

# 2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

JULY 22, 2023 ■ ROUND 12

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



**Ju Wenjun**

Round Score

**1 - 0**

Match Score

**6½ - 5½**



**Lei Tingjie**

## 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.

For the first time since the 2010 World Championship match between GM Viswanathan Anand and GM Veselin Topalov in 2010 — and the first time ever in a Women's World Championship — a tie was broken in the final classical game. GM Ju Wenjun successfully defended her title for the third consecutive match, beating GM Lei Tingjie 6½ - 5½ in a match she never led before this round.

In a narrative that will be familiar to many chess players across all levels, the story began with opening preparation but ended up being about stamina and mental resolve. Lei and Ju both had top grandmasters working as their seconds, but Azerbaijani GM Teimour Radjabov seemed to have Lei prepared a few moves further in almost every opening she played than Ju and Indian GM Pentala Harikrishna were expecting.

Nevertheless, Lei landed only one decisive blow in the first half of the match. With a two-day break and a change of scenery, Ju

emerged with a new game plan.

Round twelve was a perfect encapsulation of the dynamics of this match. Once the position left theoretical waters, Ju's plan was clearly to just "get a game" as she successfully managed in her eighth-round victory. As Ju grew more patient, Lei had the opposite reaction, grasping for the most concrete variations at multiple points in the game when flexibility would have been more prudent.

When there was something to do, in other words, Lei reliably figured out what it was and executed it. But once Ju was able to change the character of the match to one that was less concrete, Lei never regained her footing. Match experience likely played a major role here, too, as it is difficult under pressure (such as a lead in a world championship match) to not try and clarify things as quickly as possible. But Ju had been here before, and she showed why she's still the player to beat.



**QUEEN'S PAWN GAME, COLLE SYSTEM (D04)**

GM Ju Wenjun (2564)

GM Lei Tingjie (2554)

FIDE Women's World Chess Championship (12), Chongqing, 07.22.2023

Annotations by WGM Tatev Abrahamyan

**1. d4 d5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. e3**

For the final game of the match, Ju chooses a quiet system to avoid theoretical confrontations. This approach has served her well in the match.

**3. ... c5 4. dxc5**

In game five of the Candidates finals, Lei faced 4. Bd3 e6 5. b3 Nc6 6. Bb2 cxd4 7. exd4 g6!? and won this game convincingly as Black: 8. 0-0 Bg7 9. Ba3 Ne4 10. Re1 f5 11. c3 Bd7 12. Qc2 Rc8 13. Qb2 g5 with an advantage that she converted in 38 moves in Tan - Lei, Chongqing, 2023.

**4. ... e6 5. b4 a5 6. c3 axb4 7. cxb4 b6**



This is a typical pawn break for these structures. White won't be able to hang on to her extra pawn.

**8. Bb5+**

Not 8. cxb6

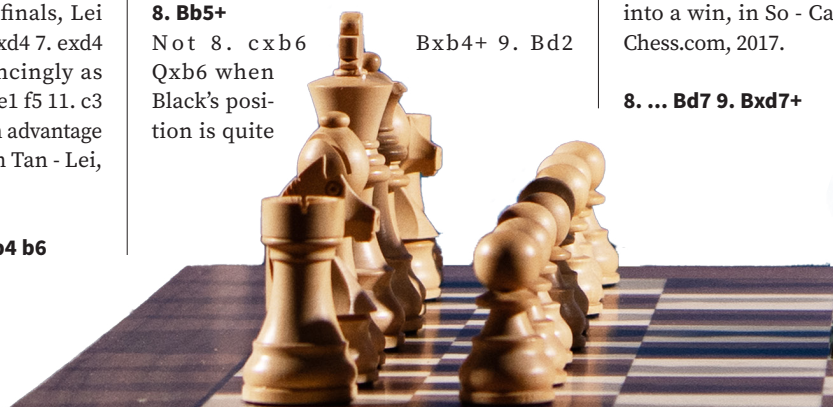
Qxb6 when Black's position is quite

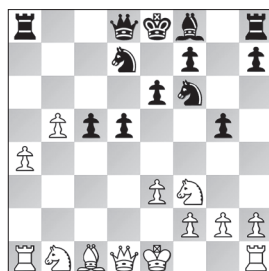
Bxb4+ 9. Bd2

comfortable here.

