

2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

JULY 16, 2023 ■ ROUND 08

BY **JJ LANG** ■ ANNOTATIONS BY **IM NAZI PAIKIDZE**



Ju Wenjun

Round Score

1 - 0

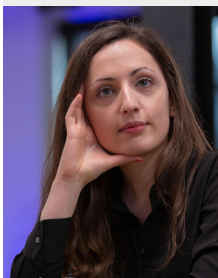
Match Score

4 - 4



Lei Tingjie

NAZI PAIKIDZE



IM Nazi Paikidze is a Russian-born Georgian-American chess player currently residing in the Las Vegas area. She has won two U.S. Women's Championships, the

first in 2016 with an impressive $8\frac{1}{2}/11$ score in her second appearance and the second in 2018 with a tiebreak victory over WIM Annie Wang. Paikidze won a number of individual and team medals in her youth, and, at the age of 16, was ranked 35 in the world of FIDE's list of top women by rating. In 2013, she switched her federation to the U.S.

Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of studying chess is that, despite all the rich, complex opening theory that strong players must know, there is always the possibility that one's opponent will try to eschew theory altogether and "just get a game." In a just world, such attempts would be profoundly refuted.

Instead, players at all levels are realizing that, sometimes, it is practically simpler to outplay one's opponent from an equal position than to try to obtain a theoretically objective edge.

After struggling to achieve anything with her preferred 1. d4 in her previous three games with white in the 2023 Women's World Championship, defending champion GM Ju Wenjun decided it was time to "just get a game." And the game she got turned out to be a wildly entertaining, complex, and instructive battle that resulted in her first win in the match. The score is now tied 4-4 with four games remaining.

Out of the opening, Lei made an interesting choice to clarify the center and stick Ju with the notorious "hanging pawns" on c4 and d4. Conventional wisdom says White should be looking for dynamic breaks to trade these pawns before she is saddled with weaknesses in the endgame, but Ju instead found ways to play off long-term active pieces that compensated for her slightly vulnerable pawns.

Lei struck back by correctly sacrificing a pawn, judging that her position would be too passive otherwise.

From here, Ju continued to push while up a pawn, but one unforced trade of knights brought the position dangerously close to the dreaded opposite-colored bishop endgame. But with one pair of rooks still on the board, Lei missed a couple tactical shots to trade them off and ended up having to part with a second pawn and, consequently, her lead in the match.

RETI OPENING (A06)

GM Ju Wenjun (2564)

GM Lei Tingjie (2554)

2023 Women's World Championship
(8), 07.16.2023

Annotations by IM Nazi Paikidze

1. Nf3 d5

The Reti Opening has been in Ju's repertoire, but it is her first departure from 1. d4 in this match.

2. e3 c5 3. b3 Nc6 4. Bb2 a6 5. g3



Both sides have finished development and the evaluation is equal. However, this position

their roles defending and supporting the pawns.

16. ... Be7 17. Qe3 Rac8 18. Rfe1 Bg6

This is a bit passive. Instead, with 18. ... Qb6!? 19. Ba1 a4 20. Rb1 Qa7, White is still slightly better, but this was a good option for Black.

19. Qb3

White had an interesting opportunity to change up the position:

A seriously interesting candidate move was 19. d5!?. After exd5 20. Bxf6, Black must make a serious concession on her kingside.

a) The natural 20. ... Bxf6?? loses on the spot



It is rare to see White play both e2-e3 and g2-g3 this early in the game, as it weakens the light squares. Clearly, Ju Wenjun wanted to avoid any theoretical discussions today, and instead wanted to get a simply playable position.

5. ... Qc7 6. d4 cxd4 7. exd4 Bg4

Instead, 7. ... Bf5 was interesting, putting some pressure on the c2-pawn. After 8. a3 (preferable to 8. c4?! Nb4 with more chances for Black) 8. ... Nf6 9. Bg2 b5, Black has equalized.

8. Bg2 e6 9. 0-0 Nf6 10. Nbd2 Bd6 11. c4 0-0 12. a3 a5 13. h3 Bh5 14. Qe2 Rfd8 15. Rac1

is easier to play with White.

15. ... dxc4

Black could have continued improving their position before making any major changes in the center.

