

# 2023 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

APRIL 27, 2023 ■ ROUND 13

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



**Ian Nepomniachtchi**

Round Score

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

Match Score

$6\frac{1}{2} - 6\frac{1}{2}$



**Ding Liren**

## Match Recap

2023 WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP

	White	Result	Moves	ECO	Summary
1	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$	49	C85	Ding defends well after opening surprise.
2	Ding - Nepomniachtchi	0-1	29	E10	Nepo wins without much resistance.
3	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$	30	D35	Not much excitement; even Hikaru couldn't muster a recap!
4	Ding - Nepomniachtchi	1-0	47	A28	Strong middlegame play and an Exchange sac bring Ding his first win.
5	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	1-0	48	C84	Nepo strikes back with thematic Ruy Lopez kingside attack.
6	Ding - Nepomniachtchi	1-0	44	D02	Ding's positional London masterpiece ends in spectacular fireworks!
7	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	1-0	37	C07	Ding quells Nepo's initiative with Exchange sac, but the clock is a piece.
8	Ding - Nepomniachtchi	$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$	45	E28	A trendy Nimzo gives Ding real chances, but Nepo holds the draw.
9	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$	82	C65	Ding employs the Berlin, holds the draw, but Nepo didn't make it easy.
10	Ding - Nepomniachtchi	$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$	45	A28	Resilient defense gives Nepo an easy draw.
11	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$	39	C84	After a critical moment on move 19, the game fizzles out to a draw.
12	Ding - Nepomniachtchi	1-0	38	D04	Nepo's flawless game crumbles in complications, Ding levels match!
13	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$	40	C84	Passive opening gives Ding brief shot, Nepo recovers, settles for draw.

With no rest for the weary after a dramatic and hectic game 12, GM Ian Nepomniachtchi did not take many risks in drawing the penultimate game of the match with the

white pieces.

GM Ding Liren seemed prepared for Nepo's latest deviation in the Anti-Marshall variation of the Ruy Lopez, and earned a

small advantage out of the opening after a couple of uncharacteristically passive moves from Nepomniachtchi.

While the opening was not a success for

White, keeping the edge proved difficult for Ding, at one point resting on a counterintuitive continuation on move 24 that rested on a knight sacrifice. After missing this, Nepomniachtchi quickly equalized.

Ding once again showed a readiness to sacrifice an Exchange rather than suffer for the sake of holding onto material equality. The position was imbalanced but, without incredibly precise play, impossible for White to prove an edge. Nepomniachtchi allowed a repetition of moves shortly thereafter.

With the score tied headed into the final round, and neither player showing a particular willingness to take risks in this game, it is quite likely that tiebreaks will be looming.

Interestingly, this was the first time Ding had fully equalized (let alone claimed an advantage) playing 1. ... e5 as Black this match, which could suggest either that Nepomniachtchi's well of ideas is drying up, or that he is saving a few ideas for the impending tiebreaks.

## RUY LOPEZ, MARTINEZ VARIATION (C84)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2792)

GM Ding Liren (2788)

FIDE World Chess Championship (13), Astana, 04.27.2023

Annotations by IM Nazi Paikidze

After a roller-coaster of a game in round 12, it was hard to predict anything for round 13. It



is every chess player's dream to bounce back with a win right after a devastating loss, but it is certainly not an easy task. especially given the current match situation: with only two classical games left, neither of the players can afford to take big risks.

### 1. e4 e5

No surprises here.

### 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Be7 6. d3

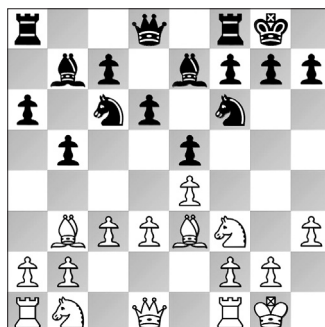
Nepomniachtchi chooses the Ruy Lopez, Anti-Marshall variation once again.

In the first round, 6. Bxc6 was played, but it has not been repeated.

### 6. ... b5 7. Bb3 d6 8. c3

In round 11, 8. a3 was Nepomniachtchi's choice.

### 8. ... 0-0 9. h3 Bb7 10. Be3



The first surprise of the game! According to the database, this move has only been played a few times previously. The idea of developing the dark-squared bishop so early is to prepare an early central push with d3-d4. An interesting idea, but it didn't seem to

surprise Ding, as he continued to play his moves quickly.

In round five, 10. a4 brought Nepo a win. However, it was a logical choice to not repeat this move, as there is no doubt that Ding would be extremely prepared and ready for this line if it happened again.

