

# Shankland Searches Gibraltar for Final Norm

by IM San Shankland  
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IM Sam Shankland Photo courtesy Monroi.com

It feels like it was just yesterday that I was hurrying through Staples to try to find some European power converters before I had to go to the airport to make the lengthy trip to Gibraltar, the home of the [2010 Gibtelecom Masters tournament](#). Just for fun, I put on a fake European accent when I asked for help in finding them, and I must say I was treated better than I normally would have been. The cashier was particularly friendly- while she was ringing up the charges she was telling me she never gets to meet people from Europe. I was very tempted to at that point drop the whole accent thing, but I thought that would prolong the conversation and NM and US Chess League Vice-president Arun Sharma was back home waiting to drive me to the train station.

Some 22 hours later, I landed in Gibraltar after one of the most stress-free travel experiences I've ever had. The 10-hour flight from San Francisco to London was probably my best ever, because for some reason, none of the seats adjacent to me were taken (geez, do I smell THAT BAD??) so while the rest of the plane was packed, I got to lie down and get some sleep.



Caleta Hotel in Gibraltar, Photo IM Irina Krush

Once I arrived in Gibraltar, things started to get strange. The room key to my hotel was about a foot long, and I was informed that when I leave the hotel I must leave it at the front desk and then pick it up again when I got back. Odd, but whatever. I managed to get to sleep at around 11pm local time. It seemed I was beating the jetlag in just one day! Not so, I woke up at 4:15 am. I spent a couple hours playing through some [Corus games](#) on Chessbase and waited for breakfast to open at 7:30. When it finally did, I rushed down and found a not so amazing selection but perfectly adequate meal, charge included in the hotel bill. That's about the last thing I

remember. The next thing I knew I was on my bed, groggy eyed and wondering why someone was strangling a chicken in my room. After a few seconds I realized no such poultry was around, and the terrible squawking sound was the phone. I picked it up and was delighted to hear GM Vinay Bhat's voice on the other end. It was about 1:30 pm and after this strangely timed nap's interruption, we found a nice pub together and got some lunch. Other than that, the day was very low key and I don't recall leaving the hotel room except to go to the lobby for wifi. The next day, the drama started.

Being an IM, I knew I got free entry to the tournament so I did not have to fill out one of the entry forms, rather just send an email. Thus, it came as a mild shock to hear that all those who were not at the opening ceremony would not be paired for the first round. After calling many times, I finally managed to make sure I was paired for round 1. However, my opponent did not show up. As a result, I played with Cyril Sigamoney, an 1800 player from the US. Despite playing like a total idiot in a couple places, I managed to pull out the win. I thought this was a good omen, because at one point in the game (after 32. ... Nf5) I had never seen a more beautiful position where material was equal in my life. I was almost sad to remove the d4 pawn because it let White trade his pawn on g1 for my bishop.

## 8th Gibraltar Chess Festival, 2010

**White:** Sigamoney, Cyril

**Black:** Shankland, Sam

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.Bf4 Bg7 4.e3 d6 5.h3 O-O 6.Be2 b6 7.O-O Bb7 8.Nbd2 Nbd7 9.c3 h6 10.Bh2 Kh7 11.Bd3 Qe8 12.Qe2 a6 13.Nc4 Nh5 14.Nh4 Kg8 15.g4 Nhf6 16.f4 e6 17.e4 Bxe4 18.Rae1 d5 19.Nd2 Qd8 20.Ng2 c5 21.Kh1 cxd4 22.cxd4 Bxd3 23.Qxd3 Ne4 24.Nxe4 dxe4 25.Qxe4 Nf6 26.Qe3 Re8 27.Rd1 Qd5 28.b3 Rac8 29.Rc1 h5 30.g5 Ne4 31.Bg1 Nd6 32.Qd3 Nf5 33.Kh2 Bxd4 34.Bxd4 Nxd4 35.Qxa6 Ra8 36.Qc4 Rxa2 37.Qxd5 exd5 38.Rcd1 Ree2 0-1

Round 2 I played down again, another game I managed to win.

