

2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

JULY 21, 2023 ■ ROUND 11

BY **JJ LANG** ■ ANNOTATIONS BY **WGM TATEV ABRAHAMYAN**



Lei Tingjie

Round Score

$1\frac{1}{2} - 1\frac{1}{2}$

Match Score

$5\frac{1}{2} - 5\frac{1}{2}$



Ju Wenjun

TATEV ABRAHAMYAN



WGM Tatev Abrahamyan is an Armenian-American chess player, teacher, and *Chess Life* columnist based in Kansas City, MO. Among her best results,

Abrahamyan has tied for first in two U.S. Women's Championships in 2005 and 2011. She is renowned for her uncompromising, attacking style of play, for which Susan Polgar awarded her a "Goddess Chess Award" for fighting play in 2008. Abrahamyan currently works as the Chess Ambassador for the ChessUp startup.

The penultimate game of the 2023 Women's World Championship is full of "what ifs." If challenger Lei Tingjie wins in the final round, or in tiebreaks, defending champion GM Ju Wenjun will surely be haunted by missing 38. ... Bg5! in this game.

While neither obvious (in time trouble, without an engine) nor obviously winning (with proper defense), this move might be the clearest, cleanest tactical shot that either player missed in the entire match, which had been characterized by resolute defense and accuracy thus far.

And if Ju had found this shot, Lei would surely be wondering why she went for such an ambitious, risky idea of a king-walk when a draw would have been a perfectly acceptable result.

Did she overestimate her position here, believing that this was a safer plan than it actually was? Or did she underestimate her position, thinking that she was in danger if

she did not take drastic action?

More likely, it was a mixture of nerves and inexperience in high-pressure matches. Compared to Ju, who is playing her fourth world championship match, Lei likely was tempted at least subconsciously by the opportunity to create some clarity in the match situation.

Ju, in contrast, was clearly not "desperate" enough to be looking for a forcing win (otherwise she would have found 38. ... Bg5!). For now, at least, we can praise her resolve in gaining yet another promising position in the second half of the match, with all signs pointing to the momentum being on her side in a rapid tiebreak match.

But, first, she has one more chance with the white pieces to close things out. Could this be a culmination of her growing confidence in the match? Time will tell. For now, enjoy a remarkably tense eleventh round featuring detailed annotations as always.

PHOTOS: BONHAGE / FIDE (WWCC); OOTES / SLCC (TATEV)



ITALIAN GAME, TWO KNIGHTS' DEFENSE (C55)

GM Lei Tingjie (2554)

GM Ju Wenjun (2564)

FIDE Women's World Chess Championship (11), Chongqing, 07.21.2023

Annotations by WGM Tatev Abrahamyan

1. e4 e5

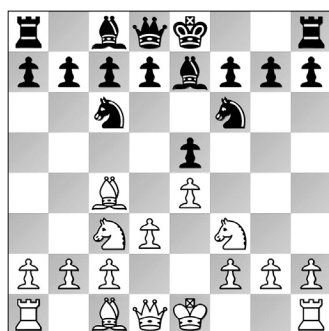
After trying the Caro Kann and even a Sicilian, Ju decides to stick to the solid opening in her final classical game with the black pieces.

2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. d3 Be7

A deviation from game five where Ju chose 4. ... Bc5, transposing to an Italian.

The alternative with 4. ... d6 5. 0-0 h6 6. c3 g6, fianchettoing the bishop, is another set-up for Black, but I don't think Ju was looking for any sharp lines.

5. Nc3



Normally in the Italian, White puts the pawn on c3, with the idea of playing d4. Since the

f8-bishop went to e7, the d3-d4 thrust won't come with a tempo and White can choose other set ups, as positions resemble that of the Ruy Lopez. This is also the first time we see Lei spend some time so early in the opening.

