

# 2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

JULY 8, 2023 ■ ROUND 03

BY **JJ LANG** ■ ANNOTATIONS BY **WGM GULRUKBEGIM TOKHIRJONOVA**



**Lei Tingjie**

Round Score

**1/2 - 1/2**

Match Score

**1 1/2 - 1 1/2**



**Ju Wenjun**

## GULRUKBEGIM TOKHIRJONOVA



WGM Gulrukbegim “Begim” Tokhirjonova is an Uzbek-born American chess player. The 23-year-old attended the University of Missouri and ma-

ajored in business while competing on their chess team. In 2021, she finished second in the U.S. Women’s Championship, and has been a regular in Saint Louis Chess Club invitational events since. After playing for Uzbekistan in the 2016 and 2018 Olympiads, she made her debut appearance on the U.S. Olympiad squad in 2022.

We have a match! After struggling to equalize twice in the FIDE Women’s World Championship, defending champion GM Ju Wenjun had some chances of her own for the first time. The match is still tied 1½-1½ after the third consecutive draw, but Ju must be happy to have had an initiative with the black pieces in challenger GM Lei Tingjie’s anti-Berlin.

Lei missed a nice tactical point at the end of a long sequence beginning with 11. ... h6, as WGM Gulrukbegim Tokhirjonova explains below. Because of this, her counter-intuitive 12. Bf4 gave Black a nice game and Ju is likely also wondering whether she could have sustained her initiative longer.

Indeed, around move 19, Black had a chance to press directly against White’s king. She eventually went this route, but only after giving Lei a few moves to consolidate.

Once again, this match is demonstrating how quickly an initiative can evaporate, especially with players as skilled as these two.

While Lei was expected to stick with 1. d4, she has twice now played into Ju’s Ruy Lopez with 1. e4 and nevertheless managed to catch the champion off-guard with a well-chosen sideline. But just how deep is Lei’s well of ideas? Will she return to playing into Black’s Berlin? If she sticks with 4. d3 instead, does she have more ideas here? Or was this the end of her king’s-pawn experiment?

Additionally, it will be interesting to see how Ju responds to the changing dynamic of the match. Even though she was surprised in the opening again, taking 20 minutes on her sixth move, she was able to solve all of her problems over the board and even claim an advantage by move 12. Will this confidence change her approach?

Regardless, this is proving to be a high-quality contest between two worthy and evenly matched competitors. Here’s to nine more games as nuanced and intricate as the first three!



## RUY LOPEZ, BERLIN DEFENSE, ANTI-BERLIN (C65)

GM Lei Tingjie (2554)

GM Ju Wenjun (2564)

2023 FIDE Women's World Chess Championship, Shanghai (3), 07.08.2023

Annotations by WGM Gulrukhbegim Tokhirjonova

### 1. e4

Lei Tingjie chooses again to go with 1. e4, even though she plays 1. d4. The main reason must be that Ju is a 1. d4 player herself, so Lei wants to be aggressive with the white pieces and take Ju to less familiar territory.

### 1. ... e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 Nf6

Berlin again! Also, the most-played line by Ju. She decided to go with it again, even though she got into trouble in the first game. This means she has improved her line and is confident in her preparation.

### 4. d3

Lei goes with the anti-Berlin this time instead of castling as in the first game. She wants to keep the pieces and avoid some forced lines. Lei also has some games in this line, so Ju most have expected 4. d3 for sure.

### 4. ... Bc5

Interestingly enough, this is the only move Ju plays in this position and is the main line. Lei's preparation was mainly against this move, we can assume, and Lei made her next move instantly.

### 5. c3 0-0 6. Bg5



An invitation to fight! This is not the main line; however, it can put serious problems for Black if they do not know or remember what to do. It was a small surprise for Ju because she spent about 20 minutes before making her next move!

The main line goes 6. 0-0 d6 7. Nbd2, when Black has a choice.

a) Traditionally, play continues 7. ... a6 8. Bxc6 bxc6 9. d4 exd4 10. cxd4 Bb6 with play for both sides.

b) Instead, 7. ... Ne7 8. d4 exd4 9. cxd4 Bb6 10. Re1 Bg4 11. h3 Bh5 12. Qb3 d5 13. e5 Nd7 is also an option.

### 6. ... d6

Ju decides to go with a relatively rare alternative to 6. ... h6 or 6. ... Be7. Perhaps she wanted to surprise Lei with a rare move, or she spent 20 minutes trying to remember her prep.

