

The Tussle in Brussels

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I led off last week's column with a paragraph about "looking forward to seeing the coverage from Brussels as the best players in the World put the newest set through it paces in a Limited Grand Prix for Pro Tour–Berlin." Those words could not have been more prophetic as a field of more than 1,400 players was whittled down to an impressive Top 8—and a top 4 for the ages.

Many times you will see four or five top players in a Top 8 only to have them feed on each other in the quarters or get upset in their bracket. No offense to Holger Lange, Alexandre Peset, Rogier Kleij, or Gaetan Lefebvre, but they weren't final four everyone sitting at home this weekend was hoping to see when the brackets were posted. There was one Hall of Famer, three future Hall of Famers, 20 combined Pro Tour Top 8 appearances, three Pro Tour champions, and way in excess of a half a million dollars in lifetime winnings vying for the Brussels trophy once the semifinals were set.

Emerging from the semifinal scrum that included Pro Tour–Los Angeles winner Antoine Ruel, eight-time Pro Tour Top 8 competitor Gabriel Nassif, and Hall of Famer Raphael Levy was the enigmatic Netherlander Kamiel Cornelissen. Despite five Pro Tour Top 8 finishes, winning Pro Tour–Seattle as a member of Von Dutch, and leading the Netherlands to the World Team Championships in 2006, Kamiel has never accumulated the celebrity that many of his other countrymen with lesser resumes have received. Never a flamboyant player, Kamiel has always taken a deliberate, detail-focused approach to his game. While that style has not garnered him throngs of fans, it has earned him nearly \$200,000 in lifetime winnings.

Up until this weekend, it looked like we might have had to wait until what I feel is a sure Hall of Fame induction to see Kamiel at a Pro Tour again. A 27-year old student at the University of Twente, Kamiel has been approaching the finish line of his master's degree in Applied Mathematics, hoping to complete his thesis in the spring of 2009 — nicely synched up with his eligibility for that 2009 Hall of Fame class.



That would be the culmination of a career that started pretty casually with his two brothers and a schoolmate who would go on to be a World Champion... and an inspiration for Kamiel.

Cornelissen battled through a gauntlet of challengers in the Top 8.

"One of my brothers read about the game in a local newspaper and we started playing together with my other brother and a friend of ours," Kamiel explained when asked about how he started playing **Magic**. "Later I met some people at school who also played the game, including Tom van de Logt. At

first we played mostly in the local games shop in Nijmegen called 'Moenen en Mariken,' later we started playing tournaments all over the Netherlands. Tom had some good results including reaching the Top 8 of the 2000 European and World Championships, and at that point I started trying harder to qualify for the Pro Tours."

It was not long before Kamiel made the biggest splash of his career, posting back-to-back second place finishes during the 2000-2001 season - van de Logt would also go on to win the World Championships that season. Kamiel felt that his time in the PTQ trenches was essential to his growing ability to go up against the likes of Kai Budde and Jon Finkel during his breakout season.

"One of my first tournaments was the *Mirage* Prerelease and after some time playing local tournaments I started playing in PTQs as well," Kamiel recalled. "I played PTQs for a long time, probably about two or three years, often getting into the Top 8 or getting close to it, but never managing to qualify. I think this may have helped me after all, because the moment I did qualify, I was a much better player than when I started playing PTQs and was ready for the Pro Tour level."

Kamiel had a couple of close calls including a heart-breaking 11th-place finish at Pro Tour–New York 2000. Just one turn away from winning the match that would put him into the Top 8, Kamiel came up just short and had to settle for the draw. There was also a 23rd-place finish at the team Pro Tour to start to 2000-2001 season playing alongside his two younger brothers. Up next that season for him was Pro Tour–Chicago and a star-studded elimination bracket for his Sunday debut.



Cornelissen defeated Jon Finkel and Rob Dougherty before succumbing to Kai in the finals of Pro Tour–Chicago.

After a couple of years of toiling at PTQs, most players would be pretty awestruck by taking part in one of the greatest Pro Tour Top 8s of all time. Chicago 2000-01 culminated with Kamiel playing against none other than Kai Budde, with the rest of the brackets littered with the likes of Rob Dougherty, Zvi Mowshowitz, Brian Kibler, Mike Pustilnik and Jon Finkel. Kamiel's level-headedness—and deck choice—allowed him to remain calm and reach the finals before being run over by the German Juggernaut as he was approaching a full-head of steam.

"Even though there were a lot of good players in my first Pro Tour Top 8 in Chicago," he explained, "I was pretty confident at the start of the Top 8. I thought my CounterRebel deck was pretty good against Fires and I was going to play against Fires for the first two rounds. In both of the Top 8s I was not very nervous before they started and just tried to play my best in all of the games."