With the alternative 8. a4 bxc5 9. b5, White could have reached the same structure with the light-squared bishops on the board. However, since Black has more space in the center, the presence of the bishop pair would be more favorable, for instance after 9. ... c4 10. Be2 Nbd7 11. 0-0 Bb4 12. Bd2 Qa5 13. Qc2 0-0 14. Nc3 Qc7 15. Rfb1 Ba5 16. e4 Bb7 17. exd5 exd5 with an advantage for Black, which the former world champion did eventually manage to convert into a win, in So - Carlsen, Chess.com, 2017.

**8. ... Bd7 9. Bxd7+**





POSITION AFTER 11. ... g5!?

One of the engine's top suggestions. This move has been tried by Grischuk, So and Xiong in rapid online games, but given the frequency and seriousness of those tournaments, we know that players prepare quite extensively for them. I wonder if Lei was familiar with this idea because it seems to be very much in the spirit of how she likes to play.

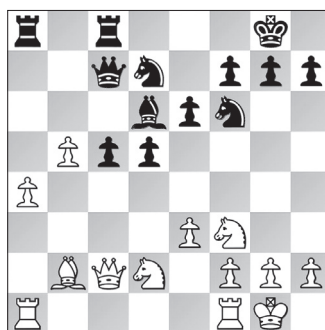
For instance, after 12. Bb2 (not 12. Nxc5 Rg8 13. Nf3 Rxc2, as the white king will be more vulnerable) 12. ... Bd6 13. Qe2 g4 14. Nfd2 Qc7 15. f4 gxf3 16. Nxf3 Rg8 17. 0-0 Ke7, the position was unclear, although Black won on move 48 in Le - So, *Chess24.com*, 2021.

**12. Bb2 Bd6 13. 0-0 0-0**

Lei chooses the more standard route of developing her pieces.

The thematic 13. ... g5 is still possible here and has been played in four correspondence games. The fact that this is a main move in this very normal looking position is an indication that the computer is worried about the long term implications of this structure. The game is unclear after 14. g3 g4 15. Nh4 Be5 16. Nc3 Rg8 17. Qc2 h5, as is often the case with popular correspondence positions.

**14. Nbd2 Rfc8 15. Qc2**



White's idea is straightforward: Bb2-c3, Rf1-b1 and push the pawns.

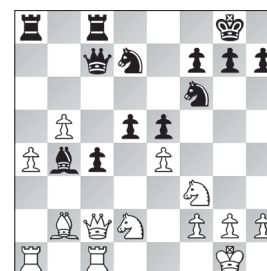
**15. ... c4?**

Too committal and strategically bad. Lei is looking for counterplay with ... Nd7-c5-d3, but this pawn push makes it impossible for her center to move in the future as it fixes the structure.

Instead, 15. ... e5! would force White to make some decisions here as ... e5-e4 is a threat.

Interestingly, 16. Rfb1 e4 17. Bxf6 exf3 18. Bb2 Bxh2+ 19. Kf1 fxg2+ 20. Kxg2 is some kind of strange computer line that is apparently equal.

For humans, play is more likely to continue with 16. e4 c4. Compared to the game, Black is able to play ... d5-d4 here. After 17. Rfc1 (not 17. exd5? c3 winning) 17. ... Bb4, things are sharp.



POSITION AFTER 17. ... Bb4



A quick and efficient way for White to finish her development.

**9. ... Nbx d7 10. a4 bxc5 11. b5**

The players reached this position rather quickly. In the long run, the position is quite dangerous for Black, as White's connected passed pawns can become quite dangerous. Indeed, some endgames will just be lost. On the other hand, Black does have a nice center and a very solid structure. Since White's passed pawns won't be moving anytime soon, it gives Black some time to look for active play.

