

2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

JULY 11, 2023 ■ ROUND 05

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



Lei Tingjie

Round Score

1 - 0

Match Score

3 - 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.

GM Lei Tingjie's homecoming to Chongqing might have a bit more fanfare now. The challenger scored the first win of the 2023 Women's World Championship, defeating defending champion GM Ju Wenjun in the next-to-last game of the Shanghai portion of the match.

Lei now leads 3-2, and she will have the black pieces for Ju's attempt to equalize before intermission.

After showcasing deep preparation while surprising her opponent twice with 1. e4 during her two previous white games, Lei stuck with the king's pawn but chose a new opening against Ju's 1. ... e5. Lei decided to give her Ruy Lopez (3. Bb5) a rest, switching to Bc4. While Ju normally responds with the Italian (3. ... Bc5), she instead chose the Two Knights' Defense with 3. ... Nf6. But with White electing not to play 4. Ng5, play soon transposed to a normal Italian.

For once, Ju seemed more prepared out of

the opening, with Lei beginning to think as early as her seventh move. But one passive move from Black with 12. ... Bb7 handed Lei a serious initiative. From this point, she had a number of clear moves while it was increasingly difficult to suggest anything for Black.

As a result, Ju found herself making several committal pawn moves, beginning with 14. ... c5 and continuing all the way through the end of the first time control with 35. ... f6 and 40. ... f5.

Eventually, Lei was able to break through, and won the resulting endgame with relative ease.

After several back-and-forth contests showing each player's defensive resolve, this was the first game where one player was able to earn, keep, and convert the initiative. Lei is clearly in great form for this match, and it will be interesting to see how Ju and her team respond to the new match situation.

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



ITALIAN GAME (C54)
GM Lei Tingjie (2554)
GM Ju Wenjun (2564)
 2023 FIDE Women's Chess World
 Championship, Shanghai (5),
 07.23.2023

Annotations by WGM Tatev Abrahamyan

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4

After not finding any success with the Spanish, Lei decides to resort to another classic

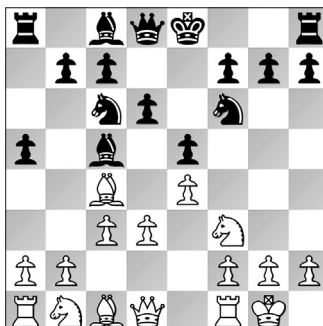
3. ... Nf6

Normally, Ju is an Italian player, but chose the Two Knights rather quickly in this game.

4. d3

4. Ng5 Lei had tried three times in the 2022 Charity Cup Preliminary without any success, though it is worth nothing that her opponents were GMs Vidit Gujrathi, Le Quang Liem and Pentala Harikrishna, the latter of whom is her opponent's second in this match. Clearly, Ju was not afraid to face this move.

4. ... Bc5 5. 0-0 d6 6. c3 a5



One of several set ups for Black here. It takes away the option for White to play with a2-a4 and b2-b4. It makes the a7-square available for the c5-bishop, but at the same time weakens the b5-square.

In some lines, the c4-bishop can move to b5 and threaten to capture on c6. Ju has played this move three times, all of which were online rapid or blitz games. This was also the move chosen by Carlsen in the final game of the 2021 Nepomniachtchi - Carlsen World Championship Match. Carlsen went on to win the game.

7. Bb3

A bit of a committal move, as the bishop does not have to go to b3 yet. Interestingly enough, Lei has faced this move several times herself, including against GM Hou Yifan. She spent around four minutes on this move, perhaps meaning that she wasn't expecting 6. ... a5.

Instead, 7. Re1 is the most common move in this position, with one *tabiya* occurring after 7. ... 0-0 8. h3 h6 9. Nbd2 Be6 10. Bb5. This position has been played hundreds of times. White maintains flexibility with this move, as in the future the c6-knight can be captured, or, alternatively, the bishop can return via the a4-square. It's worth mentioning 10. ... Qb8, which is an unusual idea for Black. The queen is headed to a7 after 11. Nf1 Qa7 12. Be3.

