

2023 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

APRIL 13, 2023 ■ ROUND 04

BY JJ LANG ■ ANNOTATIONS BY GM ELSHAN MORADIABADI



Ding Liren

Round Score

1 - 0

Match Score

2 - 2



Ian Nepomniachtchi

Match Recap

2023 WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP

	White	Result	Moves	ECO	Summary
1	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	½-½	49	C85	Ding defends well after opening surprise.
2	Ding - Nepomniachtchi	0-1	29	E10	Nepo wins without much resistance.
3	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	½-½	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.



**ELSHAN
MORADIABADI**

Today's annotations come once again from GM Elshan Moradiabadi. Moradiabadi is the second Iranian player to reach a 2600 FIDE rating. He moved to the United States to attend Texas Tech University in 2012, and has represented the United States since 2017. Moradiabadi is also a distinguished coach, having coached the U.S. national team in the 2019 World Team Championships and the Pan Am team that same year. He currently resides in Durham, NC.

What a week! Over just two days, the narrative surrounding the 2023 FIDE World Championship has gone from questioning whether GM Ding Liren was in acceptable form to whether GM Ian Nepomniachtchi can recover.

After a confident draw with the black pieces on Wednesday, Ding was all smiles and assured reporters he had settled into his element. Nepomniachtchi got very little playing white after choosing to open with 1. d4, but that should not be too much reason for pessimism, as nobody thought this would be his main weapon.

Instead, Ding followed Nepo's lead in also picking a different opening move in his second game with the white pieces, returning to an English Opening with 1. c4 that got him into hot water against Nepo just last year. But the Chinese grandmaster was comfortable, inadvertently following a game played by his second, GM Richard Rapport, for over ten moves before choosing an original pawn sacrifice for a huge center.

From here, Nepo's position was objectively playable, but by no means pleasant. He surprised commentators by continuing to move quickly, rather than taking the time to make sense of his position. This set Ding up to play a brilliant Exchange sacrifice, absolutely paralyzing Nepo's position. From there, Ding took his time, converting with the cold precision he is renowned for.

As play heads into the weekend, the match is tied once again, and momentum is firmly on Ding's side.

ENGLISH OPENING (A28)

GM Ding Liren (2788)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2795)

2023 FIDE World Championship (4),

Astana, 04.07.2023

Annotations by GM Elshan Moradiabadi

I am glad CLO allowed me to cover rounds two and four of the World Championship match, because now I can talk about the very different stories these players create through their moves. After a disastrous first two days, I compared coming back from such a start to being down three points in a match. Ding proved it was not the case as he managed to collect himself and be a different 'beast' in games three and four. Today he played ambitiously with a lot of willpower. Nepo collapsed under pressure, and Ding again showed his flawless technique and won convincingly.

1. c4

As mentioned by Nepo in the post-game conference, he did not think there was a high probability of Ding playing the English in this game. We all remember how Nepo had a crucial victory against Ding in the first round of 2022 Candidates in Spain.

1. ... Nf6

The predecessor from the Candidates: 1. ... e5 2. g3 c6 3. Nf3 e4 4. Nd4 d5 5. cxd5 Qxd5 6. Nc2 Nf6 7. Nc3 Qe5 8. Bg2 Na6 9. 0-0 Be7 10. Ne3 0-0 11. a3 Re8 12. b4 Ng4 13. Bb2 Qh5 14. h4 Bf6 15. Qc2 Nxe3 16. dxe3 Bf5 17. Na4 Bxb2 18. Nxb2 Nc7 19. Nc4 Re6 20. Rfd1 Nd5 21. Rd4 h6 22. Qd2 Rae8 23. Kh2 Bg4 24. Na5 Rf6 25. Kg1 g5 26. Nxb7 gxh4 27. Nc5 h3 28. Rxe4 hxg2 29. Rxe8+ Kg7 30. f4 Qh1+ 31. Kf2 Qxa1 32. Kxg2 Bh3+ and White resigned in Ding - Nepomniachtchi, Madrid, 2022.



