

To Affinity and Beyond

Hello and welcome to my brain dump on all things Izzet Affinity. My hope is that this reaches you before your RC and can help you in some way. The focus of this article will be centered around how I approach playing and building the deck as well as giving insight into how I prepared for RC Houston.

For those who don't know me (and why would you?) My name is Drew Debevoise. I'm a member of the nationally esteemed Team Mirror-Breaker and was formerly a member of the nationally disgraced Team Odyssey. I qualified for my first Pro Tour at my first RC appearance in San Diego in 2023, and from there successfully chained together a series of abysmal to mediocre results before finally breaking back through to Top 8 RC Houston in October of 2025.

(For those uninterested in why and how I chose to play the deck, the strategy and deck info starts with Card Decisions)

The Lead Up

Prior to Houston I was not particularly invested in the Modern format as my main avenues to qualify were Limited and Standard. I dabbled a bit into the format prior to PT EOE and was quite keen on a Jeskai Scam (Blink) deck that local Austinite Roy Varney brewed in early September. I was able to go 5-0 in the 2 leagues I played but unfortunately was unable to garner much interest from my teammates on the deck. I made a last ditch effort attempting to con a couple of friends into playing it at PT EOE, but alas. I put the deck down and returned focus to EOE limited for the PTQs and decided to see how the PT shook out.

One deck that particularly caught my eye was an Izzet Affinity masterpiece that Shuhei Nakamura brought featuring Weapons Manufacturing and Claws of Gix. Aside from Weapons Manufacturing being one of the sweetest cards recently designed, it also fixed the Wrath of the Skies problem that the deck previously had. On top of that it offered redundancy to Pinnacle Emissary, functioning as copies 5 and 6. I decided this would be the deck to learn and I could always play Jeskai Scam as a backup. Having never previously played the deck, I enlisted my good friend/team captain Devon Straub to teach me the ropes of Affinity. Many of the lessons he taught me will be incorporated in the strategy portion. Another major resource I used early on was the [guide David Inglis \(Tangrams\)](#) posted on his Twitter. I highly recommend checking that out if you have not done so already.

From the onset, it appeared that there were 2 primary schools of thought on how to build the deck. The previously mentioned Weapons Manufacturing version, and the balls to the wall 0 drop version that Team Handshake brought. I tried a few leagues with both versions to get a feel. The initial conclusions I came to was that I didn't like the clunkiness of the Weapons version and I didn't like the glass cannon aspect of the 0's version. I decided to implement the mana base of 0's into Weapons and cut the Thought Monitors for cheaper options/better interaction. In the 5 or so leagues I played, I racked up nothing but 1-4's and 2-3's. Discouraging

for some. Perhaps a former self would have put it down. But there was one thing I couldn't shake. The vibes were immaculate. I was hooked. I wanted to learn everything I possibly could about the archetype. Unfortunately, I couldn't find too many resources on it ☹️. This is mostly why I wanted to document my learnings for others interested in the deck.

The primary reason I gravitated towards Affinity was that Modern was/is a very proactive format. I was concerned that if I played another Midrange deck, it needed to be both the perfect build for the weekend AND would need to line up well into what I played against. The nice thing about bad matchups with proactive decks is that you still have the opportunity to win the die roll and not draw from time to time.

Another driving factor was that several teammates were interested in the deck, and I wanted to have the camaraderie of learning and working on a deck with others. Unfortunately, I was betrayed early on by my teammates and they all jumped ship to other decks for one reason or another. I mitigated this by looking at the recent 5-0 results to see who else had been playing the deck. I found one person I knew, Devon O'Donnell aka D00mwake, and was effectively able to upgrade my Devon and have conversations about the deck that proved quite valuable.