**11. ... Qc7**

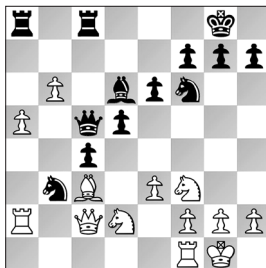
A surprisingly common alternative for Black here is 11. ... g5!?

We can keep following the top computer line, as all the moves are pretty forced: 18. Bc3 Bxc3 19. Qxc3 dxe4 20. Ng5 Qb7 is unclear. Perhaps Lei considered this line and was afraid of losing her queenside and leaving White with the two passed pawns; it's a difficult position to evaluate over the board.

**16. Bc3 Nc5 17. a5 Nb3 18. Bxf6?!**

After a 15-minute think, Ju chooses the most concrete continuation, changing the flow of the game.

Instead, 18. Ra2 was simple and strong. The pawn is untouchable and the option of capturing on f6 is still in the air. With 18. ... Qc5 (not 18. ... Nxa5 19. Rfa1 winning) 19. b6:



POSITION AFTER 19. b6

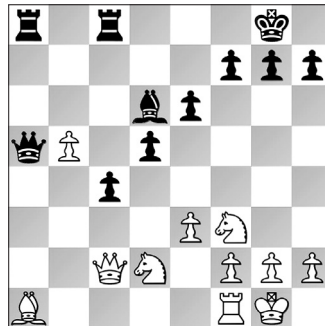
The pawn is still forbidden unless Black gives up the Exchange with 19. ... Rxa5 20. Bxa5 Nxa5. Perhaps Ju was unsure of this position and didn't like giving up her dark-squared bishop, thus opening the path of the c-pawn. However, after 21. Rb1, White still manages to hang on to the other pawn and maintain her advantage.

**18. ... Nxa1**



A mistake would be 18. ... gxf6? 19. Nxb3 cxb3 20. Qxb3 when White is happy.

**19. Bxa1 Qxa5**



Lei must have been quite happy about this turn of events as her chances in this imbalanced position are as good.

**20. Qc3 Qxc3 21. Bxc3 Rcb8 22. Nd4 e5?**

A costly mistake. Again, Lei chooses the most concrete variation. I am not sure what is behind this decision: nerves, ambition or simply wanting to get rid of this b5-pawn that has been sitting there since move 11.

A safer move was 22. ... Ra3. Now after 23. Bb2 (not 23. Nb1 Raa8 with an easier game) 23. ... Ra2 24. Bc3, I don't think White has anything better than to repeat with 24. ... Ra3.

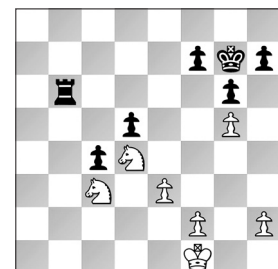
Even if Black wanted to play more ambitiously, why not 22. ... g6 preparing ... e6-e5? The answer is that with 23. e4, White will quickly break apart the pawn structure. If she hangs on to the b5-pawn, Black will be in trouble. But things are still not

entirely clear, even after 23. ... e5 (not 23. ... Bc5 24. exd5 exd5 25. N2f3 as this position looks dangerous for Black as the pawns are blocked and the c3-bishop can be rerouted to the h2-b8 diagonal) 24. Nc6 Rxb5 25. exd5 Rxd5 26. Ne4. But now, with tactics, White will collect the pawns. After 26. ... Rd3 27. Nxd6 Rxc3 28. Nxe5 Ra5 29. Nexc4 Ra6, Black will play ... Ra6-c6 next and trade the rook for the knights.