7. ... 0-0 8. Re1

Hou's choice in her game against Lei was 8. 3. Play went 8. ... h6 9. Re1 Be6 10. Bxe6 fxe6



11. Be3 Bxe3 12. Rxe3 Qd7 13. Nbd2 Rf7 14. Re1 Raf8 and White went on to win on move 57 in Hou - Lei, Chess.com, 2021.

8. ... Ba7

The bishop usually slides back to a7 in the Italian to prevent White from playing d3-d4 with a tempo. The bishop is just as useful on a7 as it is on c5.

9. h3 Be6

Instead, 9. ... Ne7 was tried by Sindarov against Aronian earlier this year. White was able to win with 10. d4 Ng6 11. Be3 h6 12. Nbd2 Re8 13. Qc2 in Aronian - Sindarov, Astana, 2023.



10. Bc2

it makes more sense to me to keep the bishop pair, rather than capture on e6, as White has already move the bishop twice. If the bishop were still on c4, capturing on e6 would have been a viable option.

10. ... h6 11. d4 exd4 12. Nxd4

Capturing with the pawn would have forced Ju to make a decision here: 12. cxd4 d5 (or 12. ... Nb4!? to avoid the below mess) 13. e5 Ne4 Thematic! The pawn sacrifice is temporary. White must also be careful now.

- a) Correct is 14. Nc3 f5, as Black must maintain the knight on e4 (not 14. ... Nxc3? 15. bxc3 when Black's position is strategically awful) 15. exf6. This is the type of headache Black could have avoided with 12. ... Nb4. Instead, she must make a choice.

- a1) With best play, Black can justify 15. ... Nxf2 when the position gets very sharp. Of course, it is nice to have the engine on our side! White will respond

with 16. Kxf2 Nxd4 17. Nxd4 Qxf6+ 18. Kg1 Bxd4+ 19. Kh1 Bxh3 20. Be3 (not 20. gxh3 Qh4 winning) 20. ... Bxg2+ 21. Kxg2 Bxe3 22. Qxd5+ Kh8. I think this is a fair point to stop. White has a very weak king and a piece against three pawns. With good play, the game should end in a draw as White has to try to get the queens off the board and enter some kind of endgame.

- a2) Instead, if Black tries 15. ... Rxf6 16. Nxe4 dxe4 17. Rxe4 Bd5 18. Bb3!, White maintains the pawn.



POSITION AFTER 18. Bb3!

- b) White cannot keep the pawn after 14. Bxe4 dxe4 15. Rxe4 Bd5 (see diagram) If White gets greedy with 16. Rg4, she will find herself in other trouble after 16. ... f5! 17. exf6 Qxf6.



POSITION AFTER 15. ... Bd5

12. ... Bd7

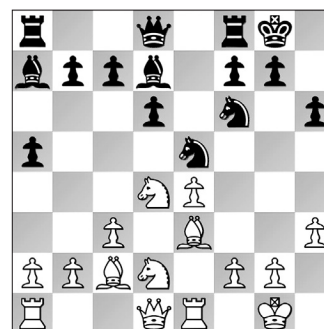
This is a concession for Black.

Instead, with 12. ... Nxd4 13. cxd4 d5 14. e5 Ne4 We get a similar position to what we saw with 12. cxd4, except without a pair of knights.

Now White can try 15. Nc3 f5 16. Ne2 (not 16. exf6 is not as good here as after 16. ... Qxf6 the f2-pawn comes under immediate attack) 16. ... Qh4 17. g3 Qe7 when Black can claim that the inclusion of g2-g3 is helpful as it weakens the white king slightly.

After 18. Nf4 Bf7, the position remains unbalanced. While White has the better center and a passed pawn, Black can start an attack with ... Kg8-h8, ... Rf8-g8 and finally ... g7-g5. Compared to the game, this unclear try certainly offered Black more chances. Surely, Ju wishes she had this one back.

13. Be3 Ne5 14. Nd2



White's play is very easy here as her next moves are very natural: f2-f4, Qd1-f3, Ra1-d1, simply grabbing more space and putting pieces in the center.

14. ... c5

This is definitely not a move that Black is happy to play as it weakens the d6-pawn and

PHOTO: BONHAGE / FIDE

does not make the a7-bishop's life any better. But given how easy her opponent's play is, she must have felt that she had to change the flow of the game somehow.