### 10. ... Na5 11. Bc2 c5 12. Nbd2

We are seeing typical Ruy Lopez moves.

### 12. ... Re8

With this move Black is preparing ... Be7-f8 followed by ... d6-d5!. Successfully opening up the center with ... d6-d5 can take Black's position from equal to better.

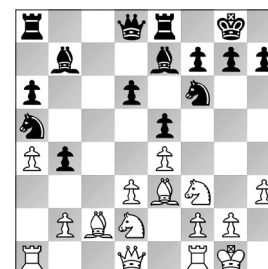
### 13. a4

Nepo is still blitzing his moves, so clearly the game is following his preparation.

### 13. ... h6

Ding chooses a prophylactic move. Since White's bishop is already developed on e3, it has an option to go to g5 at the right moment, then exchange on f6 and make Black's ... d6-d5 idea weaker. Therefore, Ding's decision to be prophylactic is absolutely justified.

A tempting move was 13. ... b4!?, however, after 14. cxb4 cxb4



POSITION AFTER 14. ... cxb4



## 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 8½/11 score and the second in 2018 in a tiebreaker 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 2012, she began studying at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), and switched her federation to the U.S. in 2013.

White can play 15. Nb3! with the idea to bring the other knight to c4 (via d2), when White's position looks more pleasant after 15. ... Bf8. The objective engine evaluation is equal, but the position looks easier to play for White.

It would be a positional mistake to play 13. ... bxa4? 14. Bxa4. In similar structures, this is a mistake for the same reason it is no good here, as it allows White's bishop to activate and leaves Black's pawn on a6 permanently isolated and weak.

**14. d4**

Nepomniachtchi took a long think before committing to this move. White's plan all along has been to push this pawn, but the question he was trying to answer is: should White exchange the pawns on the queenside first? As it turns out, it would have indeed been better for White to include the pawn exchange.

For example, after 14. axb5! axb5 15. d4 cxd4 16. cxd4 exd4 17. Nxd4, now White's knight is attacking the pawn on b5, and at the same time planning to go to f5 and create threats on the kingside. The position is still objectively equal, but this version would give White more chances.

**14. ... exd4 15. cxd4 cxd4**

An important choice. Wrong is 15. ... c4?



POSITION AFTER 15. ... c4?

when 16. axb5 axb5 17. d5 would have been a very risky continuation for Black. The queenside pawns look nice, but they are actually quite weak, especially the pawn on b5.

**16. Nxd4 Nc4**

Bringing your corner piece towards the center is always a good idea.

**17. Nxc4**

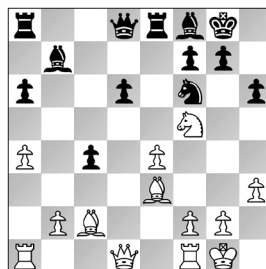
The only other logical option for White would be 17. Bf4, since they should not give up the dark-squared bishop for the knight. However, this move looks awkward, leaving both the knight on d4 and the bishop on f4 unprotected.

**17. ... bxc4 18. f3?!**



A natural-looking move to over-protect the e4-pawn, but it is also quite passive.

Tempting would be 18. Nf5, but it doesn't bring White any advantage after 18. ... Bf8!.



POSITION AFTER 14. ... Bf8!

Black shouldn't accept the pawn sacrifice on e4 right away, but after this prophylactic move, Black is completely fine and it's hard to find a strong continuation for White. (Note that taking the pawn would let White back into the game after either: 18. ... Nxe4? 19. Qg4 is pleasant for White; or 18. ... Bxe4 19. Bxe4 Nxe4 20. Qg4).

Therefore, it was better to play 18. Qe2! first. 18. ... Rc8 19. f3 and now we see that including Qd1-e2 was important for White to keep the position equal.

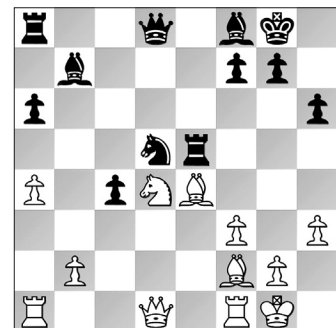
**18. ... Bf8 19. Bf2?!**

This was another passive move by Nepomniachtchi.

A better try was 19. Bf4 d5 20. e5 Nd7 (Not 20. ... Nh5? 21. Bh2 with a small edge for White) 21. Re1 Bb4 22. Re2 Qh4 when Black

is certainly doing well, but with accurate play White can survive.