Black can play ... Bc5-e7 before or after pushing the h-pawn, so let's look at lines beginning with 6. ... h6 7. Bh4.

a) The push 7. ... g7-g5 leads to a complicated but exciting position. However, we already know from the previous game that the players do not like to

push the g-pawns and weaken their kings if they can help it. After 8. Bg3 d6, White has a choice between developing and attacking.

a1) The standard 9. Nbd2 Nh5 10. 0-0 Qf6 gives White different options to create uncertainty, which we might see later in this match.

a11) The prophylactic 11. Kh1 Ne7 12. d4 exd4 13. e5 Qg6 14. cxd4 Bb6 15. Nc4 d5 16. Ne3 reaches a complicated position where both sides should be careful.

a12) Trading with 11. Bxc6 bxc6 12. d4 exd4 13. cxd4 Nxg3 14. hxg3 Bxd4 15. Nxd4 Qxd4 16. Qc2 is unclear.

a2) Instead, White can try to go straight for the king with 9. h4.



POSITION AFTER 9. h4

But the attempt to attack immediately is not good because of 9. ... g4 10. Nh2 Kh7 11. Nd2 Nh5 when Black is the one who is attacking!

b) Instead of pushing the g-pawn, 7. ... Be7 is another very decent option. Black wants to avoid the pin and play ... d7-d6 next. It might seem unprincipled to play the bishop out to c5 then back to e7, but now White's bishop is on h4, which is not an ideal square.

b1) After 8. Bxc6?! 8. ... bxc6 9. Nxe5 Nxe4, things are again unclear.

b2) Instead, 8. 0-0 d6 9. Bg3 Bd7 would lead to a whole different game than any of the above positions.

### 7. Nbd2

Played fast again by White. Now it is Ju's turn again to make a decision, which is not easy. She has many alternatives, but it is hard to say which is the most precise one, especially when White is blitzing out the moves.

### 7. ... a6

A logical move, asking White to decide what they want to do with their bishop.

An interesting idea is 7. ... Ne7.

a) The idea is after 8. d4, White should be better because the black knight is no longer protecting the e5-pawn, so it is

time to attack and take the center. After 8. ... exd4 9. cxd4 Bb6 10. Bd3, Black must be careful.

- a1) The only choice is 10. ... Nc6! It is crucial to get back and start attacking White's center immediately. Now things are not so clear.
- a2) Instead, 10. ... Ng6 11. h4 Re8 12. h5 Nf8 13. h6 is good for White, who is too fast here.
- b) White can also try 8. Bxf6 gxf6 9. d4 exd4 10. cxd4 Bb6 11. 0-0 Kh8.



POSITION AFTER 11. ... Kh8

Even though Black has a bad pawn structure, she has two bishops, and White does not have an immediate way to attack the pawns.

Also, the doubled pawns are more of a strategic weakness for Black, while the position remains dynamic for now. After 12. Bd3 Rg8 13. Kh1 Nc6, things are unclear.

Another alternative is 7. ... h6, but when Black did not play ... h7-h6 immediately after 6. Bg5, it already suggested that she did not want to make this permanent of a decision this early, so it would be illogical to play it here after already deciding to play 6. ... d6 a few moves ago. This reasoning would turn out to be very logical here, too.

Indeed, after 8. Bh4 g5



POSITION AFTER 8. ... g5

White has 9. Nxc5 when now it is possible because the c5-bishop is blocked by the d6-pawn. White can sac now, with 9. ... hxc5 10. Bxc5 Kg7 11. Qf3 and Black is paralyzed.

**8. Bxc6**

A typical trade in the Ruy Lopez. White gives

away the bishop to get compensation from doubling Black's pawns, and now tries to take the center.

**8. ... bxc6 9. d4 exd4**

The alternative was 9. ... Bb6, but it is hard to give a pawn away if Black does not know the position. With 10. dxe5 dxe5 11. Nxe5 Re8 12. Bxf6 Qxf6 13. Nef3 Bf5 14. Qe2 Rad8 15. 0-0, it seems like Black has compensation for the pawn with two bishops and active pieces.

However, what should she do now? It is not easy at all. The only move to keep the pressure is 15. ... g5, so, it is makes sense why Ju decided to take on d4 first. With 16. Qxa6 Bc8 17. Qc4 g4 18. Nd4 Bxd4 19. cxd4 Qxd4 things are equal, but Black's path was narrow.

**10. cxd4 Bb6 11. 0-0**

White is threatening e4-e5 and Black has to decide how to get rid of the pin.

The immediate 11. e5 does not work yet: 11. ... dxe5 12. dxe5 Qd3! 13. Qb3 (not 13. exf6 Re8+ winning) 13. ... Qxb3 14. axb3 Nd5 allows Black to equalize.

**11. ... h6 12. Bf4**



Giving up the pin voluntarily seems like such a weird move while playing Bg5-h4 looks right, keeping the pressure and the pin. This move is immediately taking away all the pressure from Black, and suddenly, Black does not have much to worry about. However, there is a reason why she did this:

Lei's concern with the obvious 12. Bh4 was the natural 12. ... g5?, which is quickly becoming a theme of this match! She thought she had to go 13. Bg3 and after 13. ... g4, she did not see how to continue.

