

Notes on Regulation M-B

A Review of my Competitive Pokemon Practice

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Generative AI Disclosure

Here, the term “Generative AI” refers to large language models used to generate text and/or media.

No generative AI was used to create this document, analyze data, or otherwise practice VGC.

You can do difficult things.

Chapter 1

Introductions

1.1 On Me, The Author

Hello, my name is Peter G. Hotvedt. I am twenty-eight years old and live in Ann Arbor, MI. In my daily working life I am a scientist. I obtained my Ph.D. in Nuclear Engineering from the University of Michigan on July 23, 2026. Prior to this date, I had not played Competitive Pokemon in any serious capacity since late 2021, even with the launch of Pokemon Champions

I have been playing competitive Pokemon in many different capacities since roughly September of 2010, with a primary focus on competitive, 6-on-6 singles. I got my start playing in the serebiibforums “clans” and “guilds” at the end of Generation 4 and at the start of Generation 5, playing on the Pokemon Online battle simulator. After some truly meaningful mentorship by a more experienced player, I eventually migrated to Smogon and played OU from through the end of Sun and Moon. I also got seriously involved with Smogon’s “Create a Pokemon” project, wherein members of the community collaborated to engineer and build new competitively viable fake Pokemon, between 2018 and 2021. However, in starting my doctoral studies in 2021, I quickly realized that my priorities in research and study would have to be realigned. So I quietly made my departure from the community to focus on my education.

My first outing with the official competitive Pokemon play, VGC, was circa 2015 when I was a Senior in High School. I participated in my local tournament scene in Minneapolis at venues like Highlander Games in Columbia Heights, and attended the 2015 Ft. Wayne Regional Tournament ¹. Upon learning that the 2016 VGC format would allow for restricted Pokemon,

¹I dropped out after Round 3 because I didn’t realize at the time that the tournament itself was on Sunday, not Saturday and we had driven all the way from Minneapolis to Ft. Wayne. The drive back was long and quiet. It was a tough learning moment for a 17-year-old who thought he knew everything

I recognized the time commitment it would take to soft-reset for the perfect Groudon, and set aside VGC indefinitely.

When Pokemon Champions was released, I was in the throes of writing my thesis. It was a dangerous time for a new distraction to appear in my life, but I held strong. It wasn't until after I had submitted my dissertation and defense slides for sponsor review that I had time to even *try* playing again. But once I started, it grew harder to pull myself away from the attractive nature of literally *anything* to distract myself from my simultaneous thesis defense, and apartment move with each passing day. After defending my thesis, I returned to my PC and began working on my next learning exploit: learning to be a healthy competitor ².

I bring all of this information to this report because I want to first explain myself as a player and my own experiences, circumstances, biases and limitations as a player. In doing so, I am able to make clear the context in which I view the format, and how I would like to improve as both a player of Competitive Pokemon and as a person learning to love competition again. I also want to make clear my own privileges and means that may tilt the playing field with respect to time, energy, and money. With that said, I expect that the less explicit I am about myself, the more interesting the things in these reports may be. I will share personal anecdotes and matters as they become relevant to discussing the matters of play.

Competitions like this require two parties: your self and your opponent. I cannot begin to understand what goes on in the mind of my opponent as, sadly, I am not a telepath. I also cannot begin to entirely understand myself perfectly. This may seem strange to share in a report like this, but I believe it is important to recognize that I am a human. I make mistakes, I misplay, I am irrational, I make decisions that don't make sense. All of these decisions are rooted in who I am as a person, my past, my present and my outlook on the future. This is the reality of what it means to play any sport. We don't play in a vacuum; the world around us shapes our skills, sharpens our minds, and our abilities are reflected through the ways in which we engage with ourselves and our communities. Competition requires two parties, after all.

If you're not interested in my philosophizing on the meaning of play and competition, then that's fine with me, but know that I see this venture into competitive Pokemon to be as much of an opportunity to learn about myself as I see it as an opportunity to chase my dreams of being a high-performing competitor. To win, I have to be willing to lose. To be willing lose, I have to love myself. To love myself, I have to accept the parts of myself that can often bring me strife and anxiety. I may never achieve my grandiose goal of being the World Champion, but I can certainly learn to love the game and who I am as I play it.

²We'll explore this more over the coming pages of this report and through the foreseeable future in my efforts to improve at Competitive Pokemon.

1.2 What is this Document?

This is a document intended to benchmark my experiences playing competitive Pokemon in the official VGC format. Given the period nature of format changes with respect to Pokemon Champions, I intend to make one of these documents for each VGC Regulation format I play. The purpose is therefore to understand my efforts during this period and appreciate how much time and energy I put into this format, among others.

Through graduate school, I was expected to write monthly reports to document my efforts, and to make clear to my advisors and sponsors what I had done in a given monthly period. While I don't have anyone I'm reporting to externally, I find that creating a log of my work ("saving my data" so to speak) can help me recognize the progress I've made in a given period. This internal satisfaction is in service of eventually returning to this document months or even years later to observe my progress towards my various goals.

I am sharing these reports for the sake of transparency in my own efforts. I am certainly nowhere near the top of the colloquial food chain. I believe that in being open with my own learning, I can not only improve as a person towards my goals, but I can encourage others to do similarly. This is the paradox of competition- only one person can be "the best", but to improve, one must find other like-minded individuals willing to work together ³. So I am writing these reports for myself first, and for a general audience second. I intend to be as contextually clear as possible with respect to the matters I include in these reports, explaining what plots and figures may mean, or the important matters to learn from them, for example. These are generally educational, but please don't expect academic professionalism every single time- I *will* be shitposting in here from time to time ⁴.

I am writing these reports in L^AT_EX. I will spare you the manifesto of obtaining and learning how to use an open-source text editor.

If you find this report and want to get in touch, find me on bluesky at [@voltage.neocities.org](https://bsky.app/profile/voltage.neocities.org) or at my website which is the same URL.

1.3 My Goals for Reg. M-B

Because I returned to competitive play for Regulation M-B, my short-term goals in this format were very modest. I also took care to develop long-term goals in service of determining

³Consider the Prisoner's Dilemma. the game theory suggests that it is most effective in most circumstances that both individuals trust each other. A betrayal may yield a short term boon, but has long-term negative consequences. While I'm not a game theory expert, I *have* played through *Zero Escape: Virtue's Last Reward* so, yeah, I think I know a thing or two about Game Theory lol

⁴And if you haven't already figured it out, I like to use footnotes for a kind of "director's commentary". Rarely will footnotes have a significant impact on the body of a report like this. I just like to talk and sometimes I have asides. Your mileage may vary.

the direction of where my short-term goals ought to build towards.

1.3.1 Short-Term Goals

Short-term goals are often quantifiable, and easy to demonstrate. Even when these goals are not wholly specific, they can be made specific by adding a modifier or two based on the context of the circumstances.

1. **Reach Master Ball Rank on the in-game Champions ladder in both Seasons I Play**

Laddering has never been my strong suit as I am prone to over-thinking. I want to demonstrate my ability to myself that I am capable of reaching the “tournament-level” player tier through effective building and piloting of a given team.

2. **Attend In-Person Tournaments and Play My Best**

Here “Playing my best” is variable. At the first in-person event I went to, this was quite literally “win one game”. Later, this was “win one set”, and eventually it was “go positive overall”. These “accomplishment-based goals” are only for the sake of giving me something to strive for when I compete, given that one of my long-term goals is to simply “learn”.

3. **Develop Competence with Multiple Teams**

Here “competence” refers to the ability to pilot a given team at an in-person event or on the ladder, and win consistently. I wanted to avoid locking myself into maining a single team or archetype because I recognize that the formats of Pokemon Champions are constantly changing, never mind following the trends in the metagame. In Reg. M-B, what is most important to me is to have a few teams I can use with reasonable confidence so that I can determine my personal preferences when playing.

1.3.2 Long-Term Goals

My long-term goals are a bit more nebulous, if only for the sake of flexibility. I do not want to tie myself down to something so early on in my return to a field where I am still figuring out my own interests. In this way, I can use these long-term goals more as “North Stars” in my growth as a player and person.

1. **Reach Day 2 of a Regional Tournament**

Reaching Day 2 of a Regional Tournament is the mark of a generally skilled player. This practice typically requires the player to have won at least 6 sets of matches, or at least twelve total matches in a given day over an extended period of time.

2. Obtain Teambuilding and Archetypal Literacy

In order to be an effective team builder, one must have a thorough understanding of the metagame, and what each Pokemon does in a given match. I believe in my foundational knowledge of the game, but I recognize that there are many strategies that I need to learn more about. For example, I am still baffled by Oranguru. I expect to challenge myself to use a team with it to understand literacy of these Hard Trick Room teams that might make use of it. More generally, this goal could be summarized as “learn as much as possible”, dare we say “obtain expertise” ⁵

3. Develop a Strong Local Competitive Pokemon Community

I cannot get better unless I surround myself with like-minded players who are also looking to improve. This is most easily accomplished by going to in-person events and attempting to make friendships and healthy rivalries. I have a lot of experience in community building initiatives event planning and execution, and I have experience in coaching, mentorship and personal development. I understand that developing community requires building trust and friendship among the others who show up. I learned this first-hand through both my previous in-person VGC practice, through my experience in sports, and through my collaborations with peers in academia and professional settings. When in doubt, the in-person play at the local levels is for fun, and is a great way to get practice reps in.

4. Learn to Love Competition

This means that I want to learn how to win gracefully, and lose with dignity. It means taking responsibility for my misplays, acknowledging when RNG rolls won me the game, and what effect that can have on a person. It also means learning to handle the pressure of the mental aspect of the game better. In a short sense, I am an over-thinker which has stifled some of my personal experiences with competition as a whole. I see this return to competitive mons as a means of building mental toughness, stamina, and care, with the eventual ideal goal of being a more mentally healthy person through self-respect.

1.4 How I Approached Learning

There were a number of ways I approached learning VGC as I returned after my hiatus. The most practical way to learn was to simply play. Most of my meaningful play, wherein I played with the intention of learning and winning, was done on Pokemon Champions. I played initially at breakfast, two matches on my phone, sort of aware of what I was doing. I was not making well thought out decisions, but I was playing. I’d then also play a few matches in the

⁵Please believe me when I say that obtaining expertise is not trivial, and I *know that*.

evening before going to bed, getting a few basic reps in. I figured that this would be enough to at least start playing and getting back into the mindset of Competitive Pokemon. Still, it wasn't until I actually started losing a LOT in Master Ball Rank at the end of Season 4 that I realized that if I wanted to keep climbing the ladder, I would have to play "seriously".

