks to Venser...and a little rain delay.

Remi padded back and forth across the tiled patio searching not only for his shoes but Pierre Canali, who had agreed to help him with his English as the queue of reporters grew. Ultimately he was reunited with his footwear, his back was slapped roughly a hundred more times, and Canali was corralled and Remi's reign as a Pro Tour champion was under way...not that he ever expected such a thing coming into the tournament or even coming into Day Two.

"I wanted to finish in the Top 50 for Kuala Lumpur," said Remi of his pre-event expectations. "Then the first day was good and I talked with Antoine Ruel who told me that I could make Top 8. I did not believe him. On Day Two I won my first match and I started to believe him a little. I won the second match and I was very, very happy."

From there Remi was in a position to draw his final match and secure his Top 8 berth. As he looked over his matchup against Rock-wielding Slovenian Tine Rus, the notion of being a Pro Tour champion did not even cross Remi's mind.

"I thought I was going to lose because I was playing a **Counterbalance** deck with a lot of low casting costs and my opponent was playing Rock. My most expensive spell is four—and I only have two—while my opponent was playing **Loxodon Hierarch**, **Genesis**, **Gifts Ungiven**."

Pernicious Deed was also a concern for Remi who feared for his Moxes and creatures alike. Despite his concern, Remi quickly went up two games to zero against Tine but just as fast he found himself along the ropes in Game 5 with little room to get out from under a barrage of body blows from the Gifts Rock player taking part in his first Pro Tour. Remi needed every card he could muster from his deck with **Sensei's Divining Top** and was able to Explosives away a board of four-casting cost critters, find a crucial counterspell, and dig up a dragon-slaying **Putrefy** to seal the game and advance to the semis.

This was only Remi's third Pro Tour and the first time he has been anywhere near the Top 8. He missed the cut to Day Two in Honolulu last year at only 14 years old and was near the bottom of the standings in Yokohama. It did not even occur to Fortier that under normal circumstances—not having Day One rained out, the tournament compressed into 13 rounds, and playing Day Two and the Top 8 out on the same day—he would have had a full

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evening to examine the decklists of the players in his bracket and put his powerhouse French support group, that included Ruel, Canali, and Guillaume Wafo-Tapa to work testing out the matchups.

The decklist that Remi was using was a **Magic Online**-born deck chock full of good cards. I had an opportunity to see the deck in action watching premier-event replays in the days leading up to the Pro Tour when one of the deck's creators met Luis Scott-Vargas in the finals. The deck seemingly had the most powerful cards available from each legal set—**Trinket Mage**, **Loxodon Hierarch**, **Sensei's Divining Top**, **Umezawa's Jitte**, **Dark Confidant**, and **Tarmogoyf**. One of the exciting interactions of the deck from that PE was the use of **Riptide Laboratory** to get multiple uses out of **Trinket Mage**, save **Dark Confidant**, and even get a recursive Venser going. That element was gone by the time the deck made it to the Pro Tour and I asked Remi about the origins of Chase Rare Control.

"The deck was designed by Manuel Bucher—ManuelB on MTGO—and Jonathan Rispal," explained Fortier. "The deck started out blue-black but when they saw how amazing **Tarmogoyf** was we put green in. For the mirror match and against aggressive decks they put in white for **Loxodon Hierarch**."

Fortier had played with the deck but did not feel fully confident with it coming into the tournament as he could not get an accurate assessment of what the metagame would be like. Then it started raining.

"The day before the PT I was going to play Blue-white Tron and then Day One was cancelled," grinned Fortier. "I had one more day to test and I decided to play the deck of Jonathan Rispal thanks to the rain."

"I love rain!"

"There was one [**Riptide Laboratory**] but I removed it from my list because the manabase is five color and I need lands that don't produce colorless mana," he continued. "**Academy Ruins** was too powerful with **Engineered Explosives** because you can destroy all the permanents against Rock and against **Dredge** you can keep getting back **Tormod's Crypt**. After the rains I made the change. Manuel Bucher and Jonathan Rispal both decided to play no colorless lands but **Academy Ruins** is just so good. I tried to get them to play it but they said no."

Fortier has been playing **Magic** since the release of **Torment**, albeit only casually until the release of the **Kamigawa** block when he embarked on the road that led him our interview.