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**White:** Shankland, Sam

**Black:** Haarr, Jon Kristian

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 d5 3.c4 c6 4.e3 e6 5.b3 Nbd7 6.Bb2 Bb4+ 7.Nbd2 Ne4 8.a3 Bd6 9.Nxe4 dxe4 10.Nd2 f5 11.Be2 O-O 12.O-O e5 13.c5 Bc7 14.Nc4 exd4 15.Qxd4 Nf6 16.Nd6 Bxd6 17.cxd6 Be6 18.Bc4 Bd5 19.Bxd5+ cxd5 20.a4 Rf7 21.Ba3 Qd7 22.Rac1 f4 23.exf4 Qg4 24.Rc7 Rxc7 25.dxc7 Qxf4 26.Rc1 Re8 27.Rc3 h6 28.h3 Kh7 29.Be7 Ne8 30.Qxd5 Nxc7 31.Qd6 g5 32.Qd7 Qd2 33.Qxd2 1-0

The day was not without its excitement though- On the bus ride over to the tournament, someone parked in the bus stop, causing the bus driver to honk like a madman and wait in the middle of the road for a couple of minutes. When the guy came back, one of the players on the bus went over to the window and said "Hey you! This is our time you are wasting! !@#%\$^& \$%^&\*\*\*()#CENSORED BY CLO#\$\$^&&^\*\*". It was a very interesting story, feel free to talk to me in person to get all the details :)

I posted an update after three rounds on my personal blog, which I'll excerpt here.

*I have 2.5/3, having won 2 games against significantly lower rated opposition and drawing GM Romain Edouard (2608) from France with the Black pieces. (Game- Edouard-Shankland) I felt that out of the opening my position was less than pleasant and I released the tension perhaps prematurely, missing that in the position after 20. Bf4!*



Position after 20.Bf4

*I cannot play my intended b5 (21. Ra4 was threatened) because after 21. Rc6 Nb4 Black would get good counterplay... if not for 22. Bd6+ instantly ending the game. So I was forced to play 20. Ke8, and then after 21. Ra4 Nb8 22. Bxb8 Rxb8 23. Rxa7 Rc8 a curious position arises. At this point I felt that White should be pretty trivially winning with his extra pawn, but really matters are not so clear. I think his best plan is to play a move like 24. Ra6, then Rc2+ 25. Kg3 h5 Rxb6 Rxa2.*

Because of White's weak pawn on d4, he has no way of reorganizing his pieces to not allow the exchange of the queenside pawns. Then his knight is very passive on b3 and he cannot move it because d4 is hanging. Eventually after the game we concluded that White could play e5 and then Rb2 Rb8+ Ke7 Rb7+ Ke8 Nc5 Rxb7 Nxb7.



Position after 31.Nb7

At this point GM's Bacrot and Fressinet joined the discussion, and the three of us felt the position should be an easy win for White. Romain, however, was not convinced. He said, "I'm sorry for being a snail, but show me how to win." Oddly enough, none of us could. Black looks to have very good drawing chances because of White's pawn structure. All of his pawns are on dark squares, making them easy to attack, but more importantly after the d5 push he will not be able to recapture with a pawn, which would give him a passer and likely be winning. Thus, White will have to trade a lot of pawns to make progress, and Black's drawing chances are quite good.

Luckily for me, I did not have to deal with that at all because he made quite a big mistake on move 24 with g4? which allows Rc2+ 25. Kg3 and now the very surprising anti-positional e5!



Position after 25...e5

The point is that if the e-pawn is traded for the d-pawn, Black's bishop becomes active and if the normal response 26. d5, then after Bh6 White is suddenly about to get checkmated, and he has to shed some pawns in order to prevent this and likely end up in a worse position. I had to find a couple more accurate moves, but after e5 the draw was not so hard to achieve.

Round 4 was my first real disappointment of the tournament. I got to a complicated middlegame against GM Josep Lopez Martinez (2593) of Spain, and in a topsy-turvy battle where I felt I was worse for a small portion, I ended up with a close to winning position approaching the time control. With my precious seconds ticking away, I hurriedly played Qxb7?



Position after 36.Qxb7

I thought this was a strong positional move because it avoids the queen trade, keeps the Black king confined to the back rank where some checks will be annoying, the a6 knight being *en prise* would likely tie his queen down as well, and it may control the b2 square in some rare cases.

Unfortunately, concrete calculation shows that this is too slow. After the strong respite Bc1! White will have to take a draw by perpetual check, as he has no way of stopping Qb2+ when Black will have some dangerous threats of his own. I overlooked this move- for some reason I felt that the Black bishop was needed for defense on the long diagonal. I had considered Ba1?! Instead, but then after Ne3! Qb2+ is comfortably met by Ng2 and its clear Black's king is going to run into some perils. Bc1! However, controls the e3 square. The lesson to be learned here is that I underestimated my opponents counterplay and perhaps didn't calculate as much as I probably should have, despite the low clock.