2. Nc3 e5 3. Nf3 Nc6 4. e3 Bb4 5. Qc2 Bxc3 6. bxc3



This is a good sign! Ding is playing for a win, after all. I am personally connected to this position, as I won from the black side against GM Illia Nyzhnyk in the last round of the 2022 U.S. Open. In addition to my personal bias for this position, Black indeed has a few plans against White's ambitious move. [See Appendix 1.](#)

6. ... d6

The engine's favorite move. Perhaps 6. ...0-0 is a more practical choice, and one I also have experience with. [See Appendix 2.](#)

7. e4 0-0 8. Be2 Nh5

Nepo committed to this rather quickly. I suspect he had some in-depth analysis (dah!) and he was confident that he would recall it as he played through the next few moves. [See Appendix 3](#) for more coherent alternatives.

9. d4 Nf4 10. Bxf4 exf4 11. 0-0 Qf6 12. Rfe1 Re8 13. Bd3

Ding mentioned that he was already out of his preparation. Yet, he continued with energetic play and clear plans. This is what he is known for: crystal clear plans!

13. ... Bg4 14. Nd2!



Without hesitation. The alternative 14. e5 dxe5 15. Bxh7+ Kf8 only hands over the initiative to Black.

14. ... Na5 15. c5!

A very enthusiastic move from Ding Liren. It's interesting to note that this does not worry the engines much at all, but in a practical sense, White has something to play for now.

15. ... dxc5 16. e5 Qh6 17. d5 Rad8 18. c4 b6 19. h3 Bh5 20. Be4!



Another excellent idea, though engines like Qc2-c3 followed by retreating the bishop to c2 a tad better. This move keeps the knight

PHOTOS: COURTESY FIDE / SHTOURMAN (LEFT), FIDE / BONHAGE (RIGHT)



on a5 at bay. Also, the e5-pawn is tactically protected thanks to the Be4xh7+ idea.

20. ... Re7 21. Qc3 Rde8 22. Bf3 Nb7 23. Re2 f6

The knight needs the d6-square. However, this leaves White with a monstrous center.

24. e6 Nd6 25. Rae1 Nf5?!

The beginning of a strategic catastrophe.

After 25. ... Bg6 the engine suggests the odd 26. Ra1!. Now, after 26. ... Qg5 27. a4 a5 28. Ree1! White has some chances associated with some Ra1-a3, Bf3-g4, or even Bf3-Be4 plans. It appears that White is maintaining long-term pressure by 'dillydallying' his pieces around Black's queen. I am not convinced White is even that much better, but it is certainly unpleasant for Black. After 28. ... Qh6 29. Bg4 Kf8 30. Qb3 Qg5 31. Nf3 Qh6 the game would go on.

26. Bxh5 Qxh5 27. Re4 Qh6 28. Qf3 Nd4??



Nepo walks into a strategically losing position where White dominates the board with his knight. It reminds me of the game Hort – Kurašica (1976) where Hort played 20. Rd6! and dominated the dark squares. [See Appendix 4.](#) A necessary move to stay in the game was

the unpleasant-looking 28. ... g5, after which White has nothing concrete.

29. Rxd4!

Ding returns the “favor” of Nepo’s second-round Exchange sacrifice. The remainder is an immaculate technical display by Ding.

29. ... cxd4 30. Nb3 g5?!

Bad, but it really does not matter.

31. Nxd4 Qg6 32. g4!

An accurate move, securing the f5-square.

32. ... fxg3 33. fxg3 h5 34. Nf5 Rh7 35. Qe4 Kh8 36. e7

(Around here, several commentators were debating whether White could “slow play” the position. One possibility was even walking the king over to the queenside, reminiscent of Karpov – Jussupow (1993) [as shown in Appendix 5.](#) – JJJL)

36. ... Qf7 37. d6!



Taking advantage of the move ... Kg8-h8.

37. ... cxd6 38. Nxd6 Qg8

After 38. ... Rxe7, White wins with 39. Nxf7+.

39. Nxe8 Qxe8 40. Qe6 Kg7 41. Rf1 Rh6 42. Rd1 f5 43. Qe5+ Kf7 44. Qxf5+ Rf6 45. Qh7+ Ke6 46. Qg7 Rg6 47. Qf8, Black resigned.

