

2023 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

APRIL 15, 2023 ■ ROUND 05

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



Ian Nepomniachtchi

Round Score

1 - 0

Match Score

3 - 2



Ding Liren

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.
5	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	1-0	48	C84	Nepo strikes back with thematic Ruy Lopez kingside attack.



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 (2005, 2011) and, more recently, a third-place finish in the 2022 American Cup. I. She

is renowned for her uncompromising 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.

Some players are dangerous because of their ability to play well in any type of position resulting from any opening. Others might lack that versatility but make up for it by being particularly dangerous in their element. By switching from 1. e4 to the queen's pawn in game three, GM Ian Nepomniachtchi was perhaps conveying a desire to demonstrate that he was the former type of assassin.

Instead, after defeating GM Ding Liren in the fifth game of the 2023 FIDE World Championship by returning to 1. e4 with compelling effect, he instead hammered home just how deadly he is in an open game with a nagging initiative.

Electing an early d2-d3 push in the Anti-Marshall that many commentators predicted would be a staple of this match, Nepomniachtchi was able to clearly conceptualize a dangerous attack out of a position where Ding admitted he thought he was perfectly safe.

The critical moment came close to the first time control, when Ding had under ten minutes on his clock compared to Nepomniachtchi's 40. He blundered with 37. ... hxc5?? in a rare concrete miscalculation from a player known for his accuracy. But, had he understood how dangerous Nepomniachtchi's attack would be once

he reached this position, he likely would have tried to avoid it in the first place.

In other words, Nepomniachtchi out-strategized Ding out of a position that both sides likely anticipated being integral to the match. Nepomniachtchi is a player known for streaky results, and there was some question as to how he would respond to losing his early lead. It certainly appeared as if he has buried those demons, producing such a fine attacking game in the process. The question now is whether Ding can do the same.

RUY LOPEZ, ANTI-MARSHALL VARIATION (C84)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi

GM Ding Liren

FIDE World Chess Championship (5)

04.15.2023

Annotations by WGM Tatev Abrahamyan

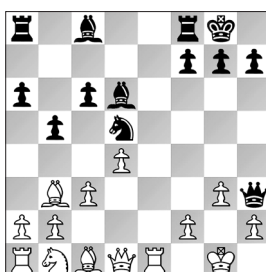
1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Be7 6. d3

Nepomniachtchi deviates from his experiment in game one, but still avoids the Marshall Attack.

In the first game, play continued with 6. Bxc6 dxc6 7. Re1, which eventually ended in a draw. White achieved a pleasant initiative, but it had more to do with the “surprise factor” than an objective edge that White could try to repeat.

The main move is 6. Re1, and after 6. ... b5 7. Bb3 0-0 8. c3 d5 we have reached the fearsome Marshall Attack. 9. exd5 Nxd5 10. Nxe5 Nxe5 11. Rxe5 c6.

This pawn sacrifice has proven to be theoretically sound. Black gets counterplay on the kingside with moves like ... Bd6-e7 and ... Qd8-h4, provoking g2-g3 and weakening the light squares around White’s king in the process. Play continues 12. d4 Bd6 13. Re1 Qh4 14. g3 Qh3:



POSITION AFTER 14. ... Qh3

This unclear position has been played thousands of times, and it has long been a main part of Ding’s repertoire.



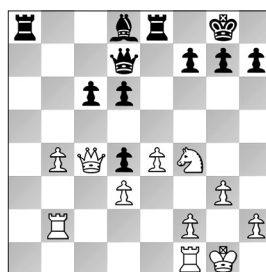
6. ... b5 7. Bb3 d6

Black is ready to play ... Nc6-a5 and force a trade of the b3-bishop for a knight, so White usually reacts in a way that preserves the powerful bishop.