Unlearning many of my bad Competitive Pokemon habits was relatively easy. I had not played Competitive Pokemon serious in over five years, meaning that it was simple to approach the game with a blank slate, even if my previous play was in Singles. The main challenge was, then, to adopt the mindset of playing Doubles in an effective capacity. This meant that I needed to learn the power of clicking Protect, and appreciate that clicking Protect does not necessarily cede momentum in a vacuum. I kept track of my positives, negatives, plays I was proud of, misplays, leads and mons in the back, and other things that worked well or poorly in a match in a little journal. I would then review the notes and keep track of my notes on using a given team in my Obsidian Vault⁶.

I am in the process of learning how to review my matches and pick up the nuances of my play. I believe in the power of self-scouting, but I still need to learn the practice of reviewing my own matches in greater detail. This is something I will focus on more as I move into formats in which I expect to compete at a truly serious level. I've also been able to develop a community of like-minded players- I'll discuss this later in the report.

1.4.1 On Charts

Let's talk about charts. I love a good chart. You're going to see some charts in this report, and likely future reports.

I've been using these charts as a way to learn about Competitive Pokemon and in an effort to get better at data analysis, among others. Let me begin with a caveat: I recognize that this is not a perfect representation of the data. These charts aren't going to be things that I make public outside of these reports, strictly because they're not *really* a good way to describe what's *ACTUALLY* going on in the metagame. But this is, in my opinion, a good way to get a finger on the pulse of current trends, and to see what is generally doing well or poorly as a means of launching into a certain direction. These charts can be used in a general sense to make sense of what occurred at a given tournament, so the more players that entered, the more meaningful the conclusions that I can derive from the data.

I work in RStudio, which is an accessible statistics analysis and plotting software. With the script window in RStudio, I can plot and analyze data from a given dataset. Competitive Pokemon tournament data is a natural fit. The data from these charts is gathered from

⁶I use Obsidian for a myriad of things beyond Competitive Pokemon, including my research notes. This transition into a different kind of research was a very easy parallel process.

LimitlessVGC's online tournament results. These results are quite nice as they provide plenty of information both related to overall results, but also matchup and metagame data for a given Pokemon. I call the database's API to gather most of the data, though I do also scrape the HTML tables for the sake of determining the matchup-based information. I will make it clear where the data is from and cite the datasets with URLs and relevant links so you can parse the data for yourself.

“Okay nerd, enough with your charts, on with the Pokemon.” Buddy, *you're* the one reading the multi-page report about my experiences playing VGC.

Chapter 2

Teams

Here's some teams I used. They're generally unordered, though I try to have some flow between them. I want to discuss the teams I found to be most relevant, most impactful, or otherwise interesting to me in this format. I am not necessarily the author behind all of these teams, but I do think that the culture of sharing and collaboration in teams is one of the hallmarks of this community. I love team building, and I hope to be knowledgeable to build some of my own meta-relevant teams for future tournaments in time. In this way, I have to learn how to teambuild effectively. Some of the writing you'll find in this section is my discussion of using a team in general, which includes motivations of why I chose to focus on a team archetype, what the specific training might be for, and relevant matchups the team might need special focus for. In the future, should I main a given team, this section might instead discuss each matchup into other archetypes more rigorously. For now, it's a spread of multiple teams I found fun and interesting to use in this format.

The discussion presented here is NOT comprehensive. This is primarily due to the fact that when I started playing Regulation M-B I hadn't planned I would write a report like this. I intend to write a similar report for Regulation M-C, which will likely be more in-depth on the primary teams I use in playing the format. For now, please enjoy my general discussions on some teams I used. Thanks for your grace as I demonstrate my learning.

2.1 Delphox + Blastoise + Kingambit Setup



Sneasler (M) @ Focus Sash

Ability: Unburden

Level: 50

EVs: 2 HP / 32 Atk / 32 Spe

Jolly Nature

- Dire Claw
- Close Combat
- Fake Out
- Quick Guard

Blastoise (M) @ Blastoisinite

Ability: Rain Dish

Level: 50

EVs: 1 HP / 1 Def / 32 SpA / 32 Spe

Modest Nature

- Dark Pulse
- Water Spout
- Shell Smash
- Protect

Kingambit (M) @ Life Orb

Ability: Defiant

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 32 Atk / 1 SpD / 1 Spe

Adamant Nature

- Kowtow Cleave
- Sucker Punch
- Swords Dance
- Protect

Incineroar (M) @ Citrus Berry

Ability: Intimidate

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 24 Def / 8 SpD / 2 Spe

Impish Nature

- Flare Blitz
- Helping Hand
- Parting Shot
- Fake Out

Delphox (F) @ Delphoxite

Ability: Blaze

Level: 50

EVs: 21 HP / 16 Def / 29 Spe

Modest Nature

- Heat Wave
- Nasty Plot
- Psychic
- Protect

Sinistcha @ Kasib Berry

Ability: Hospitality

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 4 Def / 30 SpD

Bold Nature

- Matcha Gotcha
- Rage Powder
- Trick Room
- Protect

2.1.1 Introduction

I’m a big believer in the archetype wherein you have three powerful setup Pokemon and three mons dedicated to supporting them. I like to call this “Choose Your Champion” (or ‘CYC’) since the idea is to pick one of Mega Delphox, Mega Blastoise or Kingambit and support it by any means necessary. When I’m picking my “Champion” at Team Preview I am asking myself: “Which mon can likely get three knockouts?”. From this question I am able to devise a generally flexible game plan for a given matchup. Because of my current state in my play, I haven’t outright planned out lines for each archetype matchup, but I can generally pick out which of my three Champions is going to have the best matchup, especially in Open Team Sheet matches.

A variation of this team with slightly different EVs was the team I used to climb to Master Ball rank in my first season. I found myself consistently finding setup openings in my opponents’ play in the higher ranks of Ultra Ball tier which made for a nice set of win-streaks. Once in Master Ball tier, this team was less of an “auto-win” squad, which was a rude awakening. Despite this, I think this team is a very strong kind of construcion, and I think that other iterations of this team are certainly viable. We’ve seen this to be true with teams that replace Blastoise with Mega Floette or other powerful setup sweepers¹, and I believe that in future regulations this structure will be a generally strong backbone.

2.1.2 Following Some Trends

As previously reported, in my efforts to learn the metagame, I made charts that investigated the production of individual Pokemon in various online tournaments posted on LimitlessVGC. From studying the tournament Khun Champions Cup 2 (266 Entrants, July 5, 2026), I observed that Blastoise and Delphox were winning quite frequently relative to their share on a team. This is observed in Figure 2.1 which plots a Pokemon’s Share percentage and win percentage plotted on the x and y axes, respectively. In this plot one can assess how well a single Pokemon performed in an online tournament. A high share means the Pokemon was on a larger number of teams, while a higher win percentage implies a Pokemon being on teams that won more. Naturally, the more matches a Pokemon players, the closer they will trend towards having roughly a 50% win-rate. Therefore, the Pokemon that are further from this line, while also being further to the right of the plot are supremely interesting to investigate further. They are the “launch pad” into deducing metagame developments. In Figure 2.1 Delphox defines the “winner’s front” of the data with Blastoise being just below it². This, coupled with the fact that a number of top players were starting to talk about how

¹See ‘Pledge, Turn, Prestige’ for my further thoughts on this.

²Here “winner’s front” refers to the top edge of the data curve. The Pokemon that comprise the “winner’s front” demonstrate the highest win percentage given their usage. Similarly, the “loser front” are the Pokemon with the lowest win percentage given their share.

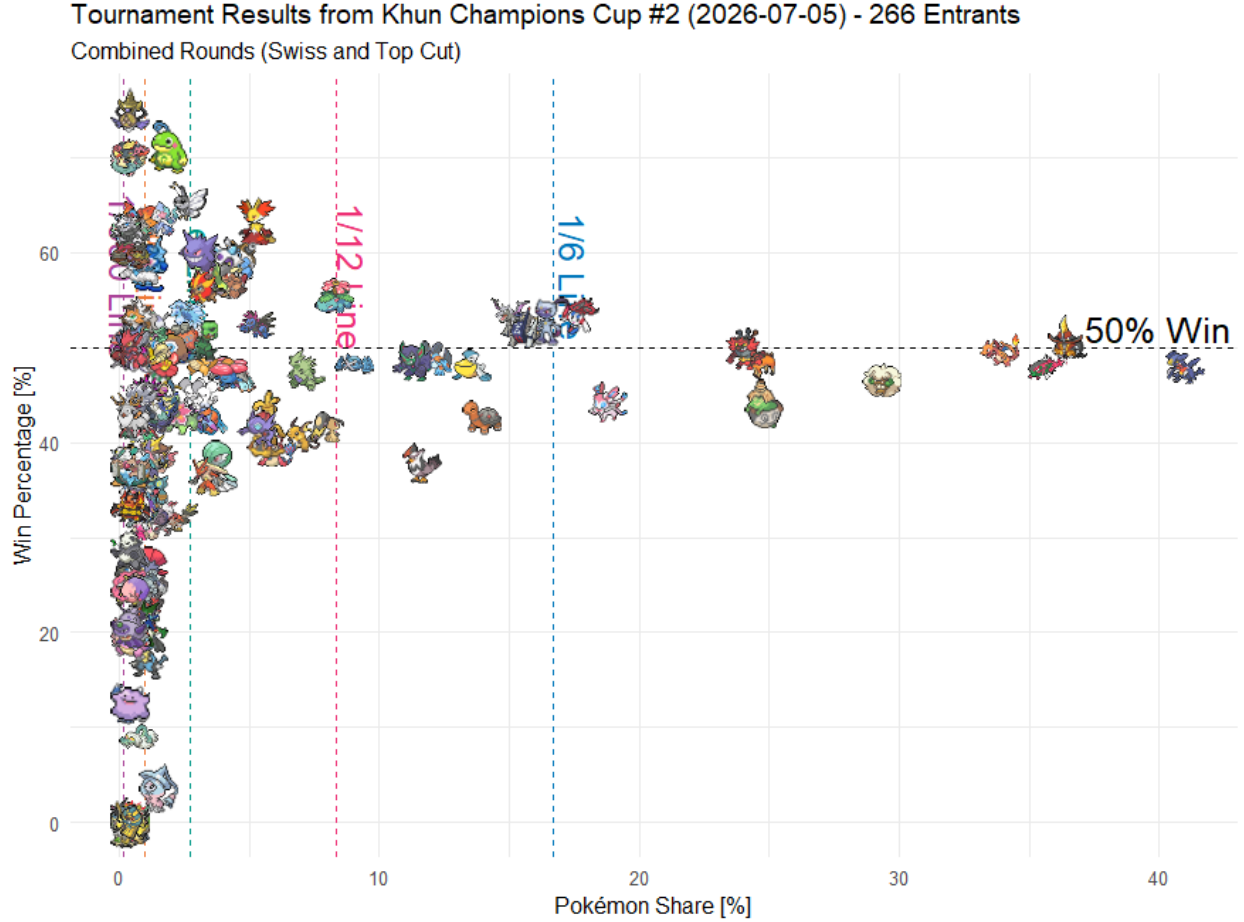


Figure 2.1: The Pokemon Share vs. Win % for Khun’s Champions Cup 2 for the Combined Swiss and Top Cut Data.

effective the two Megas were was enough for me to try building and playing with it.

