

Shankland Pulls Off Upset at U.S. Championship

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by FM Mike Klein



For four players at the U.S. Championship and U.S. Women's Championship, there was no rest day. Tied after round-robin play, GM Alex Onischuk and GM-elect Sam Shankland (left) faced off for a spot in the semifinals, while IM Anna Zatonskih played WGM Sabina Foisor. Both matches were repeats of round seven, and when the two-game series ended, Shankland upset Onischuk and Zatonskih beat Foisor to advance.

Shankland's victory over the second highest rated player began with a solid draw as Black in their first game. The game in 25 minutes time control was significantly faster than their previous rounds, which were played under a classical time control. Shankland said going in to the match that the faster the time control, the higher the expected variance in result. He questioned Onischuk's unfamiliar Nf3. More usual is Qd4, or even Bxc4, both with the idea of regaining the gambited c-pawn. "I don't know what was going on with his preparation," Shankland said. The game unfolded into a Caro-Kann via an unnatural move order.

2011 US Chess Championships playoffs, Saint Louis

White: Onischuk, Alexander

Black: Shankland, Samuel

1.c4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.d4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bg5 dxc4 7.d5 Ne5 8.Nf3 Bg4 9.Be2 Bxf3 10.gxf3 g6 11.Qd4 Nd3+ 12.Bxd3 cxd3 13.d6 Bg7 14.Qa4+ Qd7 15.Qxd7+ Kxd7 16.dxe7 h6 17.Be3 Kxe7 18.O-O-O Rhd8 19.Rd2 Rac8 20.Re1 Kf8 21.Red1 a6 22.Rxd3 Rxd3 23.Rxd3 Ke7 24.Bd4 Nh5 25.Kd2 Bxd4 26.Rxd4 Nf6 27.Ke3 Rc5 28.Rh4 Re5+ 29.Kd4 Rf5 30.Ke3 Re5+ 31.Kd4 Rf5 32.Ke3 Re5+ 1/2-1/2

Coincidentally, Shankland also played the Caro-Kann as Black against GM Ray Robson when the two had a tiebreak to decide the U.S. Junior Championship. Shankland won that match too, earning him a seat at this year's U.S. Championship.

In game two, Shankland was given White and Onischuk entered a sharp Nimzo-Indian.

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White: Shankland, Samuel

Black: Onischuk, Alexander

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.f3 d5 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 c5 7.exd5 Nxd5 8.dxc5 Qa5 9.e4 Nf6 10.Be3 O-O 11.Qb3 Nfd7 12.a4 Qc7 13.Qa3 b6 14.a5 Bb7 15.Ne2 Nxc5 16.Nd4 Nbd7 17.Be2 Ba6 18.Bxa6 Nxa6 19.O-O Qc8 20.Nb5 Nac5 21.Qb4 Nd3 22.Qd4 N7c5 23.Rfb1 Rd8 24.Qc4 a6 25.axb6 axb5 26.Qxb5 Rxa1 27.Rxa1 Nb7 28.Bd4 e5 29.Qxd3 exd4 30.cxd4 Rd6 31.Rb1 Rc6 32.Qe3 Rc3 33.Qf4 h6 34.h4 Rc2 35.d5 Qc5+ 36.Kh2 Qf2 37.Qb8+ Kh7 38.Qg3 Qd4 39.Qf4 Kg8 40.Qb8+ Kh7 41.Qf4 f6 42.h5 Qe5 43.Qxe5 fxe5 44.Kh3 g6 45.Ra1 Rb2 46.Rc1 Rxb6 47.Re7+ Kg8 48.hxg6 Na5 49.Rc5 Nb3 50.Rc6 Rb7 51.Re6 Nd4 52.Rxe5 Kg7 53.Re8 Kxg6 54.f4 Rb3+ 55.Kh4 Rd3 56.d6 Ne2 57.f5+ Kf7 58.Re7+ Kf6 59.Re6+ Kf7 60.Rxh6 Rd4 61.Re6 Nf4 62.Re7+ Kf8 63.Kg5 Nd3 64.e5 Nf4 65.g4 Nd5 66.Ra7 Ne3 67.Kf6 Nxg4+ 68.Ke6 Re4 69.d7 Rxe5+ 70.Kd6 1-0

Faced with a passive retreat after 24...a6 threatened his knight, Shankland thought for a while and sacrificed the piece for two pawns and complications. He said that after he captured a third pawn that he could no longer be considered worse. Later, Shankland's pawn phalanx became unstoppable and Onischuk resigned the game and the match.

In the semifinals, Shankland will receive defending champion GM Gata Kamsky, who already qualified without the need for a tiebreak. "I was four or five years old when Kamsky was playing for the World Championship," Shankland said. "To

be a great player, you have to stand the test of time. He has that and I obviously don't." The two have never played a rated game.

In the U.S. Women's Championship, Zatonskih's tournament was all but over three days ago. After losing to her main rival, IM Irina Krush, Zatonskih fell to a minus-one score. She then won her final two games in preliminary play just to enter the playoff.

In game one today, Zatonskih took Black and the women castled on opposite sides of the board. Zatonskih crippled Foisor's pawn structure, and then entered a favorable rook-and-pawn ending to earn the win. Needing to win in round two, Foisor achieved an imbalanced position, but her kingside attack never materialized and Zatonskih's pieces repulse the invasion. Eventually Foisor resigned, handing the match to her opponent.

"I'm really tired," Zatonskih said. "I didn't expect to make it into the finals. I'm critical about myself." Zatonskih will now play Krush in the semifinals, while WGM Camilla Baginskaite and WFM Tatev Abrahamyan will play in the other semifinal.

Besides Shankland-Kamsky, GMs Robert Hess and Yury Shulman will play head-to-head in the U.S. Championship. All semifinal matchups are two-game matches spread out over two days, with a possible tiebreak on the third day.

To follow the first game of the semifinals, log on to www.uschesschamps.com or saintlouischessclub.org/live at 2 p.m. local, 3 p.m. Eastern on Saturday. Find the livestream directly at livestream.com/uschess