A very standard and a non-committal way for White to play is 5. 0-0 0-0 6. Re1 d6 7. a4, as the options of Nb1-c3-d5, as well as c2-c3 and d3-d4 are possible. After 7. ... Na5 8. Ba2 c5, Black does have the option of putting the pawn on c5, resembling the Chigorin variation of the Ruy Lopez.

5. ... d6 6. a4

White has to make sure to keep the bishop alive and on the a2-g8 diagonal, while also grabbing some space on the queenside.

For instance, with 6. 0-0?! Na5, White would already have to give up the bishop for a knight since 7. Bb5+ c6 8. Ba4 b5 nabs the bishop.

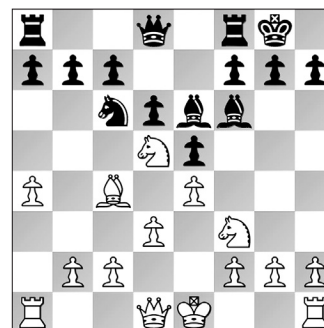
6. ... 0-0 7. Bg5

After a 10-minute think, Lei chooses her plan.

7. ... Be6 8. Bxf6 Bxf6 9. Nd5

(see diagram top of next column)

Giving up the bishop pair is quite committal. But, as in the Sveshnikov, White's claim is that due to the pawn structure, the dark-squared bishop is useless and the fight over the d5-square is more important. If White could trade all the other minor pieces, leaving her with a knight on d5 against the f6-bishop, she would be very happy with the outcome.



9. ... Bxd5

Black chooses the most concrete continuation, which makes sense given that her opponent's king is still in the center.

The less committal 9. ... g6 10. 0-0 Bg7 would lead to a long strategic battle where White would play on the queenside and Black would continue with ... Kg8-h8 and ... f7-f5.

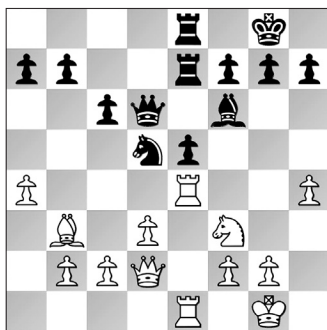
10. Bxd5 Nb4 11. Bb3 d5 12. exd5 Nxd5 13. 0-0

Opposite-colored bishop middlegames are quite interesting. Here, the light-squared bishop is quite strong as it is on an open diagonal aiming at the king, but the knight on d5 is a good blocking piece. Opposite-colored bishops lead to aggressive middlegames.

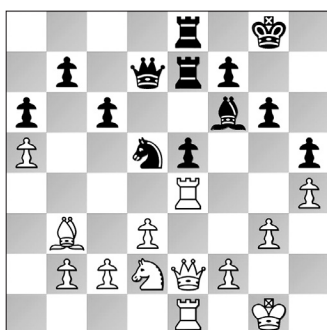
13. ... c6 14. Re1 Re8 15. Qd2 Re7 16. Re4 Qd6 17. Rae1 Rae8 18. h4

(see diagram next page)

Both sides have put their pieces on their most logical squares, so White is now looking for some expansion on the kingside.



18. ... h5 19. g3 g6 20. Qe2 a6 21. a5 Qd7 22. Nd2?!

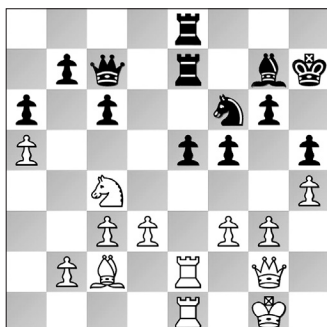


The engine doesn't like this move as it gives Black the option to finally get ... f7-f5 in, now that the e5-pawn is not hanging. That said, it is not so easy for Black to make use of this break.