**19. ... d5! 20. exd5 Nxd5 21. Be4 Re5?!**



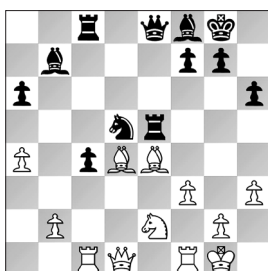
An unexpected, strange move. I am still unsure what Ding's idea was with this move. Lifting a rook is generally a good idea when you're trying to attack the opponent's king, but in this case, this rook doesn't have anywhere good to go. For example, if Black tries ... Re5-g5, White can simply kick it out with h3-h4.

It is not clear why Ding rejected 21. ... Rb8, which was the most logical-looking move. Black defends the bishop on b7 and plans to go ... Nd5-f4 followed by ... Qd8-g5 with deadly threats on the kingside.

**22. Rc1 Rc8 23. Ne2 Qe7?**

After this move, Black's advantage is fully gone.

Instead, Black had a much stronger continuation with 23. ... Qe8! 24. Bd4.



POSITION AFTER 24. ... Bd4

Here, Black must find the brilliant move 24. ... Ne3!! After the sacrifice, 25. Bxe3 Bxe4 26. fxe4 Rxe4 puts Black on top. Brilliant tactics displayed by the engine, but no one can blame Ding for not finding these moves, as sacrificing a full knight doesn't come to mind easily.

**24. Qd4!**

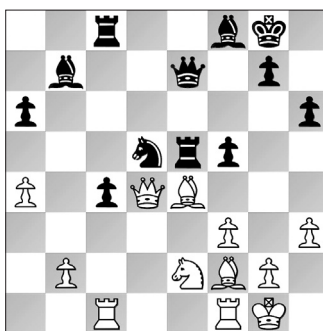
The most critical moment in the game and Nepomniachtchi found the best move in the position. He saved this game with this move, which he played quickly.

Tempting was 24. Bd4, but not good for White after 24. ... Re6! when Black keeps the initiative.

**24. ... f5!?**

(see diagram top of next column)

It takes a confident person to make this move! It looks risky, but Ding was sure the



Exchange sacrifice was the right thing to do.

**25. Bg3**

The only move, as moving the other bishop would hang the e2-knight.

**25. ... Rxe4 26. fxe4 Qxe4 27. Qxe4 fxe4**

After a series of exchanges, Black is down an Exchange but has sufficient compensation.

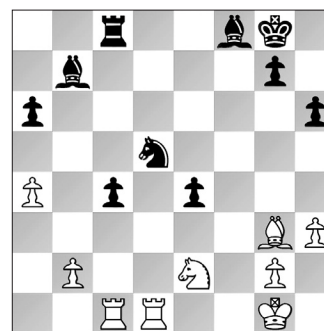
**28. Rfd1**

(see diagram top of next column)

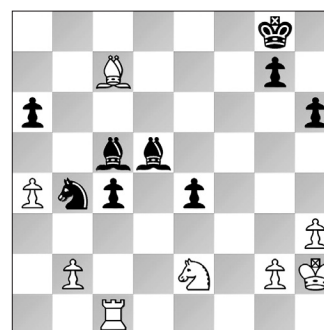
**28. ... Nb4**

The knight is headed to its dream spot on d3; however, allowing White to activate the rook on the seventh rank was a bit risky.

The alternative was 28. ... Bc5+ 29. Kh2 Be3, which I liked more for Black. Now, Ding does not allow White to activate their pieces as much, keeping the position equal.



**29. Rd7! Bc5+ 30. Kh2 Bc6 31. Rc7 Rxc7 32. Bxc7 Bd5**



In these types of endgames, with material imbalances, it can be hard to tell who is playing for a win. In this case, it's White, but Nepo had to find the most accurate moves to make it challenging for Ding.

**33. Nc3?!**

After this move the endgame is equal. Both players made very logical moves and found a three-move repetition in a couple of moves.

If White wanted to push for a win, the way to go was 33. a5! Nd3 34. Rd1, when White's idea is Bc7-b6! taking control of the important black squares.

**33. ... Nd3 34. Rc2 Bc6 35. a5 Kf7 36. Re2 Nc1 37. Re1 Nd3 38. Re2 Nc1 39. Re1 Nd3 40. Re2, draw.**

A draw was a fair result in this game. They both had some chances, but neither of them were willing to take risks. In the post-game interview, Ding used an interesting phrase: "It's still some dark ocean kind of position, so I didn't go further into it." This confirms my guess that they cannot afford to take risks and walk into unknown territories this late in the match. Going into the last round with an even score, Ding (who has the white pieces) will try to put pressure on Nepo, but it seems very likely that the match will move on to the playoffs. Either way, it will be a dramatic finish to this incredible match!

