

2023 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

APRIL 30, 2023 ■ TIEBREAK

BY JJ LANG ■ ANNOTATIONS BY GM ELSHAN MORADIABADI



Ian Nepomniachtchi

Match Score

7 - 7

Tiebreaker Score

1½ - 2½



Ding Liren

Tiebreaker Recap

2023 WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP

	White	Result	Moves	ECO	Summary
1	Ding - Nepomniachtchi	½-½	35	D02	Nepo brilliancy squashes Ding's chances
2	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	½-½	47	C84	Nepo hesitancy squashes Nepo's chances
3	Ding - Nepomniachtchi	½-½	33	A14	Ding tests Nepo's opening knowledge, Nepo knows the right response
4	Nepomniachtchi - Ding	0-1	68	C84	Nepo novelty backfires, Ding courageously pushes through time trouble



**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.

GM Ding Liren wasn't, according to one popular narrative, even supposed to be here today.

Looking for a final springboard into the 2022 Candidates, and with only the 2022 Belgrade Grand Prix event remaining, visa troubles prevented Ding from travelling to Serbia, effectively ending his chances of qualifying for the 2023 FIDE World Chess Championship.

Then, after FIDE suspended Russian GM Sergey Karjakin for pro-war comments on March 21, 2022, they decided to give his spot to the highest rated player who had played at least 30 games in the past year as of April 28, 2022. While Ding was the highest rated player, he had played only four FIDE-rated games in the past 11 months.

Thanks to some creative organizing from the Chinese Chess Federation, Ding nevertheless played 28 — two more games than needed! — FIDE-rated classical games from March 27 through April 24, bouncing back to number two in the world rankings and qualifying for the candidates.

Of course, there was a reason Ding had played so few rated games. Chinese players were, by and large, still cut off from the return to over-the-board chess due to travel restrictions. To make matters worse, many of the COVID-era online rapid tournaments that had cropped up were held in the middle of the night for Chinese players. Considering that Ding already seemed like a ghost of himself after the quarantined portion of the



2020-21 Candidates tournament, there was a question whether he would be in top form.

These questions were only amplified after he lost with the white pieces to GM Ian Nepomniachtchi in the first round of the 2022 Candidates. “Nepo” went on to win the tournament in convincing fashion, mere months after being written off after his 7½-3½ defeat in the 2021 World Chess Championship. But the reigning champion, GM Magnus Carlsen, had already expressed hesitation about whether he would defend his title in 2023, and as it became clear that his challenger would once again be Nepo, his participation became less likely.

The fact that Magnus had not made his decision about defending his title made the 2022 Candidates a particularly tricky event. Consider the calculus: if Magnus plays, then there’s no difference between finishing second and third (or eighth) except for a relatively negligible difference in prize money. But if Magnus doesn’t play, the difference between second and third is huge. As Nepo built to his lead, it became clear that American GM Hikaru Nakamura could end up qualifying for the match as well. All he had to do was hold a draw against Ding in the last round.

58 moves later, Ding scored an improbable victory to take second place. Then, three weeks later, Ding scored a second improbable victory: Carlsen announced he would not be defending his title, giving Ding a shot at the World Championship. This catches us up to the match, where a shaky start and up-and-down event led to maybe the most

improbable victory of all for Ding in game 12.

But a focus on the improbable poses a bit of a recency bias. Before the pandemic, Ding’s appearance in a world championship match felt a bit closer to inevitable. GM Fabiano Caruana had his chance in 2018, but Ding’s play and rating had only increased since then as he gained more experience in top-level invitationals. Up-and-coming prodigies like French-Iranian GM Alireza Firouzja were still a few years away from their peak, and Uzbek GM Nodirbek Abdusattorov was still virtually unknown.

Add to that Ding’s rapid playoff victory over Carlsen in the 2019 Sinquefeld Cup, and he was a clear front-runner (if not *the* front-runner) to become Carlsen’s next challenger. With a solid style that once produced a 100-game unbeaten streak and a flexible repertoire that even the world champion seemed unable to dent, there was every reason to think that Ding would sooner or later end up playing for the title. It is easy to forget this, especially considering that the pandemic chess boom brought in an influx of fans who were not even around at Ding’s pre-pandemic peak, but it deserves to be repeated: Ding *was* supposed to be here.

With the stage set for the rapid tiebreak, Ding and Nepomniachtchi produced a thrilling back-and-forth match of four games played with 25 minutes per side and a ten-second increment starting on the first move.

