

# 2023 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

APRIL 29, 2023 ■ ROUND 14

BY JJ LANG ■ ANNOTATIONS BY GM ELSHAN MORADIABADI



Ian Nepomniachtchi

Round Score  
 $\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2}$   
Match Score  
**7 - 7**



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.                 |
| 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 | ½-½    | 45    | E28 | A trendy Nimzo gives Ding real chances, but Nepo holds the draw.           |
| 9  | Nepomniachtchi - Ding | ½-½    | 82    | C65 | Ding employs the Berlin, holds the draw, but Nepo didn't make it easy.     |
| 10 | Ding - Nepomniachtchi | ½-½    | 45    | A28 | Resilient defense gives Nepo an easy draw.                                 |
| 11 | Nepomniachtchi - Ding | ½-½    | 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 | ½-½    | 40    | C84 | Passive opening gives Ding brief shot, Nepo recovers, settles for draw.    |
| 14 | Ding - Nepomniachtchi | ½-½    | 90    | E46 | Ding's impatience gives Nepo a chance, but we'll see you tomorrow!         |

The last classical game of the 2023 FIDE World Chess Championship was a wildcard.

Would GM Ding Liren, playing with the white pieces, push for a win? His opponent, GM Ian

Nepomniachtchi, is renowned for his quick, intuitive (if not impulsive) decision-making,

and might be a favorite in rapid. Then again, maybe Nepomniachtchi would try to resist the shift in momentum after his game 12 collapse.

When play began, Ding returned to 1. d4, allowing Nepomniachtchi to play another Nimzo-Indian Defense. While Ding earned real winning chances from this opening during the eighth round, that variation was more of a one-off surprise (akin to Nepomniachtchi's Delayed Exchange Spanish in the first game) than a reliable weapon.

A week later, he did not appear to have anything new in this opening, playing the aptly named Normal Variation and allowing Nepomniachtchi to steer the game towards equality after 11 moves. Then, Ding made an uncharacteristic miscalculation of the position, incorrectly assessing a rather crude and straightforward attacking plan as highly favorable.

Ding described himself as "excited" when he chose to play 12. Ng5 and 13. h4, and perhaps a desire to close out the match (or a belief that his opponent might have been in an error-prone state, allowing such simple moves) was partially to blame. Nepo's more sober assessment of the position was that he had not done anything wrong in this game, and so should not be susceptible to such a rudimentary attack.

Indeed, Ding quickly found himself on the defensive. He once again made some rather committal decisions, particularly with 21. Nc5?!, sacrificing a pawn. On one hand, his confidence in his ability to hold positions



down a pawn or an Exchange is commendable. That said, this was not the only — let alone the simplest — way to offer resistance.

A few more committal decisions gave Nepomniachtchi real chances close to the first time control, but after playing 36. ... e5?! rather quickly, the game was headed for a draw. Of course, with no losing chances, Nepomniachtchi was happy to make his opponent work for it, and the game ultimately lasted 90 moves and just over six-and-a-half hours.

The endgame is also an instructive illustration in defending against an outside rook's pawn, and the need to balance patient solidity with the ability to generate counterplay.

Despite the increased number of rest days in this match, there will be no break to discuss match strategy before the four-game playoff.

## NIMZO-INDIAN DEFENSE, SIMAGIN VARIATION (E46)

GM Ding Liren (2788)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2795)

FIDE World Chess Championship (14),  
Astana, 04.29.2023

Annotations by GM Elshan Moradiabadi

### 1. d4

The last classical game of the match was exciting, but not in the way this author expected. In a game that was below the general level of this match, the players made many mistakes, and again it is Ian Nepomniachtchi who has all the reasons to kick himself for all the missed opportunities. Anand remains the only player who won his last game of a tied world championship match, in 2010 against Topalov.

### 1. ... Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. e3 0-0 5. Bd2

When I saw this move, I expected a quick draw, as Black has many ways to "destroy" the game. The term is now part of the chess lexicon after Carlsen used it to describe a situation where his opponents would exhaust all the resources in a game to achieve a drawish position.

### 5. ... d5 6. a3 Be7 7. Nf3 c5

Ding was hoping for 7. ... b6 8. cxd5 exd5 9. Bd3 c5 10. Ne5, but a fighting game was not part of today's plan for Nepo.