22. ... Bg7 23. Qf3 f5 24. R4e2 Kh8

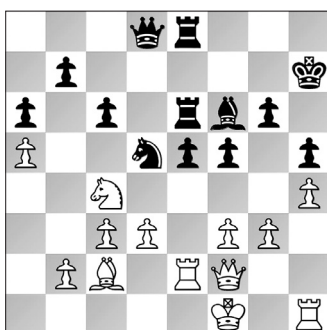
This expansion feels like an achievement for Black, but it is hard to see how either side will make any progress as pawn breakthroughs are difficult.

25. c3 Qd8 26. Nc4 Kh7 27. Bc2 Qc7 28. Qg2 Nf6 29. f3



Preparing for a potential pawn break with g3-g4, which of course comes with a lot of risk as White's king would be exposed.

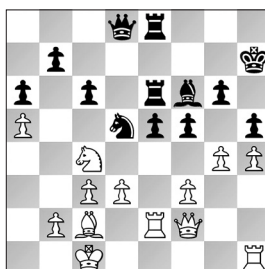
29. ... Nd5 30. Qf2 Bf6 31. Kg2 Qd8 32. Rh1 Re6 33. Kf1!?



A clever idea by the challenger! If she manages to get her king to the queenside and play g3-g4, Black's king will come under a strong attack.

33. ... Kg7

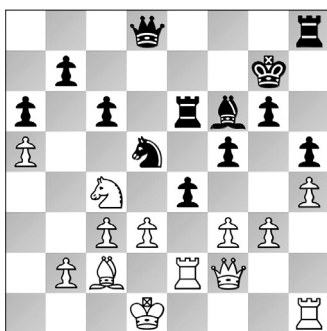
To see this idea, let's make a few waiting moves for Black to see how White's idea would play out: 33. ... R6e7 34. Ke1 Re6 35. Kd1 R6e7 36. Kc1 Re6 37. g4!



POSITION AFTER 37. g4

The black king comes under fire, as we will quickly see the c2-bishop come to life after the pawn structure falls apart.

34. Ke1 Rh8 35. Kd1 e4!



A quick reaction, striking in the center while White's king is still there.

36. fxe4 fxe4 37. Kc1

Not 37. Rxe4?? Rxe4 38. dxe4 Ne3 when Black is winning.

37. ... e3

Black takes the most direct approach and correctly stops the c2-bishop from activating.

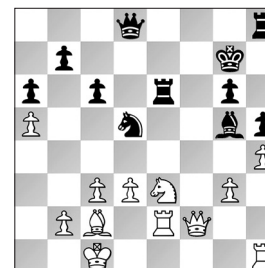
38. Nxe3

It is possible to keep more pieces on the board with 38. Qg2 and then try to play for d3-d4, but it is understandable why White wouldn't want to let the pawn stay on e3.

38. ... Rhe8

We have reached a critical moment that generated quite a bit of buzz on social media during and after this game.

Black had a remarkable shot with 38. ... Bg5!

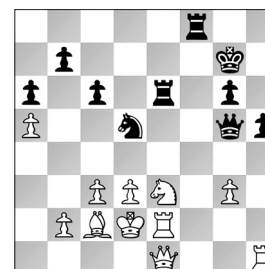


POSITION AFTER 38. ... Bg5!

Our silicon friend spots a nice tactic. If given as a puzzle, this move is quite findable, but it's not such an easy task to spot it on move 38 in a real game with six minutes remaining to reach the time control! The resulting endgame will be unpleasant for White.

To appreciate this, let's assume White takes the piece with 39. hxg5 Qxg5. Now, White can either return the piece or try to hold on.

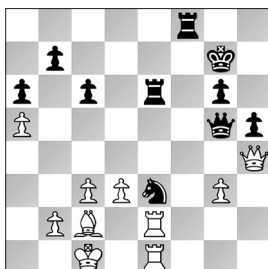
a) White cannot successfully hang on to the piece with 40. Kd2. After 40. ... Rf8 41. Qe1, Black can break through:



POSITION AFTER 41. Qe1

The winning sequence goes 41. ... Rxe3 42. Rxe3 Nxe3! 43. Qxe3 Rf2 when Black is winning.

b) Instead, the critical continuation goes 40. Rhe1 Rf8 41. Qh2 (not 41. Qg1 Rf3 picking up the g3-pawn) 41. ... Nxe3 42. Qh4!