Kamiel Cornelissen - Counter Rebel

Pro Tour Chicago 2000-01, 2nd Place



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Adarkar Wastes
4 Coastal Tower
10 Island
8 Plains

26 lands

2 Defiant Falcon
2 Defiant Vanguard
1 Jhovall Queen
2 Lin Sivvi, Defiant Hero
4 Ramosian Sergeant
1 Ramosian Sky Marshal
1 Rebel Informer

13 creatures

4 Absorb
4 Brainstorm
4 Counterspell
1 Disenchant
2 Dismantling Blow
1 Dominate
2 Fact or Fiction
1 Rout
2 Wrath of God

21 other spells

Sideboard

2 Circle of Protection: Green
2 Disenchant
2 Dominate
2 Fact or Fiction
2 Mageta the Lion
3 Prohibit
1 Rout
1 Wrath of God

15 sideboard cards

Next up for Kamiel was Pro Tour—Los Angeles and multiple players from the previous Top 8 rebooked their reservations for the Sunday table for that event, including eventual winner Mike Pustilnik and Jon Finkel. With back-to-back Top 8s—one in Constructed and one in Limited—people began to ask, not for the last time, "Who is this guy?" Just as every rising star in basketball is at one time dubbed "the next Michael Jordan," there were comparisons to Finkel. Once again Kamiel finished second and brought his winnings for the year to in excess of \$40,000—life-changing money for a 20-year old university student.

"When I did well at those Pro Tours I had just started university," Kamiel said. "The main effect of winning that much money was that I didn't have to worry about money as much as most students have to and could do the things I wanted to do without thinking about the costs involved."

When I checked in on the coverage from Grand Prix—Brussels this past weekend my browser refreshed on the top 4 and my jaw hit the keyboard. Despite the fact that he is playing a lot less **Magic** these days, it made perfect sense to me that Kamiel was right in the midst of such an impressive bunch. I was curious where he thought the elimination bracket from this event stacked up against some of his other finishes.

"The top 4 of GP—Brussels was certainly very impressive. I don't think it could have been much stronger even if you could pick any four players out of the 1,471 participants," said Kamiel. "However, I think the Top 8 of PT—Chicago was the best Top 8 I have ever played in. It consisted of all very good players, including both Kai Budde and Jon Finkel."

Kamiel was not surprised to experience success in the opening days of a new Limited format. He feels his skill at figuring out new formats has been a key factor in his success over the years.

"I think I'm usually good at adapting to new formats and figuring out what is important in

these formats," he explained. "I do much better in formats that are new than in older formats. Even when I started playing **Magic**, I always did relatively well in the prereleases. Later I had some success in the Limited GPs and PTs following the release of a new set."

While he did take part in Kuala Lumpur, Kamiel will not be attending Pro Tour–Hollywood. He does have a shiny new invitation to Berlin in his pocket, so what are his expectations for the coming year?



"At the moment I'm not qualified for all of the Pro Tours and **Magic** has become less important to me," he explained with his thesis looming over his shoulder. "When I went to GP–Brussels I hadn't played for some time and didn't have a lot of expectations, but I think a lot of times when I take a break from **Magic**, when I start playing again the game feels fresh again and my results are better. I don't have any real goals for this year, but I will definitely play in PT–Berlin for which I'm now qualified and I will probably play in some of the European Limited GPs."

You would be hard pressed to find a better person to offer advice on how to succeed at the highest levels of **Magic**. There are no short cuts for Kamiel and no illusions that his success did not come as the product of the hard work he put in at the beginning of his career—even if he can roll out of bed now and win a 1,400-person Grand Prix.

"I think the most important thing is to practice a lot," came the unglamorous answer from Kamiel about how to improve. "It helps a lot if you can find a group of people that have the same goals and approximately the same playing skill as you, so you can work together to get better at **Magic**."

Looking back at the past nine years on the Pro Tour—and longer if you include schoolyard matches and PTQ battles—I wanted to know what Kamiel's best memory of his career will be when he looks back on it.

"What I like a lot about **Magic** is that it allows me to visit a lot of places that I would never have visited if I didn't play **Magic**," he said. "I don't think I would have been to countries like Japan, Malaysia, South Africa, and Russia if I didn't play **Magic**. One of the most fun tournaments I have played in was the *Ninth Edition* Prerelease in Moscow, where I played together with Pro players from all over the world against some of the best Russian and Ukrainian players."

When you consider that he has won a Team Rochester Pro Tour and led the Dutch National team to victory in the very same format, it should come as no surprise as to what his favorite all-time format is.

"My favorite format is Team Rochester Draft. I think it's the most skill-intensive format. The thing I like most about the format is that your only goal is to beat your opponent's deck, so cards that are normally not very good can be very important for the matchup you are playing, which asks for re-evaluating a lot of the cards. There is also a lot of strategy in keeping track of which cards your opponents will be able to use when it is their turn to draft. Sometimes you can leave a powerful card on the table, since you know your opponents are not going to be able to use it."

His favorite Constructed deck of all time?

"I usually like playing combo decks that are very powerful in the abstract and figuring out a way to beat all of the hate cards. My favorite deck is the Angry Hermit deck I played at Pro Tour–Houston 2002."

