

2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

JULY 19, 2023 ■ ROUND 10

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



Ju Wenjun

Round Score

1/2 - 1/2

Match Score

5 - 5



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.

It's been 13 years since a tied world championship match was decided in the final two games, with Anand defeating Topalov in the final game of a tied match. In the Women's World Championship, it's never happened!

With a tied match heading into game 10 and a subsequent rest day, history would say this game would be the last realistic chance to land a decisive blow. During the final two rounds, players tend to be a bit cagey and reserved, reasoning that they would rather take their chances in the rapid tiebreaks than go "all in" during one of the final rounds.

Indeed, both defending champion GM Ju Wenjun and challenger GM Lei Tingjie have shown that they're more than capable of holding their own in slightly worse positions and more than adept at drawing theoretically drawn rook endgames. So, would we see a bloodbath?

Unfortunately, game 10 petered out to a draw relatively easily, but not for lack of effort. Ju stuck with 1. Nf3, which leveled the match for her in the eighth round, but Lei was once again moving quickly and clearly in her preparation.

By Ju's 15th move, she had already used half of her initial time allotment, but Lei was beginning to slow down too as her pieces began to gravitate towards the kingside. Either player could have easily wound up worse if they pressed too hard, but both players were surgically accurate from there. By move 26, the last set of minor pieces had traded off, and White's extra pawn was equally matched by Black's active rooks, all but guaranteeing the peaceful result.

Will these players make history in the final two games? Or will we get more opening surprises on Sunday? Chess fans may want to consider clearing their weekend plans to find out!

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



ENGLISH OPENING (A13)

GM Ju Wenjun (2564)

GM Lei Tingjie (2554)

FIDE Women's World Chess Championship (10), Chongqing, 07.19.2023

Annotations by WGM Tatev Abrahamyan

1. Nf3 Nf6

Lei deviates from her eighth game choice of 1. ... d5.

2. c4

Here a four-minute think on the second move implies that Ju was surprised by her opponent's first move.

2. ... e6 3. e3 d5 4. b3

After a successful result in game eight, perhaps Ju has shifted her strategy to playing structures instead of challenging her well-prepared opponent to theoretical battles.

4. ... c5 5. Bb2 Nc6 6. cxd5

(see diagram top of next column)

White's idea is to trade on d5, followed by d2-d4, inflicting Black with an isolated pawn.

6. ... exd5



Black can try to avoid the IQP with 6. ... Nxd5, but the downside is that developing the f8-bishop will be a problem as the g7-pawn is now a target. After 7. Nc3 (7. Be2 is weaker, allowing Black to develop the dark-squared bishop as the g2-pawn is loose, i.e., 7. ... Bd6 8. Bxg7 Rg8 9. Bb2 Rxc7 when things are unclear) Black already lacks a useful move! Play might continue 7. ... a6 (waiting for White to commit to moving the f1-bishop) 8. Ne4 and this already looks somewhat annoying for Black, as at some point ... f7-f6 will need to be played and Black will also have to deal with the threat of Ra1-c1.

7. Be2 a6

Keeping the option of ... d5-d4 to shut down the b2-bishop, while also preventing Be2-b5.

The immediate 7. ... d4 has the additional problem of 8. exd4 cxd4 9. Bb5 Bc5 10. Qe2+

Be6 11. Bxc6+ bxc6 12. Qe5 forcing Black to give up the pawn, although with compensation. After 12. ... Qd5 13. Bxd4 Qxe5+ 14. Bxe5 Nd5 15. 0-0 f6 16. Bd4 Be7 17. Nc3 White was for choice in Keymer – Grischuk, Astana 2023.

8. d4

Preventing ... d5-d4, and forcing the IQP.

If alternatively 8. 0-0 it's now easier to play 8. ... d4 as Be2-b5 is no longer an issue. One recent example went 9. exd4 cxd4 10. Re1 Be7 11. Na3 0-0 12. Nc4 Bf5 13. Nfe5 Nb4 14. d3 b5 15. Nd2 Rc8 and Black was already significantly ahead in Potkin – Najer, Moscow 2021.

8. ... cxd4 9. Nxd4 Bb4+

Of course, Black can immediately play ... Bf8-d6, but this is an annoying check to deal with, as it forces White to misplace one of her pieces.

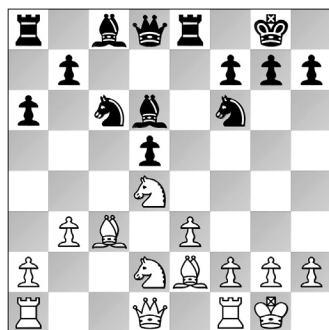
10. Bc3

After 10. Nc3 Ne4 11. Rc1 Qa5 12. Qd3 (12. Qc2 is worse due 12. ... Nxd4 13. exd4 Bd7 followed by Ra8-c8) 12. ... Ne5 Black gets the initiative.

10. ... Bd6

This is a small achievement for Black, as White would rather have the knight on c3.