As an aside, look at Staraptor hanging out there with a Share above 10% and a win percentage below 40%. Talk about over-preparation for a metagame threat!

This team’s strength was further revealed in the Grand Champions Festival Encore Tournament (4254 Entrants, July 26, 2026), hosted by SkrawVGC. While the tournament ultimately proved the effectiveness of Sun-Rain as an archetype, Delphox + Blastoise teams also proved to be quite reliable winners. Figure 2.2 shows a zoomed in view of the Share vs. Win % plot, with the x axis plotted on a logarithmic scale to more easily observe the lower percentage data. In this figure, we can observe every Pokemon with a team share percentage greater than 1%, that is, they were on at least 1% of all teams. The 1/12 line suggests that Pokemon with a share above this line appear in approximately every other match. Delphox and Blastoise straddle the line, meaning they were only used on a subset of teams, but they yield a very high win percentage relative to their usage. Blastoise shows the highest win percentage of

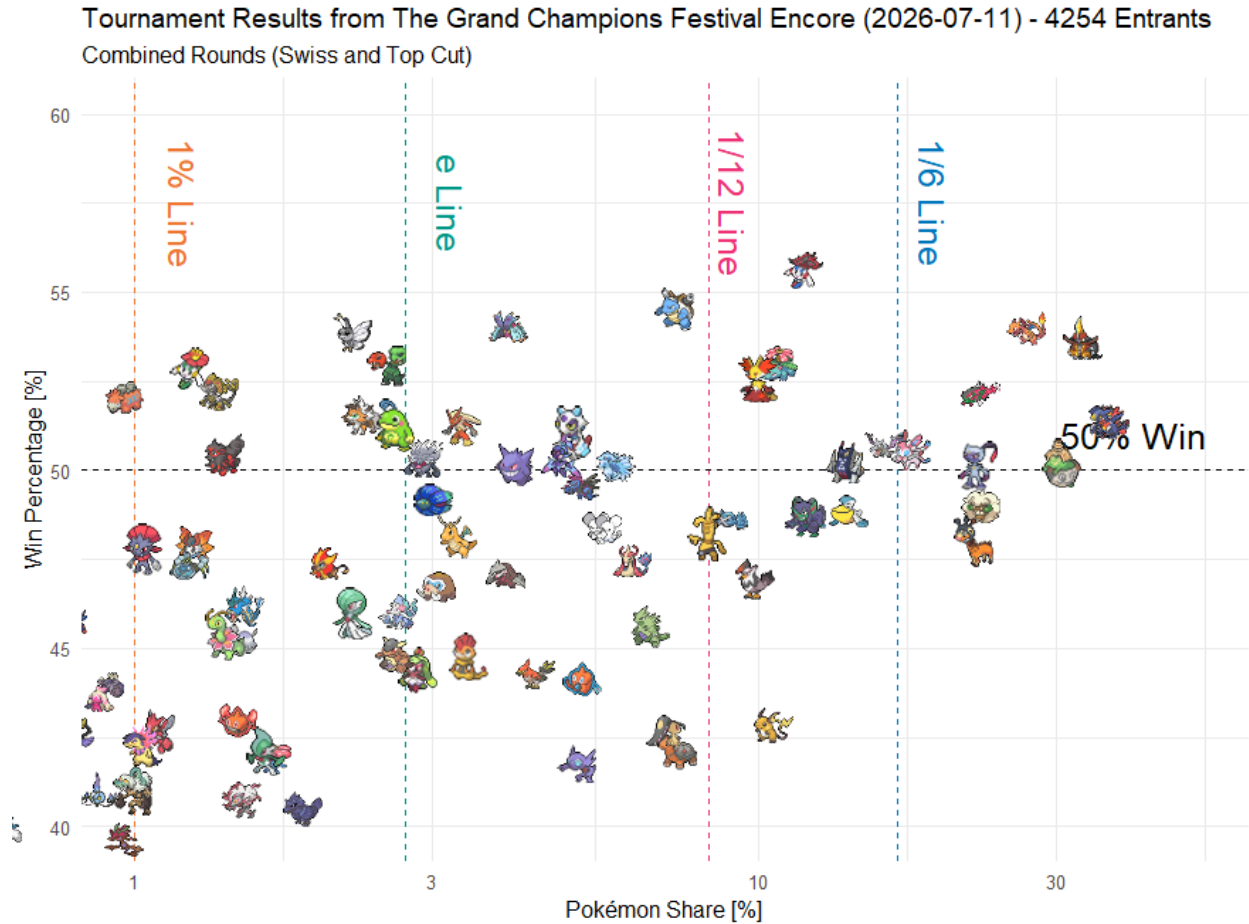


Figure 2.2: A zoomed in view of the Pokemon Share vs. Win Percentage from the Grand Champions Festival Encore Tournament for both the Swiss and Top Cut rounds.

any Pokemon below the 1/12 line, which is proof of its potency. Compare this to the other Pokemon on the “loser front” like Torkoal and Mawile, hard Trick Room staples, which were brought on nearly the same number of teams, but carried a very low overall win percentage. Around early July, Blastoise + Delphox teams seemed to be a really consistent and easy to understand construction.

2.1.3 On Sets

Because this team requires three powerful setup Pokemon and three efficient support Pokemon, the EVs and moves on each member reflect roles very distinctly. Because the other two set up mons are very straightforward, I’d like to draw attention to Mega Delphox With Fire-type spread damage with Heat Wave and consistently strong Psychic-type damage with Psyshock (or Psychic depending on your preferences), Delphox puts a ton of pressure on opponents in more neutral matchups. The EVs on this team as I present them are a

bulky variation, designed to be less afraid of a Dragon Claw from Garchomp while still maintaining offensive pressure. Couple this with the opportunity to get a Nasty Plot up on a Garchomp which thinks it's going to do more damage than not, and you can retaliate with a +2 Psychic, which is a guaranteed OHKO, provided no meaningful speed changes ³.

Garchomp into Mega Delphox

- 32 Atk Life Orb Garchomp Dragon Claw vs. 21 HP / 16 Def Mega Delphox: **99-118 (57.8 - 69%)** – **guaranteed 2HKO**
- 32 Atk Life Orb Garchomp Rock Slide vs. 21 HP / 16 Def Mega Delphox: **94-112 (54.9 - 65.4%)** – **guaranteed 2HKO** (in Doubles)
- 32 Atk Life Orb Garchomp Rock Slide vs. 21 HP / 16 Def Mega Delphox: **125-148 (73 - 86.5%)** – **guaranteed 2HKO** (in Singles)

Mega Delphox into Garchomp

- +2 0+ SpA Mega Delphox Psychic vs. 2 HP / 0 SpD Garchomp: **189-223 (102.1 - 120.5%)** – **guaranteed OHKO**
- +2 0+ SpA Mega Delphox Psychic vs. 16 HP / 0 SpD Garchomp: **189-223 (94.9 - 112%)** – **68.75% chance to OHKO** ⁴

These calcs are one of the main neutral damage calculations I used to my advantage during this format. You'll be able to read about it a little later :]

2.1.4 Notable Matchups

- Against **Rain Perish Trap** this team is faced with a dilemma. Perish Trap teams count on their ability to disrupt their opponent's actions to stall out turns, while this team relies on those same turns to set up. Under these circumstances, I would rely on doing as much damage output as possible and acknowledging that consistent chip damage is ideal. Sinistcha comes to these matchups every time without fail, and because I want to have the option for moving my pieces around against a Mega Gengar, I usually **lead Mega Blastoise and Sinistcha with Kingambit and Incineroar in the**

³Nasty Plot is my setup option of choice, though I have also toyed with the idea of using Substitute instead to have a turn for doing damage without any fear whatsoever.

⁴This is the EV spread used by Shohei Kimura at Worlds 2026. I think it's a relevant Bulk calculation and I'm including it for completeness. You'll notice that while the damage roll is the same, the KO chance decreases, which demonstrates the value of adding a little HP on spread in general. Then again, maybe you're reading this and you already knew the value of adding HP EVs when in doubt. Or maybe you're Shohei Kimura, which if so, こんにちは、あなたのチームが好きです。今年の世界大会での活躍、おめでとうございます。

back. I would love to bring Mega Delphox to this matchup to click funny damage buttons, but Incineroar is a staple on teams like this and the last thing I want to have in this matchup is a Mega that doesn't make huge progress very quickly. I am also not yet skilled enough to make the reads made by my opponent to bring Kingambit and make progress in the match when my opponent makes interesting pivoting moves. Most Perish Trap teams these days also run Politeod, so I can call their weather by bringing Mega Blastoise and get powerful Water Spouts.

- Against **SunRain**, I am relying on consistent ways of winning despite weather. Mega Blastoise doesn't like being under Sun and Mega Delphox doesn't like being under rain. For the latter mega, I really like playing Mega Delphox into the Sun side of this matchup, so if I am feeling confident in my planning I will use that as my setup Champion. Kingambit is often in the back as a means of cleaning up after Delphox punches holes in the match, ideally with Sinistcha's support. Because I don't like Mega Blastoise's matchup and because Incineroar is not great into the Rain half of the matchup, I'm usually inclined to **lead Sneasler and Delphox with Sinistcha and Kingambit in the back**. It is worth noting that in a best-of-three situation there are cases where I would absolutely still bring Incineroar if I expect my opponent to lean into the Sun side of the team, or if I think I would really appreciate Fake Out support.

