

2013 World Championship  
Magic: The Gathering

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26. Juli 2013

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# 1 History

The first World Championship was held in **1994** at the GenCon game fair in Milwaukee. Its structure differed from later Worlds in several aspects. It was a single elimination tournament, that everybody could enter until all 512 seats were taken. The format was Vintage, called 'Type I' at the time. Eventually American Zak Dolan won the tournament with a Bant Stasis Control deck, that of course nobody would have called 'Bant' back then.

In **1995** the second World Championship was held and its structure resembled later tournaments much more closely. The tournament commenced with five rounds of Sealed Deck on the first day, and continued with five rounds of Standard, then called 'Type II'. On the third day a cut was made to the best eight players, and they fought for the title with their Standard decks from the previous day in this final elimination stage. In contrast to later tournaments individual games were counted to determine the standings, but otherwise the tournament was the blueprint for the subsequent Worlds. Even a team portion of 19 teams had already been included in the event. The American team consisting of early Magic celebrities Mark Justice, Henry Stern, Peter Leiher, and Mike Long claimed the first team title.

From **1996** on the World Championships' format was almost identical to what it would be for over a decade. The tournament now had a Draft and a Standard portion on day one and two, and another Constructed format on day three. This one would rotate from Worlds to Worlds. The fourth day was exclusively for team competition. Eventually the tournament finished on Sunday with the final elimination stage of the tournament. The best eight returned to fight for the title, using their decks from the Standard portion. Uniquely in 1996 a special present was given to the winner, Tom Chanpheng. He received the 1996 World Champion card encased in a glass cubus.

In the following years the structure of the tournament was kept intact. As more countries held National Championships the World Championship grew gradually. With the exception of **1999** and **2000** most Worlds were won by players that were well-respected Pros but not quite the superstars of the game. However, the 1999 Worlds saw Kai Budde claim his first of seven Pro Tour titles, and in 2000 Jon Finkel won both the individual and the team title at the World Championship.

It was not until **2007** that further changes were introduced to the structure of the World Championship. For the Worlds in New York, Wizards had decided to shorten the tournament by a day. Wizards decided to have 5 rounds of Constructed and three rounds of Draft on each of the first two days, and then the team competition on day three. This was changed again for the **2008** Worlds. Instead of having a specific team day, teams competed after individual play had finished on the first day, and before

individual play commenced on the third day. Also for the first time, the team portion used Constructed decks. Of the three players forming a national team one had to play Standard, one Extended, and one Legacy.

The same modus was used in **2009** albeit the Magic Online Championship was added to the tournament weekend. Until today this is the only Pro Tour ever held that had players from eight different nations in the top 8. It is also the only Pro Tour that had no player from either of the two most successful Magic nations, USA and Japan, in the top 8. The **2010** World Championship ended with Guillaume Matignon winning the tournament and thus equalizing on Pro Points with Brad Nelson. Consequently the Player of the Year had to be determined by a deciding match which was held at Pro Tour Paris two months later.

The **2011** World Championship marked the end of an era. The World Championship as it had been known was announced to be discontinued. From **2012** on there would only be a 16-person invitational tournament, that decided the de facto World Champion and the Player of the Year. This was named the **Players Championship**. Jun'ya Iyanaga of Japan won the last of the classic World Championships. After some grievances about the termination of the team competition, Wizards added a new team event to the season schedule. Instead of holding a big World Championship, in 2012 there would be the Players Championship and the World Magic Cup, a competition solely for National Teams.

For **2013** –this year's tournament– Wizards renamed the Players Championship back to World Championship. Also both events will again take place at the same time and in the same place. It has already been announced that the modus will be the same for **2014** with the joint event being called the **Worlds Week**.

## 1.1 Flashback to 2012

Last year's Players Championship was the inaugural edition of the World Championship as an elite-class invitational tournament. Similar to this year's edition, the tournament challenged sixteen players to play six rounds of Draft and six rounds of Constructed, followed by a cut to the best four. In contrast to this year the Draft formats were Magic 2013 and Cube, and there was only one Constructed format, Modern.

The Players Championship started with Cube Draft. Shouta Yasooka and Alexander Hayne won their draft tables to move to the top of the standings after the first portion of the event. Hayne had assembled a powerful combo from fifteen years ago. Survival of the Fittest and Recurring Nightmare gave his opponents nightmares by reanimating Griselbrand and his peers. Yasooka on the other hand had drafted a

blue-red control deck with only four creatures.

The second part of the tournament featured the still relatively new Modern Constructed. Martin Jůza and Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa were the only players to win all three rounds of this portion of the tournament. Both had started off rather badly, Paulo even coming back from a Cube Draft where he hadn't been able to win a single match. Despite both being integral parts of Team ChannelFireball, Paulo and Martin had ended up on different teams for the World Championship. Paulo's group had decided to bring Zoo to the tournament, whereas Martin's group had opted for Jund.

Going into day two, Shouta Yasooka was sitting at the top of the standings, having lost only one match so far. As the players went into the second draft with different points the pairings worked out in a way, that allowed three players to "win" two draft pods. Jun'ya Iyanaga, Yuuya Watanabe, and again Shouta Yasooka proved themselves as masters of the Core Set Draft format.

Another set of Modern matches was then used to determine who would return on Sunday. At that point Yasooka was already locked in for the semi-final. Jůza was sitting in the second place with a group of players following on his heels. Unfortunately for the Czech he was not able to win another round in this final portion of the tournament. Instead Yuuya Watanabe, Jon Finkel, and Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa managed to claim their seat at a semi-final table. Just as Shuhei Nakamura, they all had won two of the last three rounds, but edged out the Japanese on tiebreakers. Meanwhile Yasooka had managed another three wins. As if losing only a single match wasn't impressive enough, Shouta had dominated the Modern portion with a completely new deck of his own design, Eternal Command.

In the semi-finals Watanabe disposed of da Rosa's Zoo deck while Yasooka scored a flawless victory over Jon Finkel. The tournament then came to a conclusion with an all-Japanese final. Everybody who had expected another display of Shouta's dominance, would be surprised by a closely contested final that was worthy of the event. In the end, Yuuya Watanabe prevailed and became the 2012 Players Champion.

## 1.2 World Champions

Year	World Champion	Team Champion	Host City
1994	Zak Dolan	—	Milwaukee
1995	Alexander Blumke	United States	Seattle
1996	Tom Chanpheng	United States	Seattle
1997	Jakub Slemr	Canada	Seattle
1998	Brian Selden	United States	Seattle
1999	Kai Budde	United States	Yokohama
2000	Jon Finkel	United States	Brussels
2001	Tom van de Logt	United States	Toronto
2002	Carlos Romão	Germany	Sydney
2003	Daniel Zink	United States	Berlin
2004	Julien Nuijten	Germany	San Francisco
2005	Katsuhiko Mori	Japan	Yokohama
2006	Makihito Mihara	Netherlands	Paris
2007	Uri Peleg	Switzerland	New York
2008	Antti Malin	United States	Memphis
2009	Andre Coimbra	China	Rome
2010	Guillaume Matignon	Slovakia	Chiba
2011	Jun'ya Iyanaga	Japan	San Francisco
2012	Yuuya Watanabe	Chinese Taipei	Seattle

## 2 Structure

The Magic World Championship will be held over three days, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday.

### Day One

On Wednesday there are

- 3 Swiss rounds of **Modern Masters** Booster Draft *and*
- 3 Swiss rounds of **Standard** Constructed

### Day Two

On Thursday there are

- 3 Swiss rounds of **Magic 2014** Booster Draft *and*
- 3 Swiss rounds of **Modern** Constructed

### Day Three

The **top four** players will then advance to the playoffs on Sunday. The playoffs will be **Modern** Constructed with the players using the **same decks**, they played on day two. The first player to **win three games** of a match wins that match.

#### 2.1 Prizes

The following prizes will be awarded to the competitors, based on the final standings

Place	Prize Money
1	\$40,000
2	\$20,000
3–4	\$10,000
5–8	\$5,000
9–16	\$1,000

In addition each player earns one Pro Point per match win in the Swiss portion, and two Pro Points per match win in the Playoffs.

## 3 Players

### 3.1 Dmitriy Butakov

**Name:** Дмитрий Бутаков

**Qualified as** 2012 Magic Online Champion

**Nationality:** Russia

**Age:** 24

**Pro Points:** 0 lifetime

**Pro Tour debut:** —

**Pro Tours played:** 0

**Median finish:** —

**Average finish:** —

**Top 8:** —

**Planeswalker level** 39

**Other accomplishments:** 2012 Magic Online Champion, 2012 MOCS season 1 winner

There is no denying that Dmitriy Butakov is the wild card in this tournament. Where all other players are well beyond a 100 lifetime Pro Points Butakov is looking forward to his first forays into professional Magic. Playing under the cameras for the first time and without a star-studded team to help him prepare for this event, it will surely need a colossal effort on Dmitriy's side to keep up with the world's very best players.

That said *Butakov* is a name well known to Magic Online players. He might not have the experience of a dozen Pro Tours under his belt, but being an ardent Magic Online grinder the Russian has a lot of playing routine, that will surely help him to focus despite the excitement.