Vibes Vs. Results

So why stick with this deck when I was having better results with another archetype? You hear people talk about not being results oriented often in Magic, but I wanted to showcase this as an example on when to apply it. Although Jeskai would have given me more immediate gratification, I had an innate feeling that Affinity had more potential. Past me may not have been able to identify this. I believe this intuition may be a skill that you naturally develop from years of playing the game. But sometimes you need to be confident enough to trust your gut. If you play it safe and always stick to your comfort zone as a player, you will have more short-term success, but you will never reach your full potential.

Pre-Tournament Strategy

Aside from playing some leagues to get a feel for the deck, I implemented a strategy for this tournament that I had never thought of. In David's article, he mentioned another Handshake player going through test hands and reaching the conclusion that they wanted infinite zeros to maximize their openers. This gave me the idea to import the deck into Moxfield and simulating hundreds if not thousands of test hands. This helped me develop my mulligan philosophy and become very familiar with the range of the deck. It also helped streamline my conclusions on the tweaks I wanted to make to the deck in real time.

One thing I really wanted to focus on for this tournament was my mindset. Taking one decision at a time and not letting what happened in the past affect my current mindset. This particularly helped when I had to mulligan to 4 in Game 3 of Round 1 against my opponent's 7. I implemented box breathing between rounds and made sure not to exhaust myself socially. I also decided to minimize distractions while I was playing by raw dogging my leagues with no music

or voice chats. This helped me focus better and retain the lessons I learned while playing. I was better able to reflect on my games and ask better questions.

Once I was able to discuss and answer most of my questions, I transitioned to focused play testing. The main matchup I was most unsure of was Boros. The games I played seemed to vary so drastically and I was unsure why. For this I enlisted my nemesis, Joshua Floro. I believe we played 3 different testing sessions while I iterated on the list and formulated a cohesive and consistent approach.

Now for some strategy!

Card Decisions

Mana Base: This deck is susceptible to flood, so I chose the Fiery Islet mana base that Handshake used. Early on in my testing, I encountered a ton of land destruction, primarily White Orchid Phantom. So, I mitigated this by playing an extra basic. This appears to be less prevalent now, so you can play steam vents if you prefer. You still want to have 2 lands to get for Boseiju. Thundering Falls coming in tapped can be devastating. If you're playing fetch lands, you may be able to justify it, but I would advise against it. Almost all decks were playing 12-13 turn 1 blue sources. I found by having 14 I could mulligan less and better maximize my turn 1 Emissary's. It's also what Karsten math dictates.

Springleaf Drum: I want as few 1 mana artifacts as possible in this deck. They make far too many openers clunky and non-functional. Adding the 14th blue source helped justify cutting this. It was the last cut in lieu of the 4th metallic rebuke. There are spots where it may be nice to have, and you may have to fetch a 2nd Mox Opal and sacrifice it to the legend rule, but I assure you this is far less detrimental than stifling your velocity.

Emry: A lot of lists have this for their "Grindy Matchups". I found most decks keep/bring in removal against you already. It's nice to have a Plan B sometimes, but why make their removal good against us? Make them use it on our shitters.

Whipflare/Blast Split: Initially I wanted 2 Whipflares for the Boros matchup. However, I found they were not forced to overcommit in a lot of games. Many lists were also playing 2 Clarion Conquerors in the sideboard that you absolutely need to be able to answer. For this reason, I prefer 2 Galvanic Blasts.

Void Mirror: E-Tron had a lot of steam going into Houston. This matchup was problematic, particularly with them adding several Vexing Baubles. I wanted to use this flex slot as a slam dunk card in the match up. We are unable to cast our 0's when it's out, but they are unable to cast anything. Eventually you'll find a way to win. The deck has since died down a bit, and I would recommend not respecting it as much.

Grafdiggers Cage: This is what I would play over Void Mirror at the moment. It gives us harder hate to fetch off Saga in the graveyard matchups. It also shuts down neoform and birthing ritual.

Ashiok: Plain and simple best hate against Titan. This is a rough match up where you need to mulligan aggressively to a fast start, and having 2 Ashioks expands our range of keepable hands.

