

CZ0491: Perfecting the Mulligan or, How to Lose the Game Before the First Turn

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-

1) INTRO Jimmy & DJ

@jfwong - **@JumboCommander** - @commandcast

One of the first things we do in a game of Commander weighs so heavily on the outcome - It's the mulligan. Does this hand work or do we throw it back?!

****CHANNEL FIREBALL** **ULTRAPRO #1** **PATREON: Des1redPlays****

2) **Perfecting the Mulligan**

DEFINE MULLIGAN

- The London Mulligan (there have been different versions of the mulligan which we will not cover because it will just be confusing).
- To take a mulligan, a player shuffles the cards in their hand back into their library, draws a new hand of cards equal to their starting hand size, then puts a number of those cards equal to the number of times that player has taken a mulligan on the bottom of their library in any order.
- In a multiplayer game and in any Brawl game, the first mulligan a player takes doesn't count toward the number of cards that player will put on the bottom of their library or the number of mulligans that player may take. Subsequent mulligans are counted toward these numbers as normal.

HOUSE MULLIGANS

- Just get a keepable 7, but don't sculpt your hand!
- "The RC continues to use and recommend the Gis ("Mulligan 7s to a playable hand. Don't abuse this") for trusted playgroups, but that's not something that can go in the rules."
 - Gis Hoogendijk - Magic Judge Hall of Fame Inductee
 - Draw 7, if you don't like it, set it aside and draw another 7, repeat until you have a hand, then shuffle the other non-playable hands back in
- Shuffling can take a long time - just draw another 7 off the top and be considerate to the time of the playgroup - aka JUST GET THE GAME GOING!
- Talk to your playgroup about what works and makes players most comfortable
 - Competitive groups will likely be more strict on Mulligans
 - Mulligan as much as you like, but don't keep a Turn 1 Sol Ring after your regular free mull.

WHY MULLIGANS MATTER

- The goal of refining and redefining the mulligan is to make sure that there are “fewer non-games of magic”. The same can be said for Commander.
- Every Commander and deck is different, but will often share the same...
- GENERAL Baseline Goals:
 - Get your game plan going
 - Rhys, the Redeemed - create Tokens, copy them
 - Yuriko, the Tiger’s Shadow - swing unblockable, Ninjutsu, manipulate top deck
 - Kaalia of the Vast - cheat crazy Angels, Demons, and Dragons into play
 - Stand a chance against the table
 - Card draw / Mana Ramp
 - Interaction
 - Recursion / recoverability
- Note that the baseline goal of “win” is not included
 - Winning is not something necessarily sculpted in the opening hand
 - It’s more about staying alive and healthy until you can arrive at a winning boardstate

WHAT IS A GOOD HAND

- At the core of it, playing Magic comprises of two components: playing lands and playing spells
- A good hand will have both things - lands and spells
- Typically the ratio of “3 / 4 lands and 3 / 4 spells” is what we have recommended in the past
 - It goes beyond that!
 - Lands:
 - Should give you access to the colors of your Commander (or spells in hand)
 - Should not count cards like Temple of the False God or Maze of Ith
 - Spells:
 - Need to be castable by the lands in your hand
 - Should be castable in your initial turns
 - If a spell costs more than the lands in your hand (and ability to ramp), then you may as well consider those cards to *NOT* be in your opening hand
- Sample hand: 3 lands in your colors and 3 creatures - a 3-drop, 4-drop, and 7-drop
 - This hand is closer to a hand of 6 cards than 7
 - You can reasonably expect to get another land by your 4th turn for your 4-drop
 - Your 7-drop is so far off from being cast, it almost as if it’s NOT in your hand
- Where does RAMP fit into this?
 - If you have Arcane Signet, does that replace a land? (Discuss)
 - If you have a Gilded Lotus, does that replace a land? (Discuss)
 - If you have a Rampant Growth, does that replace a land? (Discuss)

(cont)

- We recommend CARD DRAW!
 - Card draw might be more important than ramp - if you play everything out of your hand by turn 3 and only draw lands, you're dead in the water
 - The cheaper the card draw / selection the better (in your opening hand)
 - If you're having trouble with your decks, try playing "Smoother" cards like Preordain, Opt, or Serum Visions
 - If you had to prioritize one or the other, we would prioritize Card Draw over Ramp
- Your Commander counts too
 - Commanders can count as your 8th (sometimes 9th with Partners) card in your hand
 - If your Commander has RAMP or CARD DRAW attached to it, then it also changes your opening hand evaluations

BEYOND THE NON-GAME

- You can mulligan more technically and aggressively to give yourself every advantage and bring you closer to winning the game.
- This is something that cEDH takes into consideration much more than casual players - sometimes a hand of 3 or 4 right cards is more powerful than 7 (very deck dependent)