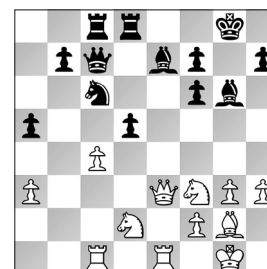
For instance, by playing simple moves like 15. ... h6 16. Rfe1 Rac8, White has no way to exploit Black's delay in capturing on c4. Of course, Black likely evaluated the hanging pawns structure as worse for White than it actually was.

16. bxc4

Now White has hanging pawns on d4 and c4, but all of her minor pieces are well placed in

because 21. cxd5 wins the pinned knight, as 21. ... Rxd5?? 22. Qe8+ forces mate!

b) Therefore, Black must play 20. ... gxf6, when White can end up on the favorable side of a material imbalance.



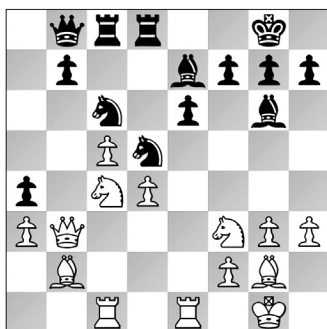
POSITION AFTER 20. ... gxf6

After 21. cxd5 Rxd5 22. Rxc6! Qxc6 23. Qxe7, the two knights should be preferred to the rook and extra pawn here, given that Black's pawns are almost all vulnerable and neither of the rooks have clear targets.

19. ... Qb8 20. c5

Opening up a nice path for the knight with Nd2-c4-b6. This was probably White's reasoning for avoiding 19. d5: she had a clear way to statically improve her position, so did not want to commit to such dynamic transformations.

20. ... Nd5 21. Nc4 a4!



A necessary pawn sacrifice. Otherwise, Black's position would become too passive once White's knight landed on the b6-square.

22. Qxa4 b5 23. cxb6 Nxb6 24. Nxb6 Qxb6 25. Ba1

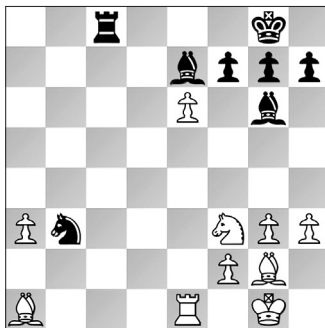
The dynamic alternative with 25. d5!? Qxb2 26. dxc6 Qxa3 27. Qc4 was also interesting. The position is equal, but White has practical chances with the outside passed pawn. Perhaps White did not want to clarify into this position, but that suggests she missed Black's next move.

25. ... Qa5!

Typically, we don't trade pieces when we are down material, but in this position, Black

has excellent chances of saving the endgame because of the good pieces as well as White's weak pawns on a3 and d4.

26. Qxa5 Nxa5 27. Rxc8 Rxc8 28. d5 Nb3 29. dxe6



29. ... fxe6?

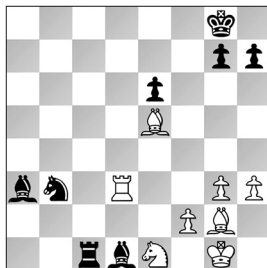
Black was very close to equalizing, but this is a big error, leaving the pawn on e6 forever weak.

Instead, 29. ... Bxa3! would have kept the position close to equal with 30. exf7+ Bxf7 31. Be5 Rc1. The extra f-pawn will not be enough for White to convert this endgame into a win.

30. Be5 Bxa3 31. Re3 Bc2 32. Nd4?

White misses a huge opportunity here. After a long sequence of only moves, White's position could have been +4!

The sequence begins by keeping pieces on the board with 32. Ne1! Bd1 33. Rd3 Rc1.



POSITION AFTER 33. ... Rc1

Black's pieces are certainly loose, but they do seem to hang together in defense of each other. However, White now clears the d3-square for the knight with 34. Rd8+ Kf7 35. Nd3 Rb1 36. Rd7+ (36. Ra8 Be7 holds) 36. ... Ke8 37. Ra7 Be7 38. Kh2. This was not an obvious winning line, as it was difficult to find all the correct moves and even difficult to realize just how positionally dominating this final position is.

32. ... Nxd4 33. Rxa3 Nc6 34. Bxc6 Rxc6

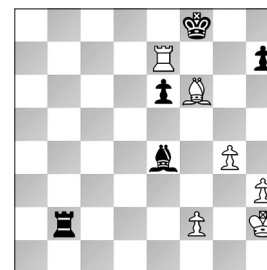
And now Black has equalized again. However, it is not an easy endgame to defend as it still requires a lot of accurate play.