Kamiel Cornelissen – Angry Ghoul

Pro Tour Houston, 20th Place



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Bloodstained Mire	2 Cabal Therapy
4 City of Brass	4 Duress
2 Darigaaz's Caldera	4 Entomb
4 Forsaken City	4 Exhume
4 Llanowar Wastes	1 Krosan Reclamation
1 Mountain	4 Mox Diamond
2 Reflecting Pool	2 Reanimate
1 Tarnished Citadel	4 Vampiric Tutor
1 Underground River	

25 other spells

23 lands

2 Anger
1 Avatar of Woe
4 Hermit Druid
1 Krosan Colossus
2 Sutured Ghoul
2 Verdant Force

12 creatures

Sideboard

3 Chill
4 Defense Grid
1 Engineered Plague
1 Flaring Pain
2 Naturalize
1 Phantom Nishoba
1 Ray of Revelation
1 Seal of Removal
1 Swamp

15 sideboard cards

And finally a favorite card that only a control player can truly love:

"My favorite card is Brainstorm. It's a simple card, but it has a lot of different applications and it is hard to play the card correctly. I think good players can get a big advantage over worse players by having access to cards like Brainstorm. One of the mistakes I see a lot of players make is that they play Brainstorm in the end step of their opponent's turn because they made it a habit to play all of their instants during their opponent's turn, while in a lot of situations it's much better to wait until your next turn, because you will see an extra card. If you're the control deck in the matchup, sometimes you can even keep it in hand until you're forced to do something to maximize the chance to draw something useful."

Prelude to Hollywood: Five Questions with Pete Hoefling

We have seen high-profile non-Wizards events increasingly impact impending metagames over the past few years. The Kentucky Bluegrass Open just weeks before U.S. Nationals last year threw a metawrench in the metaworks of that Standard format. With \$13,000 on the line this weekend highlighted by a *Shadowmoor*-fueled Standard event, Star City Games Tournament Organizer Pete Hoefling is hoping that his tournament will have a similar—if not greater—impact on Pro Tour-Hollywood.

1. *What exactly are you doing this weekend?*

Pete: StarCitygames.com is organizing our first Mega-Magic Weekend in Richmond, Virginia. It includes the following events:

- Friday, May 9th
\$5,000 Standard Open Trials
(Standard, these are the ONLY way to earn byes for Saturday's \$5,000 Standard Open)
- Saturday, May 10th
\$5,000 Standard Open (Standard)
"Power Nine" Richmond – Day One! (Vintage)
Grand Prix Indianapolis Trial (*Shadowmoor* Limited)
- Sunday, May 11th
\$2,000 Standard Open (Standard)
"Power Nine" Richmond – Day Two! (Vintage)

Over the course of the weekend, we're giving away over \$13,000 in cash and prizes. In addition to that, we'll have live video coverage of the event (courtesy of Evan Erwin and The Magic Show), **Magic**-themed trivia contests, **Magic**-themed charades, *Shadowmoor* card artist Daarken (Corrosive Mentor, Kulrath Knight, Loch Korrigan, Midnight Banshee, and Spawnwrithe) signing cards on Saturday, and lots of other fun things going on. It should be a blast!



2. Would you be doing this tournament if there wasn't a Standard format Pro Tour on the horizon, and if the format for the Pro Tour was different would you be running this in a different format?

Pete: Yes, to the first question. No, to the second. The fact that Pro Tour-Hollywood falls shortly afterwards, and will also be using the Standard format, is completely coincidental. This Mega-**Magic** Weekend is only happening because 400 players came out to support our last big event. This time around, I believe we've put together an even bigger and better weekend of **Magic** for the fans, and every person who attends this weekend is doing their part to ensure bigger and better events in the future.

3. How big an impact do you expect this event to have on the Hollywood metagame?

Pete: I think the results from this weekend will have to have some sort of impact on Pro Tour-Hollywood, but how much remains to be seen.

4. Are you expecting a lot of the qualified Pros to be in attendance or will they be lurking on the virtual sidelines for tech?

Pete: Both will probably happen to some degree, but our last event felt more like a 400 player States/Regionals, and this Mega-**Magic** Weekend was specifically designed to cater to those same players.

5. Judging from individual card demand, does it look like there should be any new decks emerging from *Shadowmoor*?



Pete: Based on sales, we are expecting to see a lot of new archetypes in Richmond. In order...

1. Red-green Aggro
2. Enchanted Evening / Patrician's Scorn
3. Greater Gargadon / Juniper Order Ranger / persist combo
4. Swans of Bryn Argoll combo
5. Green-white mid-range

Hope to see everyone this weekend in Richmond!

Firestarter: Weekend Winners

What Standard decks do you think will come out on top this weekend in Richmond? Will any real tech find its way into the Top 8 or will the Pros manage to lock it all down? Head to the forums to speculate on what decks we will be talking about this time next week.

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