

Earlier this season I made the claim that Burning Core were going to be the gatekeepers of the LJL, a role they have held for several splits at this point. They consistently beat everyone weaker than them, and consistently lose to everyone stronger. While they've become a little more volatile this split, if you had told me at the beginning that they were going to take a game off of DetonatioN FocusMe in a convincing fashion, I would have laughed at you.

However, it's no secret that DFM have been struggling this split and their loss this week feels like the lowest point this team has fallen to. This squad has been the most dominant domestic team in Japanese history, and suddenly losing to a team that has struggled to beat the top teams shocked us all.

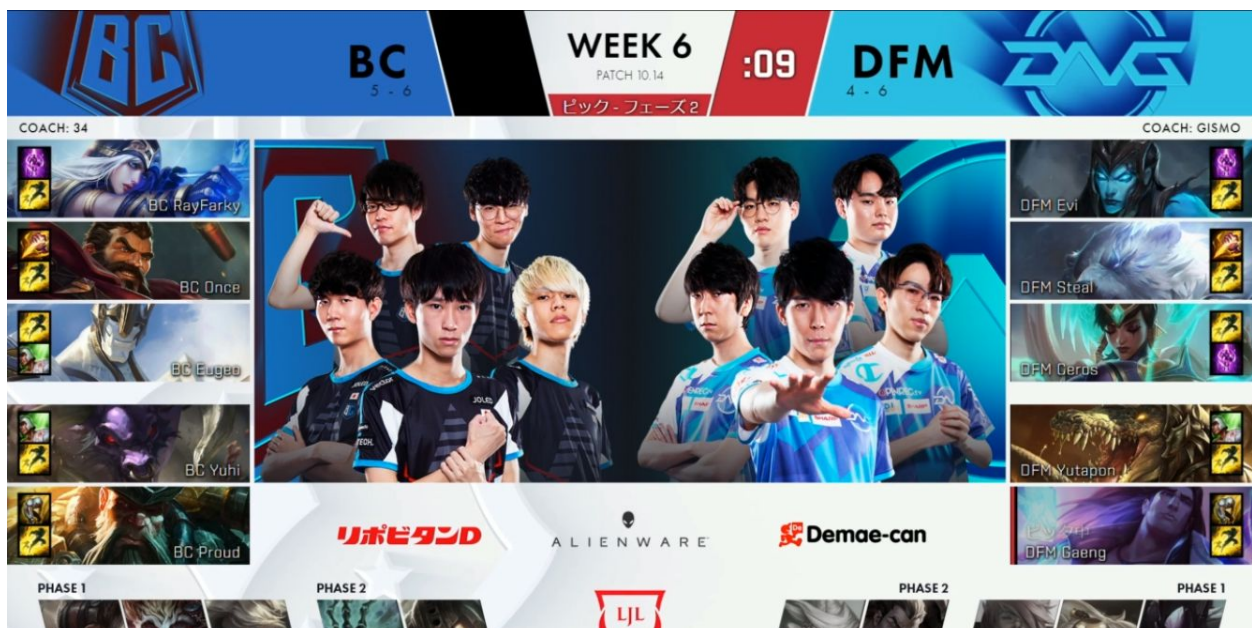
We're going to take a bit of a deeper dive into how these two teams on opposite trajectories actually came together this last week.

I've been critical of DFM's drafts this split, as it feels like they're specifically trying to play things they haven't normally played in the past. As an example, Evi hasn't played Gnar, Camille, or Ornn a single time this season, and Vladimir only once. Historically these have been his most played and most successful champions, with Camille and Ornn being meta picks. At the same time, his foray into other meta picks, Wukong and Renekton, has been going rather poorly.

People who know me may argue that I'm being unfair. I ask players like Ceros to widen their champion pools, and Evi is trying to do exactly that. I don't disagree, the difference here is that historically Ceros' small champion pool has been a drafting liability, where you could significantly reduce his ability to impact a game with a small number of bans. That's not true of Evi.

This drafting attitude has been reflected in their lack of success this season as they continue to experiment, and this game was a perfect example of why.