35. Ra8+ Kf7 36. Ra7+ Ke8 37. Rxc7

Even with an extra pawn, opposite-colored bishop endgames are usually drawn. Because of this, Black's simplest path to a draw should be looking for tactical opportunities to force a trade of rooks.

37. ... Kf8 38. g4 Rc5 39. Bf6 Be4 40. Kh2 Rb5 41. Re7 Rb6?!

Black misses a great opportunity for a tactical shot with 41. ... Rb2!.



POSITION AFTER 41. ... Rb2

This tactical move would have ended the game in a draw rather quickly! 42. Kg3 (or 42. Bxb2 Kxe7 equalizing) 42. ... Rb3+ 43. Kf4 Bg2! winning one of the pawns back.

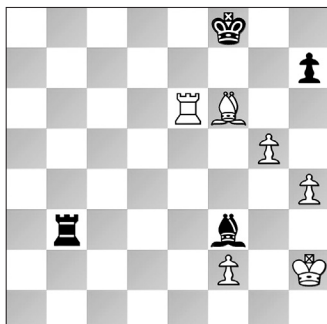
42. h4 Rb3?



PHOTO: BONHAGE / FIDE

Here, 42. ... Rb2! was still the best move.

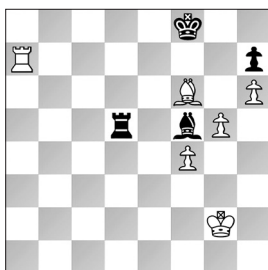
43. Rxe6 Bf3 44. g5



Now White has serious winning chances with the two extra pawns and active pieces.

44. ... Bg4 45. Re7 Bf5 46. Kg2 Bh3+ 47. Kg1 Bf5 48. h5 Rh3 49. h6 Rd3 50. Kh2 Rh3+ 51. Kg2 Rd3 52. f3 Rd7 53. Re5 Bc2 54. f4 Rd5 55. Re7 Bf5 56. Kf2?

A blunder! The only winning move was 56. Ra7.

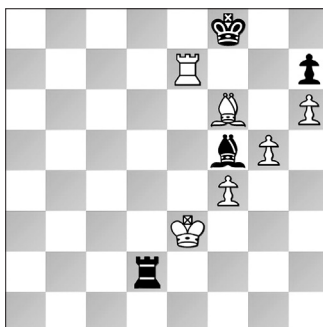


POSITION AFTER 56. Ra7

With the rook further away from Black's

king, White's bishop is free to defend the f-pawn. If Black tries to defend by going after the f-pawn, as in the game, then after 56. ... Rd2+ 57. Kf3 Rd3+ 58. Ke2 Rd4 59. Be5 she is out of ideas.

56. ... Rd2+ 57. Ke3



57. ... Rd6??

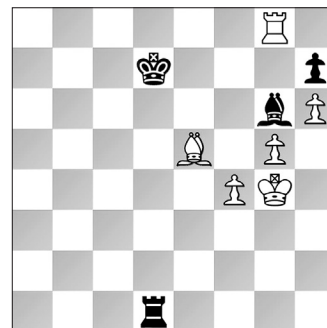
Black misses another great chance:

She should have played 57. ... Rd3+, when it is a draw again after 58. Ke2 Rd4! 59. Ke3. With White's bishop tied down to defending the e7-rook, the king must come up to defend the f4-pawn, allowing Black to repeat the position with 59. ... Rd3+.

58. Rc7

Now it's only a matter of technique. White is absolutely winning.

58. ... Rd3+ 59. Ke2 Rd5 60. Bc3 Ke8 61. Kf2 Kf8 62. Bb4+ Ke8 63. Re7+ Kd8 64. Rf7 Ke8 65. Rf8+ Kd7 66. Bc3 Bg6 67. Rg8 Rd6 68. Be5 Rd2+ 69. Kf3 Rd3+ 70. Kg4 Rd1



71. Rxc6! hxc6 72. h7, Black resigned.

An important win for Ju Wenjun to even the score in the match! The game was not one-sided, as Lei Tingjie missed a couple of opportunities to save the half point. This makes the match even more exciting, and I am looking forward to more decisive games.



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.

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