A neat victory for Ding. A step-by-step execution of his plans, tailored to perfection! It is amazing how fast he managed to come back from a barely recognizable shadow of himself to the man who won this game in style.

APPENDIX 1: WHY NOT 6. Qxc3?

The alternative 6. Qxc3 has proven to be too easy to handle these days.



POSITION AFTER 6. Qxc3

After 6. ... Qe7 White has three options here, which are deeply analyzed and give no advantage for White. In what follows I want to sketch the theory for you, especially as I have some practical experience here.

a) The direct 7. d4 is not going to offer White much play after 7. ... e4. Black seizes space and his control over the light squares (as you can see in the more principled line with Qc3-a3) secures a solid and easy game. For instance, in this correspondence game

from 2020, White got nowhere after **8. Nd2 d5** **9. Qa3** Or **9. b3 Bf5** with easy play for Black. **9. ... Qxa3** **10. bxa3 dxc4** **11. Bxc4 Be6** **12. Be2** **0-0-0** **13. 0-0** **h5** **14. a4 Bg4** **15. Bb5 Nb4**



16. a3 Nbd5 **17. f3 exf3** **18. Nxf3 Nc3** **19. Ne5 Be6** **20. Bb2 Nxb5** **21. axb5 h4** **22. Rae1 h3** **23. e4 hxg2** **24. Rf4 Nh7** **25. Rxf7 Ng5** **26. Rxc7 Rxc7** **27. Rxc7 Rxc7** **28. Kxg2 Nxe4+** **29. Kf3 Nd6** **30. h4 Rf8+** **31. Kg2** and a draw was agreed in a high-level battle between GM Jan Zidu and SIM Jens-Uwe Klügel, ICCF, 2020.

b) I have had some pleasant experiences from the white side after **7. a3**, but I should mention that it was only my opponent's inaccurate play that gave me the chance to activate my bishop pair. The idea is to cover the b4-square from possible checks after White plays d2-d4. In addition, White is eyeing on playing b2-b4 as well, but Black does still have a swift response with ... d7-d5.

Play continued **7. ... d5** **8. d4 exd4** **9. Nxd4 Nxd4** **10. Qxd4**. Now I think Black's most accurate move is **10. ... 0-0**. **11. cxd5** (another high-level correspondence game saw a rather quick draw after **11. Bd2 c5** **12. Qh4 dxc4** **13. Bxc4 Re8** **14. Be2 Bf5** **15. 0-0 Qd8** **16. Be1 h6** **17. h3** in Pessoa – Panitevsky, ICCF, 2021) **11. ... Rd8** **12. Bc4**



POSITION AFTER 12. Bc4

12. ... Nxd5! **13. 0-0 Nb6** and it is time for White to call it a day.

Practically, **10. ... c5** is also playable. Playing White, I won after **11. Qh4! 0-0?** This was an inaccuracy by my opponent, but Mickey Adams had already shown that Black can hold after some slight suffering thanks to active pieces and the simplicity of Black's play on the c- and d-files. **12. cxd5 Rd8** **13. Be2 Rxd5** **14. f3 Be6** **15. e4 Rd7** **16. 0-0 Nd5** **17. Qf2 Nc7** **18. Be3 b6** **19. f4 f5** **20. exf5 Bxf5** **21. Rfe1 Qf6** **22. b4 Nd5** **23. bxc5 Nxe3** **24. Qxe3 bxc5** **25. Qxc5 Qd4+** **26. Qxd4 Rxd4** **27. Bf3 Rad8** **28. Re7 Rxf4** **29. Rxa7 g5** **30. a4 g4** **31. Ra8 Rfd4** **32. Rxd8+ Rxd8** **33. Bb7 Rd7** **34. Bc8** and Black resigned in Moradiabadi – Percivaldi, Stockholm, 2019.