Ding had a great initiative in the first game, but an absolutely spectacular in-between move from Nepo shot the advantage into

his favor. Perhaps overly optimistically, he settled for a draw when he could have pushed with the black pieces. Then, in the second game, he watched a great initiative evaporate, and found nothing in the third game.

With the white pieces in his preferred Spanish in the final rapid game, Ding seemed much better prepared and managed to launch his own attack in this opening for the first time in the whole match. Things seemed headed towards a draw, with commentators explaining that, with under two minutes on their clock, absolutely nobody would decline the perpetual check Nepo was offering.

But Ding Liren is not nobody. He is the 17th World Champion. He shocked his opponent, “self-pinning” his rook in a way that could not be exploited. The computers seemed indifferent, claiming the position was still equal. What the “eval bar” did not say, however, was how narrow White’s path to holding equality would be, or how counter-intuitive some of Ding’s resources were.

After a few tense minutes and further clock-induced inaccuracies on both sides, Ding sat at the board alone, head in his hands. It was a position familiar to many chess players, but to a casual observer, he might have appeared to be devastated after a loss. Instead, he was experiencing what he described aptly as “relief.” Excitement followed a few minutes later, but for now, immediately after the handshake, all he could think about was that one of the bravest gambles in chess history paid off.

QUEEN'S PAWN GAME(D02)**GM Ding Liren (2788)****GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2795)****2023 FIDE World Chess Championship****(15.1), Astana, 04.30.2023***Annotations by GM Elshan Moradiabadi***1. d4**

Ding Liren became the 17th world champion, and the first Chinese man to ever claim the title of world champion, following in the footsteps of six Chinese women from GM Xie Jun to GM Hou Yifan. The tradition that began in 1886 with the match Steinitz-Zukertort continues after the second throne abdication in chess history. After chasing his opponent for the entire match, Ding took the lead when it mattered most: the fourth game, under severe time pressure. As world number one, and five-time world champion, Magnus Carlsen put it: "Self-pinning for immortality!" In this game, though, Ding came closest to winning against Nepo before two seemingly uneventful draws.

1. ... Nf6 2. Nf3 d5 3. c3

I first saw GM Arjun Erigaisi employing this move. The idea is to prevent ... Bc8-f5 by enabling Qd1-b3. Now if Black plays ... e7-e6, White can choose between the Torre Attack and London without worrying about critical lines with Black's bishop on the f5-square.

3. ... c5 4. dxc5

I was not aware this has resurfaced in top-level events until I saw the following game of Erigaisi's mentioned on his interview on ChessBase India.

4. ... e6 5. Be3 Be7

Erigaisi's game continued with 5. ... a5 6. c4 Na6 7. cxd5 Nxc5 8. Nc3 Nxd5 9. Nxd5 Qxd5 10. Qxd5 exd5 11. g3 Na4 12. Bd4 Bb4+ 13. Kd1 0-0 14. a3 Bc5 15. b3 Bxd4 16. Nxd4 Nc3+ 17. Ke1 Bd7 18. e3 Ne4 19. Bd3 Rac8 20. Bxe4 dxe4 21. Kd2 f5 22. Rhc1 Kf7 23. b4 a4 24. b5 Ke7 25. Rab1 with a small advantage that Van Foreest eventually neutralized in Erigaisi – Van Foreest, Abu Dhabi, 2022.

6. g3 Nc6 7. Bg2 0-0 8. b4

Okay, there is nothing new for those who follow the theory of this line. Even I have looked at this position in my notes for my students.

8. ... Ng4

Nothing else really makes sense.

A risky idea was 8. ... b6 9. cxb6 Ng4 10.

Bd4 axb6 11. 0-0 Nxd4 12. Nxd4 Bd7 which surely gives enough compensation to Black, but it is too risky for a rapid game given the stakes!

9. Bd4 Qc7

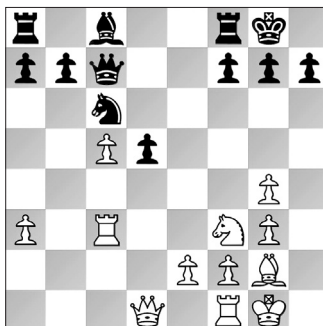
The undermining ... b7-b6 was still possible.

10. 0-0 e5

A tad hasty for the engines' taste. Preparing with ... Bc8-d7 appeals more to the engines, but it makes no sense for a human to play ... Nf6-g4 and let your opponent kick your knight back.

11. h3 exd4 12. hxg4 dxc3 13. Nxc3 Nxb4**14. a3 Bf6**

Black must eliminate the knight on c3 otherwise the capture on d5 would prove deadly.