*Being a rookie, most spectators are probably not familiar with you. What kind of a player are you? Which formats do you like? In what kind of Magic events do you participate?*

I've been a Magic Online grinder for a couple of years now. I play all Constructed formats on Magic Online, and draft in a local MTG club. There are not many big tournaments in Siberia, but I'm trying to visit all PTQs and open championships. That's, however, more about seeing your old friends from other cities. Playing Magic is secondary then.

*You are playing a professional Magic tournament for the first time, and it's the biggest thing right away, the Worlds. What expectations do you have for the tournament?*

No matter how it will end for me, it will be a great experience to have for future tournaments, but I'll do my best to show a good result as well.

*How do you prepare for the event? Do you have a team?*

I can't say that I have a real team, so I will be preparing with the good players from my region. However, the backbone of my preparation will be on Magic Online.

*Do you have any expectations for your competitive Magic career after the World Championship? For Reid Duke winning the MOCS jump-started his career as a Magic pro. Is that something where you can or would like to see yourself two years from now?*

Yes, I've waited for such an opportunity for a few years, and I will try to get the best of it.

## 3.2 Stanislav Cifka

**Qualified** as Pro Tour Return to Ravnica winner

**Nationality:** Czech Republic

**Age:** 25

**Pro Points:** 53 in 2012–13, 109 lifetime

**Pro Tour debut:** Honolulu 2009 (169th)

**Pro Tours played:** 8

**Median finish:** 90.5

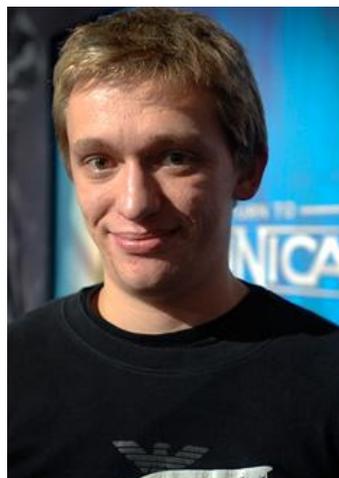
**Average finish:** 139.5

**Top 8:** 1 Pro Tour (1 win) and 2 Grand Prix

**Planeswalker** level 43

Stanislav Cifka burst onto the Pro Tour scene with his win at Pro Tour Return to Ravnica in 2012. Surprisingly for many Cifka had locked up Platinum even before win. Almost secretly he had racked up the necessary 45 Pro Points, just barely staying out of the spotlights all the time. At Pro Tour Return to Ravnica Cifka impressed many observers with his sleek control over the Eggs deck. Not for a second could it be doubted, that Stanislav Cifka knew everything there was to know about that deck. After his triumph the Czech continued what he had done before, collecting Pro Points with finishes just out of the spotlights.

Cifka is not only a powerful planeswalker, though. Albeit being a semi-professional poker player, Cifka's other passion is really Chess. Stanislav had earned his laurels in chess well before starting Magic professionally. For example he won the Czech Championship U20 in 2006.



*Between a bunch of rock-solid finishes it is your Pro Tour title that stands out. You won the title with eggs, a deck that stands out, too. Therefore your name is strongly connected to the deck. Why did you choose such a roguish deck? Do you have any special feelings towards the deck? What do you think about the banning of Second Sunrise?*

I simply thought Second Sunrise was well positioned for the Pro Tour Return to Ravnica metagame. The main reason was the Jund match-up, since most builds weren't able to destroy Leyline of Sancy in postboard games. Obviously I have very strong feelings about the deck, but I completely agree with the ban of Second Sunrise, because for your opponent the game is extremely boring, and the main goal of Magic is to make people have fun.

*You have played some of the most challenging games competitively: Chess, Poker, and Magic. How does each of the games appeal to you and what makes Magic special?*

While I can make a decent living on my Poker earnings, it is not really something I enjoy. I played some Poker at the age of 18 and quickly realised that it is easier to make a living on Poker than making a living on Chess. After two good years in 2010–11 I drastically reduced the time I spent on Poker, because I didn't like the lifestyle at all.

Magic is just the game I enjoy most. When I started playing Magic I had some decent results, but to be honest I was not very good. I care a lot about Magic, however, and worked hard to improve my game. As to Chess, I still follow the big events closely, but I don't play that much any more. Being a Grand Master some day would be a dream, but at the moment I don't practice enough. I would have to work a lot harder. Actually the first step would be to become International Master, and that might be possible in the next few years.

*Do you think you have special skills due to having played all these games competitively? What kind of skills transfer from Magic to Chess or the other way around?*

All three games are very different, but some requirements are similar. This is mostly unrelated to the games themselves. Instead there are more general abilities, that are necessary to play a mental game well. To keep your concentration up the whole day you have to cope with losses, manage the general stress of competitions, and then there is the whole planning before the tournament even starts. On the other hand, there are calculations to be done in all games, and if you improve your ability to do that it will help you in all games.

*The Czech Republic has been cranking out high-caliber pro players basically since the beginning of the game. With Jakub Slemr you even have a former World Champion in your country. Is Magic especially popular in the Czech Republic, or what do you think makes your country have so many talented players?*

If someone asks me what I do for living and I answer that I play Magic, most people will have no idea what it is. So I wouldn't say that Magic is very popular in our country. Despite not having many Pro players, the level of play in the Czech Republic is very good. It's probably due to drafting being very popular here, and I believe in order to get better, playing Limited is much more helpful than grinding Constructed tournaments.

### 3.3 Reid Duke

**Qualified** for 10th most Pro Points in 2012–13

**Nationality:** United States

**Age:** 23

**Nickname:** The Duke

**Pro Points:** 52 in 2012–13, 111 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 11

**Pro Tour debut:** Amsterdam 2010 (405th)

**Median finish:** 119

**Average finish:** 147.9

**Top 8:** 7 Grand Prix (2 wins)

**Team:** StarCityGames

**Planeswalker** level 46

**Other accomplishments:** 2011 Magic Online Champion, 2011 Magic Online Player of the Year, 2010 MOCS season 2 winner

Reid Duke is Dmitriy Butakov's predecessor as Magic Online Champion. For Reid that event proved to be his breakthrough as he has been a fixture on the pro scene since. Last year's Players Championship did not go too well for Reid, but he has had a remarkably consistent season afterwards. That season culminated in his so far best Pro Tour finish, a 9th place at Pro Tour Dragon's Maze.

Last season Duke had some success with his extremely controllable take on the Bant Control, finishing back to back Standard Grand Prix in the top eight. Afterwards he took a fancy to Jund, a deck type that probably none other than himself and Willy Edel have mastered so completely.



*You are still most familiar to many as "that MTGO kid". Indeed your breakout performance was the win at the MOCS Championship. However, you have had a lot of great real life finishes since, making you a platinum pro. Was there something like a transition from MTGO grinder to a real life pro?*

Actually, I was an in-real-life player long before I was an MTGO grinder. I feel very lucky to have both experiences, as they cultivate slightly different strengths, and compliment one another well.

However, more so than actual gameplay, the toughest transition was in actual lifestyle. As an MTGO player, it was easy to focus and to devote endless hours to whatever task was at hand. As a pro, there's so much planning, traveling, building decks, etc. that it's hard to find the time to really sit down and grind games the way I used to. Naturally, there are good things about the lifestyle too. Hopefully, what I've lost in quantity, I've gained in quality in that I now get to test with world class players, and get more actual tournament experience.

*Shortly after your breakout performance at the MOCS, you were part of the Black Team of SCG. How did that come to be? What kind of an experience was it to prepare for a Pro Tour with the legends of the game?*

At Grand Prix San Diego in 2011, I walked up to introduce myself to Patrick Chapin. I told him that we wrote for the same website (Starcitygames.com) and that I was a big fan of his work. After a pleasant, but short, interaction, I walked off, thinking that would be the last of it. Imagine my surprise when, the next month, I got a phone call from Mr. Chapin inviting me to join his all-star team to prepare for the Pro Tour!

I felt out of place for the first few days, as everyone else on the team seemed to be old friends, but I had hardly met anyone before the day I arrived! Nonetheless, I was determined to make the most of the experience, as it seemed like the chance of a lifetime to work with all of my longtime heroes. I wasn't disappointed; everyone was as good as their reputation, and joining team SCG was a huge turning point in my career.

*The last Player's Championship went very badly for you. What did that mean to you then and does it have any implications for this year's World Championship? How did you process that disappointment?*

After a disappointing finish in last year's Players Championship, all I could think about was getting back, and getting another chance at it. Today, the lessons from last year are still fresh in my mind, but there's no fear or worry. I'm going to play each match the absolute best that I can, and if I end up 0–12, then I'll brush myself off and qualify again.

*At the beginning of the Innistrad-Return to Ravnica Standard season you were very successful with Bant. You then moved to Jund and apparently never looked back. Why the transition? What is so special about Jund?*

Both Bant and Jund have been very good to me, but for Grand Prix Miami, Jund was just the better choice. It plays so many of the best cards in Standard, and is unique in that it doesn't need to play underpowered cards just for the sake of mana curve or synergy. I also feel that it's a deck with no particular weaknesses that rewards tight play and a good understanding of all of the matchups. Consequently, its been the perfect deck to stick with on a long-term basis.

