

Field Finalized for 2010 U.S. Championship

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by USCF (edited by Tom Langland)

SAINT LOUIS, MO April 20, 2010 --The final four spots have been filled for [the 2010 U.S. Championship](#), which is set for May 13-25 at the [Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis \(CCSCSL\)](#).

The 24-player field was finalized today with the four, official wildcard selections: GM Alexander Stripunsky (NJ), **GM Vinay Bhat (CA)** and IMs Irina Krush (NY) and **Sam Shankland (CA)**. This year's championship will feature a purse of more than \$170,000, the largest per-capita prize fund in the tournament's history.

"Our four wildcards represent many aspects that are important to the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis," said CCSCSL Executive Director Tony Rich. "By nurturing America's top juniors and women and inviting the top contenders, we have created an incredibly strong and dynamic field for this year's championship."

GM Alexander Stripunsky, 39, missed out on qualifying by rating for the 2010 U.S. Championship by a single point. On the February 2010 rating list used to invite rating qualifiers, he was rated 2615, right behind CCSCSL GM in-residence Ben Finegold, who was rated 2616. Last year, he also missed out by just one spot on the rating list. Stripunsky has an excellent record in U.S. Championships. In 2005, he was runner-up and lost in a playoff to reigning champion GM Hikaru Nakamura. In 2006, he had another strong run and finished in third place. Stripunsky also just tied for first in the Philadelphia Open.



GM Vinay Bhat

GM Vinay Bhat may be the strongest eligible American who has never played in a U.S. Championship. The 25-year-old lives in the Bay Area and has been a chess professional ever since receiving the Samford Scholarship in 2008. Bhat maintains a blog, "An Unemployed Fellow," where he gives insightful analysis on his recent games and thoughts on the tournament circuit (vbhat.wordpress.com).

Samford Scholar and IM Irina Krush is a renowned team player. She led the 2008 bronze medal Olympic team in Dresden, Germany, and was part of the 2004 silver medal Olympic team in Mallorca, Spain. Krush, 26, hails from Brooklyn, NY, where she manages the New York Knights U.S. Chess League team. She is also a two-time U.S. Women's Champion and will be the only woman in this year's mixed event. Krush plans to play in the 2010 U.S. Women's Championship, set for Saint Louis from July 9-19.



IM Sam Shankland

IM Sam Shankland, 18, is the top rated player under 21 who was not already slated to play in the U.S. Championship. GMs Robert Hess, Aleksandr Lenderman and Ray Robson qualified by rating and winning the U.S. Junior, respectively. Shankland won a gold medal for the U.S. at the 2008 World Youth Championship in Vietnam. He currently has two grandmaster norms, and is ardently searching for his third, which will qualify him for the title. The incoming Brandeis University freshman called the U.S. Championship his "dream tournament for the year." He maintains a [blog](#) and a [website](#).

Another recent addition to the U.S. Championship field is IM Levon Altonian of Arizona, who bested competitors from all over the country by winning the ICC Tournament of State Champions. Altonian wrote a [story on Chess Life Online about his quest to qualification](#).

"It is very exciting to play at the U.S. Championship, the most important event of the year," Altounian said. "I am very proud to be a part of this elite group."

The complete list of players includes the following:

- The defending U.S. Champion: GM Hikaru Nakamura
- The winner of the 2009 U.S. Senior Open Championship: GM Larry Christiansen
- The winner of the 2009 U.S. Junior Championship: GM Ray Robson
- The top five qualifiers from the 2009 U.S. Open Championship: GMs Aleksandr Lenderman, Sergey Kudrin, Alex Yermolinsky, Dmitry Gurevich, and **Jesse Kraai**
- The winner of the 2010 ICC State Champion of Champions: IM Levon Altounian
- The top 11 U.S. players by rating of the United States Chess Federation:
 - GM Gata Kamsky
 - GM Alexander Onischuk
 - GM Varuzhan Akobian
 - GM Yury Shulman
 - GM Jaan Ehvest
 - GM Alexander Shabalov
 - GM Gregory Kaidanov
 - GM Robert Hess
 - GM Melikset Khachiyan
 - GM Joel Benjamin
 - GM Ben Finegold
- Four wildcard spots:
 - GM Alexander Stripunsky
 - GM Vinay Bhat
 - IM Irina Krush
 - IM Sam Shankland



GM Jesse Kraai

The 2010 U.S. Championship is open to the public and will feature live grandmaster commentary by GM Maurice Ashley and WGM Jennifer Shahade. Spectators can access the event by purchasing a membership to the CCSCSL, which costs just \$5/month for students and \$12/month for adults.

The championship quad finale will take place May 22-24 and will culminate with the \$10,000 U.S. Championship Blitz Open at 8 p.m. on Monday, May 24, an event that will feature U.S. Championship competitors and some of the top players from across the country. [Click here for more details about the \\$10,000 U.S. Championship Blitz Open.](#)