Thought Monitor: I found myself siding this out in every matchup. You can play 1 if you really want to grind harder, but every card that's not a 0, hurts your Emissary and Kappa Draws.

0's: I went up to 4 Memnites and 4 Engineered Explosives. Memnite is great against opposing Ragvan draws. EE plays extremely well with Weapons Manufacturing and is the heart of our plan against some of the aggressive decks. As stated previously every 0 we're able to cram in the deck helps maximize our Emissary and Kappa draws + helps improve our consistency of keepable hands.

Mulligan Philosophy

In general you're not keeping any hands that don't have Emissary, Kappa, or Urza's saga. Emissary and Kappa need a supporting cast, so you can't keep hands with 1 or less 0's that don't optimize these cards. I'm perfectly fine keeping a hand that only does turn 3 Kappa or only makes a few Drone tokens with Emissary if I have Metallic Rebuke or Thoughtcast. A turn 1 Saga hand that has Mox Opal is perfectly acceptable against the fast matchups. I've seen far too many people try to pick up this deck and want to ship any hand that's not the nuts on 7. This may be a reasonable strategy with other decks, but not Affinity. *Affinity is a critical mass deck*, so every mulligan makes every card weaker. In general, you need to be able to look at your opening hand and have a plan for how the first 3-4 turns will play out. Goldfishing hands on Moxfield helped me significantly with this.

Attrition Vs Fast decks

I've heard several people refer to Affinity as a Slot Machine deck. I think the general belief is that it is more of a glass cannon than it truly is. Sure some hands can be disrupted by removal on Emissary, but it's able to grind more than most people realize. In general, I break a match-up down into attrition and fast decks. For attrition decks I'm much more inclined to play a slow game and ride an Urza's saga to a victory. So long as my opening hand is functional, I generally will not mulligan. Against fast decks, I'm looking for a turn 2 Kappa, turn 1 Saga OR turn 3 Kappa/turn 2 Saga with interaction-Metallic Rebuke mostly.

Adapting and Evaluating the Board

Understand that you will often be disrupted. This is mostly why I don't like mulliganing aggressively with this deck. Mulligans often lead to needing to keep a hand that can be disrupted and not function. A lot of opponents will keep bad hands on the back of 1 element of disruption, because they believe that's all it takes for us to not function. This can be easily exploited by expanding our keep range by keeping slower hands that have a clear plan. If it looks like your opponent kept a slow hand, you don't have to go all in. You can pace your threats and wait for them to tap out before going for an explosive turn. This won't always be the

case, sometimes it will be correct to just go for it, but I want you to understand that it's an option not to blink first.

Sequencing

This is not an exclusive concept to Affinity, but it is extremely important when piloting this deck, because your resources are precious, and one false move can be the difference between complete disaster and triumph. Prior to doing anything, you need to map out how your turn is going to go. You need to consider what interaction your opponent may be representing. You need to consider what their follow-up might look like on the next turn cycle. When sequencing my free/cheap spells, I like to begin with the weakest ones first before playing out the important ones for the match up. It's important that you give your opponent as little information as possible with each decision point. For example, if you're going for a turn 1 Saga/Opal draw, don't play out your Saga before knowing your Opal will be online. This gives your opponent the decision to interact with Opal, which can then render your Saga useless. If they do interact with Opal, now you have that information and you can hold your saga for turn 2 and still get value from it.

0's

You need to think of every 0-drop as a resource. If you don't have a reason to play it, hold it, plain and simple. You deny yourself value on future top decks every time you play out a bauble just to cycle or an Opal for extra mana that you're not going to use. This doesn't mean you should never play your 0's if you're not getting value, you just need to have a reason. For example, playing 0's to hold up rebuke or playing a Tormod's Crypt to insulate you from reasonable graveyard shenanigans. On the flip side, I will almost always play out my 1-drops if I can afford to because they represent far less future value due to them costing 1.