As an alternative, Adams' game continued with **11. ... Be6!**



POSITION AFTER 11. ... Be6

12. cxd5 Nxd5 **13. Bb5+ Bd7** **14. Qxe7+ Kxe7** **15. Be2 Ba4** **16. e4 Nc7** **17. Be3 Ne6** **18. b4 Rhc8** **19. bxc5 Nxc5** **20. Rb1 b6** **21. f3 Bc2** **22. Ra1 Rc7** **23. Kf2 Rd8** **24. Ra2 Bd3** **25. Rc1 Bxe2** **26. Kxe2 Rdc8** **27. a4 Nb3** **28. Rxc7+ Rxc7** **29. Rb2 Na5** **30. g4 Rc4** **31. Ra2 g6** **32. Kd3 Rc6** **33. g5 Ke6** **34. h4 Nb3** **35. Ra3 Nc5+** **36. Kd2 Nb7** **37. Ra2 Na5** **38. Kd3 Nb3** **39. Ra3 Na5** **40. Ra2 Nb3** **41. Ra3 Na5** when Howell secured the draw in Howell – Adams, London, 2019.

c) A tricky waiting move is **7. Be2** but Black's simple and principled play leaves very little room for White's bishop pair to shine. **7. ... d5** (7. ... 0-0 This is an attempt to play for a win. Although, I personally believe that Nepo should have followed the correspondence game below rather than this riskier try. **8. d4 Ne4** **9. Qc2 exd4** **10. exd4 Qb4+** **11. Bd2 Nxd2** **12. Qxd2 Qxd2+** **13. Kxd2 d6** **14. h3 Bd7** **15. Rhe1 Rfe8** **16. Bd3 Rxe1** **17. Rxe1 Re8** **18. Rc1 Ne7** **19. b4 a6** **20. Rc3 c6** **21. a4 f6** **22. Ra3 Be6** **23. Ne1 Kf7** **24. Nc2 Ra8** **25. Na1 a5** **26. bxa5 Rxa5** **27. Nb3 Ra7** **28. Kc3 b6** **29. a5 c5** **30. Be4** and a draw was agreed in Vitiugov – Kryvoruchko, Germany, 2019) **8. d4 exd4** **9. Nxd4 Nxd4** **10. Qxd4 c5** **11. Qf4 Be6** **12. cxd5 Nxd5** **13. Bb5+ Kf8**



POSITION AFTER 13. ... Kf8

14. Qe4 Rd8 **15. 0-0 Bd7** **16. Qc4 Bxb5** **17. Qxb5 b6** **18. Rd1 f5** **19. Bd2 Kf7** **20. a3 Rd7**



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21. Be1 Qe6 22. h3 and an All-American draw was agreed in Murray – Fleetwood, ICCF, 2019.

APPENDIX 2: BLACK'S SIXTH MOVE ALTERNATIVES A MORE PRACTICAL CHOICE?

When I was trying to play for a win, my choice was **6. ... 0-0**.



I consider this move more flexible and easier to play. Black has four plans after White's e3-e4: First, Black could try for ... a7-a6 and ... b7-b5 on the queenside. Second, Black could play ... d7-d6 and reroute the knight from c6 to g6. Third, Black could play ... d7-d6 but instead follow up with ... Nf6-h5-f4, like Nepo did. Finally, after ... d7-d6, Black could try ... h7-h6 and ... Nf6-h7 followed by ... f7-f5.

My U.S. Open game continued **7. d3 a6 8. Be2 b5 9. d4 e4 10. Nd2 bxc4 11. Nxe4 Nxe4 12. Qxe4 d5 13. Qf4 Re8 14. Bd1 Na7 15. a4 Rb8 16. Bc2 Rb6**



17. Rb1 Rxb1 18. Bxb1 Bd7 19. Bc2 Nc8 20. Ba3 a5 21. Kd2 Nb6 22. Rb1 h6 23. h4 Bxa4 24. Bxa4 Nxa4 25. Rb7 Re6 26. g4 Rb6 27. Rxb6 cxb6 28. g5 hxg5 29. hxg5 Qe8 30. g6 fxg6 31. f3 b5 32. Qg5 Nxc3 33. Kxc3 b4+ 34. Bxb4 axb4+ 35. Kxb4 Qb8+ 36. Ka5 Qd6 37. Qg4 Qc6 38. Qg2 Kf7 39. Qc2 Qb7 40. Ka4 Qd7+ 41. Ka5 Qf5 42. Qg2 c3 43. Qh2 Qc8 44. Qc2 Qc4 and White resigned in Nyzhnyk – Moradiabadi, Rancho Mirage, 2022.