2.2 Pledge, Turn, Prestige - Mega Gardevoir + Mega Delphox Setup



Gardevoir-Mega @ Gardevoirite

Ability: Trace

Level: 50

EVs: 26 Def / 13 SpA / 27 Spe

Bold Nature

- Protect
- Hyper Voice
- Calm Mind
- Psyshock

Farigiraf @ Citrus Berry

Ability: Armor Tail

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 2 SpA / 32 SpD

Quiet Nature

- Hyper Voice
- Helping Hand
- Imprison
- Trick Room

Delphox-Mega @ Delphoxite

Ability: Levitate

Level: 50

EVs: 1 HP / 32 SpA / 1 SpD / 32 Spe

Timid Nature

- Nasty Plot
- Heat Wave
- Psychic
- Protect

Kingambit @ Life Orb

Ability: Defiant

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 32 Atk / 2 SpD

Adamant Nature

- Swords Dance
- Sucker Punch
- Kowtow Cleave
- Protect

Sinistcha @ Colbur Berry

Ability: Hospitality

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 32 Def / 2 SpA

Relaxed Nature

- Trick Room
- Rage Powder
- Matcha Gotcha
- Protect

Annihilape @ Focus Sash

Ability: Defiant

Level: 50

EVs: 32 Atk / 1 Def / 1 SpD / 32 Spe

Adamant Nature

- Protect
- Phantom Force
- Rock Tomb
- Close Combat

2.2.1 Introduction and Overview

In embodying the “Working with the garage door up” mentality, I include this team despite its limited success. I recognize that, in reviewing it for this report, that there are a number of decisions I’ve made in this construction that can certainly be changed for future use. Still, I’m proud of this team! I was able to try out some new ideas and see how they worked, and I ultimately learned a lot about the archetype and why Mega Floette is a better option. Unfortunately for me, I have not played Pokemon Legends ZA, so Mega Floette was not an option for me in that moment⁵. While I believe Mega Floette may be a real meaningful substitution for Mega Gardevoir on this team, I did not interrogate this idea beyond thinking to myself “I think Mega Floette would be better than Mega Gardevoir here”.

2.2.2 Mega Gardevoir and Mind Games

In using 2.1, I found Blastoise’s all-or-nothing playstyle a little limiting. I didn’t like how it felt like Mega Blastoise had to be developed immediately, or it would fail to accomplish its goals. Furthermore, around the time that I was developing this team, the YoshimaP Sand team was gaining high popularity, and Sand chip was intrinsically counter intuitive for Blastoise⁶. So I looked at other Mega Evolutions with inordinately high stats which could also lean into setup options, and found some options.

Calm Mind Mega Gardevoir was the Pokemon I ultimately settled on as the compliment to Mega Delphox. This pairing feels a little redundant in hindsight, but I wanted to lean into the idea of having a Mega Pokemon maintain similar matchups but have functionally different roles. Again, the immediate answer is Mega Floette, but since I’ve acknowledged that, let’s move forward with Mega Gardevoir.

What stands out with Mega Gardevoir is its combined ability to threaten spread damage with Hyper Voice and targeting damage with Psychic STAB. This is a fascinating parallel with Mega Delphox, which instead offers Fire-type spread damage and Psychic single-target STAB. For the sake of learning, these two mons would provide similar piloting methods but for different matchups, making it easy to learn differences between two mons which otherwise functioned very similarly. But Mega Gardevoir is not nearly as fast as Mega Delphox, so I instead wanted to lean into it’s better bulk and boosting its high base Special Attack.

The EVs on Gardevoir are a little misguided, but we can chalk that up to a novice in the format shaking off the teambuilding rust. I was incredibly annoyed that Mega Gardevoir

⁵This opens the door for a rant that I’d love to share with you all about how Pokemon Champions was advertised with the ideal of mitigating the ‘pay to win’ nature of Competitive Pokemon, and then one of the best Mega Evolutions in the metagame was locked behind a 30+ hour time commitment in a middling 70 dollar game.

⁶One lesson to internalize: even if Blastoise is chipped, Water Spout still does TRUCKLOADS of damage

couldn't beat a Garchomp 1v1 without significant Defense investment, so I set the EVs accordingly to live a Jolly Garchomp's Poison Jab⁷, among others. From this Calc, I could then get roll on a OHKO with the odds in my favor with Hyper Voice.

- 32 Atk Life Orb Garchomp Poison Jab vs. 0 HP / 26+ Def Mega Gardevoir: **117-140 (81.8 - 97.9%) – guaranteed 2HKO**
- 13 SpA Pixilate Mega Gardevoir Hyper Voice vs. 2 HP / 0 SpD Garchomp: **170-204 (91.8 - 110.2%) – 56.25% chance to OHKO**

The Speed EVs feel a little misguided in hindsight. I think I should've leaned less into the speed aspect and more into the bulk side of things since Mega Gardevoir is speed tying with Base 95 speed mons, and, among others underspeeds Adamant Mimikyu⁸. What I'd do differently is determine the proper calculations to figure out what Mega Gardevoir would live when at +1 SpD, and backproject the proper defensive EVs accordingly. Then I could decide whether I wanted legitimate speed investment, or if I was satisfied staying at a min speed Base 100 Pokemon. This is what makes Mega Gardevoir so tricky to use: it would really love being a little faster or having proper Speed control support to get moving. Unfortunately, when I was constructing this team, I was still learning exactly what modes of speed control were effective.

Because, really **this is a fake Trick Room team**. The idea is that I wanted to give the impression that this was a Trick Room team from the Team Sheet preview and then take advantage of my opponent's pre-conceived notions about what the team would be. This works in vacuum or against players who are still finding their own footing, but this trick would hardly fool more experienced players. Because Mega Gardevoir was on a lot of Trick room teams at the time, I was leaning into the idea that I could get my opponents to think this is a weird and kind of bad Trick Room team".

So with Mega Gardevoir boosting its bulk along with the more commonly accepted boosting mons with Mega Delphox and Kingambit, which are otherwise the standard and unoptimized sets, I began to consider the ways in which these mons might obtain support from their allies.

Sinistcha and **Farigiraf** were easy options. Sinistcha offers redirection support and means of doing spread damage with AMtcha Gotcha. Trick Room on Sinistcha is the pinch option where I might click it if for some reason flipping the speed dynamic would be beneficial for my play. I was not relying on it to click Trick Room to win my matches in an active way. Farigiraf is a similar story, and equally as essential. Imprison Farigiraf with the moves it has effectively shuts down the offensive side of Sylveon, forcing it to either use Hyper Beam or

⁷This was a metagame trend at the time that has since died down.

⁸Which is less of a meaningful checkpoint and more of a hey maybe this'll be relevant" note.

Yawn, which I found to be useful in supporting Kingambit and Annihilape. The movesets could certainly be tailored to modern sensibilities, but I opted for Helping Hand on Farigiraf to both provide offensive team support and to shut down other prominent Helping Hand users which would otherwise use the boosts to muscle past Farigiraf and Mega Gardevoir's bulk. And, of course, shutting down Trick Room for as long as Farig was on the field ensured that I could theoretically control who flipped the speed field. I believe that Protect instead of Helping Hand might be the more broadly applicable set since at least then you can bank your momentum in clicking Imprison, for turns later where your opponent is no longer able to use Protect to stall. Imprison Farigiraf is certainly better on true Hard Trick Room teams, so the illusion of this team being a more dedicated Trick Room team came into play here at least.

The last mon certainly could be another support mon like Citrus Berry Incineroar or even Friend Guard Maushold, but I instead opted for a more offensive approach with **Focus Sash Annihilape**. This team, as it stands with five Pokemon, does NOT like Incineroar. Having a Pokemon that actively dissuaded that Intimidate cycling, and had a good matchup into Mega Charizard Y was a serious priority. Focus Sash Annihilape with Phantom Force was a fun option that allowed me to dodge incoming attacks while also pressuring pins- not many people I played in the early days of my play realized that Phantom Force broke Protect. Rock Tomb was also a nice extra way to have some speed control, even though it gave away a little about what my intended means of Speed control were.

I think this team is a good example of the Dunning-Krueger effect in action. I was building a team with a meaningful foundation, but I didn't quite know what I was building a team to withstand. I would liken it to building reinforcing a house for a tornado when I should actually be preparing for earthquakes or hurricanes.

2.2.3 Notable Threats and Matchups

- **Mega Floette and Sylveon**

Naturally, powerful Fairy attackers have a field day with this team if you don't pilot it carefully. The best way I found to handle these two would be to **lead Farigiraf and Mega Delphox** with Sinistcha and one of Annihilape or Kingambit in the back. This latter decision is based on the remainder of the team composition, which begs the question: "why not run Iron Head on Kingambit?", to which I answer, "Yeah, I think that might be a good idea". Farigiraf at least, again, shuts down Sylveon reasonably well.

- **Wide Guard**

Four of the six attacking Pokemon on this team rely on spread moves for damage. Any Pokemon with Wide Guard poses an immediate threat and should be dealt with

accordingly. Pelipper can be handled with Gardevoir getting a Calm Mind off, so long as it isn't too chipped, paired up with one of the physical attackers on the team.

2.3 Conclusions

Is this the best team ever made? No. Certainly not. Was it a really good exercise in building again after a long while, learning a new format? Absolutely! Did I learn a lot in my efforts to build this team for meaningful in-person play? Yes, of course! I went 2-1 at my first visit to my local Ann Arbor scene with this team!

