



Wings, Arrows and Demons

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With the biggest event on the e-sports calendar concluded, it is time to take a bit of a breather and look back at the hits and misses of what was one of the most fascinating tournaments of recent memory. With the prize pool having crossed a jaw-dropping \$20,000,000, expectations were sky-high, and The International certainly lived up to the hype. Going completely against the grain, Wings Gaming brought TI back to Asia with their unorthodox drafts and ridiculous item builds.

Straight from the starting blocks, the form book was thrown out the window. The number one seeds and two-time major champions, OG, were immediately sent to the lower bracket after the first round of the main event. In a performance that reeked of their trademark aggression, MVP phoenix straight up outfought Miracle, Notal, and the Guerrillas, despite losing the draft in all three of their matches. This was epitomised by MVP's all melee line up in game 1, which played into the hands of Miracle's Timbersaw. The 9K MMR Mid Behemoth ran rampant as expected, but it all changed with one fight in the Radiant Jungle. QO, Miracle's opposite number on MVP, weaved in and out with his Phantom Assassin and ripped the entirety of OG to shreds. From then on, fights took a familiar pattern, with MVP running rampant while Miracle was always the last man standing, trying to salvage something for his team. OG never really recovered, though they took the second game, and MVP went through on the back of QO's signature PA.

Team Secret, the all-star line-up pegged to be OG's biggest rivals for the Dota 2 throne, didn't even make it that far. Having been consigned to the lower bracket after a lacklustre group stage, they were immediately eliminated by traditional Chinese powerhouse, LGD. One has to wonder if Secret will ever learn from their mistakes, as their constant shuffling inevitably seems to lead to failure on the big stage. EternalEnvy has already left for new pastures following the latest disappointment, and who knows what rag tag mash up we'll see when the next major rolls around.



EG showed the merits of a consistent line-up as they produced a commendable defence of their TI5 crown. While they fell short of the Grand finals, losing out to both finalists in the Upper and Lower Bracket, they still put in a strong showing. On the way, they produced the game of the tournament versus EHOME in the Upper Bracket Semi Finals. In a topsy-turvy game that lasted 75 minutes, with Fear on Axe, Sumail playing a mid Mirana, Universe on Faceless Void, and no fewer than three Dagon, EG pipped the Chinese juggernaut. Games like that are few and far between.

In the end, however, it came down to Digital Chaos versus Wings in the Grand Finals. DC put in a performance reminiscent of CDEC from last year, slogging through the lower bracket before finally being bested in the finals. Wings took an altogether different route, coasting through the Upper Bracket. In fact, the only team that managed to take a game from Wings were DC: one in the first round of the Upper Bracket, and one in the Grand Finals. The key to Wings' success was their willingness to pick unorthodox heroes. While other teams tended to stick to the tried and tested, Wings were willing to experiment, bringing out Razor, Brewmaster and even Huskar on separate instances. In the end, no one really knew what to do against them and they took flight with the Championship.

While unpredictability took the day, we still did see some consistency in the current metagame, and it came in the form of two heroes: Shadow Demon and Mirana. No matter how teams tended to alter their game plan,

these two heroes inevitably had to be factored in.

In Shadow Demon, we have a support with that rare quality of completely changing the nature of the game. This capacity boils down to the new buffs to his Q ability, Disruption. Previously, his Q was used purely as either a disable or a saving mechanic. While the ability can be cast on an enemy hero to keep them in place, the short duration invulnerability it provides can be a godsend if your carry gets stunned. However, these days it has another purpose due to the increased duration on the illusions it spawns. Shadow Demons in the current metagame usually whittle down towers by constantly spawning illusions and sending them in to attack while the team waits outside vision range. This is particularly effective with illusion based cores such as Terrorblade or Radiance-Manta Alchemist.

Changes to Mirana, on the other hand, are at a more fundamental level. With the addition of her new Aghanaim's sceptre effect, the Priestess of the Moon finally has an item build. The New-school Mirana build revolves around maximising the Agh's double-Starfall, making her a magic-damage carry. She gets her sceptre and a blink dagger, before proceeding to nuke heroes and creep waves alike. Aside from being a tremendous farming and fighting ability, the double-Starfall also gives her the wave clear ability to deal with illusion based split-push line-ups that the new Shadow Demon fits so nicely in.

All in all, TI6 was one of the most interesting Dota 2 tournaments in a long time. In it, we saw a gradual shift from the old-school Dota strategies, and completely new heroes are becoming viable in competitive play. Yet, amongst the unpredictability and the emergence of new teams and heroes, EG and Fear remains, showing that what truly matters in Dota is a solid grasp of the fundamentals so you can adapt to ridiculous situations.

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