15. Rc1 Bxc3 16. Rxc3 Nc6**17. Qxd5**

A better try was 17. g5 Rd8 18. Qa4 d4 19. Rd3 Bd7, which was discussed in different commentaries as a worthy alternative. However, the difference between Ding's choice and this continuation is really hard to measure. So, it all comes down to which poses more practical problem to Nepo, and in that sense, Ding's choice proved adequate.

Another try was 18. Re3 Bg4 19. Qd2 Rac8 20. Rc1. I did not see this being mentioned anywhere but engines show it at different depth as one of the top three choices. I personally find the queen on a4 to be more practical, however, preventing ... b7-b6 ideas by eyeing the c6-knight while also pressuring the a7-pawn.

17. ... Bxg4 18. Ng5 h6?!

Playing with fire.

A safer move was 18. ... Rae8 19. Qd3 g6 20. Ne4 Qe5 21. Qd6 f5, which would have sufficed for equality, but chances are that Nepo did not see the resource of 20. ... Qe5 from afar.

**19. Ne4 Rae8**

White has more than enough compensation after 19. ... Bxe2 20. Re1 Bg4 21. Nd6 Be6 22. Qe4 Qe7 23. Qh4!? Qxh4 24. gxh4 Rab8 25. f4.

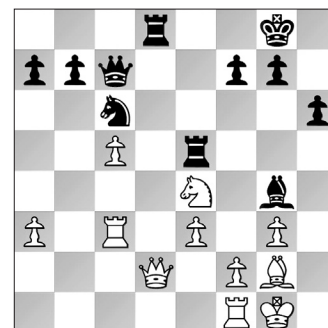
20. e3 Re5 21. Qd2 Rd8?

PHOTO: FIDE / STEV BONHAGE



Pretty much a gamble. Nepo gives too much credit to his kingside 'swindles'.

Instead, after 21. ... Bh3!? 22. Bxh3 Rxe4 23. Bg2 Re5 24. Rfc1, White has a lasting 'microscopic' advantage, but Black has successfully traded off one of White's best pieces. We will never know why Nepo did not like this line.

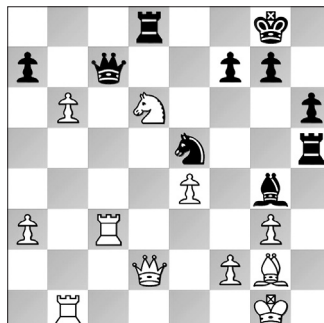
22. Nd6 Rh5 23. Rb1?

A massive oversight by Ding, from which he managed to quickly recover.

Instead, the rook belonged on c1 with 23. Rfc1! Ne5 24. e4 as now ... b7-b6 is met with f2-f4!! For instance, 24. ... b6 25. f4 Ng6 (or

25. ... bxc5 26. fxe5 Rxe5 27. Rd3 winning) 26. e5 and White is happy.

23. ... Ne5! 24. e4 b6! 25. cxb6



25. ... axb6! 26. Nb5!

Ding fights back.

The obvious 26. Rxc7?!, allowing 26. ... Nf3+ would have been the swindle of the century, but you cannot expect that big of a blunder in the final of the world championship!

26. ... Rxd2 27. Nxc7 Bh3

More annoying would be 27. ... Nd3 28. Rf1 Rc5. This does not give a lot of chances to Black, but it at least could pressure Ding a lot longer than the text, where Ding forces Nepo to take a perpetual in order to avoid losing.

28. Bxh3 Rxh3 29. Kg2 Rh5 30. Rb5 Rd1

31. Nd5 Rdh1 32. Ne7+ Kh7 33. Rxe5

R1h2+ 34. Kg1 Rh1+ 35. Kg2, draw.

A well-fought draw.

RUY LOPEZ, MARTINEZ VARIATION (C84)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2795)

GM Ding Liren (2788)

2023 FIDE World Chess Championship

(15.2), Astana, 04.30.2023

Annotations by GM Elshan Moradiabadi

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5.

0-0 Be7 6. d3 b5 7. Bb3 d6 8. a4 Bd7 9. h3

0-0 10. Be3 Na5 11. Ba2 bxa4

All according to the theory.

12. Bd2!?

A rare move tried in correspondence chess.

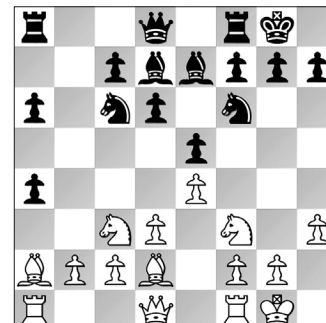
12. ... Nc6

A sensible response.