Even 10. Rc1 Bb7 11. 0-0 Nbd7 12. Ne5 would have made Ding very happy.

### 8. dxc5 Bxc5 9. Qc2

The tempting 9. Rc1 Nc6 10. cxd5 exd5 11. Be2 d4 dries out to a complete 'nada'!

White can't even gain anything from keeping the tension with 10. Be2, as after 10. ... dxc4 11. Bxc4 b6 12. Bb5 Ne7 13. Qe2 Bb7 14. 0-0 Ng6 15. Rfd1 Qe7, the game will peter out soon once Black places his rooks on the c- and d-files.

### 9. ... dxc4 10. Bxc4 Nbd7

Now, White cannot hope for any form of long-castle plans, so the question remains how Ding can go for any complications, should he wish to do so.

### 11. Rd1 Be7?!

This is an odd retreat. A previous game in the database continued with 11. ... b6 12. Ne4 Bb7 13. Nxc5 Nxc5 14. Bc3 Qe7 in Witwicki – Rozycki, Polanica Zdroj, 2015. This position looks totally fine, so I have a hard time understanding what triggered Nepomniachtchi's retreat to e7.

## ELSHAN MORADIABADI

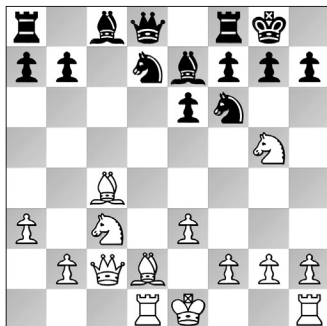
Today's annotations come once again from GM Elshan Moradiabadi. Moradiabadi is the second Iranian player to reach a 2600 FIDE rating. He



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.



12. Ng5?



Nepo's provocation paid off and Ding heavily overestimated his margin of risk. This could work in my online blitz games, but not in the final of the world championship!

It was better to go for 12. e4! Qc7. Now this is an only move, otherwise e4-e5 is a major threat. After 13. Nb5 Qb8 14. Be2 b6! 15. Nc7 Bb7 16. Nxa8 Rc8 17. Bc3 Bxe4 18. Qd2 Qxa8 19. 0-0 Nd5, Black has reasonable compensation, but it is a risk-free game for White to try playing for a win. I wonder why Ding did not choose 12. e4 over almost any other candidate move.

12. ... h6 13. h4?

Continuing with the same 'wrong plan.'

White could "bail out" with 13. Nge4 b6 14. 0-0 Bb7, which is still better for Black, but not to a very large extent.

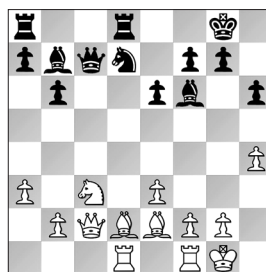
13. ... Qc7 14. Be2 Rd8!?

Nepo does not try to test what Ding had in mind and goes for a solid line. It, eventually, almost paid off!

A sharper line was to try 14. ... b6!. Now, White had to be precise to stay in the game.

a) After the natural 15. Rc1 Qb8! 16. Nge4 (or 16. Bf3 Ne5! 17. Bxa8 Ba6 18. Be4 Nxe4! winning) 16. ... Bb7 17. 0-0 Rc8 18. Qb1 Nxe4 19. Nxe4 Rxc1 20. Rxc1 Bxh4, Ding would have kicked himself for choosing the whole plan with 12. Ng5 and 13. h4.