### 3.4 Willy Edel

**Qualified** as Pro Point leader in Latin America in 2012–13

**Nationality:** Brazil

**Age:** 34

**Pro Points:** 52 in 2012–13, 206 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 24

**Pro Tour debut:** New York 2000 (79th team)

**Median finish:** 99

**Average finish:** 124.5

**Top 8:** 4 Pro Tours and 4 Grand Prix (1 win)

**Planeswalker** level 46

Willy Edel had his first showing on the Pro Tour in 2000, but remained largely unknown until 2006. After a few Pro Tour appearances in between, Edel suddenly broke through with back to back runner-up finishes at 2006 Pro Tours Charleston and Kobe. The first of these performances was along teammates Paulo Vitor Damo Da Rosa and Celso Zampere Jr. The team is described in the event’s coverage as “a group of young Brazilian players who have surprised many with their outstanding performance here this weekend”; maybe not that surprising with hindsight.

After yet another top eight in early 2007 Edel fell slowly off the gravy train again, and was on a pro play hiatus for almost two years after a subpar 2009 season. Having had his big successes and being well beyond the age of the average Magic pro, that might have been the end of the story for most, but not so for Edel. He fought his way back onto the gravy train, and put up strong finishes again, including another Pro Tour top eight appearance and his first Pro title, a win at Grand Prix Toronto.



*You have been around forever, and you have had good finishes in the past, but it feels like your play has reached a new pinnacle just in the last year. What's the secret to the sudden leap?*

I feel I am much more mature right now. Maybe I can't make so many awesome, brilliant plays like I did seven years ago, but right now I make much less mistakes. In the past I think I didn't deal very well with the pressure of quitting an awesome job and my Masters to be on the Pro Circuit. My wife and parents always gave me a lot of support, but the pressure I was putting on myself was more than I could handle, and suddenly I wasn't playing very well anymore.

After I fell off the train, I had time to open a new business (a Magic store) and take care of a couple of familiar health problems. When everything was back on track, I decided to try once again to get into the pro Magic circuit. I just felt I still have something to prove to myself and after talking with my family I set a target of being silver in 2011, then gold in 2012 and then finally platinum in 2013, or I would just retire from competitive play. Turns out that playing without pressure and enjoying the game and the trips was everything I needed, and I achieved it. Now my new target is being in the Hall of Fame. I think that with a couple good seasons I will have a real shot in a couple years.

*In the last year you and Reid Duke have made yourselves names for being the most consequent proponents of Jund. Do you talk to each other about the deck? Do you think you have a different approaches to the deck, or do you tick the same way?*

You are not the first one to ask this one, but unfortunately we never tested together for a tournament or even talk about decks — maybe we should try it eventually for a GP. It wouldn't be possible for a PT since he tests with team SCG then. But I do think we have different approaches to the deck. Reid loves Jund in Standard which I don't really like as I don't like any deck with Farseek in it. I, however, kept playing Jund in all Modern GPs, where Reid tried other decks like Storm and Zoo. The format we agree most on is Legacy, where I totally love Jund, and he played it in a GP if I'm not mistaken. It's a shame I never had an opportunity to play Legacy outside MTGO lately.

*In Brazil there are basically only three players that are known outside the country. Do you have a special relationship to PV and Carlos? How do the online grinders like batutinha figure into the community?*

Carlos' win in 2002 was the true inspiration for any Brazilian to consider playing at the PT with a real shot at a good result. At that time, we never ever considered a Brazilian would come any close to the top of a PT, so when he won the whole thing several people started to believe that they could do it as well. Carlos stayed in the PT circuit for several years and when he was about to fall off, Paulo and I top eighted together and we ignited Carlos' competitive spark again since for the first time he would have other Brazilians travelling with him around the world. The incentive was good enough that we three were on the train at the same time for 3–4 years. During this time we always travelled and playtested together.

After I fell off the train at the end of 2009, Paulo started testing with Channel-Fireball and even brought Carlos with him for PT Paris. Nowadays, I can say we are friends even if we don't talk much lately since we live far from each other, and we don't really play Magic together since Paulo plays with CfB, I with the other Brazilians, and Carlos is taking a break. I still room and test with Paulo for some GPs and if Carlos ever wanted to come back he would be welcomed, so I can safely say that we have a cooperative relationship.

As for MTGO grinders, this totally exploded in Brazil after PV's good finishes at the PT along Brad Nelson's success. Every single MTGO player knew the name *FFfreak*, so when they figured out that the *FFfreak* they had regularly played against on MTGO became the Player of the Year they went nuts. Suddenly everyone started creating accounts and buying tickets to build decks, and play online PTQs. That was another boost for MtG in Brazil since our country is really big and the PTQs are concentrated in a small area.

In the first three years of the QP race on MTGO, we had 4–5 Brazilians in the Top 10, including the first one twice. *Batutinha* is probably the most famous since he plays a lot and has good results, but most of the "serious" brazilian MTGO grinders proved themselves with IRL success. Recently we had *megafone* top eight PT Return to Ravnica, *KaOz.Zeh* winning GP São Paulo, *Babones* qualified for the Brazilian national team at the WMC, *Bolov0* won several online PTQs, and recently the *SSS* at GP Vegas, *L1X0* top eighted GP Denver and so on. As these grinders have success IRL, more and more new players start MTGO on their heels so I can safely say MTGO is vital for the Brazilian competitive community.

*You are travelling a lot, own a shop, you want to prepare for the World Championship, but live far away from all the other qualified players, and finally you are leading a rather inexperienced Brazilian WMC team, that is probably spread out all over the country. Some people even want to have a life besides Magic. How do you manage?*

Fortunately I found some trustful good people to take care of the shop when I'm travelling and even though I still do a lot, I'm sure the business is in good hands. I'm lucky that people can take vacations in July and I won't be travelling then so availability won't be an issue. Testing for the World Magic Cup is tricky because M14 releases only two weeks before the tournament and I'm not sure if it will be available on MTGO in time. Since we live far from each other and we will arrive in Amsterdam only on the Monday before the tournament there is no chance of irl testing till the week of the WMC, either. The other formats are DGM sealed which I already asked them to keep in touch via MTGO and M14 Limited which shouldn't be too complicated to figure out with a couple drafts.

The main problem is the World Championship starting two days before the WMC which will immensely reduce the time I will have to test with them. On the bright side, the only two other formats are Modern Masters Limited, which I play on a daily basis on MTGO and Modern which I don't think will change much after M14. The only real change is Scavenging Ooze becoming legal. The other qualified players for the World Championship usually test with other qualified players or have their own playtest group, so for this one I will be preparing almost exclusively with the WMC brazilian team. This is not a perfect situation, but I think it should be sufficient since the team is really motivated for the WMC and they take it very seriously.

### 3.5 Eric Froehlich

**Qualified** for 3rd most Pro Points in 2012–13

**Nationality:** United States

**Age:** 29

**Nickname:** Efro

**Pro Points:** 65 in 2012–13, 239 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 34

**Pro Tour debut:** London 1999 (60th)

**Median finish:** 56

**Average finish:** ~102

**Top 8:** 3 Pro Tours and 10 Grand Prix

**Team:** ChannelFireball

**Planeswalker** level 47

Eric Froehlich is another old school competitor. He was a mainstay on the Pro Tour from 2001 to 2003. Especially in 2001 and 2002 he managed impressive results, including a Pro Tour top eight appearances. Afterwards he fell off the gravy train and from 2005 focused on his professional poker career.

It was not until 2010 that Efro got back into professional Magic. Froehlich then got together with ChannelFireball and has had outstanding results since. Two Pro Tour top eight finishes, two near misses, and a string of Grand Prix top eights don't leave much to be desired for most people. On the other hand a trophy is still missing in Froehlich's resume, a fact that occasionally seems to bug Eric a bit.



*When you found your way back to Pro Magic, you hadn't been around for quite a while, but suddenly you were a fixed part of Team ChannelFireball. How did this come to be?*

The PT I got a sponsor's invite for was San Diego 2010, which is before Channel-Fireball was even a team. There were a few friends working together, which got even bigger for San Juan, where there was tons of success. I went to Amsterdam to just hang out in advance and did some testing with a collaboration of the guys currently on CFB, Sperling, Rietzl, Chapin, etc sitting around a couple apartments grinding games. I eventually decided to play the White Weenie deck that Paul won with, as well as Sperling and Nassif. For Worlds in Chiba, the next tournament, the decision was made to actually try to form more of a team and meet in advance in San Jose to do some testing. We tried the same approach for PT Paris to start the next season, resulting in Caw Blade, and haven't looked back.

*Last season you had a very good run at and after Pro Tour Gatecrash. Still it seemed like it would have meant a lot to you if you could have gone all the way in at least one of these events. Magic players are usually measured by their Top 8 finishes, though. Even in the Hall of Fame there is a hand full of people who never won a trophy. Why is winning a title so important to you?*

Winning means a lot because it's why you compete. Any time you enter any competition, winning has got to be the goal. Now, I don't actually put nearly as much weight into it as most and don't think winning a PT is worth much more than top8ing a PT since it's a game of sooooo much variance that consistency is the only true measure of skill in my book. That being said, who doesn't want to win?

*This is not the first year that you are on the ballot for Hall of Fame, but the last season certainly did a lot to advance your cause. How do you feel about the Hall of Fame? Is it something you are working towards?*

The Hall of Fame is the biggest goal just because it is recognition from so many people that you respect on your accomplishments. I think my stats are currently among the best for people not in and it's definitely a goal of mine I hope to achieve at some point. My brash attitude and approach may keep me off the ballots of some voters in the future, but hopefully I can continue having some degree of success and will be eternally grateful if I can make it one day.