Round 5 was a good learning experience, although not a happy one in terms of the chess result. I was playing my first ever 2700+ player, GM Sergei Movsesian. Originally I annotated this game, [but after reading Joel Benjamin's most recent column](#), I decided not to divulge what I learned in the post-mortem here, in hopes of using it against an unsuspecting opponent later on. I will, however, show how badly I got smashed.

### 8th Gibraltar Chess Festival, 2010

**White:** Movsesian, Sergei

**Black:** Shankland, Sam

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e6 7.O-O Be7 8.f4 O-O 9.Be3 Nc6 10.a4 Qc7 11.Kh1 Rd8 12.Bd3 Nd7 13.Qf3 Bf6 14.Nde2 Nb4 15.Qh3 g6 16.f5 exf5 17.Nf4 Bxc3 18.bxc3 Qxc3 19.exf5 Ne5 20.Qh4 Re8 21.Qf6 Nbx3 22.cxd3 1-0

Rounds 6-8 were all uneventful. I won two games were I was paired and drew GM Ruben Felgaer with White when I forgot to play b3 in the Maroczy bind, thus allowing a4 and easy equality for Black.

### 8th Gibraltar Chess Festival, 2010

**White:** Shankland, Sam

**Black:** Felgaer, Ruben

1.d4 d6 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.c4 g6 4.Nc3 Bg7 5.e4 O-O 6.Be2 c5 7.O-O cxd4 8.Nxd4 Ne6 9.Be3 Nxd4 10.Bxd4 Bd7 11.Rc1 a5 12.Qd2 Be6 13.f3 Nd7 14.Be3 a4 15.Rfd1 Ne5 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.cxd5 Qa5 18.Qxa5 Rxa5 19.Rd2 Rb8 20.Kf1 b5 21.Bxc5 Rc8 22.Rdc2 Rxc5 23.Rxc5 dxc5 24.Rxc5 Bxb2 25.Rxb5 Rxb5 26.Bxb5 a3 27.f4 f6 28.Ke2 Kg7 29.Kf3 Bc3 30.g3 Bb2 31.h4 Kf7 32.Bd7 Kg7 33.Kg4 Bc3 34.h5 Kh6 35.hxg6 hxg6 36.Kf3 Kg7 37.g4 g5 1/2-1/2

I did have one amusing move in round 7 though:



Kantans- Shankland, Position after 12.Nxc6

What should Black play?

[Show Solution](#)

Round 9 is here. The moment of truth. Although I didn't have any spectacular individual games in this tournament, if I won this one it would be my last game as an IM (unofficially). I was playing the Black pieces against GM Antoaneta Stefanova, the 2004 World Women's champion.



GM Antoaneta Stefanova, Photo courtesy Monroi

Stefanova, the 2004 World Women's champion.

Previously in must-win situations I would go crazy for a win and almost always lose, so I treated this game like it was any other (in fact I didn't even tell anyone I was playing for the title). She played one of my own systems against me, dodging all my preparation. In this line of the b3 Semi-Slav, I once saw a game between GM Nyback and GM Erdos where Black played Qe7 and played e5 before castling, equalizing and leading to an unbalanced pawn structure. This would have been perfect. Unfortunately for me, Stefanova had prepared the strong Ne5! (this move is completely obvious but somehow I thought it was impossible or not an issue) and we are

back in normal b3 semi Slav territory... except that I have wasted a move on Qe7.



Position after 8.Ne5

In fact, the queen is often better placed on d8. To justify my play, I took on e5 to not allow her to recapture with the f-pawn as it was not yet on f4, but even still the position was unpleasant and she played a great game, start to finish, which ended my chance at the final GM norm in Gibraltar.