Another option would be to enter a forced, sharp line beginning with **6. ... e4** in which

Black hardly has any difficulty. However, Nepo was already surprised, and recalling such a sharp line in a critical game would require an in-depth review right before the game, which Nepo clearly had not done.

The line could continue with **7. Ng5 Qe7 8. f3 exf3 9. Nxf3 0-0 10. d4** which was tried just a day before this game in the Saint Louis Spring Classic in the game between Yakubov and Sevan, where Black went astray with 10. ... d5. Nevertheless, Black could instead continue on a sharp path with ... b7-b6 and ... Bc8-Ba6 while letting White castle and go for Nf3-h4-f5. I do not wish to make this analysis more complicated, so I leave that to you and your engine. 10. ... d6 (Or 10. ... b6 11. Bd3 Ba6 12. 0-0 Rae8 13. Nh4 g6 14. e4!



POSITION AFTER 14. e4

14. ... Nxe4 15. Nf3 Na5! 16. Bh6 Bxc4 17. Bxf8 Bxd3 18. Qxd3 Rxf8 19. c4 f5 20. g4 with a good position) 11. Bd3 Bd7 12. 0-0 Rae8 13. Ng5 h6 14. Nh7 Nxh7 15. Bxh7+ Kh8 16. Bd3 Na5 17. e4 f6 18. Bf4 Be6 19. Qe2 b6 20. Rae1 Qd7 with a promising position.

An alternative for White would be **10. Be2 d6** where Nepo could still opt for the plan of getting the bishop to the b7-square, leading to another sharp line as seen in 11. 0-0 Bd7 12. Rb1 b6 13. Nd4 Rae8 14. d3 Nxd4 15. cxd4 Ng4 16. Bxg4 Bxg4 17. d5 Qg5 18. Rf4



POSITION AFTER 18. Rf4

18. ... Qg6 19. Qd2 Re5 20. Bb2 Rf5 21. e4 Rxf4 22. Qxf4 f6 23. Re1 Bd7 24. Qf2 f5 25. e5 dxe5 26. Rxe5 f4 27. Re7 Rf7 28. Rxf7 Qxf7 29. Be5 Bf5 30. Qf3 Qe7 31. d4 Qb4 32. h3 Qe1+ 33. Kh2 g5 34. Bxc7 h5 35. d6 Kg7 36. Qxh5 resulting in a draw in Neto – Schwenck, ICCF, 2012.



APPENDIX 3: WAS 8. ... Nh5 A MIX-UP?



POSITION AFTER 8. Be2

I suspect that Black was remembering an idea of moving the knight to h5 after White had committed to d2-d3 and thus could not play d2-d4 in one turn. Here are some alternatives that have been tried for Black in this position.

Simplest is probably 8. ... b6 9. 0-0 h6 10. d3 Ne7! with a nice position.

The alternative with 8. ... a6 is slow now. After 9. 0-0 Rb8 10. a4 h6 11. a5!



POSITION AFTER 11. a5

11. ... Nh7 12. Re1 f5 13. d4 Kh8 14. Bf1 engines eventually show some balanced middlegames, but practically this is very good for White.

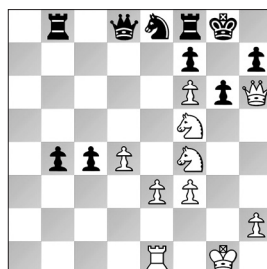
Interestingly, Black had a good result after 9. d3 Ne7 10. 0-0 h6 11. Nh4 g5 12. Nf3 Ng6 13. Re1 Nf4 14. Bf1 Nh7 15. d4 Qf6 16. Nd2 c5 17. a4 a5