2.4 Raichu-Raptor Speed Play



Arcanine-Hisui @ Focus Sash

Ability: Rock Head

Level: 50

EVs: 2 HP / 32 Atk / 32 Spe

Jolly Nature

- Protect
- Extreme Speed
- Head Smash
- Flare Blitz

Farigiraf @ Citrus Berry

Ability: Armor Tail

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 14 Def / 20 SpD

Calm Nature

- Protect
- Psychic
- Trick Room
- Helping Hand

Kingambit @ Life Orb

Ability: Defiant

Level: 50

EVs: 13 HP / 32 Atk / 21 Spe

Adamant Nature

- Protect
- Kowtow Cleave
- Swords Dance
- Sucker Punch

Staraptor-Mega @ Staraptite

Ability: Intimidate

Level: 50

EVs: 31 HP / 3 Atk / 32 Spe

Jolly Nature

- Tailwind
- Protect
- Close Combat
- Dual Wingbeat

Sylveon @ Fairy Feather

Ability: Pixilate

Level: 50

EVs: 9 HP / 22 Def / 30 SpA / 5 Spe

Modest Nature

- Detect
- Hyper Beam
- Hyper Voice
- Quick Attack

Raichu-Mega-Y @ Raichunite Y

Ability: Lightning Rod

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 2 SpA / 32 Spe

Timid Nature

- Fake Out
- Zap Cannon
- Focus Blast
- Protect

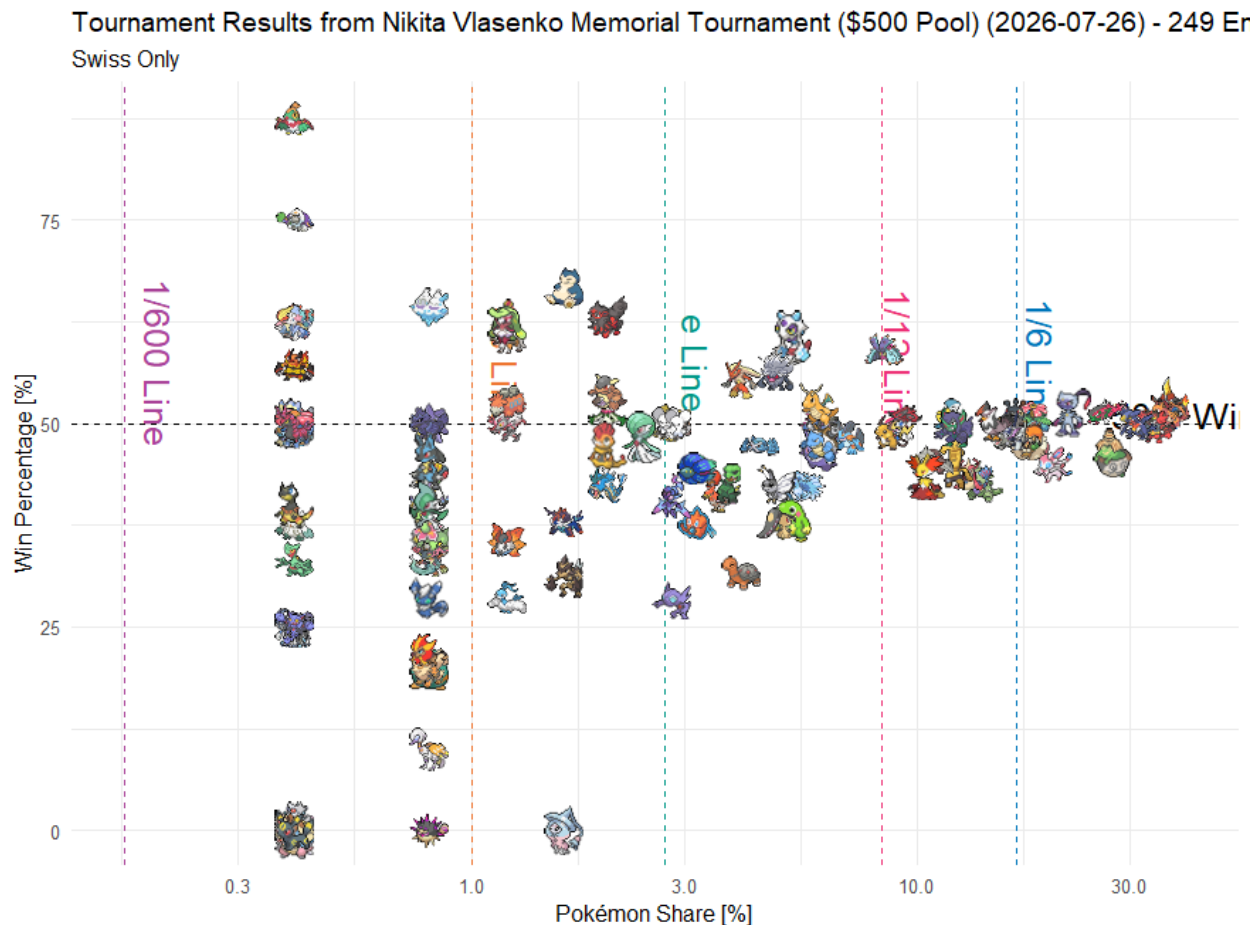


Figure 2.3: The Share vs. Win% for each Pokémon at the Nikita Vlasenko Memorial tournament, for only the Swiss rounds of the tournament. The horizontal axis is plotted on a logarithmic scale.

2.4.1 Building Intention and Methods

In studying the results from the Nikita Vlasenko Memorial Tournament (249 Entrants, July 26), I was surprised to see the success of Hisuian Arcanine (HArc). As observed in Figure 2.3, HArc is a member of the tournament’s “winner front”. Despite its presence on only five teams, it had a win percentage above 64%, meaning that whichever teams it WAS on were winning quite seriously. This Pokémon was ultimately on the winning team, which is the team presented here. I was curious as to what benefit this Pokémon provided, so I looked at where the two megas on the team, Raichu and Staraptor, struggled. Both had trouble into the Mega Floette matchup, and Hisuian Arcanine managed to put lots of offensive pressure on Floette and other Fairies. I don’t mean to suggest that this tournament is where this team archetype took off (I believe it was from Japan from before July 26), but this is where I first observed its prominence.

I don't want to reiterate too much about this team since I ended up stealing it from the Limitless page only for Aaron Zheng to make a video about it four days later⁹.

2.5 Usage

Speed Play is my favorite way to describe this team. You have a ton of chances to play the Speed Control game in just the right way for the matchup which presents a huge amount of flexibility in game planning and a very high skill ceiling as a result. Maybe this isn't the best team to use to learn how to play the game— let's just say that learning how to pilot this team was kind of like being thrown in the deep end and being told to learn to swim. I had to choose very specific speed tiers to ensure that I would memorize various speed tiers as I learned to play. With 5 Speed EVs, Sylveon hits 85 speed which is quite important. 85 Speed is slow enough to be effective under Trick Room, but under Tailwind it hits 170 Speed, which is one point faster than unboosted Max Speed Garchomp I also opted for a faster Kingambit than most here— 21 Speed makes Kingambit hit 91 Speed, which is faster than a neutral speed Sinistcha without investment. This means that I can generally see if the Sinistcha has any speed very quickly, and getting an attack in before any kind potential for Matcha Gotcha burns. I think this decisions was a little short-sighted since Kingambit appreciates having as much HP as possible, and the HP number isn't optimized for Life Orb recoil in favor of max Attack. Still, information through speed play is valuable. While 182 Speed is excessive for a Kingambit, knowing that a Pokemon's speed is halved from paralysis when hit by a Zap Cannon gave me a very useful benchmark to hold in mind. That's the magic of Paralysis and Tailwind all on the same team, the Speed math is the same, you just have to know your speed tiers.

Oh, and if you still don't outspeed your opponent, you can always bring Farigiraf for Trick Room support. By flipping the speed field as Tailwind burns out, the speed field can again be flipped in your favor. This can also be played in reverse if Farigiraf is better suited for a lead meatchup. The speed play in this approach is primarily valuable when you bring Staraptor's Tailwind support, but certainly there are matchups where Raichu can still provide offensive team support parallel to Farigiraf.

One of the underrated aspects of this team is that you actually have eight different viable Pokemon on the team. Staraptor and Raichu have an interesting trait with their Mega forms which I'd like to call "self-synergy". They are capable of supporting their Mega form through play in their regular form. For Staraptor this is intimidate and Tailwind Support before turning into a Mega with Contrary, while for Raichu it's Lightning Rod redirection that also boosts its Special attack so that Zap Cannon and Focus Blast can hit that much harder. It's

⁹which, lol, but also it is a nice signal to see that I am looking at the same teams that the top players are seeing and picking them out in the same way they are, which means I might be on the right track here.

not a perfect science by any stretch, but these two Pokemon can both provide meaningful team support before and after Mega Evolving and in different ways ¹⁰. Compare this to a Mega Blaziken which is essentially the same Pokemon before and after Mega Evolution, but with higher base stats. It certainly helps too that Mega Raichu-Y has the same bulk as a regular Raichu, making the decision to Mega less about survival and more about utility and timing. It's very reasonable to bring both Raichu and Staraptor to a single match and then flex one into the Mega slot depending on what the opponent has played in the game and possibly set thus far. It's a very elegant approach to efficiency and team applications. I'm quite smitten with its construction, as well as the modernization that we saw at Worlds which replaces Farigiraf for Basculegion to better manage Water-type attacks. The one pitfall on the team- no meaningful water resists.

With the speed control support from the two mega Pokemon and Farigiraf, the remaining selections come explicitly from the matchup against the opponent. Sylveon, HArc and Kingambit all provide immediate offensive pressure into multiple Pokemon in the metagame, and all appreciate both Tailwind and Trick Room

This makes piloting this team both exhilarating and daunting. Rather than six Pokemon to consider in a team at Team Preview, one must consider eight instead. To a skilled player who has been choosing this team as their main loadout, this dilemma is manageable with practice and time. To someone like me who has only been playing for so long since picking the game back up, this dilemma remains a bit of a dilemma. I love playing with this team, but I must admit that I think it's still a little too advanced for me at times. Navigating the lack of Water-resists has been the greatest issue. I expect to return to this idea more in future formats.

¹⁰Lots of Pokemon with viable Mega Evolutions have a kind of self-synergy, separate from simply planning out the proper time to Mega Evolve. I have reason to believe that Mega Raichu-X is going to be really quite good in a future format for this exact reason.

