

# New US GM Shankland Annotates Wins from State Champs

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by Sam Shankland

Bay Area Chess hosted the 2011 CalChess State Championship at the Fremont Marriott. 188 players participated in six sections during May 28-30. The tournament paid out a prize fund \$12,000. GM Sam Shankland, our newest official GM, earned \$2,000 of that for his first place finish. The total attendance, the total prize fund, and Shankland's earnings all set a record for a locally organized tournament in the recent history.



GM Shankland won the CalChess State Championship in 2008 and 2009 (with GM Jesse Kraai) as well, and did not play in 2010. The turning point of the tournament came when he overcame IM Emory Tate, a fantastic tactician who collects GM scalps for a hobby. Despite playing all over the world, GM Shankland says, "I always love to play in Bay Area tournaments because they are well organized and it is like coming home." Shankland annotated two of his games, starting with his win over Tate.

Playing Emory Tate is usually an interesting experience, even when he loses he tends to put up a serious fight and create messes all over the board for the players to try to sort out. However, this particular game was actually my smoothest of the tournament, and I was very happy to win a clean positional game after playing some really lousy moves in the rapid games of the 2-day schedule.

## 1.d4 c5

The Old Benoni has been one of Tate's main weapons for many years

## 2.d5 g6 3.e4 d6 4.Bb5+

With this move White tries to disrupt the coordination of the black pieces.

## 4...Nd7

4...Bd7 5.a4 is similar.

## 5.a4 a6?!

Not a terrible move, but very committal- Black has weakened the b6 square.

## 6.Be2 Bg7 7.Nf3



Oddly enough the black knight would be much better placed on b8 here- the bishop could get to g4 and exchanging a

pair of minor pieces will relieve a lot of Black's problems with his lack of space.

### 7...Ngf6 8.Nc3 0-0

8...b6 could be considered to stop a5, but even after 9.0-0 0-0 10.Nd2 followed by Nc4 and Be3, I strongly prefer White's position.

### 9.a5!

Fixing the black queenside

### 9...Ne8 10.0-0 Nc7

10...Bxc3!? This anti-positional looking move actually caused me some mild concern during the game. 11.bxc3 Ndf6 12.Qd3 Bg4± Black gets some relief by trading pieces, but the open b-file and strong center promises White a clear advantage. Clearly my concern was ill conceived and irrational.

### 11.Be3 h6?!

Doesn't seem particularly useful. 11...Bxc3 12.bxc3 f5 This hyper-aggressive lunge falls on its face 13.exf5 Rxf5 14.c4±; 11...f5 12.exf5 Rxf5 13.Bd3! Black's rook must leave the 5th rank and White will have a clear structural advantage; 11...Rb8 would be my choice.

### 12.Na4

White starts preparing his main plan of playing b4.

### 12...Rb8 13.c3 Kh7



Draw offered. 13...b5 Unfortunately for Black the nature of the queenside pawn structure removes the desired effect of this active lunge. 14.axb6 Nxb6 15.Nxb6 Rxb6 16.Qd2! winning a key tempo on the h6 pawn 16...Kh7 17.b4± Black is getting blasted apart.

### 14.Ra2

White calmly prepares b4. 14.b4? cxb4 15.cxb4 Bxa1 Is much less effective!; 14.Nd2 I considered this move, but the ridiculous looking 14...f5 15.exf5 gxf5!? Concerned me for some reason, although I don't think this is what Bronstein had in mind when he said "Every Russian schoolboy knows to recapture on f5 with the pawn" 16.Nc4 (16.g3 Nxd5) 16...f4 17.Bc1 I didn't like letting my pieces get passive but Black has made a whole truckload of new weaknesses and White has a colossal advantage.

### 14...Nb5?

After the game my opponent told me that he intended to play Nf6 first but got a step ahead of himself. 14...Nf6 15.Nd2 Nb5 16.Nb6 While this is better than the game continuation, White is still in the driver's seat with a space advantage and the possibility of a b4 break.; 14...f5? Trying for active play is no relief 15.exf5 Rxf5 16.c4 Ne5 17.Nxe5 Bxe5 18.Bd3 Qh5 is on the way.

### 15.c4 Nc7

15...Nd4? 16.Bxd4 cxd4 17.b4! was not bringing any relief.

## 16.b4!

White does not need to prepare this move as Black will not be able to defend his b4 pawn. 16.Qd2? allows 16...Nf6 and White no longer has Nd2 available.

## 16...Nf6 17.Nd2 cxb4 18.Qb3 e6

18...Ng4 19.Ba7 Ra8 20.Bb6 f5 21.Qxb4± and Black's counterplay is optical at best.

## 19.Qxb4 exd5 20.cxd5 Re8?

Eschewing the last practical chance. 20...Ncxd5! 21.exd5 Nxd5 22.Qb3 Be6! (22...Nxe3 23.fxe3 Qxa5 24.Nb6 Qg5 25.Bf3 Be6 26.Bd5± Black's pawns are not accomplishing anything and White should be able to bring the point home.) 23.Bc4 Nxe3 24.Qxe3 d5 25.Bb3 White is much better but he is running out of pawns and Black has some practical chances.