Here, 7. ... d5 doesn’t make as much sense as after 8. exd5 Nxd5 9. Re1 0-0 10. Nxe5 Nxe5 11. Rxe5 c6 the d2-d3 move proves to be more useful than 8. c3 as it allows for quicker development from White. Now, 12. Nd2 Bd6 13. Re1 Qh4 is not as venomous because of White’s quick development. White yields a slight advantage after 14. g3 Qh3 15. Ne4.

8. c3

In 2020, 8. a3 was the move Nepomniachtchi successfully tried again Ding during the Candidates. The idea is to preserve the bishop and keep it on the a2-g8 diagonal in order to then fight for the key d5-square with Nb1-c3. That game went 8. ... 0-0 9. Nc3 Na5 10. Ba2 Be6 11. b4 Bxa2 12. Rxa2 Nc6 13. Bg5 Qd7 14. Bxf6 Bxf6 15. Nd5 a5 16. Rb2 axb4 17. axb4 Bd8 18. c4 Nd4 19. Nxd4 exd4 20. Qc2 Re8 21. g3 bxc4 22. Qxc4 c6 23. Nf4



POSITION AFTER 23. Nf4

and White has a nagging advantage, which Nepomniachtchi eventually converted it into

a win on move 40 after Ding blundered on move 31 in Nepomniachtchi – Ding, Ekaterinburg, 2020.

8. ... 0-0 h3

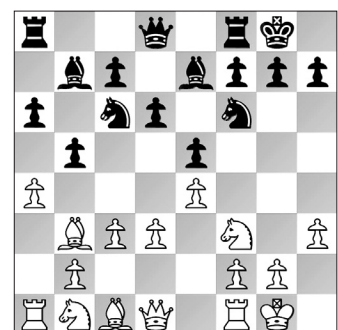
This is a typical line that has been played by GM Alireza Firouzja several times. The idea is to avoid Black’s ... Bc8-g4 in certain lines.

9. ... Bb7

Another option for Black is 9. ... Na5 as it forces the bishop to retreat to c2. After 10. Bc2 c5 11. d4 the usefulness of 9. h3 becomes clear as Black would love to capture on d4 and then play ... Bc8-g4.

The most recent top-level classical game here is from the Tata Steel Masters from earlier this year between Caruana and Keymer: 11. ... d5 12. dxe5 Nxe4 13. Nbd2 Bf5 14. Re1 Nc6 15. Nf1 c4 16. Be3 Bg6 17. Ng3 b4 18. Nxe4 dxe4 19. Ba4 bxc3 20. bxc3 Nb4 21. Qxd8 Rfxd8 22. Nd4 Nd3 23. Nc6 Re8 24. Nxe7+ Rxe7 and the players agreed to a draw after 40 moves, although White could have kept pushing with 25. Bc6 instead in Caruana – Keymer, Wijk aan Zee, 2023.

10. a4



White plays one of the least-explored moves in this position. The only top-level game in this position is from Firouzja – Giri 2022 (see note to White’s 12th move).

10. ... Na5 11. Ba2 c5 12. Bg5

While this is not a pin, White’s idea is to eventually capture the f6-knight and thus have better control of the d5-square. This is a common idea in the Sveshnikov Sicilian, where Black also has pawns on the dark d6- and e5-squares.

Firouzja continued with 12. Na3 Qd7 13. Bg5 bxa4 14. Nh4 Rab8 15. Nf5 Bd8 16. f4 exf4 17. Rxf4 Nb3 18. Bxb3 axb3 19. Qf3 Ne8 20. Bxd8 Rxd8 21. Qg3 f6 22. Raf1 Bc8 23. Nc4 Qb7 when White won after 57 moves in a back-and-forth game in Firouzja – Giri, Miami, 2022.

12. ... h6

Ding spent 13 minutes on this move.

Another move Ding was considering was 12. ... Qd7. However, he figured that after 13. axb5 axb5 14. Nbd2 he would playh7-h6 at some point anyways.