They started off very, shall we say, confidently. With Yuhi's first pick Ashe, his most played champion this season, DFM counterpick with two champions that are weak into Ashe: Kalista



and Volibear. The champions are strong in a vacuum, but DFM haven't been able to show that Evi can play Volibear, so we expect this is something Steal is going to play.

While the Karma pick makes sense as a strong flex pick between Ceros and Gaeng that supports the way that Ceros likes to play, DFM round out their composition with two more baffling picks.

Before we talk about why Renekton and Taric are uniquely bad picks this game, let's focus on what DFM's composition struggles with off of the first three champions.

1. They're low on damage. They currently over rely on Kalista
2. The damage profile is mostly physical. This isn't always a problem, but Graves specifically thrives against physical damage compositions and BC have already shown at least one champion that will itemize armor
3. DFM have weak engage and pick tools. With no obvious buttons with which to start fights, DFM will have to rely on BC to make positioning errors

With this in mind, DFM's final two picks are baffling. They do not have lanes that should win on their own merit, even assuming their individual players are better, they do not have ways to waveclear and poke, and they do not have consistent engage tools. Their composition doesn't do much of anything. The only way this composition wins is by smashing the early game through individual player skill and then creating a ball of death that Burning Core can't deal with.

Burning Core on the other hand picked 4 strong champions and Alistar, who also eats Kalista alive. They have both primary engage / pick tools (Ashe's ultimate, Alistar combo) and secondary engage / disengage (Galio and Gangplank ultimate), and reasonably safe and effective waveclear (Gangplank, Galio, Ashe, and Graves all contribute here). They can leverage global pressure with multiple ultimates and play standard, meta League of Legends with their composition. My only real criticism is they are light on Magic damage and DFM likes to build armor naturally.

With all of that said, the game still needs to be played out. We're going to be highlighting a few key moments in the game or this could become as long as a doctoral dissertation.

The game starts off rather well for DFM. Despite all of their failings over the course of Summer, they still field one of the strongest rosters individually. Their lanes go better than they really should be expecting. This allows them to move for a few early objectives, but at the same time Steal is getting starved as he tries to exert pressure for his lanes, and the lead they generate is not enough.

We see the weaknesses of DFM's composition come in full force around the 8 minute Rift Herald fight. They have no control over when fights happen. Burning Core is able to disengage the fight and re-engage when they want to. The only reason this fight is even close is Once

walks into a Taric stun and his team is forced to commit a ton of resources just to keep him alive.

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While Burning Core made a major mistake in return, it is nonetheless a Burning Core mistake, overextending a fight they didn't need to take. DFM is also one of the best teams at taking advantage of vision and making cross-map plays happen, unfortunately their attempt top lane with the Rift Herald results in Rayfarky surviving and the hole DFM put themselves in with their draft continues to dig deeper.

After that though, we see the problems with their composition compound again...

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And again...

<https://clips.twitch.tv/BlueAbnegateCookieRickroll>

And again...

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And again...

<https://clips.twitch.tv/AnimatedDelightfulPlumageKlappa>

And again...

<https://clips.twitch.tv/PhilanthropicElatedPartridgeYee>

Just look at how little control DFM have in every single one of these fights. The fact that DFM are vaguely even in this game is testament to how well they move around the map. They manage to pick up multiple turrets, and both Ceros and Yutapon are significantly ahead of their lane opponents in farm.

I don't even like Once's build. Why lethality? Black Cleaver into Death's Dance was way better this game. But I digress.

Overall, Burning Core continues to play unexciting, but effective League of Legends. It's why they've been middle of the pack for several splits at this point. They draft reasonably, they lane decently, and they are able to turn leads into victories.

On the other hand...

I've been rather upset with DFM's experimental approach to drafting this split, and this game is a prime example of just that. With only one week of regular season play, and with a playoffs spot locked in, we're left to wonder if this really is the downfall of the most dominant team in Japanese League of Legends history, or if, much like G2, Fnatic, or Team Liquid, they just need to find their form. Perhaps a return to standard play and comfort drafts is enough to bring them back into competition with V3 and Sengoku. Only time will tell.