

2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

JULY 18, 2023 ■ ROUND 09

BY JJ LANG ■ ANNOTATIONS BY IM NAZI PAIKIDZE



Lei Tingjie

Round Score

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

Match Score

$4\frac{1}{2} - 4\frac{1}{2}$



Ju Wenjun

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.

GM Lei Tingjie's preparation with 1. e4 has been so exciting throughout the 2023 Women's World Championship that defending champion GM Ju Wenjun apparently wants to see as much of it as possible.

At least, that's one possible explanation for Ju's choice to switch to the Sicilian Defense after just one (successful) game in the Caro-Kann. Another, more plausible, explanation is that Ju was still caught off-guard in the third game after repeating the Ruy Lopez from game one, so she might have more faith in the element of surprise than she did then.

But, from a match perspective, it is certainly interesting that Ju switched from the ultra-solid Ruy Lopez to the ultra-solid Caro-Kann *after* going down a game in the match, only to switch to the much sharper Sicilian after tying things up.

One thing we can say for certain is that she is not trying to safely draw the remain-

ing games and take her chances in the tie-breakers.

In this game, Ju deviated first on the eighth move, eschewing a particularly complicated *tabiya* where White often ends up with their king on the e2-square.

Nevertheless, Lei still played the first novelty a few moves later. Ju had a dynamic, creative way to simplify the position, however, and it was not long before the players reached an interesting (but equal) endgame.

This was yet another well-played game, where both players were sharp, inventive, and accurate. Neither wanted to take excessive risks, but this game could hardly be called dull or even safe.

Hopefully, we will see the players test each other in another variation of the Sicilian this weekend. We could all learn something if they do!

There are only three games remaining in the match, which is still tied up.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, FOUR KNIGHTS VARIATION (B45)

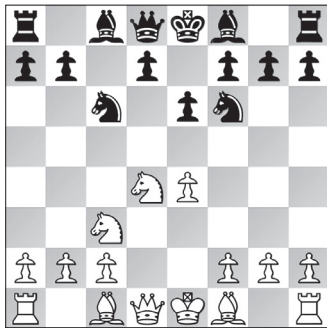
GM Lei Tingjie (2554)

GM Ju Wenjun (2564)

2023 FIDE Women's World Championship (9), Chongqing, 07.18.2023

Annotations by IM Nazi Paikidze

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6
5. Nc3 Nc6



It is exciting to see the Sicilian Defense: Four Knights Variation. The Sicilian has been in Ju's repertoire for a while, but this is its first appearance in the match.

6. Nxc6

The main alternative, 6. Ndb5 d6 7. Bf4 e5 8. Bg5, would have transposed to the Sveshnikov Sicilian. Black usually plays this move order when they want to avoid certain variations of the Sveshnikov such as 7. Nd5, which has been trendy since the 2018 match between Fabiano Caruana and Magnus Carlsen.

6. ... bxc6 7. e5

Alternatively, 7. Bd3 d5 8. 0-0 is the other main line in this opening.

7. ... Nd5 8. Ne4

If 8. Nxd5 cxd5 9. Bd3 Qc7 10. Qe2 Bb4+ 11. Kf1 (not 11. c3?? 11. ... Bxc3+ 12. bxc3 Qxc3+ losing instantly), White cannot castle and the position is equal.

8. ... Bb7

The more commonly played move is 8. ... Qc7. Bb7 is provoking f2-f4, after which the dark squares on White's kingside become vulnerable. The line continues with 9. f4 Qb6 10. c4 Bb4+ 11. Ke2 f5. This is a complicated position with hundreds of games in the database. The evaluation is close to equal, with a slight edge for White (even with the king on e2!).

9. Be2

An interesting move is 9. c4 Nb4 10. c5 Qb8 11. f4 Ba6, with an unclear game. A few players worth mentioning who have played this position as White: Caruana and Duda!

9. ... c5 10. a3



A novelty! It is a prophylactic move against ... Nd5-b4, as White is preparing to play c2-c4. The normal move is 10. 0-0. There are still

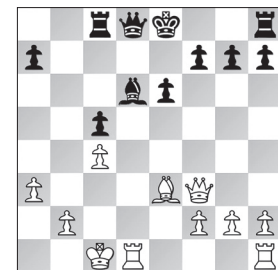
a few hundred games in the database after this move, most of them following 10. ... Qc7 11. Nd6+ Bxd6 12. exd6 Qc6 13. f3. This is a slightly better position for White, who still enjoys the pair of bishops.

10. ... Rc8 11. c4

Instead of retreating the knight back, Ju Wenjun came up with a creative solution:

11. ... Ne3! 12. Bxe3 Bxe4 13. 0-0

A very interesting continuation was possible after 13. Bf3 Bxf3 14. Qxf3 d5 15. exd6 Bxd6 16. 0-0-0



POSITION AFTER 16. 0-0-0

This is a double-edged position that is objectively equal, but the play is for three results!