*You are a professional Magic and Poker player. Do any skills you developed at Magic help you at Poker and vice versa? Do you think you are more apt at reading your opponents than other Magic players?*

I've always said that I wouldn't be half as good at one game if it wasn't for the other. I play far less Magic now than I did in my "prime", yet I am significantly better. Playing Magic as a kid prepared me for the big stage and bright lights of battling it out for tons of money with cameras on me in poker. I definitely think I can read people very well in both games and it's a huge asset.

### 3.6 Martin Jůza

**Qualified** for 10th most Pro Points in 2012–13

**Nationality:** Czech Republic

**Age:** 26

**Pro Points:** 52 in 2012–13

**Pro Tours played:** 28

**Pro Tour debut:** New Orleans 2003 (194th)

**Median finish:** 84

**Average finish:** 96.3

**Top 8:** 2 Pro Tours and 15 Grand Prix (4 wins)

**Team:** ChannelFireball

**Planeswalker** level 50

**Other accomplishments:** Czech national champion in 2005, 2006, and 2012

Martin first made it to the Pro Tour in 2003, but it was not until late 2007 that he was found competing regularly at PT level. However Jůza then managed two top eight finishes and a couple of near misses almost immediately. After that greater success on the Pro Tour was elusive for the Czech.

While his Pro Tour finishes have been “only” rock-solid recently, Martin has developed an appetite for travelling and winning Grand Prix, especially Limited Grand Prix. Everybody loves ripping a few boosters, but Martin has a reputation for being a real connoisseur of Limited. A unique feat Martin has achieved during his travels is winning two Grand Prix in the same city, Bochum.



*You are very successful on the Grand Prix circuit, but your last major success on the Pro Tour has been a while. How do you feel about this? Do you have an explanation for it or do you think it's just variance?*

Maybe I'm doing something wrong but I would like to think it's just variance. I have a great team to playtest with, and we always have good decks. On the other hand I very rarely test for GPs and I usually do well, so I really don't know.

*With playing many Grand Prix comes a lot of travelling. For most people this would be a strain. Is that different for you? What makes travelling enjoyable for you? Or is it just something necessary to play a lot of big Magic tournaments? Are there any places you didn't have the chance to go to despite all the Grand Prix trips, but still want to see?*

I actually like the travelling. Coming from the Czech Republic I normally would not have that many opportunities to travel so I'm trying to make the most of it. Obviously you need to be the highest Pro Club level and get appearance fees to do that, but since I got on the train I was able to make level8/platinum every year.

*You are known to love playing Limited. Do you like any Constructed formats at all? Are they all the same to you or do you enjoy some more than others?*

I don't like Constructed mostly because everything constantly changes and even if you keep playing the same deck you still need to adjust to different metagames pretty much every week. Out of all the Constructed formats I think I like Modern the most — its the one that's the most breakable because there are so many cards.

*This year you are on the Hall of Fame ballot for the first time. Does the Hall of Fame have any special meaning for you? Is it something you are working for?*

Obviously it's something special. I would compare it to winning a Pro Tour, maybe even more. It's why I play Magic and it would mean a lot to me to get in one day.

### 3.7 Brian Kibler

**Qualified** for 6th most Pro Points in 2012–13

**Nationality:** United States

**Age:** 32

**Nickname:** The Dragonmaster

**Pro Points:** 54 in 2012–13, 377 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 46 (?)

**Pro Tour debut:** Chicago 1998 (?th)

**Median finish:** ?

**Average finish:** ?

**Top 8:** 5 Pro Tours (2 wins) and 13 Grand Prix (3 wins)

**Team:** ChannelFireball

**Planeswalker** level 50

**Other accomplishments:** 2012 United States National Champion; Hall of Fame class of 2010

If you think of glamor in Magic, then you got to think of Brian Kibler. Brian combines good looks and eloquence with a strong analytical mind. This makes him not only an accomplished writer, but also a great tutor in the principles of the game. Kibler's Magic career started back –no, really *way* back then– in 1997 with a win at Grand Prix Toronto. His first real forays into professional Magic did not come until 2000, though. From 2000 to 2005 Brian was a mainstay on the Pro Tour, finishing almost every event at least in the Top 100. Despite the on average immaculate results his 26 consecutive Pro Tour attendances resulted in only one top eight appearance.



After a four-year hiatus Brian was back in 2009 with a top eight right out of the gates. His draft at the final table was afterwards criticized by some as haphazardous, but Kibler gave the best answer anybody could have given. He followed up with winning the next Pro Tour. Kibler's second life as a Magic pro has since displayed a higher variance than the first. Where he finished mostly somewhere in the money the first time around, this time there are several weak finishes, but also the big splashes as testified to by another top eight and another win.

*How is life as a rock star in a nerd community?*

It is still pretty surreal to me that I have “fans” and the like, though I’ve gotten used to it at this point. I’ve actually had people recognize me from Magic in all kinds of places even totally unrelated to gaming, like nightclubs and music festivals. The craziest had to be when I was visiting the Louvre in Paris after the Pro Tour, and some other Magic players who were there stopped me and asked to take a photo with me. They’re in the most famous museum in the world and they want a picture with ME. Super crazy, but really cool.

*Does Niv-Mizzet approve of the Dragonmaster’s liason with green and white humanoids?*

It’s funny that I have the reputation I have now, because my earliest successes in Magic were all with non-green decks. I won GP Toronto with a monoblue Ophidian deck in 1997, then had a lot of success with decks like Counterpost. PT Chicago in 2000 was my first top 8, though, and I did that with a bunch of green creatures and dragons. Even after that I played a lot of other kinds of decks, like Donate and Psychatog, but after I came back to Magic green creatures were so good that I’ve just kept playing them. I like proactive strategies, and green decks are the best way to do that these days.

*You stopped playing Magic competitively a long time ago. Then you were suddenly back on the scene, and one of the dominant factors right away. Why did you stop playing, what made you come back? What makes you a better player now?*

I stopped playing a few times, once in high school and then again after I graduated from college. The first time was to focus on my senior year in school, and the second was after I’d accepted a job doing Game Design at Upper Deck. I’d just won the first VS System pro circuit –that game’s equivalent of a Pro Tour– so I didn’t have quite the same drive to win in Magic as I’d had. I came back mostly because I missed the competition, but the creation of the Hall of Fame played a big part, too. Magic had been such a big part of my life that I felt like I wanted to prove myself worthy of inclusion, and I think I did a good job of that. I think my results are better now mostly because I’m more mature — I’m better able to focus and keep myself balanced mentally and emotionally, when before I had a tendency to get frustrated when I made a mistake and let myself get thrown off by it.

*You are a successful Magic pro and game designer. You even worked with Richard Garfield on your latest project. Is designing Magic something that you would want to do some day? Is it maybe something you have casually tried for yourself?*

I've actually been offered a job at WotC working on Magic several times, and every time I have turned it down. I don't like the idea of not being able to play Magic competitively. Tournament Magic has provided me with an incredible intellectual challenge for my entire life, and while working on the game would be cool, I think I'd miss that competition too much. I'm also pretty happy where I am and what I'm doing now, and get to have a hand in making awesome games like SolForge and Ascension while still playing Magic.

### 3.8 Tom Martell

**Qualified** as Pro Tour Gatecrash winner

**Nationality:** United States

**Age:** 31

**Pro Points:** 67 in 2012–13, 166 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 12

**Pro Tour debut:** San Juan 2010 (32rd)

**Median finish:** 26

**Average finish:** 80.4

**Top 8:** 2 Pro Tours (1 win) and 4 Grand Prix (1 win)

**Team:** ChannelFireball

**Planeswalker** level 46

When Tom Martell top eighted Pro Tour Paris in 2011 he might still have been thought of as “that other ChannelFireball guy”. Flash forward two years and it turns out “that other guy” has a lot more going for him than had originally met the eye. Although twelve Pro Tours is still not a lot to run statistics on, a median finish of 26th is an incredible display of consistency on the highest level.

Before winning Pro Tour Gatecrash Martell had made himself a name as one of the world’s finest Esper Stoneblade pilots. This was the deck Tom chose for the 2012 Legacy Grand Prix in Indianapolis. He won that one, but it was hardly the first time that Tom had been seen doing well with blue-white decks in Legacy. His first Grand Prix top eight came with the aid of a Bant-colored Counter-Top deck. Tom didn’t quite top eight back to back Legacy Grand Prix, though. In between his finals appearances there was “only” a 17th place for Martell in Atlanta, with Esper Stoneblade.



*You won Pro Tour Gatecrash with Aristocrats. That is certainly one of the more interesting decks to win a Pro Tour with, in part due to the fact that at that point it was a rather unusual choice. How did you end up playing Aristocrats?*

I often have a very hard time settling on a deck for PTs and have been known to bring two complete decks and decklists with me to the tournament site and decide during the player meeting. For PT Paris, where I played Caw-Blade, I decided the night before. For PT Return to Ravnica, I brought both Storm and Jund with me and didn't decide until the judge was asking me to turn in a decklist.

For Montreal, thankfully, it wasn't quite that bad. About a week before the tournament I really wanted to play some version of Esper. I kept playing it on Magic Online and getting crushed, losing to decks playing with Falkenrath Aristocrat and Boros Reckoner. I decided I wanted to play with those two cards. At the same time, Sam was iterating through dozens of versions of Zombie and Human based black-red-white decks. When he came to the shell that would turn into Aristocrats, I played a half dozen games and was confident I would play it at the PT.