**23. Nf5 Bf8 24. Bxe5 Rxb5 25. g4 g6**

**26. Nd4 Rb2**

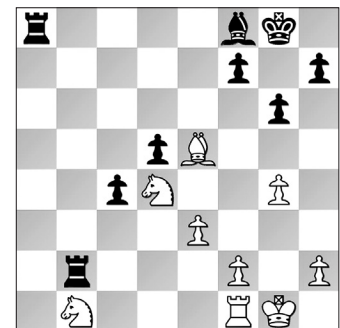
Instead, Black needs to sit tight with 26. ... Rb6. The idea is to eventually cause some kind of disruption to White's pieces with ... f7-f6. For instance, if White pushes with 27. g5 Bg7 28. Bxg7 Kxg7 29. Nb1 Ra1 30. Nc3 Rxf1+ 31. Kxf1:



POSITION AFTER 31. Kxf1

The endgame still looks good for White, but without a pair of rooks, it looks more manageable for Black. It is also important to keep in mind that king-and-two-knights versus a king is a draw!

**27. Nb1**



A nice maneuver! The knight is headed to c3, where it will attack the backwards d5-pawn.

**27. ... Bg7 28. Bxg7 Kxg7 29. Nc3 Ra5**

**30. Rd1**

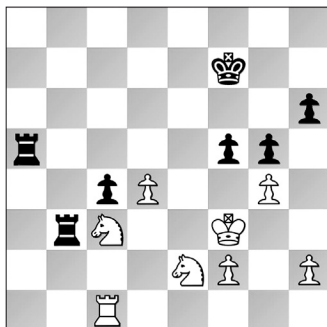
The presence of the rook pair favors White greatly as Black will be unable to defend her pawns. Ju converts this endgame with great technique.

PHOTOS, THIS PAGE AND TWO PREVIOUS: BONHAGE / FIDE

30. ... Rb6 31. Nde2 Rb3 32. Kg2 h6 33. Kf3 f6 34. Rc1 Kf7 35. Nf4

Now the d5-pawn falls.

35. ... d4 36. exd4 g5 37. Nfe2 f5



Lei is looking for some activity, but White's pieces are well coordinated.

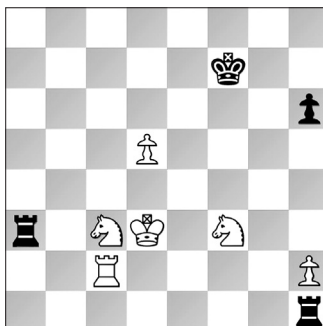
38. gxf5 Rxf5+ 39. Ke3 g4 40. Nf4 Rb8 41. d5 Rf6 42. Rc2 Ra8 43. Nb5 Rb6 44. Nd4 Ra3+ 45. Ke4 c3 46. Nfe2 Rb2

White doesn't mind exchanging the pair of rooks now, as she will pick up the c3-pawn too and begin to march the d-pawn down the board.

47. Kd3 Rb1

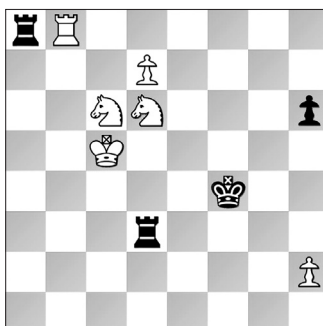
Pointless is 47. ... Rxc2 48. Nxc2 as Black can't attack White's pawns. For instance: 48. ... Ra5 49. Nxc3 is winning.

48. Nxc3 Rh1 49. f3 gxf3 50. Nxf3



Everything is perfectly safe in White's position.

50. ... Rf1 51. Nd4 Ke7 52. Kc4 Rf4 53. Rb2 Rh4 54. Rb7+ Kf6 55. Rb2 Ra8 56. Kc5 Rh3 57. Ncb5 Re3 58. d6 Ke5 59. Nc6+ Ke4 60. d7 Rd3 61. Nd6+ Kf4 62. Rb8, Black resigned.



Congratulations to Ju Wenjun on retaining her title with this clutch victory! ♠



## 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.
12	Ju - Lei	1-0	62	D04	Ju gets a game, Lei plays too committal, Ju converts to retain her title!

PHOTO: BONHAGE / FIDE