13. Bxf6 Bxf6 14. axb5 axb5 15. Nbd2

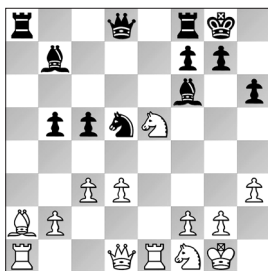
There has been some clarification in the position. Now that the f6-knight is gone, White’s idea is to play Rf1-e1 followed by Nd2-f1-e3-d5. Ideally, White would trade all the other minor pieces, leaving himself with a knight on d5 against Black’s dark-squared bishop.

15. ... Nc6

The knight no longer has anything to do on a5 so it returns to c6, with the idea of ... Nc6-e7-g6.

16. Bd5

The immediate 16. Re1 is inaccurate here as 16. ... Ne7 takes control of d5. Now, after 17. Nf1, the immediate 17. ... d5! works out for Black because after 18. exd5 Nxd5 19. Nxe5



POSITION AFTER 19. Nxe5

Capturing with the pawn would have been

costly, as after 19. ... Bxe5 20. Rxe5 Nf4 Black is doing great here, attacking both the g2- and d3-pawns.

16. ... Rxa1

Black temporarily gives up the open a-file.

17. Qxa1 Qd7 18. Re1 Ra8

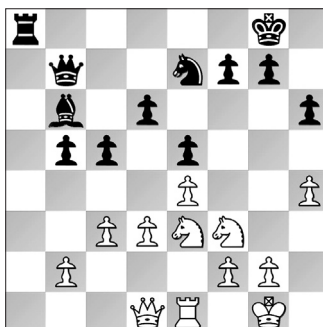
Now, Black regains the open file.

19. Qd1 Bd8

Black reroutes the “bad” bishop to the queen-side, where it will prove useful.

An alternative was 19. ... Ne7, which is similar to what happened in the game. However, after 20. Bxb7 Qxb7 21. Nf1 perhaps Ding was worried about g2-g4, h2-h4 and then g4-g5, which would give the f6-bishop some real problems.

20. Nf1 Ne7 21. Bxb7 Qxb7 22. Ne3 Bb6 23. h4!



A typical move for these structures. White will put the pawn on h5, fixing Black’s king-side pawns. The idea is to build an attack with Nf3-h4-f5 and Qd1-g4.

23. ... Qc6

A risky alternative was 23. ... h5, which stops White from playing h4-h5. After 24. Ng5 g6 25. Qf3 Rf8 26. g4, the Black king comes under a huge attack.

24. h5

During the press conference, Nepomniachtchi shared that he was unsure of what to do here, as indicated by his 15-minute think.

Nepomniachtchi was also considering 24. c4, but after 24. ... Ba5 25. Re2, he felt that this was clearly good for him as well. But, it turns out, Black is in time to play 25 ... h5! as the queen is not going to active squares such as f3 or g4.

24. ... c4

This is a logical way for Black to look for



counterplay, opening the diagonal of the bishop. Now we see the idea behind ... Bf6-d8-b6 and ... Qb7-c6.

25. d4

The capture 25. dxc4 will be met with 25. ... Bxe3 26. Rxe3 bxc4. It may feel counterintuitive to exchange the bishop for a knight after such a long journey, but this puts an end to White’s entire idea of controlling the d5-square. Black will get plenty of counterplay against the b2-pawn and it is hard to imagine the f3-knight ever landing on d5.

25. ... exd4

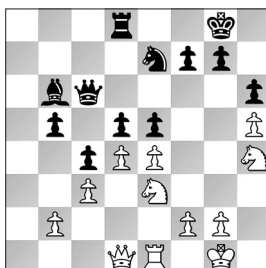
Black could not play 25. ... Qxe4 26. Nxc4 Qc6 27. Nxb6 Qxb6 28. dxe5 as it leaves White up a pawn.