Another try, from a correspondence game, went 12. ... c5 13. Bxa5 Qxa5 14. Nc3 Qb6 15. Qd2 Bb5 (15. ... Qd8!?) 16. Rfb1 Qb7 17. Qe2 g6

18. Bc4 Kg7 19. Nd2 and White had chances in Silin – Biedermann, ICCF, 2013.

13. Nc3



13. ... Rb8?!

This is somewhat problematic!

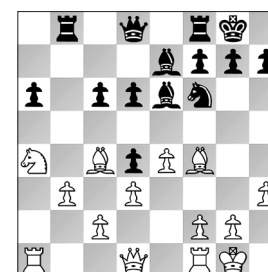
Instead, 13. ... Nd4 14. Bc4 Qe8 15. Nxd4 exd4 16. Ne2 c5, and the engines are fine with this but this is not the 'human' continuation! Black is very passive and should concede pawn weaknesses sooner or later with ... Bc8-e6.

14. Nxa4 Nd4 15. Bc4 c6 16. Nxd4 exd4 17. Bf4

Nepo must still be in his prep.

17. ... Be6 18. Re1

I cannot like this move. Instead I much prefer 18. b3!.



POSITION AFTER 18. b3

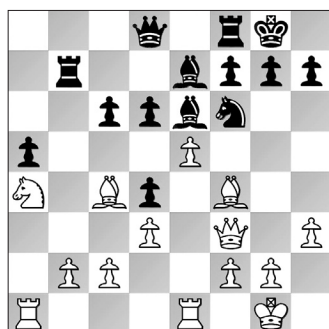
Now, Black has a number of options, but none of them are satisfactory.

a) Hopeless is 18. ... a5 19. Bxe6 fxe6 20. Bd2 d5 21. Qe1 Bb4 22. Bxb4 axb4 23. exd5 Qxd5 24. Nb2 Nh5 25. g3!. White's knight lands on c4 and may God save Black!

b) Black is still worse after 18. ... Bxc4 19. dxc4 Nxe4 20. Qxd4 f5 21. Rad1.

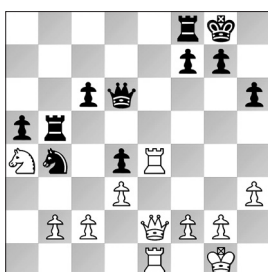
c) A more ambitious try would be 18. ... d5 19. Bxb8 Qxb8 20. Bxa6 Qc7 21. c4!. Now, White brings his bishop back to the game with 21. ... dxe4 22. dxe4 c5 23. Re1 and an advantage.

18. ... a5 19. Qf3 Rb7 20. e5

**20. ... Nd5?**

That is scary. Black needed to accurately misplace White's queen.

The best resource was 20. ... Bd5!. Play should continue 21. Bxd5 Nxd5 22. exd6 Bxd6 23. Bxd6 Qxd6 24. Re4 Nb4 25. Qe2 h6 26. Re1 Rb5.



POSITION AFTER 26. ...Rb5

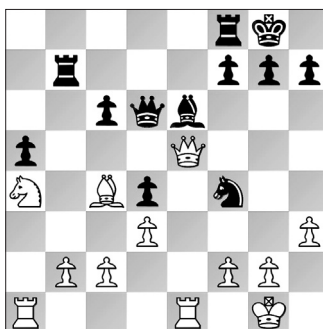
White is certainly better, but Black is not without chances given that White's queen is glued to defending the c2-pawn.

21. exd6?

White squanders the whole advantage.

The best continuation was 21. Bg3. White is about to play Re1-e4, and I have a hard time proposing any move in this position.

21. ... Bxd6 22. Bxd6 Qxd6 23. Qe4 Nf4 24. Qe5



This is the equivalent of a draw offer.

24. ... Qxe5 25. Rxe5 Bxc4 26. dxc4 Rb4 27. Rc5 d3 28. cxd3 Nxd3 29. Rxc6 Ne5 30. Rc7 Nxc4 31. Nc5 Nxb2 32. Nd7 Re8 33. Rxa5 Nd3 34. Rg5 Rf4 35. f3 h6 36. Rd5 Nb4 37. Rd6 Rf5 38. Rb7 Rd5 39. Rdb6 Rd8 40. Nf6+ gxf6 41. Rxb4 Rd4 42. Rxd4 Rxd4 43. Kh2 Kg7 44. Rb2 Rd5 45. Ra2 Rd4 46. Rb2 Rd5 47. Ra2 Rd4, draw.