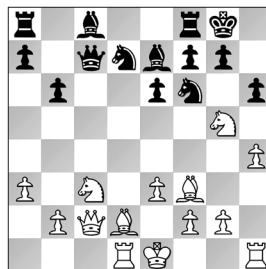
b) White might not be lost after 15. Nge4, but after 15. ... Bb7 16. Nxf6+ Bxf6 17. 0-0 Rfd8



POSITION AFTER 17. ... Rfd8

White is clearly worse due to the h4-pawn: 18. h5 Nc5 19. f3 Rac8 20. Be1 Rxd1 21. Nxd1 Bc6 22. Nc3 Qe5 and White is suffering.

c) The most interesting line begins with 15. Bf3



POSITION AFTER 15. Bf3

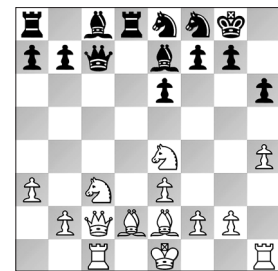
Now Black has the brilliant 15. ... Ba6!! 16. Bxa8 Nc5 17. Bc1 Rxa8 18. Nh3 Nfe4!! 19. Nf4 Nxc3 20. bxc3 Bc4, one needs a very deep understanding of chess to know that this position is actually close to winning for Black. The h1-rook will never join the main action and Black will gradually build a winning position with ... b6-b5 and ... Qc7-c6 followed by an eventual ... e6-e5.

15. Rc1!

Ding begins to make a number of accurate defensive moves.

15. ... Nf8 16. Nge4 Nxe4

An interesting idea was 16. ... Ne8!?



POSITION AFTER 16. ... Ne8!?

The point would be to make e4 a 'superfluous' square! This is a theme introduced by Dvoretzky in his *Positional Play* book commenting on Zukertort - Blackburne, Vienna, 1883 (see Appendix).

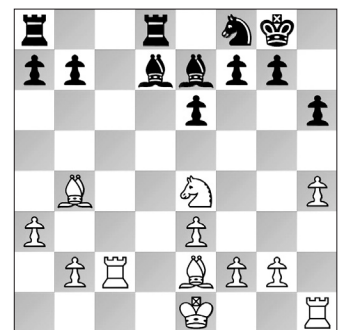
I had a fond memory of this theme, having employed it against GM Jesse Kraai in 2018, at the Cherry Blossom Open (see Appendix).

Sadly for Nepo, it is not as advantageous here: 17. Qb3 Qb8 18. Nb5 a5 19. Nd4 e5 20. Nf3 Be6 21. Bc4 Bxc4 22. Qxc4 b5 23. Qc2 b4 24. axb4 axb4 25. 0-0 Ne6 and Black is comfortable but not more.

17. Nxe4 Qxc2 18. Rxc2 Bd7

Ok, a quick draw, but ...

19. Bb4?



Ding panics again.

White could have gone 19. Rc7 Rab8 20. h5 Rdc8 21. Rxc8 Rxc8 22. Nc3 Bc6 23. f3 and a draw is the plausible outcome, although it is clear that Black has easier play after going ... Bc6-e8 and ... f7-f5. How much was Ding blaming himself for pushing his h-pawn hastily during this match?!

19. ... Bxb4+ 20. axb4 Bc6 21. Nc5?

The panic continues.

Rather than sacrifice the pawn, White could have played 21. Bf3 Ng6 22. Nc3 Bxf3 23. gxf3 Rac8 24. h5 Ne5 25. Ke2 Nd3 26. b5 Nxb2 27. Ra1 Nc4 28. Ne4 when, despite the struggles White faces ahead (and Black's extra pawn), he should be able to secure a

drawn rook ending one way or another after 28. ... Nb6 29. Rxc8 Nxc8 30. Rc1 Nb6 31. Ra1.

**21. ... Bxg2 22. Rg1 Bd5?**

Why not just 22. ... Bc6 23. b5 Bd5 24. e4 b6! 25. exd5 bxc5 26. Rxc5 Rxd5 and Black is a pawn up, right?!

**23. e4 Bc6 24. b5 Be8 25. Nxb7 Rd4 26. Rc4 Rd7 27. Nc5 Rc7**

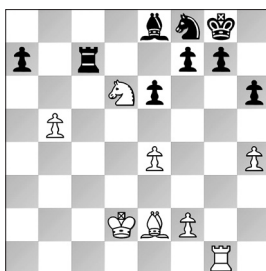
Nepo tries to play on, not going for ... Rd7-d8, which would allow White to play Nc5-b7 with repetition.

**28. Rc3 Rac8**

More testing would have been 28. ... Ng6. For instance, 29. Na6 Rb7 30. Rg4 Rd8 31. Rc7 Rxc7 32. Nxc7 e5, and the rook on g4 is awkward.