2.6 Millie-pede



Scolipede (M) @ Scolipite

Ability: Speed Boost

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 6 Atk / 28 Spe

Jolly Nature

- Leech Life
- Poison Jab
- Swords Dance
- Protect

Raichu (M) @ Raichunite Y

Ability: Lightning Rod

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 10 Def / 24 Spe

Timid Nature

- Zap Cannon
- Focus Blast
- Protect
- Fake Out

Sinistcha @ Kasib Berry

Ability: Hospitality

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 4 Def / 30 SpD

Relaxed Nature

- Matcha Gotcha
- Life Dew
- Protect
- Rage Powder

Weavile (M) @ Focus Sash

Ability: Pickpocket

Level: 50

EVs: 3 HP / 32 Atk / 31 Spe

Jolly Nature

- Knock Off
- Triple Axel
- Low Kick
- Fake Out

Ceruledge (F) @ Colbur Berry

Ability: Flash Fire

Level: 50

EVs: 32 HP / 25 Atk / 9 Def

Adamant Nature

- Bitter Blade
- Shadow Sneak
- Protect
- Bulk Up

Milotic (F) @ Leftovers

Ability: Competitive

Level: 50

EVs: 31 HP / 14 Def / 5 SpD / 16 Spe

Calm Nature

- Muddy Water
- Coil
- Protect
- Hypnosis

2.6.1 Discussion

This is a team that one of the Upkeep regulars, Millie¹¹ brought through most of the format through August which features the otherwise uncommon Scolipede¹². She grabbed the team from a Cybertron video featuring it and repeatedly stomped everyone with it. It became a regular features at these events, so it would be wrong of me to not at least try and pick it apart to see what it can do, right?

The simplest way to win with this team is to figure out which of Milotic or Cerulede is setting up to +2 with their respective boosting move. On the Milotic end, for each Coil, Hypnosis's accuracy is boosted by 20. Therefore, with two Coils, Milotic's Hypnosis is 100% accurate, which would be a huge problem as it is. Couple this disruption with a +2 Defense as well, Milotic is staying on the field for multiple turns without already boosted attacks in play. Approaching a +2 Milotic without already having boosted mons of your own is an immediate way to hand over the match. Cerulede is a similar story. Cerulede makes use of Bulk Up and Bitter Blade to effectively snowball damage and recovery in a single swoop. When Cerulede itself is unboosted, it is able to mitigate one of the most common threats to it, Kingambit, with a Colbur Berry. This effectively turns the tables, where Cerulede now checks Kingambit instead. Once the player finds an opening to commit to a Bulk Up, Cerulede can then recover more HP and do more damage through Bitter Blade. At +2, any neutral damage from Cerulede is generally enough to recovery approximately 50% of its HP. Like Milotic, if you attempt to take on Cerulede without boosted Pokemon of your own, it's over for you. This is a team, therefore, about navigating positioning and finding the exact pinhole in the opponent's gameplan to rip it wide open.

Mega Raichu Y is an offensive support Pokemon. It is faster than almost the entire unboosted metagame, and can single-handedly support its teammates by spreading Paralysis through Zap Cannon + No Guard. Raichu-Y here is used as a means of widening the eye of the needle through spreading the potential for bad RNG, beyond simply slowing down the opponent. As previously noted when discussing 2.4, Mega Raichu-Y's bulk is identical to a base Raichu's, so it's easy to play base Raichu as a Lightning Rod redirection piece in support of Milotic.

Weavile's speed tier is fascinating. Because Weavile's base Speed sits five points higher than Sneasler's (125 vs. 120), Weavile is almost always the fastest Fake out, second only to a Mega Raichu Y. With the fastest, unboosted Fake Outs, it's especially easy for one of the setup mons the team to find an opening to start the slow march to victory.

Because we never brought Mega Floette, Millie never had to bring the Mega Scolipede to the match. If we had, she would've brought it as Mega Scolipede is this team's primary answer to the Fairy-type attackers in the format, which otherwise are a general nuisance.

¹¹More on her later.

¹²Hence the name, "Millie"-pede

Chapter 3

Playing

We can consider these shorter “war stories”. These are the kinds of things that, if I were to ever make YouTube videos about tournament results, I would probably write a script that went kind of like these things. I’m writing about community and personal experience. It’s important to talk about the experience of play. We don’t play games in a vacuum, we play against each other in places made for our play. We cannot play perfectly, we can only bring the current state of the world up to the line of the match, and hopefully set it aside, ignoring everything else for up to sixty minutes at a time. When I talk about “playing the game”, I cannot talk about just the game itself, I *have* to talk about the events leading up to the ultimate set of decision I make in the heat of the moment. I have to talk about who I am and why I do what I do as a person to explain why I misplayed despite everything. I have to talk about my strengths and limitations in the context of play, and understand how my environment might then mitigate or amplify these two matters. Hopefully by writing this I will come to learn something new.

More than anything else, I learned that I need to not play on the ranked ladder in bed, first thing in the morning, or right before going to sleep. This is not how you ladder with the intention of winning.

3.1 Weekly Play at Upkeep Games - Ann Arbor, MI

Every Monday night through August 2026, I’ve gone to Upkeep Games on Stadium Boulevard and played VGC with a small, but consistent group. These, for me, started shortly after I defended my thesis. I saw online that Upkeep was offering a VGC night, and called to see if the event already had a presence or if it was relatively new. **Rosemary**, the tournament organizer at Upkeep picked up and told me that the VGC nights were its event and that some players had shown up the previous week. I was initially a little hesitant as anyone would be

when first trying something new, but I amped myself up to at least go and see what it was like. In my worst case scenario, the people who were there were jackasses and the local scene would be an unfriendly place and I would certainly find some other hobby to do in-person. I am happy to report that in my first month in attending in-person play at Upkeep, the vibes are almost entirely the opposite.

The Ann Arbor scene that has been growing at Upkeep is a positive yet reliably competitive one. It certainly helps that those of us who have continued to show up week after week all first showed up the same first week in August, so we've all been "in it" together¹. I usually bring a new team each week for the benefit of both me and my opponent. My personal benefit from cycling through teams is that it allows me to keep a consistent finger on the pulse of the metagame by trying out the high-performing teams, while simultaneously breaking them down in the builder. My education is in engineering and I am a scientist by trade- I am paid to explore curiosities. I love breaking down a team, trying to figure out why each Pokemon is on the team, why it is trained the way that it is, and what the general gameplan might be for common matchups. I haven't built teams on my own in great depth in this format just because I am still learning, and I would like to know what a "good team" feels like when I play with it. Then at the weekly play I can see if an archetype will be one I carry forward at these in-person events if I find it to be a comfortable piloting experience. Given that these matches are otherwise "friendly play", the stakes are exactly ten dollars and I can afford ten dollars. Having even a little preparation can go a long way in understanding how to generally pilot the team before going face-to-face with an opponent.

My opponents get to play a different team archetype each week against an opponent who, at the very least, has a general understanding of what makes the team click. I hope that through bringing many different teams, exposing them to these teams beyond the ladder, I can help my peers at Upkeep get some experience with new strategies. I am always really excited to see which teams my peers end up bringing too! Even when it's Rain Perish Trap! I try not to bring the truly "meta" teams² unless I am sincerely planning to main the team for a larger event. I do not bring cheesy teams, or teams that are otherwise designed to annoy my opponent³.

On the weeks we've had enough players to collect an entry fee and play three rounds of Swiss, I've gone 2-1. Going positive means I make my money back. Since my first registration, I have yet to put in new money into my account. But I haven't had a clear, definitive "first place", not that 2-1 is anything to be ashamed of. Usually I'll start 2-0 and then drop the last

¹I would be foolish to assume that there wasn't any kind of VGC scene before we all started showing up. I have heard plenty of things from other members of TCG communities here in Ann Arbor. While I certainly consider these anecdotes "good to know", I am happy to still create my own experiences into the future. I go to Upkeep to play Pokemon, and will happily play anywhere so long as I can play with peace of mind.

²see: any team that makes use of Mega Charizard Y and/or Mega-Floette

³see: that one Overqwil team designed to boost its Evasion

game given that I am going up against the closest person I have to a friendly rival, **Millie**. She's the pilot of the Mega Scolipede + Mega Raichu "Millie-pede" team Presented in Section 2.6. I beat her the first week we played because I was the "Pledge, Turn, Prestige" team previously presented in Section 2.2, which is especially amusing to me. Millie understands how to pilot her teams in a way that forces me to play with a level of skill that is difficult to manifest at 7:30 PM on a Monday night. Still, if I want to go 3-0, I have to go through Millie and I need to have enough left in the tank to play her. If I can't do it here, it's certainly not going to be any easier at larger tournaments. Millie keeps me honest, and I have a lot of respect for her skill as a player.

Mags has been on the end of a lot of rolls that landed in my favor. They're always able to give me a real challenge every time we play. They were initially trying to run the Rain Perish Trap team archetype, but were missing a Politoed. Given my previous propensity for acquiring competitive Pokemon, I had a few on hand and was willing to trade one to them. They brought my old pal against me and made it sing sweet nothings in my ears that fucking killed me if i didn't fucking LEAVE. I'm learning a lot when I play them, they challenge me in a way that I really value in the quest to learn how to play against the archetypes.

There's a Senior level player who shows up most weeks as well. For the sake of his privacy, let's call him **Kurt**. Kurt's good. Kurt understands how to play the game very well. He wins a lot too. I see a lot of my own high school self in the way he approaches playing. He plays to win every single time, but unlike me at his age, he seems content with not always winning if it means learning and having a good time. But he's still a teenager, he's learning about life here and there. He was surprised at my big Nintendo 3DS XL that I had let Millie borrow to transfer some Pokemon. He was flabbergasted when I told him I had "like four". He asked me one time, "do you have a Gameboy?" Yes, I do indeed have a Gameboy.

There are others that show up too, but these three are the ones who have been round the most in my time there. They're all great matchups and I enjoy getting the chance each week to play against them and their teams.

I am looking forward to playing against students from the University of Michigan who are returning to campus. Certainly if Montana Mott, the 4th place finisher at the 2025 World Championships, is a University of Michigan alumnus, there may be other Wolverines who can help represent Ann Arbor, right? For better or for worse, I'm also an alumnus of the University of Michigan. But now, I'm a student of the game.

3.2 Silk Road Gaming, New York, New York - August 22, 2026

It would've been easier to find Silk Road Gaming if I weren't shaking off the hangover from an anime-themed rave the night before⁴. The card shop was located in the rear of a cafe with a similar name on Mott Street, in the heart of Chinatown. The upper level featured some tables, and an unexpected, but greatly admired set of stained glass on the windows which looked out onto an otherwise uninteresting brick wall. Getting there from the Canal St. Subway station was an ordeal in and of itself. The sidewalks were congested with tourists gazing and gawking at the various handbags and iPhone cases and fruits and fish and "I ♥ NY" shirts and hats and on sale from the surrounding vendors. I had to both dash and meander through the humid city streets, looking for a way to break off from the crowd to find the place where I was planning to make use the remaining energy I had left.