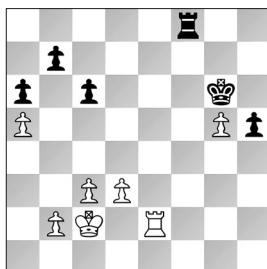
POSITION AFTER 42. Qh4!

This is an important resource for White. It is the only move that stops ... Ne3-f1. Now, 42. ... Qxh4 43. gxh4 Nxc2 44. Kxc2 Rxe2+ 45. Rxe2 g5 46. hxg5 Kg6 reaches a complex ending.

(see diagram top of next column)

Rook endgames are always tricky! Black has a distant passed pawn and can press try to press for a win.

It is worth noting that White cannot enter a king-and-pawn endgame: 47. Re7 Rf7?? 48.



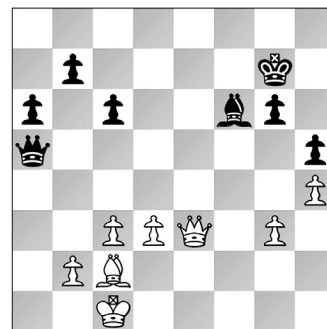
POSITION AFTER 46. ... Kg6

Rxf7 Kxf7 49. Kd2 Kg6 50. d4 Kxg5 winning, as White will have to use the king to stop the h-pawn from queening, which will give Black's king the freedom to go pick up all the queenside pawns.

39. Rhe1 Nxe3

Note that 39. ... Bg5 no longer works here: 40. hxg5 Qxg5 41. Kd2 and White hangs on to the piece with 41. ... Rf8 42. Qh2 Rf3 43. Qh4 and the game in the bag.

40. Rxe3 Rxe3 41. Rxe3 Rxe3 42. Qxe3 Qxa5



Without the rooks, the opposite-colored bishop position is harmless.

43. d4 Qd5 44. Qd3 Qh1+ 45. Kd2 Qg2+ 46. Kd1 Qg1+ 47. Ke2 Qg2+ 48. Kd1 Qg1+, draw.

The initiative is with Ju in recent games. I'm interested to see what she will have prepared for the final game as she is significantly higher rated in rapid than Lei. Will she play it safe and try to take the match directly to tiebreaks, or will she try to go for the win tomorrow? ♠



Match Recap

2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP

	White	Result	Moves	ECO	Summary
1	Lei - Ju	½-½	50	C67	White's gambit in the Berlin gives Lei chances, Ju holds on.
2	Ju - Lei	½-½	40	B32	Black gains edge out of the opening, Ju holds on once again.
3	Lei - Ju	½-½	49	C65	Ju again surprised in opening, holds her own and pushes for first time.
4	Ju - Lei	½-½	63	D37	Another Lei opening surprise leads to steady equality.
5	Lei - Ju	1-0	65	C54	Lei breaks through after forcing Ju into a difficult position.
6	Ju - Lei	½-½	48	A40	Ju's safe Exchange Queen's Gambit Declined sends match to Chongqing!
7	Lei - Ju	½-½	65	B19	Ju surprises in opening, outplays Lei, misses chance in time trouble.
8	Ju - Lei	1-0	72	A06	After opening surprise, Ju misses knockout, Lei misses drawing tactics.
9	Lei - Ju	½-½	59	B45	Ju changes it up once again, both players show off in the Sicilian.
10	Ju - Lei	½-½	47	A13	Ju's iffy piece placement in an IQP gives Lei an effortless draw.
11	Lei - Ju	½-½	48	C55	Ju misses remarkable tactical chance after Lei's overly ambitious play.

PHOTO: BONHAGE / FIDE