- a) 13. Nxc5 This is the line Lei Tingjie did not calculate until the end 13. ... hxc5 14. Bxc5 Bxd4 15. Nf3 Bxb2 It is obvious that Lei stopped calculating after this move. And what she missed is so hard to find:



POSITION AFTER 15. ... Bxb2

After 16. Rb1 Ba3 (not 16. ... Rb8 17. Qc2 winning) 17. Rb3 Bc5 18. Qa1!, White is on top. This is the whole point of why 13. Nxc5 works! It is not easy at all to find all these moves!

- b) After 13. Bg3 g4, White did not like her position, but the engine is suggesting an insane line like 14. Bh4 (not 14. Nh4 Bxd4 when Black is great) 14. ... gxf3 15. Re1 Bg4 16. Nc4 fxg2 17. Qd3, and it is claiming that White is still equal. However, it is



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so hard for humans to understand why. This explains why Lei played 12. Bf4, and she cannot be blamed for that at all.

**12. ... Re8**

Immediately attacking the center.

**13. Qc2**

An attempt to attack the c6-weakness before Black is fully developed. However, Lei missed a tactic that is very unpleasant.

White did not want to play 13. Re1 because of 13. ... Bg4 14. Qc2 Qd7, when Black is fully developed with a good position.

**13. ... Nxe4! 14. Nxe4 Bf5 15. Rfe1 d5 16. Ne5 Bxe4 17. Qc3 Qf6 18. Bg3 Re6 19. Kh1**

White is preparing f2-f3, but perhaps this is not necessary.

Instead, 19. Rac1 (or 19. Rad1 as well) is a very logical move, developing White's last piece.

**19. ... a5**

Black missed a good chance for more with 19. ... h5, when Black is attempting to immediately use the weakness of the f-file that White had created with Kg1-h1 immediately. Ju played it a few moves later, but the urgency here was important. Let's see why.

After 20. h4 (ignoring the h-pawn with 20. f3 h4 21. Bf2 h3 is unplayable) 20. ... Rxe5, the engine suggestion, of course, leads to excellent compensation for Black. 21. dxe5 (not 21. Bxe5? Qxf2 winning) 21. ... Qg6 22. Qd2 (or 22. Rac1 Bxf2 23. Rxe4 Bxg3 24. Ra4 Re8 with a great position for Black) 22. ... a5 23. Rac1 c5, Black can play positional chess, which is hard to evaluate. The bishop on e4 is so solid and annoying, which is excellent compensation for the Exchange.

**20. f3 Bf5 21. a4 h5**



Here it comes! It is obvious that Black's position is better, and White must be very careful to maintain equality.

**22. Bf2 Rae8 23. Rf1?!**

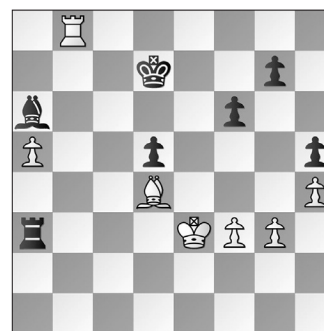
A passive move, but obviously she was afraid of the ... c6-c5 break. However, it was not working tactically for now.

White could hold with 23. h3 c5 24. dxc5 Ba7 25. Qxa5 Rxe5 26. Qxa7 Bxh3 27. Rxe5 Rxe5 28. Qb8+ Kh7 29. Qb3, when she equalizes.

**23. ... c5**

Now, the break works, and Ju decided to equalize instantly. After that, both players were precise until they found a repetition. They had to keep playing until then because, according to the rules of this match, they could not offer a draw.

**24. dxc5 Qxe5 25. Qxe5 Rxe5 26. cxb6 cxb6 27. Bxb6 Re2 28. Bxa5 Rxb2 29. Bc3 Rc2 30. Rfc1 Ree2 31. a5 Bd3 32. Rxc2 Rxc2 33. Bd4 Ba6 34. Kg1 f6 35. Rb1 Ra2 36. Ra1 Rd2 37. Bc3 Rc2 38. Bd4 Kf7 39. h4 Rc4 40. Rd1 Ke6 41. Kf2 Ra4 42. Ke3 Ra2 43. g3 Ra3+ 44. Kf2 Kd6 45. Rb1 Kd7 46. Rb8 Ra2+ 47. Ke3 Ra3+ 48. Kf2 Ra2+ 49. Ke3 Ra3+**



**Draw agreed.** Lei Tingjie once again surprised Black in the opening and tried to put immediate pressure on Ju Wenjun. However, Ju picked a rare line with 6. ... d6, which was not the best but required White to know precisely what to do.

If Lei knew how to follow up 12. Bh4 then she could have kept the pressure. However, she did not know — and, understandably, could not find — the lines which were hard to find and decided to play 12. Bf4, which immediately gave Black great play. Ju Wenjun was pressing and had some good chances but was not able to use them.

# 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.