15. N4f3 Bc6 16. Nxe5 dxe5 17. a4

The pawn structure has changed and it was clearly in White's favor. The a7-bishop is now permanently out of the game. White did not have to make any concessions to achieve this.

17. ... Qe7 18. Qe2

My top choice would have been 18. Qf3, with the idea of transferring the knight to f5 with Nd2-f1-g3.

18. ... Rfd8 19. Red1 Bb8 20. Qc4

Lei's idea is to play on the queenside.

20. ... b6 21. b4



Again, Black has to make a commitment here on whether to exchange on b4 or leave the pawns be as they are. This is an extremely difficult decision, as either way Black will face difficulties.

21. ... axb4?

The correct way of playing is with 21. ... Bd6, but again this is a difficult decision to make as after 22. b5 Bb7 there is truly no hope for the d6-bishop in this game.

However, due to the closed nature of the position, White will have to try for a pawn breakthrough with f2-f4 to push for a win, which will bring Black's dark-squared bishop back to life. Ju will have to put her bishop on c7 here and sit tight, which, of course, is not an easy task.

22. cxb4 Bd6 23. b5 Bd7

Once again, the pawn structure has changed and once again it favors White. Compared to the position without exchanging on b4, White has the clear plan of placing a knight on c4 and pushing a4-a5, which will give her a passed pawn and will weaken the c5-

pawn for Black. This is an option that did not exist before.

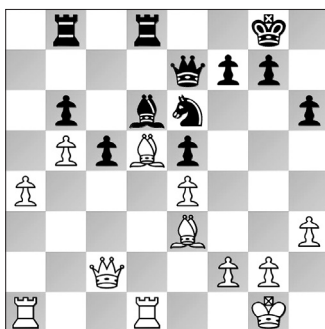
24. Qc3 Be6 25. Nc4 Bxc4 26. Qxc4

White enjoys a big edge here due to the bishop pair and the superior pawn structure.

26. ... Ne8 27. Bb3 Nc7

Ju maneuvers the only piece she can activate: the knight is headed to d4.

28. Qc2 Ne6 29. Bd5 Rab8

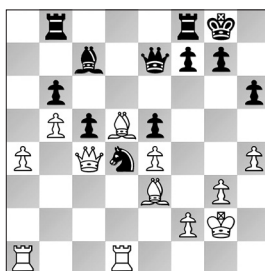


Now, White is the one who has to make a decision: to capture on e6 or allow the knight land on d4.

30. Bxe6

Very logical decision-making as White maintains superior minor piece and a grip on the light squares.

The engine prefers 30. g3 significantly. If Black tries 30. ... Nd4 31. Qc4 Bc7 32. h4 Rf8 33. Kg2, White can slowly improve with moves such as h4-h5, doubling on the a-file and eventually capturing on d4 then pushing a4-a5.



POSITION AFTER 33. Kg2

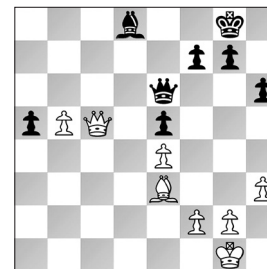
However, I think it is understandable that Lei did not want to allow the knight to sit on d4 and then eventually go for an opposite-colored bishop position.

30. ... Qxe6 31. Rd5 Be7 32. Rad1 Rxd5 33. Rxd5 Ra8

Stopping a4-a5. Ju spent around 14 minutes

on this move, trying to understand how scary it is to allow a5.

It turns out to be scary, as evidenced by 33. ... Rd8 34. Rxd8+ Bxd8 35. a5! bxa5 36. Qxc5:



POSITION AFTER 36. Qxc5

PHOTO: BONHAGE / FIDE



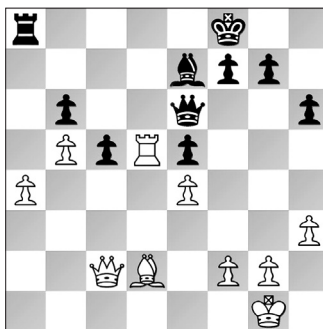
Now, due to the active queen and bishop, the b-pawn is extremely dangerous. We can follow a line that leads to four queens: 36. ... a4 37. b6 a3 38. b7 a2 39. b8=Q a1=Q+ 40. Kh2 The pair of White queens is too active! 40. ... Qd7 41. Qd5 Qxd5 42. exd5 with a strong advantage.