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**White:** Stefanova, Antoaneta

**Black:** Shankland, Sam

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.e3 e6 5.Bd3 Bd6 6.b3 Nbd7 7.Bb2 Qe7 8.Ne5 Nxe5 9.dxe5 Bb4+ 10.Nd2 Nd7 11.O-O O-O 12.f4 g6 13.Nf3 dxc4 14.bxc4 Ba3 15.Bd4 b6 16.Ng5 Bb7 17.Qg4 Rfd8 18.Rad1 Be5 19.Qh3 Nf8 20.Bxc5 Qxc5 21.Ne4 Qa3 22.Nd6 Ba6 23.Be4 Qc5 24.Rd4 b5 25.exb5 Bxb5 26.Nb7 Qb6 27.Nxd8 Rxd8 28.Rxd8 Qxd8 29.Ra1 f5 30.exf6 Qxf6 31.Rb1 Bc4 32.a4 Ba2 33.Rf1 e5 34.Qf3 c4 35.Qd1 Bb3 36.Qd4 Qxd4 37.exd4 Nd7 38.a5 Nf6 39.Bf3

The final round was an embarrassing see-saw affair where I got a positional advantage, only to follow it up by hanging an exchange, then finally getting the better of it in the time scramble.

#### 8th Gibraltar Chess Festival, 2010

**White:** Shankland, Sam

**Black:** Solomon, Kenny

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.Nc3 e6 4.g3 b6 5.Bg2 Bb7 6.O-O a6 7.Re1 d6 8.e4 e5 9.d3 g6 10.Nh4 Bg7 11.f4 h6 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.Be3 O-O 14.Bh3 Nc6 15.Rf1 Nd4 16.Qd2 Kh7 17.Rf2 Ne8 18.Raf1 Nd6 19.Nd5 Bxd5 20.cxd5 a5 21.Re1 Ra7 22.Bxd4 cxd4 23.Rc1 h5 24.Rc6 Bh6 25.Qc2 Be3 26.Kg2 Bxf2 27.Kxf2 a4 28.Kg2 a3 29.b4 f5 30.exf5 Nxf5 31.Bxf5 gxf5 32.d6 f4 33.Qe2 Qe8 34.Qe4+ Kg8 35.Ng6 f3+ 36.Kf2 Qf7 37.Rc2 Re8 38.Nxe5 Qe6 39.d7 Rxd7 40.Nxd7 Qxd7 41.Qg6+ Kf8 42.Qxh5 Kg7 43.b5 Re2+ 44.Rxe2 fxe2 45.Qe5+ Kg8 46.Ke1 Qf7 47.Qxe2 Qd5 48.Kd1 Qxb5 49.Qe6+ Kh8 50.Qc8+ Kh7 51.Qc7+ Kh8 52.Qd8+ Kh7 53.Qe7+ Kh8 54.Qf8+ Kh7 55.Qxa3 Qh5+ 56.Kc1 Qe2 57.Qa7+ Kh8 58.Qb8+ Kh7 59.Qc7+ Kh8 60.Qd8+ Kh7 61.Qh4+ Kg8 62.Qxd4 Qxd4 63.Qc4+ Kg7 64.g4 Qe5 65.Kc2 Qe2+ 66.Kb3 Qd1+ 67.Kb4 Qb1+ 68.Ka3 Kg6 69.d4 Qe4 70.Qg8+ Kh6 71.Qf8+ 1-0

This was also my only game out of 10 against an IM or FM- everyone else was untitled or GM. On the whole, it was not a bad result for me, but of course a round 9 win would really have been the icing on the cake. Also, I was unaware of their prize structure- I attended the closing ceremony expecting to get a share of the Under 2500 FIDE prize (still 2496!! Muahahaha) only to find out that they award class prizes by rating points gained, not total points scored. In some ways

this makes sense, but I think if they were to use a system like this one they should just do it by rating performance, because if in the 2400-2499 rating group a 2490 performs at a 2570 level, and a 2410 performs at a 2540 level, the 2490 who is in the same prize group did play better chess, but will come in second. In any case, it was a nasty shock for me as I thought I was going to win something, and with the dollar to pound ratio being what it is, it might have been a reasonable chunk of change.



**GM Gata Kamsky in Gibraltar, Photo IM Irina Krush**

At the end of the day, I have to say I am glad I decided to play the Gibtelecom masters, even if I ended up without a norm or a prize. It was certainly a good tournament for Americans, as GMs Kamsky and Lenderman tied for first and Drasko Boskovic of UTD scored a massive 7/10. After some much needed rest, [I'll play in Cappelle \(Feb 13-21\)](#). If anyone has any ideas as to how I can ensure my last norm is secured there, let me know!

*Find out more about Gibraltar on the official website. Shankland's latest CLO contribution was, "[Shankland Searches Europe for Third Norm.](#)" He also maintains both a [personal website](#) and a [blog](#).*