## 21.Nc3± /+-



White has more space, better central control, soon full domination of the open c-file, a healthier pawn majority, weaknesses to attack on b7 and d6, and better pieces. Black's position is strategically lost.

## 21...Qe7

However, care must be taken!

## 22.Rc1

22.Bf4?? The natural move meets a shocking respite: 22...Nfxd5! 23.exd5 (23.Nxd5 Nxd5 24.exd5 Qxe2) 23...Bxc3 24.Qxc3 Nxd5 25.Qd4 Qxe2 (25...Nxf4 26.Qxf4 Qxe2 27.Qxf7+ Kh8 28.Qxg6 (28.Nc4) ) 26.Bxd6 (26.Qxd5 Be6) 26...Ra8 and if anything Black is slightly better.

## 22...Bd7 23.Rac2!

Very methodical, just improving my position one step at a time. 23.Ba7?! Rbc8 24.Qxb7? Nb5 The pawn is taboo 25.Bxb5 Bxb5 26.Qxe7 Rxe7 With a7 and e4 hanging and a nasty pin on the c-file the tables have turned.

## 23...Ng4 24.Bd4

This move seemed so natural and obvious that I completely overlooked the possibility of Bxg4 Bxg4 e5! with a discovery on the g4 bishop, but I probably would have gone with Bd4 anyway. 24.Bxg4 Bxg4 25.e5 The computer is overwhelmed with enthusiasm 25...Bf5 (25...Qd7 26.e6) 26.exd6 Qf8 27.Bc5 Bxc3 28.dxc7 Bxb4 29.Bxf8 Rxf8 30.cxb8Q; 24.Ba7!? Bxc3 25.Rxc3 Nxd5 26.exd5 Qxe2 Looked like more hassle than I wanted to deal with, but the computer found Qf4 here and says White is still winning. But still, whenever you get a chance to press a huge positional edge with no counterplay at all, it's hard to even consider such variations!

## 24...Bxd4 25.Qxd4 Qf6?

The final nail in Black's coffin, although the position was probably beyond saving anyway. 25...Qe5? 26.Qxe5 Nxe5 (26...dxe5 27.d6 Nb5 28.Nxb5 axb5 29.Rc7; 26...Rxe5 27.Nc4) 27.f4 Ng4 28.Nc4 was even worse; 25...Nf6 was probably best, but the result still is basically decided.

## 26.Qxf6 Nxf6 27.Nc4+-

White wins the d6 pawn; the rest is agony.

**27...Re7**

27...Nxe4 28.Nxe4 Rxe4 29.Nxd6 Re7 (29...Rxe2 30.Rxe2 Nxd5 31.Nxf7) 30.Rxc7 Rxe2 31.Rxd7

**28.Nxd6 Nce8 29.Nxe8 Bxe8**

29...Nxe8 hoping to blockade from d6 and break the pawns apart with f5 was perhaps more stubborn, but after transferring a rook to b6 it is hard to believe Black can resist for too long.

**30.f3 b5 31.axb6 Rxb6 32.Ra2 Bb5 33.Rb1 Reb7 34.Rab2 Ne8 35.Na4**

35.Bxb5 Nd6 36.Bxa6 was another way to bring the game to its logical conclusion.

**35...Rd6 36.Bxb5 axb5 37.Rxb5 Re7 38.Rb7 Rxb7 39.Rxb7 Ra6 40.Nc5 Ra1+ 41.Kf2 Ra2+ 42.Kg3 Ng7 43.Rxf7 Kg8 44.Rc7 Nh5+ 45.Kh3 Nf4+**



**46.Kg4**

It was still not too late to blunder! 46.Kh4?? Rxc2 with g5 on the way

**46...Nxc2 47.d6**

Black abandoned the struggle as the d-pawn will soon promote. **1-0**

The fight for CalChess State Champion title was intense as several titled players battled to determine who would replace 2010 winner GM Jesse Kraai. Going into the final round, both GM Shankland and IM Vladimir Mezentsev led the field with four points each. GM Shankland won against NM Sevan Buscara, but IM Mezentsev lost out to IM Emory Tate.

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I found myself in the generally unfavorable situation of having to play for a win with Black. Moreover, my opponent is a London System advocate, not the most ambitious opening but a notoriously solid one.

**1.d4 Nf6 2.Bf4 c5 3.d5!?**



Not particularly common, and I was out of theory on move 3!

### 3...d6

3...Qb6?! Looked extremely risky 4.Nc3 Qxb2 5.Bd2 Qb6 6.Rb1 Qd8 7.e4 d6 8.f4 and White's initiative is growing rapidly.

### 4.Nc3 g6 5.e4 Bg7 6.Nf3 0-0

Until now, the game has been following relatively normal channels, but White's next move changed that.

### 7.Be2?

White allows a break on the queenside 7.Qd2 would have been my choice, although the position is probably close to balanced I had a very positive experience with this structure in the previous round, so I was a bit worried!

### 7...b5!

Black breaks on the queenside and seizes the initiative.