The deck felt powerful and had a lot of tricky interactions that I felt would let me outplay my opponents. I also really liked that the deck could play multiple roles in a match, letting me dictate tempo and position myself to trump my opponents' plans.

I also really didn't want to repeat my mistake in Barcelona, where I panicked about switching to our Bant hexproof deck and played a control deck that I knew I didn't believe in. I think having both Jon and Sam happy about a deck is a huge indicator that it fits my playstyle and I should be playing it.

*You are known to be a fervent supporter of Stoneblade in Legacy. Why do you like the deck so much? Do you think it is the best deck in the format, or just the one you like most?*

I think Legacy is a wide open format and you can do well with almost any style of deck if you play it well. The Esper list I've been playing for the last few years just makes a lot of sense to me; similar to Aristocrats, I like that the deck can play different roles effectively depending on the needs of the board. It reminds me a lot of Faeries in that sense; you can play a control game and then pivot to an aggressive line seamlessly to try and close out a game before your opponent has time to adjust.

There were points over the last two years where I was certain it was the best deck in the format but I'm not as sure now. The recent change to the Planeswalker rule definitely mixes things up (but also makes Lingering Souls even better as a way to answer Planeswalkers is more important) and the deck can struggle with redundant combo decks which have been gaining popularity.

*Is Legacy your favorite format? What kind of player are you in general?*

I really just love playing Magic. Legacy is my favorite constructed format because the games are very involved and have lots of small decisions that can massively impact your win percentage. This can also happen in other constructed formats but it is much less common. There is something about the elegance of properly playing and resolving a Brainstorm that I find really appealing.

I am not a big fan of building decks from scratch. It takes a lot of time and you need to be immersed in the environment; unfortunately given my schedule, I am rarely in a position to do that. I do really enjoy tuning decks; once the team settles on an archetype for a PT I find my activity level increasing dramatically as I try to identify the best sideboarding plans and really internalizing what matters in each matchup.

Limited is also a blast. Deck building in this context is much more like tuning and less like constructed deck building; you have a limited card pool and need to figure out how best to confront the challenges your opponents present. I love formats where there are lots of sideboarding decisions and ways to can morph your deck in between games.

*Your mean and average finish stats on the Pro Tour are truly phenomenal. How long do you "plan" to keep on going like that?*

I'd love to keep up this pace of results for ever but I somehow think that isn't realistic. I've obviously had a tremendous run the last few years and variance will catch up to me. Hopefully I can pick up another 2 top8s before then as making it into the Hall of Fame would be a tremendous honor and is something that means a lot to me. I want to be able to keep playing Pro Tours for the rest of my life even though I know I can't keep up the current grind of GPs and other tournaments for much longer.

### 3.9 Shuhei Nakamura

**Name:** 中村修平

**Qualified** for 6th most Pro Points in 2012–13

**Nationality:** Japan

**Age:** 31

**Pro Points:** 54 in 2012–13, 530 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 44

**Pro Tour debut:** San Diego 2002 (281st)

**Median finish:** 49.5

**Average finish:** 87.4

**Top 8:** 5 Pro Tours and 22 Grand Prix (5 wins)

**Team:** ChannelFireball

**Other accomplishments:** Hall of Fame class of 2011 vote leader; 2009 Japanese National Champion; 2008 Pro Player of the Year

**Planeswalker** level 50

Shuhei has been a constant traveller for about seven years now. It is a mystery how someone can travel around the world all the time and still perform at the highest level. For example in 2006 Nakamura placed third at Grand Prix Toulouse in late June, and followed that up with wins in St. Louis and Hiroshima in July and August. This was just one hot summer for Shuhei, though. Over his career he has racked up an astounding twentytwo Grand Prix top eights and five Pro Tour top eights. On his wanderings Shuhei has also gathered about 80,000 Planeswalker Points, more than anyone else.

The one thing that is still missing from Shuhei's resumee is a Pro Tour title. Although his Pro Tour performances are consistently very good, it has been five years since the last top eight, and the trophy is still out there. It remains to be seen when Shuhei can make this final step in his quest to become one of the legends of the game.



*You have walked the planes almost forever, but nowadays we hear rumors of you retiring from travelling. Is that true? How does that make you feel?*

That is true. I am thinking about retiring from traveling because ... there are actually two reasons. At first, my priority was playing Magic. The purpose of walking the planes is collecting Pro Points. However, the system has changed. Especially new the cap system means, that my scheme is dead. I like travelling a lot, but I cannot find a reason to travel as I have to earn some pro points from GPs. However, my Magic style is alike to Ichiro's: I don't make many home runs (top8), but I make a bunch of hits instead (top16/top32/top64).

However, I am a Magic player and not rich. I have to earn money from playing Magic. That means at least keeping platinum status, and maybe qualifying for the World Championship, too. I will have to change my style a bit, if I still want to live by Magic. The pro club system for 2014 basically says that you have to top eight a Pro Tour or have at least two top 16 finishes. Therefore I must raise the quality of my Magic play one by one.

*Although you are not one of the players usually seen as an only-Limited player, all of your GP triumphs were Limited tournaments. Do you consider Limited to be your strong side? Of the Constructed formats Extended seemed to be the one where you did best. Is that format special to you? If yes, is Modern an adequate replacement in your eyes?*

Yes, I think Limited is my strong side now. This is connected to my lifestyle as well. Constructed formats need a lot of time for me to make a deck, shape it, watch the metagame, and practice — oh, and bringing the cards, too.

Limited is more convenient for me. Just practice somewhere, and don't bring any cards. I guess, I will be going to many Limited GPs this season, but I am not sure if I will attend a single Constructed GP.

*You have been one of the top Magic Pro Players for almost a decade, and maybe the best player to never have won a Pro Tour. Is that something that is bothering you? Also when you last top8ed a Pro Tour PTs were still single-format. Is that a coincidence, or do you find multi-format Pro Tours harder to tackle?*

Of course multi-format Pro Tours are harder to tackle than single-format Pro Tours. Especially in my case. I like Limited by the way... Recently I did not have the passion for Pro Tours, that I had before. They were like GPs only a bit more important individually. If I have to find something good in the pro club change, it is that it should renew my passion for the Pro Tour.

*After the World Championship you could well be the player with the most pro points ever, the Pro Player of the Ages basically. What does that mean to you? Is it something you have been working for, or just something that happens at some point?*

No, that is not important for me. It is the same as two years ago, when I became the player with the most Planeswalker Points. I just play Magic, hoping to still keep my ways next year.

### 3.10 David Ochoa

**Qualified** for 10th most Pro Points in 2012–13

**Nationality:** United States

**Age:** 32

**Nickname:** Web / Webster

**Pro Points:** 52 in 2012–13, 199 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 21

**Pro Tour debut:** Philadelphia 2005 (257th)

**Median finish:** 88

**Average finish:** 143.1

**Top 8:** 1 Pro Tour and 5 Grand Prix

**Team:** ChannelFireball

**Planeswalker** level 47

Ochoa is a bit of a mystery man. ChannelFireball describes him as *A man of few words but large appetite*. Being a man of shrewd humor that description probably appeals to him. Good food certainly facilitates good Magic playing, however Ochoa's own exploits suggest that he has more to offer than being the team's caterer.

David's first forays into Pro Magic were as early as 2005. For a time he was on and off the Pro Tour, but around the time that ChannelFireball was formed, his performances reached a new level. From Austin 2009 to San Juan 2010 Ochoa managed three top 25 finishes in four attempts. He has since made a handful of top eight appearances at Grand Prix, but his crowning achievement so far is certainly his semi-final appearance at Pro Tour Return to Ravnica.



*Do you think Groucho Marx would approve of you being a member of the Pro Players Club? And what is this dressing up as Groucho business about anyway?*

If I had to guess, Groucho would definitely approve of my antics, although my intentions weren't to try and mimic him; it wasn't really an attempt to impersonate anyone in particular, but rather me just being spontaneous.

*Imagine it is the eve of August 4th and a man of few words, but large appetite has just won the World Championship. What would you consider an adequate dinner to indulge in?*

Well, considering that August 4th is my birthday, it would have to also include a slice of cake at the end. As for the rest, I'd settle for something in season like a roasted pork loin on arugula with nectarines and a balsamic reduction. I don't have any one particular favorite dish, but I would want something that showcases regional cuisine in tandem with the season.

*You are one of the few professional players that are known to enjoy Vintage. What do you like about Vintage? Are you looking forward to having power on MTGO?* Vintage is awesome because it's so complex. Yes, there are turn-one (soft)kills every now and then, but there are more games that last much longer, and the interactions going on in those are always fascinating. Unfortunately, I haven't had a chance to keep up with the format lately. I am looking forward to playing it on MTGO in my free time if/when that happens.

*Four of your five Grand Prix top eights were in Limited events. Is Limited your stronger side? Which Constructed formats do you like other than Vintage?*

I definitely play much more Limited than Constructed, and much of that is drafting. I like the odd card combinations that don't come up as often in some of the constructed formats which is why I also like Legacy; any format that has tons of cards to play around that's thought-provoking.