**29. b4?!**

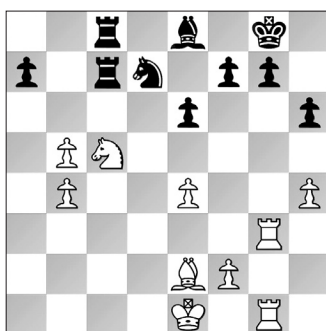
White's best resource was 29. Nb7 Rxc3 30. bxc3 Rxc3 31. Kd2 Rc7 32. Nd6.



POSITION AFTER 32. Nd6

This doesn't seem that easy to see at first, but on the other hand Caruana mentioned it on the live commentary, so it was not crazy-hard either. The idea is simple: White gives up a pawn but now all of his pieces are more active than their counterparts in Black's camp, and that gives him enough compensation.

**29. ... Nd7 30. Rcg3?**



Another moment of panic from Ding. Instead, there was a precise path begin-

ning with 30. Kd2 Nxc5 31. bxc5 Rxc5 and now:

a) Risky is 32. Rxc5?! Rxc5 33. Rb1 e5 34. b6 axb6 35. Rxb6 Bd7 36. h5 Be6 37. Ra6 Kh7 38. Ra7!. Now, this is a hard position to evaluate. At first, it appears winning for Black, but after 38. ... g5 39. hxg6+ Kxg6 40. Ra1! Kg5 41. Rg1+ Kf4 42. Rh1, we realize White is close to making a draw.

b) Simpler is 32. Rgc1! Rxc3 33. Rxc3 Rxc3 34. Kxc3 g5 35. hxg5 hxg5 36. Kd4 Kf8 37. Kc5 Ke7 38. e5. Again, not super hard, but let us say that it is a bit too long of a line.

**30. ... Nxc5?**

I am not sure why neither of the players considered pushing the g-pawn during the game.

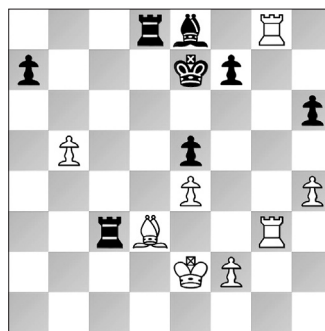
It appears to me that Black will win a pawn after 30. ... g6! 31. Kd2 Nxc5 32. bxc5 Rxc5 33. Rb3 Rc2+ 34. Ke3 Ra2! when Black's rook goes to c5 and his king comes to f6. White is probably just losing the weak h4-pawn. For instance, if 35. Bd3 Rc5 36. Rgb1 e5! 37. b6 (or 37. f3 Bd7 with ... Bd7-e6 and the king coming to f6) 37. ... axb6 38. Rxb6 Ba4 39. R1b2 Ra3 40. Kd2 Kg7 41. R2b4 Bd7 42. Rb3 Ra1 43. Rb1 Ra2+ 44. R1b2 Rxb2+ 45. Rxb2 Be6 46. Rb1 Ra5 47. Ke3 Kf6, when ... Ra5-a3 and ... h6-h5 followed by ... g6-g5 looks winning enough.

**31. bxc5 Rxc5 32. Rxg7+ Kf8 33. Bd3 Rd8 34. Ke2?**

Another blunder!

Instead, 34. Rg8+ Ke7 35. Kd2 Bxb5 36. Rxd8 would have led to the same drawish rook ending we had in the game, but without the 'twist' we are about to see.

**34. ... Rc3 35. Rg8+ Ke7 36. R1g3 e5?**



This was the last chance for Nepo to win this game.

The correct sequence began with the tricky 36. ... Rb3!. White has no adequate reply:

a) White would want to play 37. Rh8, but

after 37. ... Rd4!, preparing ... Rb3xd3, White is hopeless on all fronts:

a1) There is no time to gain space with 38. e5 because 38. ... Rxh4 is winning for Black.

a2) Over-protecting the e-pawn with 38. Re3 still loses to 38. ... Rbxd3 39. Rxe8+ Kxe8 40. Rxd3 Rxe4+.

a3) Trying to capture the h6-pawn with 38. Rxh6 loses instantly to 38. ... Rdx3.