34. Bd2 Kf8?!

(see diagram top of next column)

A very normal looking move, but Black is still in a lot of danger.

The engine finds counterplay with 34. ... Qc8 which is extremely difficult to spot.



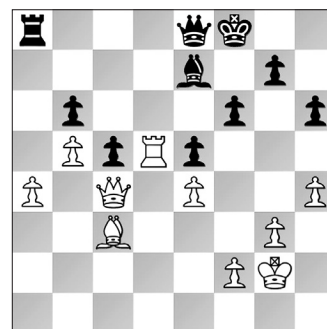
Once we see the idea, it looks very logical. The only way to come up with this is to ask what is White's only weakness in the position and how to attack it.

With 35. Rxe5 Qd7 36. Rd5 Qa7 The a4-pawn is the only weakness for White and Black is happy to get rid of this pesky pawn as it also stops the a4-a5 breakthrough.

35. Bc3 f6

Another pawn move that Ju must not have been happy to make. Even with limited material, her king is vulnerable and the dark-squared bishop is shut in even more.

36. Qb3 Qc8 37. Qc4 Qe8 38. g3 Qc8 39. Kg2 Qe8 40. h4



Again, White's moves are extremely easy to make, especially in order to reach move 40. Lei does not have to make any kind of big decisions and can simply improve her position.

40. ... h5?

Making a committal decision on move 40, which gives White another target. However, it is hard to suggest an "improvement" for Black.

An extremely difficult decision to make on move 40, or any other move for that matter, is whether to play 40. ... g5!?. At least, it makes the eventual f2-f4 push somewhat risky for White, too, as it will expose her king.

41. Bd2 Rb8 42. f4!

White is now optimally positioned for this breakthrough.

42. ... exf4 43. Bxf4 Rb7

Or 43. ... Rd8 44. Bc7 Rxd5 45. Qxd5, and the b6-pawn falls.

44. Qe2

Now we see the problem with having the pawn on h5.

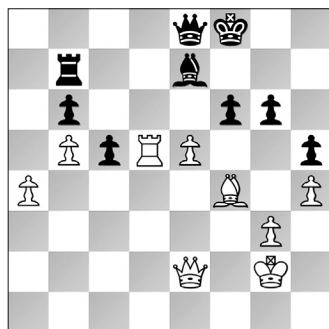
44. ... g6

It is difficult to part ways with the h5-pawn, but after this move, the king's position falls apart.





45. e5!



The problem with having a weak king is that it's a permanent weakness and can become an issue at any point in the game when queens are still present. It might have been difficult to foresee that the king would be the main issue for Black but the ... f7-f6 and ... h7-h5 pawn

pushes led to major issues on the kingside.

45. ... Qa8 46. Qf3

White is now completely winning, as Black will either get checkmated or be forced to enter a lost endgame.

46. ... f5 47. Rd7 Ra7 48. Qxa8+

Entering a winning endgame.

48. ... Rxa8 49. e6 Rxa4 50. Rb7 Ra8

The push with 50. ... c4 loses immediately to 51. Bh6+ Ke8 52. Rb8+ Bd8 53. Bg5.

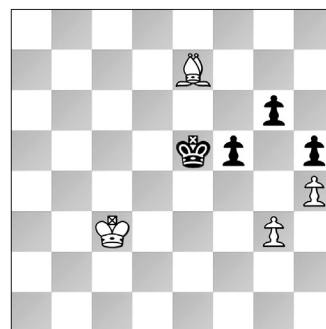
51. Rxb6

Finally, the weak b6-pawn falls. The f4-bishop is perfectly positioned to help the b5-pawn march down the board.

51. ... c4 52. Rc6 Bd8 53. b6 Ra2+ 54. Kf3

Rb2 55. Rc8 Rb3+ 56. Ke2 Rxb6 57. Rxd8+ White picks up a piece and soon, the point.

57. ... Ke7 58. Rc8 Rxe6+ 59. Kd2 Re4 60. Kc3 Kf7 61. Rxc4 Re8 62. Rc7+ Kf6 63. Bg5+ Ke5 64. Re7+ Rxe7 65. Bxe7 and Black resigned.



A very nice win by the challenger! ♠

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.