POSITION AFTER 17. ... a5

18. Nb1 g4 19. Bxf4 Qxf4 20. Na3 Ra7 21. Nb5 Rd7 22. dxe5 dxe5 23. Rad1 Rxd1 24. Qxd1 Ng5 25. Nc7 Nxe4 26. Qc2 Bb7 27. Nd5 Bxd5 28. cxd5 Nd6 29. g3 Qg5 30. Qe2 e4 31. Rb1 Rb8 32. Rd1 f5 33. Qe3 Qxe3 34. fxe3 c4 35. h3 h5 36. Be2 Kg7 37. Kf2 b5 38. hxg4 hxg4 39. axb5 Rxb5 40. Rd4 Rb2 41. Ke1 a4 42. Bxc4 a3 and White resigned in Shtembuliak – Hevia Alejano, *Chess.com*, 2021.

White has also tried 11. a4 which led to a draw after 11. ... a5 12. d4 Bb7 13. Nd2 c5? (An improvement is 13. ... Ng6! with unclear play)



POSITION AFTER 13. ... Ng6!

14. dxe5 dxe5 15. Rd1 Ng6 16. g3 Qc8 17. Rb1 Qc6 18. f3 h5 19. Nf1 h4 20. Ne3 Qe6 21. Bf1 Rad8 22. Nd5 Rd6 23. Be3 Bc8 24. Rb2 Nxd5 25. cxd5 Qf6 26. Qf2 Bd7 27. f4 hxg3 28. hxg3 exf4 29. gxf4 Nh4 in Shtembuliak – Hevia Alejano, *Charlotte*, 2019.

APPENDIX 4: 20. Rd6!

SICILIAN DEFENSE (B30)

GM Vlastimil Hort (2600)
GM Bojan Kurajica (2525)
Vinkovci, 04.1976

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 e6 4. 0-0 a6 5. Bxc6 dxc6 6. d3 Qc7 7. e5 f5 8. a4 a5 9. Na3 Ne7 10. Nc4 Nd5 11. Re1 Nb6 12. Nxb6 Qxb6 13. b3 Qc7 14. d4 cxd4 15. Qxd4 b6 16. Qc4 Qd7 17. Be3 Ba6 18. Qh4 c5 19. Rad1 Qf7



20. Rd6! Bxd6 21. exd6 0-0 22. Ne5 Qb7 23. Bg5 Qd5 24. Be7 Bb7 25. f3 Qd2 26. d7 Rfb8 27. c4 Qc3 28. Kf1 Qd2 29. Qg5, Black resigned.

APPENDIX 5: THE KING WALK

QUEEN'S INDIAN DEFENSE (E17)

GM Anatoly Karpov (2760)
GM Artur Yusupov (2630)
Tilburg (5), 1993

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. g3 Bb7 5. Bg2 Be7 6. Nc3 Ne4 7. Bd2 Bf6 8. Qc2 Nxd2 9. Qxd2 d6 10. d5 0-0 11. Nd4 e5 12. Nc6 Qd7 13. Nxb8 Rfxb8 14. h4 a5 15. a4 Rf8 16. e4 h5 17. 0-0-0 g6 18. Bh3 Qe7 19. Kc2 Kg7 20. f3 Rh8 21. Rh2 Ba6 22. Nb5 Raf8 23. Kb1 Qd8 24. Qd3 Be7 25. Re2 Bc8 26. Bxc8 Qxc8 27. Rg1 Bd8 28. Na7 Qh3 29. Qc2 Re8 30. Nc6 Bf6 31. Rf2 Qd7 32. Qe2 Rhf8 33. Rh2 Rh8 34. Qf2 Ref8 35. Rf1 Kg8 36. f4 Qg4 37. Qf3 Re8 38. Qxg4 hxg4 39. f5 g5 40. h5 Ra8 41. Kc2 Kg7



42. Kc3 Ra6 43. Ra1 Rha8 44. b4 Kf8 45. b5 R6a7 46. h6 Bh8 47. f6 Bxf6 48. Rf1 Bh8 49. Nxa7 Rxa7 50. Rh5 Ke7 51. Rxg5 Ra8 52. h7 f6 53. Rg8 Rf8 54. c5 dxc5 55. Kc4 Kf7 56. d6 cxd6 57. Rxf8+, Black resigned.