

A Perfect Storm Leads IM Sam Shankland to US Junior Title

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by Mike Wilmering

IM Sam Shankland had an atrocious first two rounds at the Junior Closed Championship. After announcing his early retirement from chess before coming to the Junior Closed, Shankland appeared listless as lower-rated opponents made quick work of him in rounds one and two.

Then, after scoring a win against FM John Bryant in round three, Shankland appeared more relaxed, and was even able to crack a few jokes in his post-mortem analysis with GM Ben Finegold and WGM Jen Shahade. Shankland went on a tear to close out the Junior Closed, scoring six points out of his final seven games.



Initially, his round eight draw appeared to seal his fate, as GM Ray Robson entered round nine a full point, and Parker Zhao a half point, ahead of Shankland. In a bizarre turn of events, Robson lost to FM Warren Harper in the final round, and Zhao was unable to convert a winning endgame against Bryant.

As the Bryant-Zhao game unfolded, Shankland and Robson were watching with tense anticipation to see if Bryant could hold the draw. As both players got down on time, Zhao finally agreed to a draw.

US Junior Closed Championship, Saint Louis 2010

White: FM John Bryant

Black: NM Parker Zhao

1.e4 c5 2.c3 Nf6 3.e5 Nd5 4.Nf3 e6 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 d6 7.Bc4 Nc6 8.Qe2 Nb6 9.Bb3 dxe5 10.dxe5 Nb4 11.Bg5 Qd3 12.Nc3 Bd7 13.Rd1 Qxe2+ 14.Kxe2 Bc6 15.Nd4 Be7 16.Nxc6 Nxc6 17.Bf4 O-O 18.Bc2 Rfd8 19.Bd3 Nd4+ 20.Kd2 Rac8 21.Kc1 Nd5 22.Be3 Nxe3 23.fxe3 Nc6 24.Be4 Bg5 25.Rxd8+ Rxd8 26.Nd1 Nxe5 27.h4 Bf6 28.Bxb7 Nd3+ 29.Kc2 Nxb2 30.Nxb2 Rb8 31.Nc4 Rxb7 32.h5 Kf8 33.a4 Rb4 34.Kd3 Rb3+ 35.Kd2 Ke7 36.Rc1 Bg5 37.Kc2 Rb4 38.Kc3 Rxa4 39.Rb1 Ra6 40.Rb7+ Kf6 41.Kd4 g6 42.g4 h6 43.e4 gxh5 44.gxh5 e5+ 45.Kd5 Bf4 46.Nd6 Ra5+ 47.Kc6 Kg5 48.Rxf7 Kxh5 49.Rg7 Ra4 50.Kd5 Ra3 51.Nf5 a5 52.Rg1 Ra2 53.Kc4 a4 54.Kb4 a3 55.Kb3 Re2 56.Kxa3 Rxe4 57.Kb3 Re2 58.Kc3 Ra2 59.Kd3 Ra4 60.Rg8 e4+ 61.Ke2 Ra2+ 62.Kf1 Ra5 63.Nd4 Rg5 64.Re8 Re5 65.Rxe5+ Bxe5 66.Nb3 Bc3 67.Nc5 e3 68.Ne4 Bd4 69.Kg2 Kg4 70.Ng3 h5 71.Ne2 Be5 72.Ng1 h4 73.Nh3 Bg3 74.Ng1 Bc7 75.Nh3 Bd6 76.Nf2+ Kf4 77.Nd3+ Ke4 78.Nf2+ Kd4 79.Kf3 h3 80.Nxh3 Kd3 81.Nf2+ 1/2-1/2

In an unlikely scenario, Robson, Shankland and Zhao tied for first place and had to play an Armageddon playoff to determine the champion.

The playoff, which will take place at 10 a.m CDT, on Tuesday, featured a unique set of rules. Robson, by virtue of being first on tiebreaks, elected to receive a bye in the first round of the playoff. Zhao and Shankland had to play first to determine who would play Robson for the championship.

Both players had to bid on how much time they were willing to start with, and whoever bid the lesser amount of time got the option to choose his color, with the black pieces getting draw odds (meaning that in the case of a draw, black is declared the winner). Whoever lost the bid received a full 45 minutes, with both players receiving a five-second increment for each move.

Shankland's bid of 31 minutes was trumped by Zhao's 29 minutes and 54 seconds, but even with draw odds, Zhao was no match for the newly focused Shankland.

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White: IM Sam Shankland

Black: Parker Zhao

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.e3 Bg4 5.Qb3 Qb6 6.Nc3 e6 7.Nh4 Be7 8.h3 Bh5 9.g4 Bg6 10.Nxg6 hxg6 11.Bg2 Nbd7 12.g5 Nh5 13.h4 Qc7 14.cxd5 exd5 15.Qc2 Qd6 16.Bd2 O-O 17.O-O-O Nb6 18.Kb1 Rfe8 19.Bc1 Rad8 20.Bf3 Bf8 21.Rhg1 Nc4 22.e4 dxe4 23.Nxe4 Qb4 24.Ka1 Nb6 25.Bxh5 gxh5 26.Nf6+ gxf6 27.gxf6+ Kh8 28.Rg5 Rd5 29.Rdg1 Rxc5 30.Rxc5 Qb5 31.Rxb5 cxb5 32.a3 b4 33.Qd1 b3 34.Qxb3 Re1 35.Qxf7 Rxc1+ 36.Ka2 1-0



Because of the victory, Shankland got his choice of color in the championship game, with Black again having draw odds. Shankland again chose Black and got a ten minute respite to mentally prepare himself for Robson. Robson attempted a line he hoped Shankland wouldn't know, the Fantasy variation of the Caro Kann, but Shankland was obviously prepared as he quickly whipped out the moves. Robson, as he has for most of the games throughout this tournament, once again found himself in time trouble, and Shankland cruised to an easy victory.

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White: GM Robson, Ray

Black: IM Shankland, Sam

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3 dxe4 4.fxe4 e5 5.Nf3 Bg4 6.Bc4 Nd7 7.c3 Bh5 8.O-O Ngf6 9.Nbd2 Bd6 10.Bd3 O-O 11.Qe1 Re8 12.Kh1 Be7 13.Be2 exd4 14.cxd4 e5 15.dxc5 Nxc5 16.e5 Ned7 17.Qh4 Nxe5 18.Nxe5 Bxe5 19.Ne4 Qd4 20.Qxd4 Bxd4 21.Nd6 Re6 22.Nf5 Be5 23.Bb3 Re5 24.Bd2 Ne4 25.Rae1 Rae8 26.Rxe4 Rxe4 27.Ng3 Bg6 28.Nxe4 Rxe4 29.Bc3 Re7 30.Bd5 h5 31.b4 Bb6 32.a4 a6 33.a5 Ba7 34.Re1 Rd7 35.Bf3 Kh7 36.Re8 Re7 37.Bd2 h4 38.g3 h3 39.Bg4 f5 0-1



"I've been happy with my play," Shankland said. "I think ... in the last seven rounds of the tournament, I think I played my best chess. Unfortunately the first two count as well."

Shankland said he may make an exception to quitting chess, instead calling it a long hiatus with the possibility of returning next year.

"It's a nice feeling to get someone who normally gets you, but really it's just the title that matters. If he had offered me a draw at any point I would have just taken it."

To review photos, videos and pgn files from the 2010 US Junior Closed and 2010 US Women's Championships, go to the official website, uschesschamps.com.