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Friday, January 18, 2008

The dust of 2007 has finally settled and we have a clear view of the coming season. Players can look down the 2008 corridor to see exactly what thresholds they will need to cross if they are to have a chance at dethroning the reigning Player of the Year Tomoharu Saito. Peering down the hallway, we can see that the 2008 schedule has been finalized, there are some significant changes to the Pro Players Club, extra incentives have been put on the summer stretch of Grand Prix and National Championships, and how even more players will have a chance to compete at the highest levels of the game all over the world.

Pro Tour–Kuala Lumpur is looming on the horizon and will be the first high-level event featuring the new Limited format with the addition of *Morningtide*. Players who are currently grinding it out on the PTQ level are well aware that the Pro Tour next on the schedule is Pro Tour–Hollywood, and will be the first Pro Tour since Honolulu to put Standard on display.

With Kuala Lumpur and Hollywood already on the docket, players have wondered where the remaining Pro Tour events this year would be held. After Hollywood, the next PT on the schedule will be Pro Tour–Berlin on October 31–November 2 and the format will be Extended. This will be the Pro Tour's first trip back to Germany since the 2003 World Championships, which were also held in Berlin.

The Pro Tour year is going to close with the 2008 World Championships on December 11–14 in Memphis, Tennessee. High-ranking members of Wizards' Organized Play and R&D departments are still debating formats, so look for that announcement in the coming months.

Let's start looking at some of the changes by turning our attention to the newly refigured Pro Players Club, which now features eight distinct levels and an exciting new way for players to qualify for a Pro Tour of their choice—plus it gives something back to some of the Level 3 players from last season. Two new levels have been added and all the levels renumbered (see chart to the right).

"A new level has been added between the old Levels 2 and 3," explained DCI Program Manager Scott Larabee. "This level will offer one Pro Tour invitation of the player's choice during the current season. This level and benefit was added in response to player feedback regarding the previous Level 2 benefits. Giving these players a Pro Tour invite should offer an opportunity for these players to more easily reach the previous Level 3."

Along with the benefits at the 15-point level, another level has been added between the previous Levels 3 and 4.

"This level offers \$250 to each Pro Tour attended by the player," continued Larabee. "When we

announced a few weeks ago that we were cutting the \$500 appearance fees for Pro Tours, we received some valuable feedback from the players affected. While this change does not completely

Pro Players Club Level Changes		
Old Level	New Level	Pro Points Required
1	1	1
2	2	10
n/a	3	15
3	4	20
n/a	5	25
4	6	30
5	7	40
6	8	50
Full details for the updated Pro Club levels can be seen here .		

address that issue, it should help with the concerns of these players."

Larabee also noted that the Pro Tour Hall of Fame benefit that bestowed Level 3 Pro Club status to its members will be bumped up to Level 5, which means Hall of Famers will receive the \$250 appearance fee.

"Additionally, previous Levels 4-6 have had \$250 added to their Pro Tour appearance fees. Both of the appearance fee-related changes allow the affected players to still enjoy the full benefits of the Pro Club despite the loss of a Pro Tour."

Under the previous system there seemed to be little distinction between Level 1 and Level 2 benefits, and the Level 2 failed to provide any handhold for players looking to jump onto the Pro Tour gravy train. Now those players will get a taste of the Pro Tour—and the chance that comes with said invitation to rack up a big Pro Point payday, like what Mike Hron, Jacob Van Lunen, Chris Lachmann, and Remi Fortier did last season with their PT wins.

This should be a tremendous tool for players looking to reach the elusive Level 5 (formerly Level 3), since it's a way for lower-tier players to earn a slot at Worlds if they didn't qualify by rating or on their National Team. Because the new Level 3 invitation is only useable the season in which you reach that status, anyone who crests the 15-point barrier by Berlin will likely be packing their bags for Memphis and that last shot at a big Pro Point jackpot in 2008.

For other Pro Tours there are always abundant PTQs and Grand Prix to feed them, but at Worlds—the critical final event in the Players Club marathon—players have often found themselves a few crucial points shy and staring in from the outside.

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Smile, Masashi, you just earned an invitation to the Pro Tour of your choice for the 2008 season. excited to know that several prominent players who fell just short of reaching 20 Pro Points will be able to return to a Pro Tour this season because of the new invitation. That means players such as former World Champion Julien Nuijten, six-time Top 8 competitor Masashi Oiso, and rising star Zac Hill (among others) are secure in the knowledge that they have a Pro Tour invite tucked safely under glass which they can break in the case of an emergency.

Here's a full list of the players who had 15-19 Pro Points at the end of the 2007 season:

Craig Krempels, Geoffrey Siron, Julien Nuijten, Osyp Lebedowicz, Manuel Bucher, Robert Jurkovic, Eugene Harvey, Gadiel Szleifer, Masashi Oiso, Masaya Kitayama, Pierre Canali, Giulio Barra, Bram Snepvangers, Itaru Ishida, Mike Thompson, Tomohiro Kaji, José Luis Echeverría Paredes, Celso Zampere Junior, Jonathan Rispal, Nicholas Lovett, Ryo Ogura, Gaudenis Vidugiris, Marco Cammilluzzi, Owen Turtenwald, Akira Asahara, Cynic Kim, David Brucker, Adam Yurchick, Arnost Zidek, David Besso, Gaetan Lefebvre, Jason Imperiale, and Zac Hill.

Along with the additional benefits added to the Pro Players Club, Grand Prix are getting a shot in the arm. Because they don't require invitations, Grand Prix exist as a unique type of tournament that expose local players to premier-level events while providing significant Pro Point and prize money carrots to the upper echelon of players. This broad accessibility is the hallmark of the 2008 season, according to Chris Galvin, vice president of Wizards' Organized Play department.