I arrived without team sheets and a Switch 2 at 11% battery. The former of these I knew and could handle, but the latter caught me off guard. I had forgotten to charge my console the night before from, again, choosing to do shots at an anime-themed rave after having already downed multiple drinks beforehand earlier that night. I tried plugging my charger, but the current draw was too low to power the console while also playing the matches. I am very thankful that the event allowed us to use our phones to play our matches.

My goal going into this event was to simply win a single game. Normally I like to set higher goals for myself, but I also wanted to be realistic— I had expended a significant amount of physical and mental energy to even get to this place. Further, I knew that NYC local tournaments can often feature some seriously strong players. While the Worlds Tournament was only a week away, I still expected many players preparing for the Baltimore Regional tournament to be looking to practice at an event like this. One win would be enough to get some general satisfaction out of this, and it would be halfway to winning a set. Winning a set would be halfway to breaking even in the overall four rounds, so it was just a matter of setting my pace. My single month of regular VGC play was going to be put to the test after having previously been facing regular matchups against the Ann Arbor regulars. I locked in my Blastoise + Delphox CYC team (presented previously in Section 2.1) and proceeded to play.

To preface, I am learning to take notes as I play. My notes from this event are not great and I do not have full team sheets from everyone I played, nor did I record which mons I brought to each set. I will be considering the best ways to take these notes moving forward, given that an open team sheet mitigates a lot of the previous manic scrawls of my note taking circa 2015.

⁴If you can call a rave that has a set list that includes "Mr. Brightside" by The Killers and "Take on Me" by A-ha "anime themed". It was more like High School prom setlist with a loose anime theme. I digress.

**Round 1:** vs. Charpie Torres

My Round 1 matchup was plagued by an inconsistent internet connection in game 1. Torres's team was a variation on a Charizard + Aerodactyl Offense team, which made use of a White Herb Garchomp, which took away a lot of early defensive pressure Incineroar would otherwise provide with Intimidate. My mindset at Team Preview followed the logic I had established previously: "which of my setup Pokémon will be most likely to net three KOs?" He led Sylveon and Garchomp while I led Incineroar and Delphox, with Sneasler and Sinistcha in the back. Because my Delphox was bulky and from popping the White Herb I was less afraid of the Dragon Claw from Garchomp on Turn 1 and felt reasonably confident to go for Nasty Plot, despite being in front of a Sylveon with Yawn⁵. Torres had Incineroar and Mega Aerodactyl in the back, but we didn't get to see the effects of this match play out too much. After a few turns of consistent pivoting from both of us, Torres got disconnected, and missed an entire turn of play. He asked what had happened and I reported the events of the turn, but he was rightfully tilted and the board state was certainly not in his favor. To my surprise he forfeited the following turn.

Game 2 was one of the most thrilling matches I've had the pleasure of playing. We brought the same leads and same back mons, as we had a sense of what the matchup would be. I feel so lucky I got to have such a back and forth game of positioning, cycling back and forth between Incineroar, Sneasler and Sinistcha. While I misplayed the endgame, leaving myself open to a potential unfortunately timed critical hit, I managed to secure the win with Mega Delphox and Sneasler, bring my overall record to 1-0.

With this win secured, I had accomplished my goal for the overall event and was feeling the rush of having actually won a match like that. I shared I was traveling and that my goal was just to win a single game. While a forfeit is technically a win, getting the win game 2 was a much more satisfying way to accomplish this goal. Torres was a good sport and we had a great chat after the match about how long we had both been playing, among other things.

**Round 2** vs. Zheng Zhu

This second round was, fortunately or unfortunately, determined by a lot of damage rolls in my favor. Because of my familiarity with my opponent's team from piloting

⁵This is a clear misplay which I freely admit.

it a lot the previous few weeks, I had a reasonably confident idea of what I would be able to survive and what damage I would be able to do back to my opponent. At team preview, I liked my odds better with Delphox than Blastoise, though this was very likely due to the success I had had the round prior. In practice, Blastoise is the more consistent option into this team, I just didn't want to have to handle the play against Mega Raichu-Y.

Game 1 I led Sneasler and Delphox with Kingambit and Sinistcha in the back against their Staraptor and Hisuian-Arcanine. They switched out Raptor almost immediately in for Farigiraf and I lost my Delphox very early on from a Head Smash from HArc. I managed to claw my way back into the match because I landed a double burn with a Matcha Gotcha from Sinistcha onto both Staraptor and Farigiraf. Sinistcha was then able to outlast a Sylveon in a 1v1 which had previously gone for a Hyper Beam into my Kingambit. This was not a clean win and I would need to not "bag my Mega T1".

Game 2 they led Farigiraf and Staraptor against my Kingambit and Inineroar lead. In the back I was bringing Delphox and Sinistcha, with the intention to still use Delphox as the setup Pokemon. I learned after this match they were surprised I didn't bring Blastoise, and I shared that I didn't like the Raichu-Y matchup potential. They had made the decisions game 2 on their brings to account for the potential that I would bring Blastoise which would explain the leads here with Sylveon and Hisuian Arcanine in the back. Another mistake I made in this match was forgetting how Quick Attack and Sucker Punch interact, making a clear blunder which my opponent was able to capitalize on. Once again though, despite my errors, I was able to maintain pace with rolls going my way in the very end of the game and I got a few good rolls on Psychic from Delphox onto Sylveon. It was certainly not a clean, skillful win, but I was 4-0 in my matches and 2-0 overall.



Round 3 vs. Jibrail Cheema

My Round 3 opponent was using the same archetype as my Round 2 opponent, meaning that I could use a similar game plan as before to win, in theory. However, I lost both my matches very quickly and fell to 2-1 overall like that.

Coming out of Round 2, I was feeling the pressure of having to play someone who was 2-0, not considering that I was *also* 2-0 in this event. I was feeling a little worn out after playing from all sides of a match and my mental state caught up with me in this matchup. "At least we're guaranteed to break even" I told my opponent before we started, to which he nodded with a confused smile. Looking back on this sentence, it explains my mentality perfectly; I was not concerned with trying to win, I was expecting

to lose against someone with a strong record. It is not a surprise to me that this defeatism manifested in the results of the rest of this overall tournament. This is an area in which I can always improve, but this is how my mental game has been ever since my high-school days. It is an area where I hope to improve moving forward.

Game 1 I led Sinistcha and Blastoise with Sneasler and Incineroar in the back, against my opponent's Farigiraf and Sylveon. I clicked Water Spout immediately with Mega Blastoise, looking to do damage immediately, but failed to do anything meaningful with Sinistcha. My opponent got Trick Room up and then proceeded to control the pace of play, ultimately taking my Sinistcha with a Helping Hand and Hyper Voice. Sylveon just ran wild against my four mons and I was immediately feeling the drain. Game 2 was even faster than Game 1.

My opponent led Raichu and Kingambit and I led Sneasler and Blastoise. Knowing and respecting the threat that a Fake Out from Mega Raichu-Y and a Swords Dance from Kingambit might have in general, I let my mind race. *'Surely then that wouldn't be the obvious play, and maybe the Raichu would just Mega and click Zap Cannon onto Blastoise, so I would be best off clicking Fake Out on the Raichu'*, I thought to myself, forgetting that if Raichu could Fake Out my Sneasler, which meant that unless my Blastoise clicked Water Spout, I would be letting Kingmabit have a free opening to simply do damage. My notes from the rest of this match are useless in reporting here, I just spiraled and accepted the loss right away, ready to move onto the next round.

This match really is proof to myself that I will have to practice more mental stamina. I can make excuses about how 'I was tired', or 'I was coming off of a hangover' or 'I hadn't drank enough water' or whatever, but it doesn't change the fact that I had ultimately accepted defeat in this match even before it began. It's a frustrating thing to admit, but if I'm not honest about this, I will never be able to grow from these kinds of things. I share them here so that other players who understand this feeling might recognize that they're not alone. And really, I was 2-0 at a high-level event after only having played at a moderate intensity for only a month. I should have given myself a little more credit, and not have simply accepted defeat because I had already accomplished my goal for the event.



Round 4 vs. Nathan Mbendeke

I was not able to recover from my tilt in Round 3 her ein Round 4. It didn't help that my opponent had brought a variation of Hard Trick Room that was wholly unfamiliar to me. I figured I could navigate the matchup alright using Blastoise and support, but I was sincerely afraid of the Torkoal + Vileplume core that appeared here.

Game 1 appeared winnable from the lead. I had led Blastoise and Sinistcha with Incineroar and Kingmabit in the back against his Farigiraf and Kangaskhan. My opponent expected me to Turn 1 Trick Room with Sinistcha in efforts to cancel out a hypothetical Trick Room he might set up, but I wasn't able to capitalize with a shell smash, instead opting to Dark Pulse into a Protecting Farig. Had I been able to level my head, I would've then anticipated the Trick Room turn 2, but I misplayed and Rage Powdered with Sinistcha and against clicked Dark Pulse with Blastoise, which did only 43% to Farigiraf, which was able to set up Trick Room. My opponent was reading me like a book, unfortunately for me. I saw the path, getting a Rage Powder to redirect the Kangaskhan, but I just couldn't execute it because my opponent made excellent reads with Protect and an Imprison Farigiraf. One would think that I, having previously made a team with Imprison Farigiraf, would understand and respect the move. But, alas, I made a major misplay where I was no longer able to Protect stall under Trick room and I lost Game 1 to the Eruption Torkoal in the back.

My notes going into Game 2 were "play slower and remember to take out Farigiraf sooner". I led Sneasler and Kingambit into his Vileplume and Torkoal, and was immediately concerned about how the hell I was going to handle the simultaneous paths of Vileplume going for a Sleep Powder or an After You Eruption in the same turn. Sleep Powder was ultimately the move that came out and I lost the set, with very few notes. My day was most certainly over, losing this match even faster than the others, with very little in the tank that hadn't been saved for getting back form the event.

I went 4-4 in total game score and 2-2 overall, taking 6/11. I had the highest resistance of anyone who went 2-2, which meant that had I won one Round 3 or 4 I likely would've made the top 4 and a top cut. I can only admit that my results come from a lack of stamina and experience. The people I played against at the event had all, at minimum, been playing seriously since the initial release of Pokemon Champions, if not having played in several years prior.