*****MIDROLL*****

EXERCISE IN HAND EVALUATION

- This is an exercise that any of you can do at home, RIGHT NOW!
1. Go get a deck, look through the cards, and craft the BEST possible opener you can
 - o Play the hand out over 3 turns *without drawing any cards*
 - o Play the hand out over 3 turns *with drawing cards*
 2. Take your perfect hand and replace each card in it with a worse version of the card
 - o EG: Fetchlands become regular lands or taplands
 - o Lower mana value card becomes a higher mana value card
 3. Take your suboptimal hand and imagine if it was a hand of 6, a hand of 5
 - o What cards are you removing first?
 - o What cards absolutely stay no matter what?
- Now let's run through the exercise for a hand from Jimmy's deck and a hand from DJ's deck

EXAMPLE 1: JIMMY'S KYKAR, WIND'S FURY DECK

- Describe the deck quickly for the audience / Power level
- 1. Go get a deck, look through the cards, and craft the BEST possible opener you can
 - a. Scalding Tarn, Arid Mesa, Chrome Mox, Preordain, Mystic Remora, Jeska's Will, Dragon's Rage Channeler
- 2. Take your perfect hand and replace each card in it with a worse version of the card
 - a. Mountain, Island, Azorius Signet, Serum Visions, Deep Analysis, Battle Hymn, Recruiter of the Guard
- 3. Take your suboptimal hand and imagine if it was a hand of 6, a hand of 5, a hand of 4
 - a. Removing Battle Hymn to make it a hand of 6
 - b. Removing Deep Analysis to make it a hand of 5
 - c. Removing Recruiter of the Guard to make it a hand of 4

EXAMPLE 2: DJ'S Angel Tribal DECK

- Describe the deck quickly for the audience / Power level
- 1. Go get a deck, look through the cards, and craft the BEST possible opener you can
 - a. Vault of Champions, Godless Shrine, Cavern of Souls, Sol Ring, Arcane Signet, Battle Angels of Tyr, Bolas' Citadel - What I learned from just this first process and have to adjust
- 2. Take your perfect hand and replace each card in it with a worse version of the card
 - a. Swamp, Plains, Bojuka Bog, Pristine Talisman, Talisman of Hierarchy, Sanctuary Warden, Linvala Keeper of Silence
- 3. Take your suboptimal hand and imagine if it was a hand of 6, a hand of 5, a hand of 4
 - a. Removing Linvala to make it a hand of 6
 - b. Removing Talisman to make it a hand of 5
 - c. Removing Sanctuary Warden to make it a hand of 4

Takeaways?

- You'd almost certainly keep the worse version of your hand
 - Even if you went down 2 or 3 more "worse versions" you'd probably still keep it
- Repeat effects / redundancy is important in a deck - so is the right ratio
- Lands don't get removed when mulliganing down to 6 or 5 (especially when you only have 2-3)
- Understand the order in which cards are removed / not necessary
 - High Mana Value / uncastable cards
 - Cards that don't function by themselves (Battle Hymn vs Jeska's Will)
 - Redundant effects (Serum Visions / Deep Analysis)
- You can create "Snapshots" of keepable hands in your deck.
- Different decks will obviously have very similar ideal openers but the minimum requirements might change based on the commander and the deck strategy.

ADJUSTMENTS

- If you are playing at a high-powered table where you expect most players to have explosive decks that can combo into a win ... would you change your ideal hand?
- When should you (if ever) take risks?
 - Ancient Tomb + Sensei's Divining Top (Episode #2 of Game Knights)
- You are playing against Craig's Infect deck. Would you change your mulligan into interaction / early creatures?
- Think of your metagame and what effect(s) / Creatures you would prioritize?

MULLIGAN TRAPS

- Humans are inherently bad at statistics - for instance, do you know how often you draw lands in your deck statistically?. What are the chances of doing that? Likely chances are still not guaranteed. Will you derail your whole game on a 66% chance?

3) **TO THE LISTENERS:**

Let us know if you have your own Mulligan tips and tricks or even house rules when it comes to situations like these!

****CHANNELFIREBALL CALL-OUT #2** **ULTRA PRO #2****

4) **CLEAN-UP STEP**

Big thanks to our amazing team here at The Command Zone! Damen Lenz, Arthur Meadowcroft, Ashlen Rose, Ladee Danger, Manson Leung, Craig Blanchette, Josh Murphy, Jake Boss, Patrick Nan, Jordan Pridgen, Sam Waldow, Gaurav Gulati, Truc Thai, Jamie Block, Mitch Trafford, and Evan Limberger.

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