Another option for Black was 25. ... Rd8, keeping the central tension. Here 26. Nh4 exd4 27. Nef5 Nxf5 28. Nxf5 looks extremely dangerous for Black as it is hard to imag-



ine a way to defend the g7-square with the dark-squared bishop on the other side of the board, but the computer finds a clever way. After 28. ... Qe8 29. cxd4 (29. Qg4 Qe5!) 29. ... Qe6 30. Qg4 Qf6 Black manages to defend the kingside and can now create counterplay via ... b5-b4 and ... c4-c3.

Instead, after 25. ... Rd8 26. Nh4, Black could reply with 26. ... d5!



POSITION AFTER 26. ... d5

This is the top suggestion by the computer. Now that the knight has moved away from the center and the e5-pawn isn't pressured, Black can try to open the center. This shift of the position would force Nepomniachtchi to

make a major decision. Play continues with (a) 27. Nf3 exd4 28. Nxd4 Qd7 29. e5 and in my opinion, the position still looks more pleasant for White as the ideas of e5-e6 or f4-f5 are still in the air. (b) 27. exd5 Qf6! was the whole idea behind pushing ... d6-d5. Now the knight will no longer land on the f5-square!. (c) No better was 27. dxe5 dxe4 28. Qg4 Bxe3 as, again, the bishop should trade itself for the annoying knight. Now comes 29. Rxe3 Qd5, when the idea of both ... Qd5-d1 and ... Qd5xe5 was strong, and after 30. Rxe4 Qd1+ 31. Qxd1 Rxd1+ 32. Kh2 Rd2 Black should be equal.

26. Nxd4

While the alternative capture 26. cxd4 looks logical as it allows White to grab the center, it gives Black clear counterplay associated with creating a passed pawn. 26. ... b4 (26. ... Qxe4 27. Nxc4 and Black's pieces begin to hang) 27. Qc2 Rc8 and Black will play ... c4-c3 creating a passed pawn, which will tie White down.

26. ... Qc5

A multipurpose move, eyeing the h5-pawn as well as bringing the queen quickly to aid her king.

Much better was 26. ... Qd7, as it leaves the a7-g1 diagonal open for the dark-squared bishop and also stops Qd1-g4. 27. Ndf5 There is a slight difference in each knight-jump to f5. (27. Nef5 Bxd4 28. Nxd4 While the knight looks better on the centralized d4-square, I like the potential of the e3-knight more. Even so, I prefer White's position here as Black's counterplay is not so clear) 27. ... Bxe3 28. Nxe3 and we see a similar position to the one where Black had captured on d4 immediately.

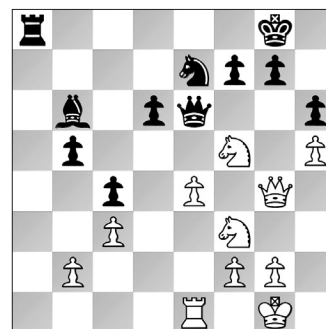
Alternatively, after 26. ... Bxd4 Black avoids White's threat of outpostting a knight on f5, but after 27. Qxd4, unlike in some other lines we saw, the e3-knight is still well-placed, as White still has control of the d5- and f5-squares. This means that Black's e7-knight could not move. Also, the d6-pawn is a bigger target as the e4-pawn is easy to defend. But, most of all, there is no clear counterplay for Black as the ... b5-b4 pawn push is more difficult here, and White can still try ideas such as a rook lift via Re1-e3 or a kingside expansion with g2-g4-g5.

27. Qg4 Qe5 28. Nf3

White can also completely shift gears with 28. Qd7 and start targeting the queenside. This move leads to some concrete lines and, given how quickly Nepomniachtchi played

this move, it is safe to assume this was not a major consideration for him. After 28. ... Bxd4 29. cxd4 Qxe4 30. f3 Black's position is extremely loose after 30. ... Qe6 (the active 30. ... Qh4 runs into 31. Nc2 and Black has only 31. ... Kf8 to defend the knight!) 31. Qb7 Re8 32. Nc2 Qf6 33. Qxb5 and there has been a major shift in the structure and flow of the game, but Black is still under some pressure on the e-file.