13. ... Be7 14. Bf3

Bxf3 15. Qxf3 0-0

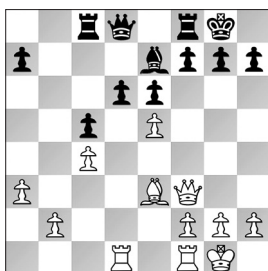
16. Rad1 f6

Since Black can't break through with the d-pawn, f-pawn it is!

Typically speaking, opening up the file for the enemy rook opposing one's queen is misguided. Here, White easily exploits the pin after 16. ... d6??.



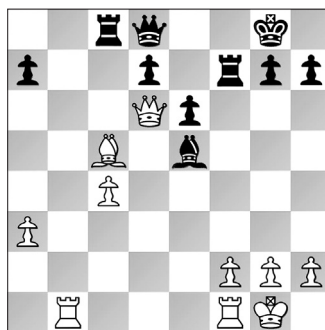
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POSITION AFTER 16. ... d6

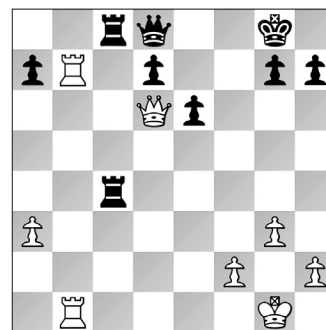
Simply put, 17. exd6 Bxd6 18. Bf4 e5 19. Bxe5 is winning.

17. Qg3 fxe5 18. Qxe5 Bf6 19. Qd6 Bxb2
The position is already equal. White has a



Black is forcing the trade of the bishops.
Also possible was 21. ... Bf6, but this is more to-the-point.

22. Qxe5 Rf5 23. Qd6 Rfxc5



26. ... R4c7 27. Kg2 a5 28. a4 h6 29. h4 Kh8 30. R1b2 Kh7 31. h5 Kh8

By moving the king back and forth, Black is showing that they can hold the position easily with a passive defense.



choice between taking the c- or d-pawn, but either way, Black is comfortable.

20. Bxc5
Or 20. Qxd7 Qxd7 21. Rxd7 Rf7 with equality.

20. ... Rf7 21. Rb1 Be5!?

(see diagram top of next column)

Another example of creative problem solving.

Both sides have equally weak pawns, and the all-heavy-piece endgame is equal with neither king particularly weak.

24. Rb7 R5c7 25. Rfb1 Rxc4 26. g3

(see diagram top of next column)

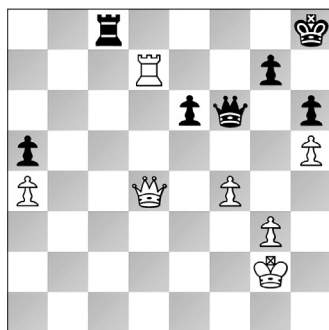
Black gets to be up a pawn, but White's compensation is clear: active pieces and the rook on the seventh rank.

32. R2b5 Rxb7 33. Rxb7 Qf6 34. Rxd7 Rf8 35. f4 Rc8 36. Qd4

(see diagram next page)

It's time to exchange queens before Black's rook and queen team up against White's open king.

36. ... Qxd4 37. Rxd4 Kg8
It's officially an endgame, which means it is



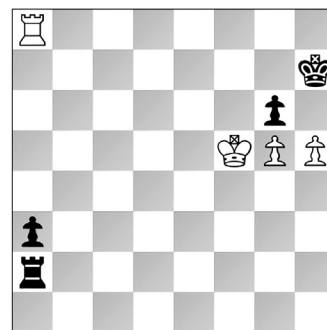
time for the king to come back to the center.

38. Re4 Rc2+ 39. Kf3 Ra2 40. Kg4 Ra3
41. Rxe6 Rxa4 42. Kf5
In this rook ending, both players showed precise play.

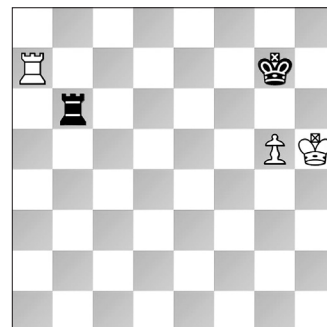
42. ... Kh7 43. Ra6 Ra1 44. Ra7 a4 45. Ra8 a3 46. g4 Ra2 47. g5 hxg5 48. fxg5 g6+!

(see diagram top of next column)

Sacrificing a pawn in order to double White's passed pawns. With draw offers not allowed, it is important to be forcing.



49. hxg6+ Kg7 50. Ra7+ Kg8 51. g7 Rb2 52. Kg6 Rb6+ 53. Kh5 a2 54. Rxa2 Kxg7 55. Ra7+ Kg8 56. Ra8+ Kg7 57. Ra7+ Kg8 58. Ra8+ Kg7 59. Ra7+, draw agreed.



It is difficult to win a chess game if your opponent doesn't make any mistakes!

You can read more about this match at our event website: new.uschess.org/2023-womens-world-chess-championship



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.