11. Nd2 0-0 12. 0-0 Re8



We have reached a pretty standard IQP position, with the big exception of the placement of the d2-knight. While the d5-pawn is a long-term weakness, it does give Black more space. Generally speaking, the side that has the IQP looks for active piece play and potentially a kingside attack, while the side playing against the IQP is happy to trade minor pieces and enter an endgame.

13. Bb2

Alternatively White can choose to transition to a hanging pawns structure with 13. Nxc6 bxc6, but with the knight misplaced on d2, this is comfortable for Black as the standard plan to pressure the pawns with Ra1-c1 and Nc3-a4 is not possible. Here 14. Qc2 a5 15. Rac1 Bd7 leaves both sides with equal chances.

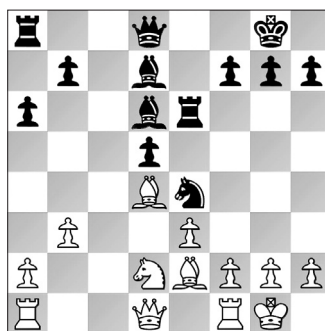
13. ... Bd7 14. N2f3

This move looks very logical, but it's not ideal here as it cedes the e4-square to its counterpart. Perhaps White can try to make useful moves and wait for Black to make some kind of committal decision with 14. a3 Qe7 15. b4 and already White wants to capture on c6, as after ... b7xc6 she will have control of the c5-square.

14. ... Ne4 15. Nd2

Admitting one's mistake by "retracting" a move is psychologically very difficult! The alternative 15. Rc1 Qf6 followed by Qf6-h6 would give Black the initiative.

15. ... Nxd4 16. Bxd4 Re6



With the not-so-subtle threat of ... Bd6xh2.

17. f4

White has to deal with the threat, but the downside of this move is the weakening of the e3-pawn. What are the alternatives?

(a) 17. Rc1?? shows us Black's idea: 17. ... Bxh2+ 18. Kxh2 Qh4+ 19. Kg1 Rh6 and game over.

(b) 17. g3 Rg6 with the idea of ... Qd8-h4.

(c) 17. h3? only gives Black a target on the kingside with 17. ... Rg6.

(d) 17. Nxe4 dxe4 solves Black's problem of the isolated pawn, and she no longer has any structural issues.

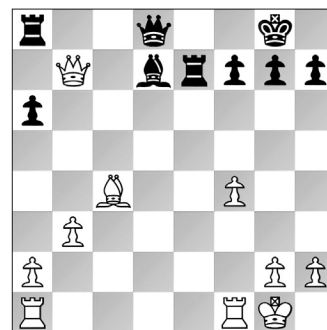
17. ... Bc5

Lei chooses the most forcing continuation after an eight-minute think.

18. Nxe4 Bxd4 19. Qxd4 Rxe4 20. Qxd5 Rxe3 21. Bc4 Re7 22. Qxb7

(see diagram top of next column)

This is the position Lei had to evaluate when she played 17. ... Bc5, as everything up until now was forced. Black has given up a pawn but will have good compensation due to the



activity of the rooks. White's king is slightly weak because of the f4-pawn — she would love to be able to put the pawn back on f2!

22. ... Bb5 23. Qd5 Rd7

Accurate. The point is to force White to recapture on c4 with a pawn. To wit: 23. ... Bxc4 24. Qxc4 Qb6+ 25. Kh1 Rae8 and while Black has enough for the pawn even here, White no longer has the isolated c-pawn to worry about.

24. Qe5 Qb6+ 25. Kh1 Bxc4 26. bxc4 Qc6

With the dual threats of ... Qc6xc4 and ... Rd7-d2.

27. Rfe1

If 27. Rac1 Rd2 28. Rg1 Rxa2 White still loses



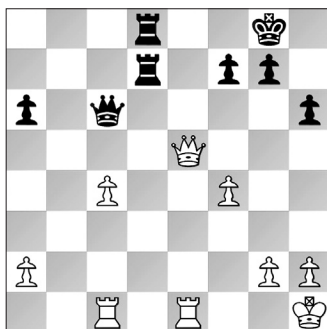
PHOTO: BONHAGE / FIDE

a pawn but under worse circumstances, as the g1-rook cannot move.

27. ... h6

Not 27. ... Qxc4?? 28. Qe8+ Rxe8 29. Rxe8 mate.

28. Rac1 Rad8



Now ... Rd7-d2 is coming, and White won't be able to hang on to the extra pawn forever.

29. h3

Here 29. Qe4 is met with 29. ... Qxe4 30. Rxe4 Rd2 31. c5 Rc2!.

29. ... Rd2 30. Re2 Rd1+ 31. Rxd1 Rxd1+ 32. Kh2 Qxc4 33. Qe8+ Kh7 34. Qe4+ Qxe4 35. Rxe4 Rd5

The resulting endgame is completely equal.

36. Ra4 a5 37. Kg3 g5 38. fxg5 hxg5 39. Kf3 Kg6 40. Ke4 Rb5 41. g4 f5+ 42. gxf5+ Rxf5 43. Ke3 Kh5 44. Ke2 Re5+ 45. Kf3 Rf5+ 46. Ke3 Re5+ 47. Kf3 Rf5+, draw. ♠



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.

PHOTO: BONHAGE / FIDE