Matchup Breakdowns

I won't be going over ins and outs in this section. If you want, I have it linked to my Twitter here: <https://x.com/DebevoiseDrew/status/1980040294826729593?s=20> . Instead, I want to use this section to share my big-picture thoughts on how I approach each match up, as well as pitfalls to look out for when applicable.

Affinity-Typically this matchup comes down to who can land a Kappa first. Beyond that, Urza's Saga plays a key role in the match-up by giving one player a resource advantage. The best way to break serve if you fall behind is Engineered Explosives on 0 to help reset their board. Beware of Pithing Needle if this is your plan. If you fall behind to an early Kappa, your most realistic way to come back is to try to set up for an Aether Spellbomb + the ward cost. The other avenue is racing with a big construct + Shadowsphere, but this is far more fragile.

Belcher-Your best card in this matchup is Saga. Typically, this isn't a matchup where you're looking to race since they have so much interaction. In an ideal world, you're able to present a clock and hold up metallic rebuke. Saga is the best avenue for this since you're not forced to blink at an inopportune time to apply pressure.

Broodscale-This matchup can be tough because they can easily disrupt us with a Vexing Bauble while representing a fast clock. The bauble forces us to play out our 0's ahead of schedule. Consign can do some work from the sideboard, but you can't bank on it due to them playing Cavern. This is a matchup where you need to apply early pressure while having disruption to get you over the finish line, because they will out-grind you if you try to play for a long game.

Control-They have a decent number of cards that can blow us out. However, their draws don't always line up great into ours. In general, I'm looking to get ahead on board and hold up Sink into Stupor. Supreme Verdict gets around rebuke, so you can't bank on it being a reliable plan. You also need to be considering Wrath of the Skies/Solitude at all times and play accordingly, as these are their best catchup mechanisms.

E-Tron-This was the matchup I was most worried about going into Houston. Just like Broodscale, Vexing Bauble forces our hand. Aside from that, Karn is the number one card you can't allow to resolve. Fortunately, you can afford to ignore most other things. Saga tokens can be difficult for them to deal with at times. Additionally, they're not particularly fast, so you can beat them down with a fast start before they can catch their footing. From the sideboard, Consign is quite potent against them, allowing you to develop your board while only holding up 1 mana. Blood Moon can also slow them down quite a bit. It's not a slam dunk, but it adds to our stack of disruption to help cross the finish line. Notably, there is some tension between Moon and Void Mirror, so play accordingly.

Energy- This matchup can be quite intricate. The core of our plan is Engineered Explosives on 1 to keep them honest. They are good at presenting pressure while representing disruption. Insulate yourself from wrath as much as possible, Weapons Manufacturing can be great for this. Both sides can out-tempo each other with a fast start, with the edge going to energy in the long game. Unchecked Saga + Shadowsphere is your best way to race outside of Kappa draws, however they can quickly turn the corner with Ajani and still win these races. Ragavan can be surprisingly potent here if we don't have Memnite, since we're not good at interacting with it once it hits the board. When possible, save your Galvanic Blast for a particularly problematic permanent.

Esper Blink- Great matchup. Just try to avoid getting blown out by a Pest Control/Wrath of the Skies. Their mana requirements can be tough since they're a deck that plays White Orchid Phantom and Psychic Frog, therefore Blood Moon can be very potent against them. The Non-Psychic Frog builds don't have this problem, so I like Consign over Moon in those cases. Post board, there are more targets for Galvanic Blast, particularly Clarion Conqueror, which is why I like to bring it in. As with all Solitude/Consign decks, be aware of the interaction with Consign targeting Kappa's ward trigger, as this can lead to a savage blowout.

Goryo's- This matchup is great for us. I'm inclined to keep just about any playable 7 against them and play a Midrange game. Their best way to win is a quick Goryo's before we can get a Tormod's Crypt out, or a Psychic Frog + heavy interaction against one of our slow starts. Blood Moon is incredible against them. It both insulates us from Wrath of the Skies and basically

causes their deck not to function. They have a surprisingly greedy mana base, and they can't really afford to play around it.