"We want to improve what we're calling the 'reach' of professional play," Galvin said. "We want to be accessible to more people in more and more diverse locations."

This GP boost starts with all regular Grand Prix re-allocating their existing prize purses. The \$5,000 previously earmarked for top amateur finishers has been moved back in to the \$30,000 main prize structure, taking first place up to \$3,500. That will be effective starting at Grand Prix-Vancouver on February 23-24.

But here's where it gets spicy. Why did I need to qualify Grand Prix as "regular" in the previous paragraph? Because all Grand Prix in June, July, and August have been ratcheted up to something Wizards is calling the "Grand Prix Summer Series." Currently scheduled in those months are Grand Prix in Indianapolis, Madrid, Denver, Copenhagen, and Manila. To add more heat to the summer, two additional Grand Prix (one in Japan, the other in Latin America) will be added in those months to extend the opportunity to participate in a Summer Series Grand Prix into two of the major **Magic** regions not originally on the summer schedule.

It's not just the addition of two events that makes this Summer Series shine. The prize payout for all seven of these Grand Prix has been increased to be \$40,000, with a \$4,000 first prize. In addition, more Pro Points have been added for finishers through 12th place, with first place getting you 10 Pro Points (instead of 8 for regular Grand Prix).

Grand Prix Summer Series		
Place	Pro Points	Prize Money
1	10	\$4,000
2	8	\$3,000
3-4	6	\$2,000
5-8	5	\$1,500
9-12	4	\$1,000
13-16	3	\$750
17-32	2	\$500
33-64	1	\$250
Total		\$40,000

"We're committed as always to the vision of professional play foremost. The primary way we realize that vision of course is through our high-level tournaments and associated programs such as the Players Club and the Pro Tour Hall of Fame," assured Galvin when asked about the shift from a Summer Pro Tour to the Summer Series.

When I look back at my friend Steve Sadin's 2007 season, I only have to look at Grand Prix-Columbus to see how he was able to get himself to Level 3 (which would now be Level 5). Winning that event and getting himself an 8-point Pro Point boost was enough to get him fired up about playing **Magic**. Prior to that event, he had contemplated putting that part of his life aside when he began college. These seven "Summer Series" events represent a very real way for players not currently on the Pro Tour to climb up to that next level of competition.

It will be exciting to see who emerges from that Grand Prix gauntlet as the next player to ascend to the Pro Tour ranks. Over the past few years we have seen back-to-back Rookie of the Year winners pave their run to the title with Grand Prix success, and Grand Prix points have factored significantly in the Player of the Year race.

While we're talking about additional Pro Points, it's time to unveil what may be the coolest part of the 2008 changes. Players in countries with closed (that is, invite only) National Championships should circle those dates once they're announced. That's because for the first time in the history of the Road to Worlds players in those events can earn Pro Points. First place is worth 10 points, with points given out through 16th place.

This will certainly be a huge factor in the 2008 Player of the Year race. It also makes the Nationals invite awarded for Level 2 Pro Club benefits much more meaningful for the aspiring Pro player, with an entire level on the line for winning Nats.

"The change to Nationals is quite exciting," grinned Larabee. "Frankly, many Pros have not fully participated in Nationals for a few years. Lower prize payouts and no Pro Points are certainly among the reasons. By adding Pro Points to Nationals, we hope this encourages Pro players to attend and do well at Nationals. Additionally, from a Pro Point standpoint, each country that runs a closed National now has roughly the Pro-Point equivalent of a Grand Prix in their country."

Galvin remained emphatic in his support for the Pro community and the highest level of **Magic** play.

"Pro players are very important to us for several reasons," he said. "They give credibility to the game. Many high-end tourney players are great ambassadors for our favorite hobby. Most importantly, though, the promise of **Magic** according to Richard Garfield's original vision involves the game as a sport. Pro level play is true to our roots."

That being said, Galvin also felt that the changes to the 2008 season would successfully satisfy multiple strata of players.

"We're definitely improving our reach with the addition of GPs and the Summer Series concept. We're putting more total events in more locations. We're making Nationals around the world much more meaningful as a high-end tournament. All the while we're keeping our top Pro Club benefits very good. Then, as a capper, we're putting some extra invites even further down in the Club, which all accomplishes our goal of broader reach. I look at the 2008 schedule as one less PT stop with more GPs, better Nats, and a very strong top-end Players Club. In the final wash this means pro play is closer, more achievable, and more real to more people."

It seems that every year there is a new twist or wrinkle to the Pro Tour program. I closed out my interview with Galvin by asking him how essential change was to the success of the Pro Tour and what could we expect even further down the line.

"I guess I'm not a big fan of change for change's sake," said Galvin after some deliberation. "But change certainly is a constant in the PT as in most things. We have run more and fewer events, visited more and fewer locations, invited this many or that many players ... the Masters series; the Player of the Year payout; the 'skins' payout. All had their strong points and their flaws. I regret none of them. I'm sure there will be yet more changes in the future. Maybe someday we will arrive at 'perfect' and never change again. But I won't hold my breath!"

Firestarter: Morningtide Prerelease is Here!

With all this talk about the entire 2008 schedule, let's not forget the *Morningtide* Prerelease is this weekend. What are you looking forward to the most with the new set? If you're qualified for Kuala Lumpur, it's your first chance to test your Limited chops in *Lorwyn-Lorwyn-Morningtide* Booster Draft. For the rest of us, it's all about that joy of playing with new cards for the first time. Come back here over the weekend and share your Prerelease thoughts!

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