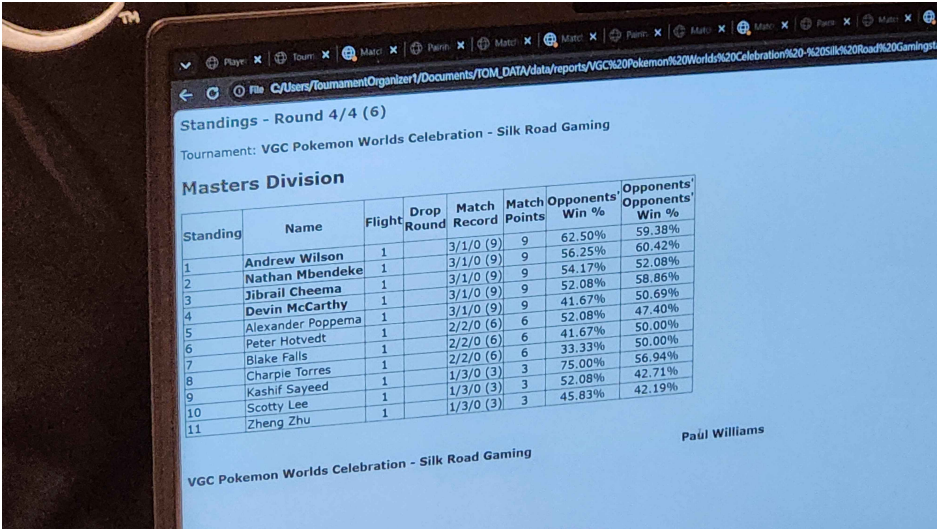
But still, my results are NOTHING to sneeze at. If this is what I was capable of after only a short period of time with the level of play I was playing at, I have reason to believe that the future is bright for me. As I keep at my consistent practice, and take my efforts seriously, I might be able to have real success at a Regional Tournament one day. When I got home, I looked up some of the players I had played against at this event. My Round 3 opponent, Jibrail Cheema went 8-4 at the Indianapolis Regional Championships earlier this May. Charpie Torres, my Round 1 opponent, had gone 8-4 and 9-3 at Toronto and Orlando, respectively. I recall Torres's comments upon sharing my goal for a Regional was to "win two sets":

"At the level you're playing right now, you could definitely break even at a regional

event”

It’s a small comment like this that sticks in my mind as I write about these matches that makes me feel confident that I’m on the right track. Writing about a frustrating set of losses is tough, but I have to be proud of my play in the first half of the day. To focus solely on the negative is to disrespect myself and the efforts I put into winning those matches, and it’s disrespectful to my opponents who were also doing their best to claim victory. In these matches there is a winner and a loser. A graceful loser can accept defeat and learn from the experience, this is something I have plenty of experience with. I’m still learning how to win gracefully since to learn the practice requires winning, something that I have historically struggled with.

I reported my results to my local Ann Arbor crew and was met with many congratulations messages, which warmed the cold sting of my finish. It’s good to have some friends in this journey. It would be impossible to do it alone.



Standings - Round 4/4 (6)

Tournament: VGC Pokemon Worlds Celebration - Silk Road Gaming

Masters Division

Standing	Name	Flight	Drop Round	Match Record	Match Points	Opponents' Win %	Opponents' Opponents' Win %
1	Andrew Wilson	1		3/1/0 (9)	9	62.50%	59.38%
2	Nathan Mbendeke	1		3/1/0 (9)	9	56.25%	60.42%
3	Jibrail Cheema	1		3/1/0 (9)	9	54.17%	52.08%
4	Devin McCarthy	1		3/1/0 (9)	9	52.08%	58.86%
5	Alexander Poppema	1		3/1/0 (9)	9	41.67%	50.69%
6	Peter Hotvedt	1		2/2/0 (6)	6	52.08%	47.40%
7	Blake Falls	1		2/2/0 (6)	6	41.67%	50.00%
8	Charpie Torres	1		2/2/0 (6)	6	33.33%	50.00%
9	Kashif Sayeed	1		1/3/0 (3)	3	75.00%	56.94%
10	Scotty Lee	1		1/3/0 (3)	3	52.08%	42.71%
11	Zheng Zhu	1		1/3/0 (3)	3	45.83%	42.19%

Paul Williams

VGC Pokemon Worlds Celebration - Silk Road Gaming

Figure 3.1: The overall results from the the Tournament.

I learned a number of valuable lessons:

- Get a good night’s sleep the night before you have any meaningful play⁶.
- Allocate a portion of your mental energy to the process of even getting to an event.
- Swiss tournaments are designed to match up winning players against other winning players. Because I was playing the 2-0 player, it meant I ALSO was 2-0 and I should’ve respected myself more in this regard.

⁶On the one hand, duh, but on the other hand, I need to learn how to get better sleep. Yes really. I am a person who gets excited when they learn they can burn the candle at both ends. I struggle with my sleep and I want to find a way to get better sleep in the coming days, weeks, months and years.

- If I do not acknowledge and appreciate our wins as much as we study our losses, I will be more prone to tilting. I want to focus more on winning than “not losing”.

Chapter 4

End Matter

4.1 Results

Alright, here you go, my results from official play. Next time I'll actually keep better track of the exact teams I used each week for the sake of tracking my own play. Again, I did plan to make this document when I first set out to start playing regularly. Some of the weekly play I went to didn't have enough players to be registered as official "tournaments", but hey, weekly in-person play isn't always about winning outright, y'know? On the final weekly meet up of the format, Millie, Kurt and I did the Pokemon Mystery Dungeon: Red Rescue Team personality quiz ¹.

Table 4.1: My Official In-Person Play Results from Regulation M-B per Play! Pokemon.

Date	Name	Location	Result
July 26	Pokemon Champions Showdown (Mid-Year Celebration)	Pandemonium Games, Livonia, MI	4 of 4
July 27	Upkeep Weekly VGC	Upkeep Games, Ann Arbor, MI	1 of 4
August 10	Upkeep Weekly VGC	Upkeep Games, Ann Arbor, MI	2 of 3
August 17	Upkeep Weekly VGC	Upkeep Games, Ann Arbor, MI	2 of 4
August 22	VGC Pokemon Worlds Celebration @ Silk Road Gaming	Silk Road Gaming, New York, NY	6 of 11
August 31	Upkeep Weekly VGC	Upkeep Games, Ann Arbor, MI	2 of 5

¹I'll let them share their results, but I know the personality quiz enough to know how to get the Impish nature more often than not.



Figure 4.1: My Laddering Results from Season M-4



Figure 4.2: My Laddering Results from Season M-5

4.2 Closing Thoughts and Lessons Learned

I never expected to be immediately excellent, but I am quite impressed with myself in this short period of consistent play. Still, I am reminded that learning and improving takes a LONG time. Moreover, without benchmarking my progress at this stage in my play, I cannot have a means of observing my progress. Making the intangible tangible is just one way of doing this, but being able to look upon my work with a sense of pride is what keeps me going.

Some key areas of play in which I can improve / focus on for the next format :

- **Slowing Down in Play**

Both in terms of clicking buttons and learning to be patient to create openings over the course of match. This includes using Protect without fear of losing momentum.

- **Remembering that Aqua Jet Negates Sucker Punch**

Remembering this specific interaction would have won me a couple different matches. By writing it here, I can drill it into my brain.

- **Recognizing Common Positions in a Match**

Sure, I am a flexible player and I can generally improvise, but I shouldn't be improvising every single match. One of the most common issues in my extended play I observed for myself was my lack of mental stamina. With discussion with some friends, the reality hit that I was wearing myself out in early matches firing on all cylinders to figure out the proper path. The top players should already know the general path when in a match so that they can pace their mental game.

- **Laddering More Intentionally**

The ladder is a place to get some genreal practice play in and it allows me to learn how to use a team more effectively against common matchups against high-level players. As I continue to learn and grow as a player, I will want to ladder regularly to get the best practice matches possible.

I will not hypothesize about what Reg. M-C will bring or what will be “good”; it feels like a fool’s errand to try and speculate about metagame trends when I don’t have all the information on hand. To be honest, I’m posting this on the day Reg. M-c is released to the world, so the innovations are already underway. If I allow myself a single hypothesis: Sunflower Teams (Charizard Y + Floette) teams will remain quite effective in the metagame. My justification is that Mega Floette has an excellent matchup into the three new Z Megs (Absol, Garchomp and Lucario), as well as Salamence and Baxcalibur (and likely their Megs²) among others. I certainly intend to keep using Mega Floette and I think you should

²Though watch out for Mega Mence. Never doubt Mega Mence

too.

Appendix A

Laddering Tunes

As an exercise in having other hobbies, I constructed a few different playlists for laddering, and background music when I stream / record my laddering. I am a freak who otherwise plays the game without music¹, but having some good background music is really useful. Most of this music is from Video Games for the sake of generally being interesting music without lyrics². I do this with foobar2000 as my primary means of playing audio, and get a lot of my music from khinsider and SoulSeek. While there are well over 60 different songs in there, I will share here a subset for your amusement. They're all songs with either high intensity through a very high BPM, or they're songs that incite a deep thinking sense through more subdued instrumentation. I have both of these in here as a means of creating contrast, which forces me to adapt and adjust to the different effect. I would ideally like to remain level throughout. In making this playlist I add an additional fun challenge: I try to not have any Pokemon themes in my laddering playlist. It forces me to go beyond my comfort zone to ask "what makes for an interesting battle theme?"

Again, maybe sometime soon I'll find a new distraction and make multiple playlists with different genres or senses to see how I can play under different sonic conditions, but for now I'll just keep going as is. I should also make a playlist that is intended for offline use (i.e. I don't have to worry about copyright when constructing the playlist).

¹If you can believe it, it helps me focus when I'm trying to make decisions

²But listen, if I could ladder while listening to music with lyrics, it would be soooooo over.

Table A.1: A Small Selection of Songs From My Laddering Playlist

Track Name	Artist	Source Game / Album
Rocket Surgeon	Masafumi Takada	<i>No More Heroes</i>
Miami Disco	Perturbator	<i>Hotline Miami</i>
Metro Madness - Act 1	Funk Fiction	<i>Sonic Before the Sequel</i>
Gakkyuu Saiban Ikei-hen	Masafumi Takada	<i>Super Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair</i>
Q	Shinji Hosoe	<i>Zero Escape: Virtue's Last Reward</i>
Beats From Above	Tetsukazu Nakanishi	<i>Klonoa: Door to Phantomile</i>
phyn'll bäcks	RRThiel	<i>ZeroRanger Arranged Album -GREEN ARRANGE-</i>



Bottoms Collector