Jeskai Blink- This has been my number one most asked about matchup. Having played both a decent amount, I think Jeskai has a slight edge, but it all depends on deck construction and how much they want to respect the matchup. Talking with Slax aka Jesse Hampton, this was the matchup they were most afraid of from the Jeskai side, so do with that information what you will ([You can see our t8 win and in match at the RC here](#)). This is another matchup where I'm keeping just about any playable 7. They have a lot of ways to interact, so you can't put yourself in a position where you don't have a backup plan. Solitude/Consign is the interaction I'm most concerned about.

The introduction of Strix Serenade gives them a bit more play since Kappa is so good in the matchup, and this gives them more answers to it. Weapons Manufacturing can be difficult for them to answer as well, so you can play a slow game, and ride that to victory. I've seen a lot of discourse surrounding Blood Moon in this matchup. Personally, I think it's quite bad given that they have Ragavan, Fable, and Phelia to get around it. In general, if we're willing to play a slow game, their answers can line up poorly against us, so that's typically what I'm trying to do.

Prowess- This matchup is very tight. It often comes down to 1 life in either direction, so minimize excess damage as much as possible. Try to buy time to set up Shadowsphere. This can be near-impossible for them to race. However, they can deal a ton of damage in 1 turn, so don't feel safe if you've only connected once. Engineered Explosives on 1 can stifle their velocity. I use Tormod's Crypt to keep them off delirium. Drone Tokens are incredibly effective at chump blocking Slickshot. If possible, I try to leave an extra 1 or 2 Drones back for insurance against Lava Dart allowing Slickshot to get through. Typically, I'm saving my Metallic Rebukes for Cori-Steel Cutter since this is their best way to apply pressure without committing to the board. Try not to over-commit early post board unless you're able to land a Kappa, as you can get blown out by Meltdown quite easily.

Titan- I think this is our worst matchup. You must aggressively mulligan to a fast hand. They're a bit more consistent than we are and can be half a turn faster than our nut draws. The best path to victory is developing a clock and landing a timely Metallic Rebuke. This is the primary reason we went up to 4. Tormod's Crypt can stifle some of their lines, so hold up that activation by any means necessary. Ashiok can cheese wins, and they don't have a great way to answer it. I'd keep just about any hand with Ashiok no matter how slow.

Zoo- This matchup is typically quite good. The only hands I'm concerned about are the Leyline/Scion starts. If you feel like they are drawing like a god, you can bring in a Consign or 2. Doorkeeper Thrull can also be annoying, which is why I bring in 2 Galvanic Blasts. They have a lot of trouble keeping up with our threats/coming back from behind, so as long as you can get ahead on board and have some form of interaction, you should easily be able to cruise to victory.

Closing Thoughts

If you've made it this far, I hope you were able to find some form of value in this article. If you did, please consider giving a Twitter follow to [myself](#) and [Team Mirror-Breaker](#). I made the decision to keep this free to make it more accessible to everyone rather than hide it behind a paywall. Prior to being so enfranchised in Magic, I found the notion of paying for anything outside of the game ridiculous. Now that I have a bit more experience under my belt, I see the value in consuming content and highly encourage you to support other creators if you have the means to. It's the best way to shortcut the learning curve. Personally, I find more value in growing the community and making it more accessible to anyone that's on the outside looking in. I spent the first year or two of my competitive journey traveling to tournaments knowing next to no one, and that sucked.

Now that I've found my community, the game is so much more rewarding. If you find yourself in that situation, my DMs are always open and I'm always happy to talk Magic. Sometimes getting your foot in the door is the hardest part. As far as content moving forward, there's been discussion of Team Mirror-Breaker making a Metafy page with the intention of giving an inside look to the team environment. Personally, my motivation to write is quite sporadic and I don't want to feel forced to make content. So, when I do, it comes from a place of passion and love for the game/community.