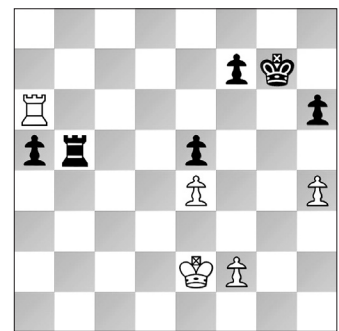
a4) Avoiding the tricks associated with ... Rb3xd3 by playing 38. Bc2 still fails to 38. ... Rb2+ 39. Rc3 Rxe4+, when White can pack it up.

b) Immediately getting the bishop out of harm's way, with 37. Bc4, also loses after 37. ... Rb2+ 38. Kf1 Rd4, when Black begins picking up the pawns left and right.

**37. Rh8! Rd6 38. b6!**

Accurate and thematic. Ding secures a drawn rook ending.

**38. ... Rxb6 39. Rxe8+ Kxe8 40. Bb5+ Rxb5 41. Rxc3 Kd7 42. Rf3 Ke7 43. Rc3 a5 44. Rc7+ Kf6 45. Rc6+ Kg7 46. Ra6**



We know this from the great Dr. Tarrasch: rooks should always be behind the pawn, either yours or your opponent's!

**46. ... Rb2+ 47. Kf3 Ra2 48. Kg3**

A more active way to make a draw was 48. h5 a4 49. Kg3 a3 50. Kf3 Ra1 51. Kg4, but Ding's choice is fine too.

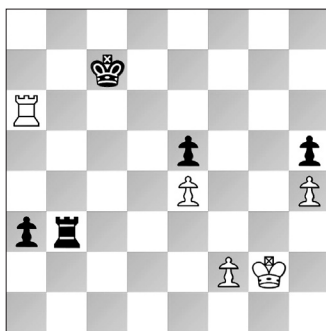
**48. ... h5 49. Ra8 Ra1 50. Kg2 a4 51. Ra5 f6 52. Kf3 a3 53. Ra6 Kf7 54. Ke3**

It is funny to see that some strong engines cannot see that this as a draw (some even give an evaluation of -3 for Black).

**54. ... Ke8 55. Ke2 Ke7 56. Kf3 Ra2 57. Ke3 Ra1 58. Ke2 Kf7 59. Kf3 Ra2 60. Ke3 Ke7 61. Kf3 Kd7**

Nepo tries something.

**62. Rxf6 Rb2 63. Ra6 Rb3+ 64. Kg2 Kc7**



**65. f4!**

You may be all nervous, tired, or agitated, but ‘class’ is acquired through years of practice. Ding knows that he needs some counterplay to keep Black’s king at bay.

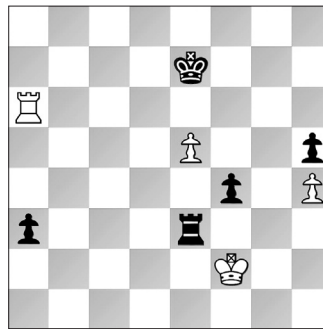
**65. ... exf4 66. e5 Kb7 67. Ra4 Kc6 68. Ra6+ Kb5 69. Ra7 Kb6 70. Ra8 Kc5 71. Ra6 Kb5 72. Ra7 Kb6 73. Ra8 Kc6 74. Ra6+ Kd7 75. Kf2 Ke7 76. Kg2 Re3 77. Kf2**

(see diagram top of next column)

White has a fortress, and it is a simple draw now.

**77. ... Rg3 78. Kf1 Rc3 79. Kf2 Re3 80. Kg2 Kd7 81. Kf2 Kc7 82. e6 Kd8 83. Ra7 Ke8 84. Kg2 Rxe6 85. Rxa3 Rg6+ 86. Kf2 Rg4 87. Ra5 Rxh4 88. Kf3 Ke7 89. Rf5 Ke6 90. Rxf4 Rxf4+, draw.**

Another escape for Ding. He was close to lost in this game and was dead lost in game 12. I



would consider the outcome of the classical games a victory for Ding. He was surely not himself throughout, but his tenacity grew as the match proceeded. Nepo is better prepared, but tomorrow is all about nerve and control over emotions. Is Nepo over his 12th game? Let us wait and see! We will discuss it thoroughly tomorrow!