28. ... Qe6 29. Nf5



We reach the critical moment of the game.

29. ... Nxf5

During the press conference, Ding admitted that he did not see White's plan associated with this move.

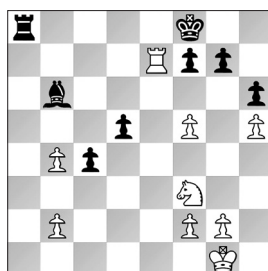
The better option was 29. ... Qf6, putting the burden on White to prove that he has anything in the position. Black can always capture the f5-knight, thus it is not a decision he has to commit to at this moment.

30. exf5 Qf6

Placing the queen on this square is very logical, but it was a mistake.

More accurate was 30. ... Qd7, which we can understand when comparing to what happened in the game. Commentator GM Irina Krush asked Ding during the press conference if he was trying to make this move work. Ding admitted that he was a bit impatient here as he thought he was already close to equalizing.

Here play continues 31. Qe4 d5 and unlike in the game, this move is now possible. On 32. Qe7 Qxe7 33. Rxe7 b4 the idea is to look for immediate counterplay. In the long run, Black is still in trouble as his king's position is worse, and the d5- and b5-pawns are both weak. If we give White two free moves to play g2-g3 and Kg1-g2, then Black is in a lot of trouble as Re7-d7, Re7-b7 and Nf3-e5 are now all threats. Continuing our analysis with 34. cxb4 Kf8



POSITION AFTER 34. ... Kf8

It turns out that this works out for Black for concrete reasons. Here's why: **(a)** 35. Rb7 runs into 35. ... Ra1+ 36. Kh2 Bxf2. Note that this is why I wanted to give White the free moves of g2-g3 and K1-g2 to illustrate my point, as then this pawn-grab would be impossible! After 37. Ne5 f6 it still looks a bit scary for Black, but he can either start to quickly push his d-pawn or play ... d5-d4 and ... c4-c3, as the f2-bishop can easily stop White's passed b-pawn; therefore **(b)** 35. Re1 Bc7 was Black's best try, stopping Nf3-e5 and preparing ... Ra8-a2.

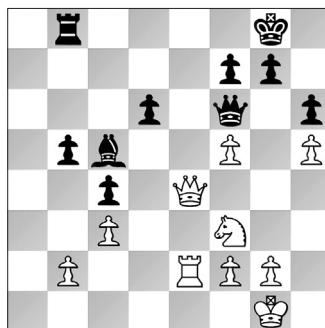
31. Qe4

This move is quite annoying to face as the queen can move to c6 and b7, harassing the queenside.

31. ... Rb8 32. Re2

This is a prophylactic move that prevents ... b5-b4 by defending the b2-pawn.

32. ... Bc5



This is the position Ding was aiming for when he played 30. ... Qf6.

33. g4

And this is the move that Ding missed. We will see the strength of this idea play out in the game.

33. ... Qd8

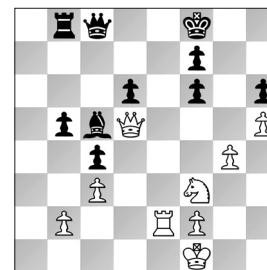
Black is no longer in time to play 33. ... b4 34. Qxc4 as White can now grab this pawn as his f5-pawn is defended.

34. Qd5

White centralizes the queen while stopping Black from ever playing ... d6-d5 and ... b5-b4.