### 3.11 Shahar Shenhar

**Qualified** for 8th most Pro Points in 2012–13

**Nationality:** Israel

**Age:** 19

**Pro Points:** 53 in 2012–13, 112 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 8

**Pro Tour debut:** Paris 2011 (38th)

**Median finish:** 103

**Average finish:** 134.1

**Top 8:** 5 Grand Prix (3 wins)

**Planeswalker** level 46

Shahar Shenhar is the youngest competitor in this field, but probably not the most inexperienced, and certainly not one to take lightly. Shenhar has taken to the life as a wandering mage already, winning three Grand Prix titles in the process. His 112 Pro Points are further evidence that he is no slouch on the Pro Tour either.

Recently the Israeli has moved back to Israel after ten years in the United States, but with all the travelling, at the moment Shahar might be more at home in a random hotel room than anywhere else. Actually one of his Grand Prix trophies he won just less than two months ago in the country he so recently departed.



*You have an early lead in the Player of the Year race. To what extra lengths will you go to stay ahead, or do you think it's just a momentary picture, basically a mirage that you are not going to pursue?*

The early lead is sweet, but any lead before any PTs is close to irrelevant. I will be playing a ton of Magic this season and we'll see if I can stay at first.

*You are nineteen years old, but you may vote for the Hall of Fame already. Isn't that a bit awkward for you, considering that these players started their professional career when you were nine, or even before that? On which basis are you going to decide who to vote for? And who are you going to vote for?*

It is a bit weird to get a vote at this age. Thankfully I've gotten to know three of the major contenders for this year very well and am happy to vote for them. (William "Huey" Jensen, LSV, and Ben Stark) I took a close look at the stats Wizards of the Coast provided and for me the most important stat is PT Top8s, and to vote for someone with less than 4 will mean you need a really good reason like Pikula, Shouta, Efro, and Juza. My ballot this year will be: LSV, Huey, Ben Stark, Willy Edel, and Chris Pikula.

*What kind of player are you? Which formats, and archetypes do you like? Do you prefer Limited or Constructed?*

I guess I would say I'm both, a Limited and Constructed player, loving them both in their own ways. I would consider myself a control player though and I definitely prefer it when it's a good option.

*Magic in Isreal; sounds a bit like Magic in exile. Despite that you have a World Champion in your country. Having just moved back to Israel, what's your first impression of the Magic community there?*

Magic in Israel has been great, the community while not big is very nice and welcoming. MTGMadness.com, an Israeli online store, took me in and I've been travelling to European GPs with them since. I haven't gotten to any IRL magic tournaments in Israel. All the players I met, I met through MTGMadness. As far as the World Magic Cup goes I'm excited to be on the team and ahh we will see how I'll be able to fit that and the World Championship in that week!!

### 3.12 Ben Stark

**Qualified** for 5th most Pro Points in 2012–13

**Nationality:** United States

**Age:** 29

**Pro Points:** 61 in 2012–13, 299 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 38

**Pro Tour debut:** London 1999 (?)

**Median finish:** 71

**Average finish:** 106.8

**Top 8:** 4 Pro Tours (1 win) and 9 Grand Prix (1 win)

**Team:** ChannelFireball

**Planeswalker** level 50

Ben Stark is first and foremost known as a Limited expert, and some even regard him as the best Limited player in the world. His six Limited Grand Prix top eights certainly stand testament to that.

Stark is one of the contestants whose Magic career has entered a second summer. The first time around it took Ben a few Pro Tours to get things going, but after a little warmup he became one of the most consistent players on the Tour. However, after back to back Pro Tour top eight finishes, Ben turned his back on pro Magic for a couple of years.

When Ben Stark made his comeback in 2009, once again it took him some time to compete on the highest level. Leaving that adaptation phase behind, Ben took his first Pro Tour title in 2011 in Paris, and has been going strong ever since.



*You have had back to back top eight finishes in the first half of your Magic career, but left professional Magic while still being on the train. What made you quit back then, and what made you come back to pro Magic almost five years later? Did you play Magic in between?*

I quit because poker was taking more and more of my time and I knew I wouldn't be able to play as well since I didn't have as much time to dedicate to Magic. I always played on Magic Online, but I didn't play in person much between 2005–2009. I came back because I figured I was still good enough to qualify and I didn't really care anymore about impressing people with my play or anything. I missed the Pro Tour and if I was mediocre instead of great that was ok with me. I just wanted to be there.

*You are one of the players on the ballot for Hall of Fame, and this year is probably the first year, where your chances of getting in are real. Does that occupy your mind? What is your attitude towards the election?*

Yes. I really enjoy playing in Magic Pro Tours so I'm really hoping to get in. It's a huge honor and I would definitely take advantage of it by coming to Pro Tours long after I'm not platinum anymore.

*You and Martin Juza are probably the two players that are most strongly identified with as being pure Limited players. Do you two have a special relationship within team ChannelFireball? Do you work together to break the Limited part of the Pro Tour while the rest works on Constructed?*

Yes, we do. He is the first person I go to during the testing when I have ideas or theories about a Limited format. We will sit around and discuss it for hours, then I'll generally start talking about it with everyone else after long discussions with Martin.

*Being around for quite some time, you probably have seen your share of Limited environments you did and didn't like. Which ones did stand out? What do you think, makes a great Draft format?*

I think Kamigawa block was by far the best Limited format. The games had so many decisions and so much play. I never enjoyed Magic more than playing Kamigawa block limited. Next would be Time Spiral and Invasion block. Modern Masters is the best limited set they have made in five years.

### 3.13 Lee Shi Tian

**Name:** 李詩天

**Qualified** as Pro Point leader in the Asian-Pacific region in 2012–13

**Nationality:** Hong Kong

**Age:** 25

**Pro Points:** 44 in 2012–13, 108 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 10

**Pro Tour debut:** Kyoto 2009 (94th)

**Median finish:** 109

**Average finish:** 140.6

**Top 8:** 1 Pro Tour and 2 Grand Prix (1 win)

**Other accomplishments:** 2009 and 2013 Hong Kong National Champion

**Planeswalker** level 43

Lee Shi Tian made his first waves in competitive Magic when he won GP Birmingham in 2008. Back then he was the only unknown player in a rather high-profile top eight, but that didn't intimidate Lee, who led his Kithkins into the fray and never looked back.

Afterwards Lee Shi Tian layed low for a while. A solid run in 2010–11 ended with a suboptimal finish at PT Nagoya. Lee's real breakthrough came later at Pro Tour Return to Ravnica. Being qualified the hard way –via PTQ– Lee Shi Tian and his Scapeshift deck marched straight to the top eight, where he lost only to the eventual winner, Stanislav Cifka.



*When you won Grand Prix Birmingham in 2008 that came pretty much out of nowhere. You were an unknown Asian, coming to a GP in England, and took the title in a top eight, that was probably as good as GP top eights get. How did this come to be?*

I was studying in Guildford as an exchange student at that time. After the semester I stayed at my friend Eric Li Yu Hin's place in Manchester. GP Birmingham was one week before my flight back to Hong Kong. So, why not?

*What formats do you like and which kinds of decks do you prefer to play?*

I like Draft most. Passing and receiving signals, deck building, combat skills, reading and bluffing, it's all there. For Constructed, I like playing metagame decks. Casting spells people don't expect and that getting them puzzled is always the best part of MTG.

*Do you have some relationship to other professional Magic players or are you a lone wolf on the pro circuit? With who do you test for events?*

We gathered the best players in Asia and formed Team MTGmintcard, and we did perform very well last year. Mostly I test with Kuo Tzu Ching, Huang Hao Shan and Chen Lieng. For the Pro Tour, we will playtest with Team Mana Deprived.

*The vast majority of the Magic playing community lives either in the United States or in Europe. What is it like to play Magic in Hong Kong? Is there a big community? Are there many competitive players?*

Hong Kong is a small country, that only shares one alternating PTQ slot with Indonesia. I believe it is not really fair to compare Hong Kong to the United States and Europe. Most Asian countries have many good and competitive players, but they just don't have the chance that you would get in the United States or Europe. Due to the low number of GPs held in the APAC region, the organized play is not really as effective in Asia and the reward for playing competitive MTG is not that great.

The low number of competitive tournaments leads to low number of dedicated players. The lower number of players leads to lower resource input from WotC and the the situation just loops on and on. Due to the five GP rule, American and European players will probably start to understand how hard it is to make Platinum in Asia. You should just hope that this kind of spiral will not also start in other regions.

### 3.14 Josh Utter-Leyton

**Qualified** as 2012–13 Player of the Year

**Nationality:** United States

**Age:** 27

**Nickname:** Wrapper

**Pro Points:** 77 in 2012–13, 223 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 19

**Pro Tour debut:** Hollywood 2008 (171st)

**Median finish:** 81

**Average finish:** 115.5

**Top 8:** 4 Pro Tours and 7 Grand Prix

**Team:** ChannelFireball

**Other accomplishments:** 2012–13 Pro Player of the Year; 2010 and 2012–13 United States National Champion

**Planeswalker** level 47

Most of ChannelFireball’s team members have been on the Pro Tour for at least ten years, and thus well before Team ChannelFireball came into existence. Josh Utter-Leyton made his first Pro Tour appearance about five years ago, however, and has thus been around the team for almost all his professional career. Josh has since top eighted a Pro Tour about once a season, an average that puts him on par with the very best in the game. Most of these he reached with aggressive decks. Where other competent players often shy away from this archetype, Josh’s performances are powerful evidence, that aggressive decks can reward skill as much as control or combo decks.