"I started playing in PTQs at **Kamigawa** block and my first Pro Tour was Honolulu," said Fortier. "I had to win for Day Two but I got a draw against Ryo Ogura. I was playing **Greater Good**."

Many 14-year-old **Magic** players would be thrilled with a strong Day One performance at their first Pro Tour, but the standards in France are pretty high. Fortier sniffed at his finish in Honolulu and looked over at Canali. "He won his first Pro Tour."

Fortier became the sixth Pro Tour champion from France adding his name to a list that includes Farid Meraghni, Pierre Canali, Gabriel Nassif, Antoine Ruel, and Guillaume Wafo-Tapa. It was the latter's influence that helped Remi remain so calm and collected throughout the Top 8.

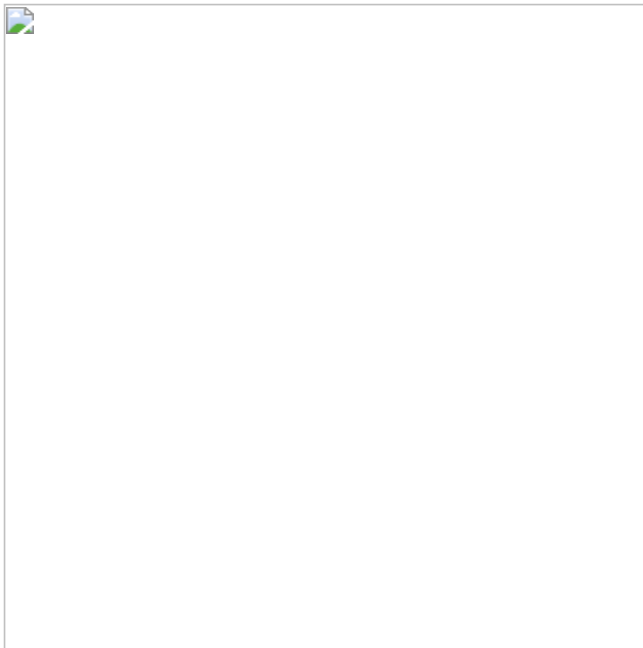
"I tried to be like Guillaume," he said when asked about his quiet style of play.

The victory was also the third straight Extended title for France. When asked about the French affinity for the format, Fortier chalked the streak up to luck and good pairings but when pushed further he added that: "In Columbus Canali's list was very, very good and in Los Angeles Antoine played really good."

Antoine Ruel wandered over at this point, completing the triptych of Extended champions, and gestured for Remi to use stronger words when discussing how he played. "Try great," Antoine laughed. He had a different theory as to the country's success in the format. "The thing is we are soooo unlucky in draft that it comes back to us in Extended."

"I knew he was going to do well," said Antoine, not wanting to steer the limelight away from the freshly crowned champ. "On Day Two I told him the PT was his."

"I did not believe him," said Fortier with a shake of his head which seemed to indicate he was still having a hard time believing that any of this experience was real. He started the tournament hoping to qualify for Kuala Lumpur and found himself with \$40,000 and an invite to Worlds as well.



Antoine Ruel, left, and Pierre Canali joined Remi for a little post-event celebration.

"New York is a very good city," said Fortier when asked if he would attend the year-end tournament. He was now hoping to find five points to get to Level 4 and cannot realistically hit any of the remaining GPs as a high school student.

"The next season of the Pro Tour is going to be very expensive and Level 4 would be nice to make it less so..."

Pierre and Antoine started throwing cups and napkins at the young winner, who had just won \$40,000 yet he was worried about his travel expenses. Then Antoine reconsidered, "It is going to take him something like \$20,000 of it to learn how to draft."

Player of Year Watch

The big story coming into Valencia was the Player of the Year race. Tomoharu Saito had a narrow two-point lead over Kenji Tsumura and both players were hoping to change that in Spain, but neither had a spectacular tournament and maintained parity with three total points apiece. When it became apparent that neither player would be padding their point total all eyes turned to Paul Cheon. He started off the tournament with a 6-0 run and was fourteen points back of the lead, but he went 1-3 over the rest of Day One and did not gain much ground at all.