**APPENDIX 1: SUPERFLUOUS SQUARES**

The concept of a “superfluous move” is nothing new to chess players. Many beginners will refer to moving a piece to a typical square as a “developing move” when actually the piece is doing nothing from its new home that is relevant to the player’s aims.

Mark Dvoretzky’s concept of a “superfluous square,” however, is a little less common. The idea is similar: even though “controlling a square” typically sounds like a strategic advantage, sometimes the square in question is irrelevant to the aims of the position.

Consider the following position:

**ENGLISH OPENING (A13)**

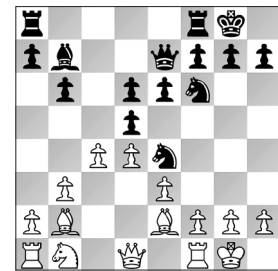
**Johannes Zukertort**  
**Joseph Henry Blackburne**  
**London, 05.05.1883**

**1. c4 e6 2. e3 Nf6 3. Nf3 b6 4. Be2 Bb7 5. 0-0 d5 6. d4 Bd6 7. Nc3 0-0 8. b3 Nbd7 9. Bb2 Qe7 10. Nb5 Ne4 11. Nxd6 cxd6 12. Nd2 Ndf6 13. f3**

The idea of the superfluous square comes into play here: see Dvoretzky’s book *Positional Play*. White could have played the brilliant 13. Nb1!

(see diagram top of next column)

The idea is straightforward enough, but still counter-intuitive on first glance. White concedes the e4-square, but so what?!



POSITION AFTER 13. Nb1

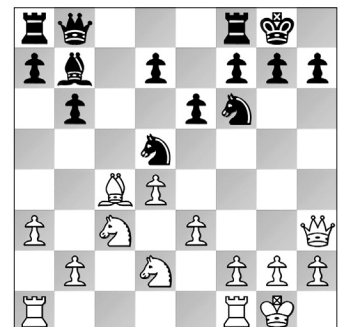
**13. ... Nxd2 14. Qxd2 dxc4 15. Bxc4 d5 16. Bd3 Rfc8 17. Rae1 Rc7 18. e4 Rac8 19. e5 Ne8 20. f4 g6 21. Re3 f5 22. exf6 Nxf6 23. f5 Ne4 24. Bxe4 dxe4 25. fxg6 Rc2 26. gxh7+ Kh8 27. d5+ e5 28. Qb4 R8c5 29. Rf8+ Kxh7 30. Qxe4+ Kg7 31. Bxe5+ Kxf8 32. Bg7+ Kg8 33. Qxe7, Black resigned.**

This same idea occurred in my 2018 game against GM Jesse Kraai.

**QUEEN’S INDIAN DEFENSE: MILES VARIATION (E12)**

**GM Elshan Moradiabadi (2537)**  
**GM Jesse Kraai(2493)**  
**Cherry Blossom Open (5), Dulles, 05.27.2018**

**1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. Bf4 Bb7 5. e3 Bb4+ 6. Nfd2 0-0 7. a3 Bd6 8. Bxd6 cxd6 9. Nc3 d5 10. Qf3 Na6 11. Be2 Qb8 12. Qh3 Nc7 13. 0-0 dxc4 14. Bxc4 Ncd5**



Around here, White employs the same idea of the “superfluous square” by electing not to fight for control in the center, instead “playing around” Black’s pieces.

**15. Ne2 Rc8 16. Bd3 a5 17. Rac1 Bc6 18. f4 Ne7 19. g4 g6 20. Qh4 Kg7 21. e4 b5 22. f5 exf5 23. gxf5 Neg8 24. e5 Nh5 25. Rf2 Bd5 26. Rcf1 Rf8 27. Ng3 Nxc3 28. f6+ Kh8 29. hxg3 Qb6 30. Rh2 h6 31. Qf4 Kh7 32. Rff2 Rac8 33. Rxh6+ Nxh6 34. Rh2 Rc1+ 35. Nf1 Kg8 36. Rxh6 Rfc8 37. Rh8+, Black resigned.**