From his team members Josh is often credited for being not so much a deck designer, but a deck engineer. Where some players like to churn out ideas for new decks, Utter-Leyton takes a deck, that is already good, and polishes until it is the best deck it can be. This approach has served him well so far. His immaculate results notwithstanding Josh Utter-Leyton is widely considered as one of the best Constructed players around.



*You seem to be perfectly comfortable with every deck that ends up in your hands. Apparently this true to such an extent, that you could well be considered the most complete Constructed player of modern times. Can you explain how you manage to adapt to every single deck so well?*

I think it's mostly a factor of being happy to play with anything, so I have a lot of experience playing all kinds of decks, and from that I have built up an intuition for playing a wide variety of deck types.

*Are there any archetypes that you enjoy playing more than others? What formats do you like? Do you prefer Limited or Constructed?*

I enjoy aggro-control the most. I prefer Limited, but would much rather work on a new Constructed format than play an explored Limited format.

*You have been described as a player that shines at tuning decks rather than creating new decks. Do you sometimes build new decks for yourself, or is it more like your job in the team is to find the best possible configuration for the team deck?*

I build new decks all the time, I just rarely play them. We don't really have defined roles like that on the team, it's more that people just work on the decks they are most interested in.

*At the World Magic Cup you captain an inexperienced team, that's spread out all over a huge country, you got to prepare for Worlds, and you are one of the few top Magic players, that have a job outside of Magic. Do you even have time to answer these questions? And how are you going to prepare for both events adequately?*

It wouldn't be possible to prepare for both events adequately without teammates

☺

### 3.15 Yuuya Watanabe

**Name:** 渡辺雄也

**Qualified** as 2012 Players Championship winner

**Nationality:** Japan

**Age:** 24

**Pro Points:** 65 in 2012–13, 334 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 25

**Pro Tour debut:** Yokohama 2007 (139th)

**Median finish:** 62

**Average finish:** 102.7

**Top 8:** 2 Pro Tours and 18 Grand Prix (6 wins)

**Other accomplishments:** 2012 Japanese National Champion; 2012 and 2009 Pro Player of the Year; 2007 Rookie of the Year

**Planeswalker** level 49

Yuuya Watanabe's career started with a win at Grand Prix Kyoto 2007. Although no further top eight finishes are recorded for Yuuya that season, he claimed the Rookie of the Year title at the end of that season anyway. The next season didn't yield any further high-profile finishes until the very end, and some might already have seen the Rookie title as a fluke. Nevertheless Yuuya finished the season on a high note, advancing as far as the semi-finals of the World Championship with the Japanese National team.

It was not until the next season, however, that his career really took off. In the late summer of 2009 Watanabe went on a Grand Prix tour, that in its dominance is only rivalled by Kai's legendary run in 1998–99. After four consecutive Grand Prix and a Nationals top eight appearance, nobody was shocked when Yuuya top eighted again at Pro Tour Austin. Only two weeks later Yuuya followed that up with yet another Grand Prix top eight. Unsurprisingly at the end of the season Yuuya Watanabe was crowned Player of the Year with one of the biggest leads in modern times. Afterwards Yuuya stayed on top of the Grand Prix scene, averaging three Grand Prix top eights a year with about a win amongst these. On the Pro Tour circuit he added another top eight to his resume last season, just a few months after his greatest achievement so far, his win at the Players Championship.



*You have achieved all of your six Grand Prix successes either in Standard or Limited. Are these your favorite formats? What kind of decks do you usually prefer to play?*

My favorite format is Limited. I like fighting, using a different strategy every time, unlike in Constructed formats. My favorite Constructed decks would be decks that can interfere with the opponent at any moment. I like decks such as UW Delver and UB Faeries.

*Who do you usually test with in Japan? Are all Japanese Pros play together or are there different groups?*

It depends a lot on the situation. Recently I have tested a lot with Makihito Mihara, but regardless of the actual test groups, all Japanese Pros stick together.

*You have won many trophies in a short time. In contrast to Shuhei Nakamura or Martin Juza, you reached most of these achievements in one region, Asia. At some point you did travel to foreign GPs, but not anymore apparently. Didn't you like the travelling? Why?*

I really like Magic, but for me it doesn't do to sacrifice everything else in life to go around the world. Having a job makes travelling even more complicated. I think it's great, what Shuhei and Martin do, but it is not for me. Going to Asian Grand Prix is relatively easy, and I do that, but frequently going somewhere else is difficult.

*Being Rookie of the Year 2007 you were not exactly an unknown going into the 2009 season. However, that summer must have been special for you. Not many even dream of top eighting six consecutive professional events. How do you remember that summer? Do you have an explanation for the constant success back then?*

That summer I was special. I won so much in those days. The big events were almost all Limited, and in a Limited environment the amount of strategies is indeed Limited. Back then I just always knew what the strategy of my opponent would be. I have played in that state all those days in all these events.

### 3.16 Craig Wescoe

**Qualified** as Pro Tour Dragon's Maze winner

**Nationality:** United States

**Age:** 30

**Pro Points:** 45 in 2012–13, 170 lifetime

**Pro Tours played:** 27

**Pro Tour debut:** Washington D.C. 1999 (27th team)

**Median finish:** 167

**Average finish:** 143.7

**Top 8:** 3 Pro Tours (1 win) and 3 Grand Prix

**Team:** TCGPlayer

**Planeswalker** level 48

Craig Wescoe's professional Magic career started a bit earlier than most people might have realized. His first Pro Tour appearance was at Pro Tour Washington, D.C., last millenium. Although money finishes were elusive for Craig back then he managed to qualify for Pro Tours the hard way eleven times, either by winnings PTQs or via Rating.

After a seven-year break Wescoe was back for Pro Tour Honolulu in 2009. Craig has since been known to be one of the most fervent supporters of any given archetype, in his case White Weenie. When he made his first top 8 in San Diego Wescoe played mono-white Weenies, when he made top 8 at Worlds 2011 Wescoe played white Weenie with just a tad of blue, when he won Pro Tour Dragon's Maze guess what he played. Of course it was White Weenie, this time with a good part of green in his deck. Either way, Craig's approach seems to have led to a hit-or-miss in his Pro Tour performances. Wescoe had his fair share of finishes far away from the prize ranges, but on the other hand three top eights in sixteen attempts don't leave anything to be desired.



*You played some Pro Tours way back then, but not really that successfully. What made you leave the game then, and what made you come back? Why are you a better player today?*

I failed to cash my first ten or so Pro Tours. I was good enough to win PTQs back then, but not yet good enough to do well on the big stage. Eventually when I started college I stopped playing Magic competitively and focused on academia. After completing my graduate degree six years later, I missed playing Magic competitively and being part of the Pro Tour. So I played in a few PTQs and won one (for Honolulu 2009), chained the next few PTs together off rating, and finally cashed a PT (Worlds 2009 in Rome). The top 50 finish at Worlds qualified me for PT San Diego 2010 where I made top 8 and haven't missed a PT since.

Since my early years on the tour, I've matured a lot as a person and as a player. I understand the game on a much deeper level and I'm not giving up all the percentage points that I used to give up. I've also learned how to play to my individual strengths and to mitigate my weaknesses.

*You are one of the players that are very strongly connected with one archetype, White Weenie in fact. This deck is usually not seen as a tier one archetype. Why the love for White Weenie? What makes you have success with the deck where others fail?*

I recently did a statistical breakdown of my performances on the PT since my return in 2009, and I do astronomically better when I play white weenie than when I play any other archetype. I think everyone has an archetype they are strongest piloting, and this one happens to be mine. I think I have more success with it than others do because I take it seriously and have developed an intuition as to when I need to play which cards. When you've played as many matches as I have with the same archetype, you see many of the same scenarios come up over and over again. I might not be the best all-around player out there, but when I'm playing white weenie, I feel like I can compete with anyone in the world.

*What do you do, when white weenie really isn't an option? Are there any other archetypes that you like?*

Sometimes I play other decks, but I do way better with white weenie than I do with any other deck. Fortunately white weenie is a rather broad archetype, at least as I construe it. So my strategy is usually to find the best versions of white weenie and test them to figure out which is the best choice for a tournament. That way I'm rarely playing a deck that is poorly positioned, yet I'm still able to play a deck that I can pilot successfully.

*After your top eight finish at Pro Tour San Diego in 2010 you decided to go pro in Magic. How does a person decide to go pro in Magic, especially considering that until recently you never had the security of being a platinum pro? How has it been working out for you so far?*

Growing up in Magic I always wanted to go pro, but never had the opportunity. When I made top 8 at PT San Diego 2010 I finally had a realistic opportunity. The prize money allowed me to focus entirely on Magic for the upcoming year and the pro points meant I would be qualified for the next year of Pro Tours. I've been fortunate to keep putting up a big finish each year that keeps me on the tour and able to continue playing Magic professionally. Writing for TCGplayer.com has also been a way to supplement my prize winnings and appearance bonuses. Since my return to competitive Magic I have finished Level 6, Level 6, Platinum, and Platinum again this year (mostly off of three PT top 8s including a win). By most standards, I would say it has been working out rather well. I still need at least another big finish to be worthy of Hall of Fame consideration though. So that is my next goal.