Quietly, it was Pro Tour–Yokohama winner Guillaume Wafo-Tapa who made the most headway this weekend. He racked up yet another Top 16 finish for his already impressive Constructed resume and gained a full five points on both Kenji and Saito with his eight-point total and leapfrogged Shingou Kurihara. He is in third place with only five points separating himself from the leader—for now.

Guillaume is playing in the [Magic Invitational](#) this weekend—as are other PoY candidates Kenji Tsumura and Raphael Levy—and will not be able to avail himself of any Pro Points from down under. Tomoharu Saito won the APAC ballot for the Invitational but elected to decline in the hopes of padding his POY lead at Grand Prix–Brisbane this weekend. Also passing on an Invitational berth for a *Lorwyn* Limited weekend was Olivier Ruel, who has put together a remarkable comeback season and is only two points off from Level 5 status and still has to be considered a viable dark horse in the PoY race.

You can follow all the action from Germany and Australia in the Tournament Center to see if Saito can extend his PoY lead and if Kenji Tsumura can make sure no one loses to a Pact on his watch. Take a gander at Kenji's Invitational submission:



Name	Pro Points
1. Tomoharu Saito	53
2. Kenji Tsumura	51
3. Guillaume Wafo-Tapa	48
4. Shingou Kurihara	43
5. Paul Cheon	41
5. Raphael Levy	41
7. Mark Herberholz	38
7. Olivier Ruel	38
9. Mike Hron	37
10. Shuhei Nakamura	37

• For complete standings, click [here](#).

I Hate Pacts

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Enchantment

All players skip all upkeep steps. Whenever you skip an upkeep step, put a kogamo counter on CARDNAME.

Remove three kogamo counters from CARDNAME: Draw a card.

WorldsCon

If you were listening to the Top 8 webcast from Pro Tour–Valencia, you should already be aware of the exciting news about this year's World Championships. Wizards of the Coast is [giving away a \\$30,000 car](#) via a series of public tournaments at Worlds.

"That's right. We're giving away a car," beamed Scott Larabee when I interviewed him about this several weeks ago. This was the announcement that I had teased out a couple of weeks ago but it was held up and revealed during the webcast instead. I have had to keep a lot of secrets throughout my involvement with **Magic**, and this may very well have been the toughest to sit on for two weeks.

"Hopefully we can play the finals on Sunday at Worlds on the hood of the car!" added Scott before explaining how players can qualify for this event. "There will be nine public events on the schedule at WorldsCon— tentatively called

Vroom Events—which will qualify either the Top 2 players or Top 2 Two-Headed Giant teams for the car tournament."

You can see a complete list of Public Events, including the Vroom Events, [here](#).

The other eight slots will come from Northeast Challenge events being held in about 100 stores around the Northeast on November 18th. Each tournament will qualify its Top 2 players to compete in the Northeast Challenge on Friday of Worlds Con, which will advance its Top 8 into the car tournament to take the remaining spots.

Over the last few months I have been emailed by countless people looking to find qualifiers for Worlds despite the fact that the tournament itself is just one facet of an amazing **Magic** weekend that includes card dealers, public events, artist signings, your favorite Wizards of the Coast personalities, gunslinging, the Hall of Fame induction of Kai Budde, Zvi Mowshowitz, Nicolai Herzog, Tsuyoshi Fujita, and Randy Buehler, and so much more.

Play your cards right and this could be yours at Worlds.

The shift in emphasis from World Championships to Worlds Con should underscore the fact that this will be an amazing spectacle for anyone who loves **Magic**—much like **Magic** Weekend is about a lot more than just the U.S. National Championships. If you are anywhere near New York City during that first week of December, I strongly urge you to come down and check out the Javits Center and play a little **Magic**. Who knows...you might drive away in a brand new car.

Firestarter: Lorwyn Limited Likelihood

Grand Prix–Brisbane will be our first high level look at *Lorwyn* Limited. Of all the tribes that will be clashing at the top tables, which one will earn the most money? Have you drafted the set at all yet? Will the Merrow deplete all the libraries before the Kithkin can conquer life totals? Or will Giants just crush the field with a deafening **Thundercloud Shaman**? Head to the forums and share your predictions there and be sure to follow the coverage all weekend long in the Tournament Center.

*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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