34. ... Kf8 35. Kf1 Rc8

As pointed out by GM Anish Giri during commentary, the idea behind 35. Kf1 is clear after 35. ... Qc8 36. f6 and the g4-pawn is not hanging with check! After 36. ... gxf6



POSITION AFTER 36. ... gxf6

The computer captures this pawn in a cold-blooded manner, but this would be incredibly difficult to play for a human, especially since the knight will later land on the key f5-square. Now necessary is 37. Qe4 Kg8, preventing Qe4-h7. White could continue with 38. Nh4 Qb7, when Black can force a trade of queens. After 39. Qxb7 Rxb7 40. Nf5 this endgame looks great for White but Black does get quick counterplay with 40. ... b4 as long as Black really senses the danger and goes for this, as he has better drawing chances here.

36. Re4

Not a particularly spectacular move by White, but I do enjoy a rook lift!

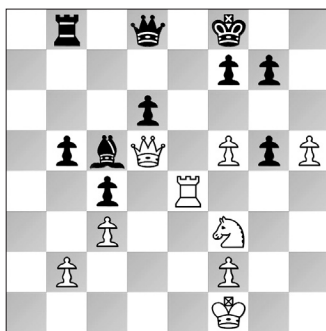
36. ... Rb8

Black's "nothing moves" are about to get punished.

37. g5! hxg5

(see diagram next page)

This is just "game over" for Black, as demonstrated in the game.



Again, the computer suggests a cold-blooded move with 37. ... Qd7. The following line is all computer analysis: White could play 38. gxh6 gxh6 39. f6 with the idea of Re4-e7, and after 39. ... Qh3+ 40. Ke2 Qg2 41. Re7 White can play a cold-blooded response in return, ignoring Black's threats entirely.

On 41. ... Qxf2+ 42. Kd1 Qf1+ 43. Kc2 Qd3+ is forced, otherwise Black will get mated on f7. After 44. Qxd3 cxd3+ 45. Kxd3, we have reached a close-to-winning endgame for White, as every single piece is better, especially the king, and all of Black's pawns are easy targets. For example, after 45. ... Re8 White has a thematic sacrifice with 46. Rxe8+ Kxe8 47. Ke4 Kd7 48. Ng5!! that should be familiar for Caro-Kann players. White's

pawn queens after 48. ... hxg5 49. h6 d5+ 50. Kxd5 Bf8 51. h7!.

38. Rg4
This was White's whole idea.

38. ... Ra8
The alternative 38. ... f6 loses to 39. Nh4!! gxh4 40. h6! which leads to either checkmate or the h-pawn getting a promotion. After 40. ... Qe7 (40. ... gxh6 41. Qg8+ Ke7 42. Rg7 mate) 41. h7, there is no way to stop the pawn!

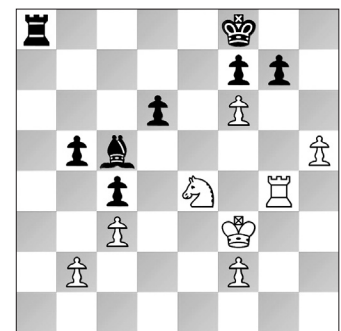
39. Nxf5 Ra1+ 40. Ke2
The king is perfectly safe here!

40. ... Qe7+ 41. Ne4
A strong move, with threats of pushing both h5-h6 and f5-f6 still in the air.

41. ... Qe8 42. Kf3
White frees the knight.

42. ... Qa8
Unfortunately, the queen-trade doesn't offer salvation for Black, as his many problems don't all suddenly disappear.

43. Qxa8+ Rxa8 44. f6



An excellent move!

44. ... g6
Black could not save the game with 44. ... gxf6 as 45. Nxf6 wins with the idea of promoting the h-pawn. The pawn marches forward after 45. ... Ke7 46. Ng8+ Kf8 47. h6.

45. hxg6 f6 46. Rxf6 Ra2 47. Kg4
Black is still getting checkmated!

47. ... Rxb2 48. Rh6, Black resigned.
Ding resigned in view of Kg4-f5-g6 or Ne4-g5 followed by f6-f7, promoting the f-pawn and finally checkmate.

A brilliant game by Ian Nepomniachtchi! Can Ding strike back tomorrow?