### 8.Bxb5?!

During the game I thought 8.Nxb5 was White's best option 8...Nxe4 9.c3 with the plan of castling, Re1, Na3-c4, I thought White had decent play along the e-file and his chances should not be worse. Of course my computer is telling me that I'm crazy and that Black is just better. However, upon further study I think the actual truth lies somewhere in between.

9...a6 10.Na3 Nd7 11.0-0 Bb7 12.Re1

### 8...Nxe4 9.Nxe4 Qa5+ 10.Nc3 Bxc3+ 11.bxc3 Qxb5 / -/+

White is very vulnerable on the white squares and if Black has enough time to defend his weaknesses, he should be able to pick off some loose pawns and get a huge advantage. Furthermore, the white king is not in the best of spots.

### 12.Qd3



12.Qe2? Qxe2+ 13.Kxe2 Ba6+ 14.Kd2 Nd7 is a positional nightmare. White will lose the d5 pawn and get dominated on the light squares.

### 12...Ba6?

This extremely natural move is actually a mistake and based on an oversight. 12...Qa4 This greedy move was the best continuation 13.c4 Bf5! For some reason I never even considered developing the bishop to f5 rather than a6. Black wins a clear pawn but White still has chances to hang on.

### 13.0-0?

13.Qxb5! Initially I thought this move was just losing 13...Bxb5 14.Nd2 Nd7 15.c4 Ba6 16.0-0 Nb6 and it seems that c4 falls and White loses, but... 17.Rfe1! Rfe8 18.Re4! f5 19.Re6 Bxc4 20.Nxc4 Nxc4 21.Rae1 White has excellent drawing chances, but Black's position remains preferable.

### 13...Qa4 14.c4 Bxc4

14...Qxc4 15.Qxc4 Bxc4 16.Rfe1 Bxd5 17.Rxe7 looked less clear.

### 15.Qe4 Nd7 16.Rfe1

16.Rfb1 This ridiculous looking move was actually a cause of concern for me, seeing that suddenly both Qxe7 (no more Bxf1) and Nd2 (no more Nb6) are threats. But I ultimately found an antidote 16...Rfe8! (16...Nf6 17.Qxe7 Nxd5 18.Qxd6 I didn't think this was so amazing for me, but my computer disagrees.) 17.Nd2 This was the point of white's previous move 17...Nb6 18.Rxb6 axb6 19.Nxc4 b5 20.Nd2 Qxe4 21.Nxe4 Ra4 22.Re1 (22.f3 f5) 22...Rea8 Black ransacks all the white pawns and should win the game.

### 16...Rfe8 17.Nd2 Nb6 18.Nxc4

18.Bg5 f6

### 18...Qxc4 19.Qxc4 Nxc4 20.Re4 Nb6 21.Rae1 f5!



### 22.Re6 Kf7

22...Nxd5 23.Bxd6

### 23.c4! Rab8

23...Nxc4 24.Bg5 seemed unnecessarily complicated.

### 24.g4?

The last mistake in a bad position. 24.Rc1 gives some chances to hold on, though I think Black should eventually win. Passive defense is very hard to accept from a psychological standpoint, especially when already down a pawn.

### 24...Nxc4+ 25.gxf5 Nb6!

The point. d5 is much more important than f5!

### 26.fxg6+

26.f6 Nxd5 27.fxg6 Nxf4

### 26...hxg6 27.R6e4 Nxd5 28.Bg5 Rb4 29.a3 Rxe4 30.Rxe4 Rc8 31.h4 c4



With this final round win I ended up in clear first as Tate beat Mezentsev in the last round. I would like to thank Salman Azhar for organizing such a wonderful state championship with a generous prize fund, and I look forward to seeing what the future brings for California Chess. **0-1**

GM Shankland finished with an impressive score of 5.0, a full point ahead of four-way tie for second place between IM Mezentsev, IM Joel Banawa, IM Emory Tate, and NM Michael Pearson.

Bay area teenager Evan Sandberg won the Expert section with a 5.0 score. He was followed closely by Jeff McCann, Benjamin Dy, and State's Barber representative Neel Apte, with scores of 4.0 each.

The A-section was dominated by James Bennett and Yuan Wang, co-champions with 5.0 points each. Damon Moskaoyama trailed close behind with a score of 4.5. The B-section featured a three-way tie for first between FM Tanuj Vasudeva, Jimmy Revelino, and Cailen Melville, each with 5.0. In the C-section Solomon Ge and Faeiq Jfouf dominated, each with 5.5. In the D/E section, David Deng won a clear first with an impressive 6.0.

Long weekends in Northern California are known for great chess tournaments. July 4th weekend in Sacramento, Labor Day weekend in San Francisco, Thanksgiving weekend in Burlingame, and New Year Weekend in Santa Clara offer opportunities to play on more boards in more places.

This is the first time that CalChess State Championship was held on Memorial Day weekend but the change in schedule dates did not reduce the attendance, in fact, the attendance increased by more than 20 players from last year's championship on Labor Day weekend. Despite the large number of entrants this year, the tournament staff did a great job. Senior TD Salman Azhar organized the event while NTD John McCumiskey served as the Chief TD and Senior TD Tom Langland served as the Assistant Chief TD.