## 4 World Magic Cup

### 4.1 Structure

The Magic World Championship will be held over three days, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. At the start of each day the teams have to decide which players will play each format, which deck they will play, and which seat each player occupies. Each player has to be appointed for at least one format per day.

#### Day One

On Friday there are

- 3 Swiss rounds of **Magic 2014** Team Sealed *and*
- 3 Swiss rounds of **Standard** Constructed using unified deck construction rules
- The top 32 teams advance to day two

#### Day Two

On Saturday there are

- eight pods of four teams each
- 3 rounds of **Return to Ravnica** Team Sealed with four boosters each of Return to Ravnica, Gatecrash, Dragon's Maze *and*
- the **best two teams** of each pod advance to the second stage of Saturday competition

*then there are*

- four pods of four teams each
- 3 rounds of **Standard** Constructed with the exact same decks from Friday
- the **best two teams** of each pod advance to the third day

## Day Three

The **top eight** team will compete in the playoffs on Sunday. The playoffs will be **Standard** Constructed with the players using the **same decks**, they used on day one and two.

### 4.2 Prizes

The top four teams win invitations and airfare to Pro Tour Theros in addition to the following prizes (per player)

Place	Pro Points	Prize Money
1	8	\$12,000
2	7	\$6,500
3-4	6	\$4,000
5-8	5	\$2,000
9-16	4	\$1,500
17-32	3	\$1,000
33+	2	—

### 4.3 Teams

71 countries send players to the World Magic Cup this year. Players in bold are also qualified for the Worlds.

Country	National Champion	Qualifier 1	Qualifier 2	Qualifier 3
Argentina	Andres Monsalve	Sergio Ramadan	Fernando David Gonzalez	Javier Vassallo
Australia	Justin Cheung	Riley Knight	Matthew Anderson	Sasha Markovic
Austria	Thomas Holzinger	Manuel Danningner	David Reitbauer	Marc Mühlböck
Belarus	Sergey Telipko	Pavel Miadzvedski	Evgeniy Zakharenkov	Ihar Klionski
Belgium	Vincent Lemoine	Xavier Vantghem	Marijn Lybaert	Emmanuel Delvigne
Bolivia	Juan Carlos Vargas Carreras	Juan Pablo Melgarejo	Carlos Torrico	A. Guillermo Ibanez Loayza
Brazil	<b>Willy Edel</b>	Carlos Davi Montenegro	Enzo Real	Allison Abe
Bulgaria	Dobrin Paskov	Pavel Hadjiev	Ilko Velikov	Christian Ivanov
Canada	Jon Stern	Tyler Woolley	Andy Peters	Devon Giles
Chile	Felipe Tapia Becerra	Roberto Castillo	Rodrigo Lopez	Fabian Lucero
China	Bo Li	Han Bing	Yi-liu Liu	Huaiyuan Mu
Colombia	Daniel Moreno	Vladimir Mayoral	Lucas Moreno Cortes	Ricardo Alfonso
Costa Rica	Miguel Gatica	Fernando Solorzano	Jose Barrantes	Rodolfo Nunez
Croatia	Grgur Petric Maretic	Toni Portolan	Matija Vlahovic	Antun Lujic
Cyprus	Daniel Antoniou	Christos Ioannides	Michalis Djougouros	Stephanos Michailides
Czech Republic	<b>Stanislav Cifka</b>	Leos Kopecky	Kristian Janda	Michal Mendl
Denmark	Thomas Enevoldsen	Søren Larsen	Morten Morre Pedersen	Lasse Nørgaard
Dominican Republic	Ronald Rodriguez	Jayme Castellanos	Pedro Pappaterra	Cecilio Tiele
Ecuador	Daniel López	Gabriel Arteaga	Francisco Cedeno	Daniel Verdesoto
El Salvador	Ricardo Cabrero	Jose Urbina	Javier Morales	Adolfo Galdamez
England	Eduardo Sajgalik	Roy Raftery	Carrie Oliver	Andrew Devine
Estonia	Hannes Kerem	Mikk Kaasik	Rauno Raidma	Simon Robberts
Finland	Max Sjoblom	Sami Häggkvist	Hannu Vallin	Antti Humalamäki
France	Raphael Levy	Stephane Soubrier	Yann Guthmann	Timotheé Simonot
Germany	Jonas Köstler	Eric Oeckert	Karl Heinz Rohde	Michael Steinecke
Greece	Simon Bertiou	Konstantinos Triantafyllou	Nikolaos Molohadis	Ioannis Filippidis
Guatemala	Carlos Emilio Hastedt	Wilfredo Bojorquez	Javier Estuardo Castellán Robles	Christopher Virula
Hong Kong	<b>Lee Shi Tian</b>	Gama Ip	Tin Chi Derek Charm	Darius, Siu On Chiang
Hungary	Tamas Nagy	Adorjan Korb	Gabor Kocsis	Ervin Hosszú
Iceland	Alvin Orri Gislason	Orri Ómarsson	Ragnar Sigurdsson	Hedinn Haraldsson
Indonesia	Andreas Pranoto	Billy Andreas	Benny Soewanda	Ferry Ijaya
Ireland	Marcin Sciesinski	David Tuite	Stefano Rampini	Sean FitzGerald
Israel	<b>Shahar Shenhar</b>	Eviatar Olpiner	Niv Shmueli	Niv Danieli
Italy	Samuele Estratti	Emanuele Giusti	Francesco Biscardi	Alan Micca
Japan	<b>Yuya Watanabe</b>	Jun'ya Takahashi	Shunsuke Aka	Kyohei Kusakabe
Korea (South)	Cynic Kim	Jung Suk Goh	Sung Wook Nam	Dongkyu Lee
Latvia	Andrejs Prost	Marat Belov	Martins Zogots	German Levikov
Lithuania	Gaudenis Vidugiris	Gabrielius Kaklauskas	Saulius Kiskis	Algirdas Neniskis
Luxembourg	Steve Hatto	Artur Queiroz	Charles Thoss	Yoann Mendes
Macedonia	Dimitar Prodanov	Miro Popov	Vladimir Trajceviski	Andrej Loparski
Malaysia	Rick Lee	Khoo Shawn	Razif Rosdin	Jason Yap
Mexico	Dalibor Trnka	Emmanuel Ramirez Sanchez	Victor Escamilla	José Miguel Lopez
Netherlands	Raymond Venis	Jasper Boelens	Leonard Kaarls	Thomas Hendriks
New Zealand	Walker Macmurdo	Jingwei Zheng	Jason Chung	Digby Carter
Northern Ireland	Alan Warnock	Conor Holmes	Dean Convery	Gavin McLeese
Norway	Andreas Nordahl	Dan Espen Flaatten	Kristoffer Frengstad	Tommy Hammer
Panamá	Saul Alvarado	Joseph De Leon	Ivan Oro	Andrés Carballo
Peru	Jose R. Rodriguez	Franz Pajares	Daniel Fernandez-prada	Francisco Sifuentes
Philippines	Richmond Tan	Jose Goo	Rodolfo Deriquito	Sherwin Aquino
Poland	Tomek Pedrakowski	Przemek Knocinski	Dominik Konieczny	Piotr Kazimierczak
Portugal	Rodrigo Borba	Fabio Rodrigues	Diogo Varela	Rafael Brito
Puerto Rico	Gabriel Nieves	Danilo Prieto	Jorge Iramain	Adrian Marquez
Romania	Alexandru Stefanescu	Florin Buzgan	Andrei Baku	Adrian Smaranda
Russian Federation	Roman Masaladzhiu	Alexander Shedyakov	Peter Semenov	Alex Gylidin
Scotland	Stephen Murray	Jamie Ross	Alan Hutton	Bradley Barclay
Serbia	Aleksa Telarov	Todor Rosic	Vuk Tomic	Marko Mazibrada
Singapore	Kelvin Chew	Chang Chua	Aik Seng Khoo	Lee Benedict
Slovak Republic	Ivan Floch	Martin Lauko	Robert Gregor	Hugo Ferreira
Slovenia	Robin Dolar	Boris Robic	Peter Kunic	Andrej Rutar
South Africa	Craig Leach	Bruce Raw	Andrew Wright	Harris Fong
Spain	Juan Carlos Adebo Diaz	Mario Zúñiga	Joel Calafell	Francisco Moreno Morales
Sweden	Joel Larsson	Joakim Åberg	Olle Rade	Elias Watsfeldt
Switzerland	Andreas Ganz	Christian Paris	Marcel Arndt	Diony Idelfonso
Taiwan	Tzu-Ching Kuo	Ryan Young	Ruei Sheng Wang	Yung-Ming Huang
Thailand	Sethsilp Chanpleng	Sittisak Wachirakaphan	Nutdanai Sadangrit	Pech Songkwamcharoen
Turkey	Emir Alimoglu	Cem Erdogan	Batuhan Ucuзал	Deniz Kara
Ukraine	Mike Krasnitski	Iurii Babyxh	Konstantin Yarosh	Vlad Ovsyannikov
United States	<b>Josh Utter-Leyton</b>	Jason Gulevich	Joe Spanier	Daniel Cecchetti
Uruguay	Martin Castillo	Ricardo Menerendez	Adrian Garcia	Juan Pablo Waszuk
Venezuela	Daniel Fior	Nestor Materano	Oswaldo Rafael Marino	Luis Luks
Wales	Philip Griffiths	Mark Kelly	Ben Kinsey	Philip Brett

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