I would say that Nepo's chances in this game were about equal to Ding's in the first game.

ENGLISH OPENING, NEO-CATALAN DECLINED (A14)

GM Ding Liren (2788)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2795)

2023 FIDE World Chess Championship (15.3), Astana, 04.30.2023

Annotations by GM Elshan Moradiabadi

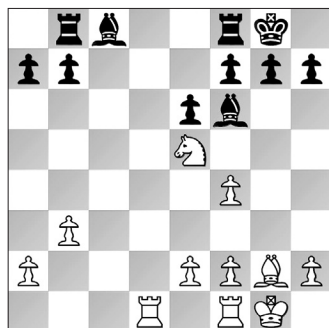
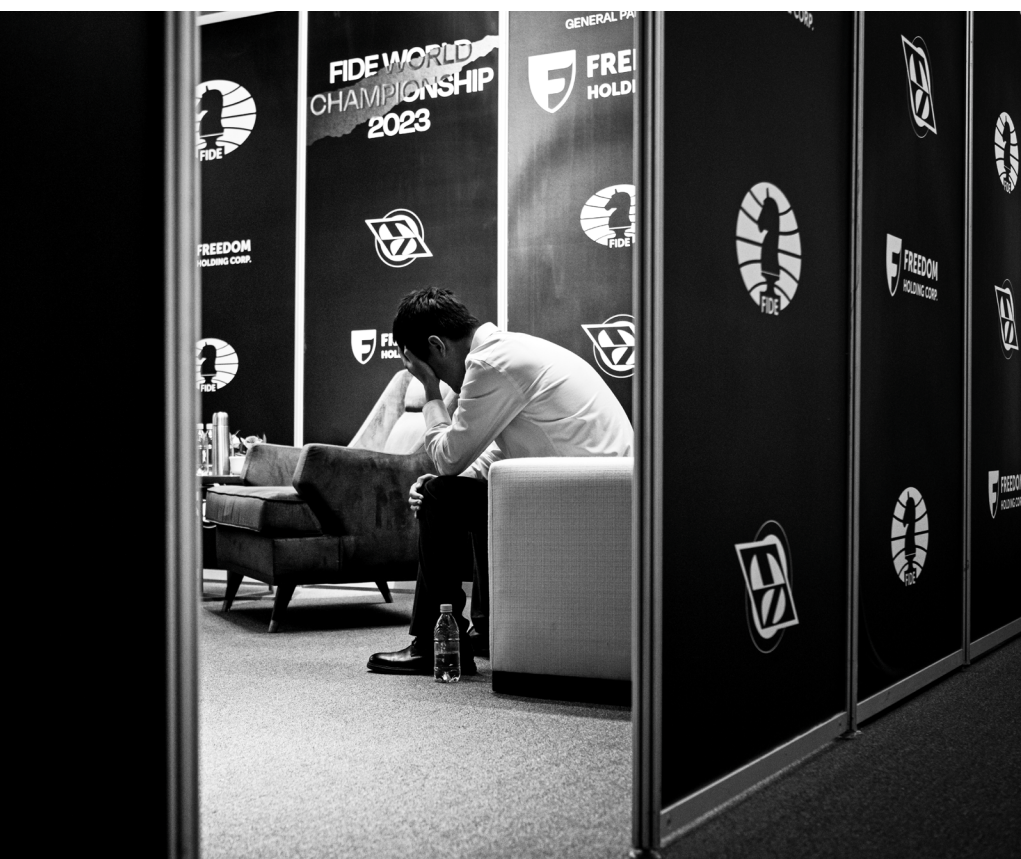
1. Nf3

The only uneventful game of the match. Ding plays a Reti, for which Nepo was prepared. The most recent game in this well-known line was played between Nakamura and Wesley So. Ding tried something different on move 17, but Nepo knew how to react. He correctly gave up a pawn to disentangle his pieces and then forced a rook trade to achieve a drawn opposite-colored bishop ending.

1. ... d5 2. g3 Nf6 3. Bg2 e6 4. 0-0 Be7 5. c4 0-0 6. b3 c5 7. cxd5 Nxd5 8. Bb2 Nc6 9. d4 cxd4 10. Nxd4 Nxd4 11. Qxd4 Bf6 12. Qd2 Nf4 13. gxf4 Qxd2 14. Nxd2 Bxb2 15. Rad1 Bf6 16. Nc4 Rb8 17. Ne5

(see diagram next page)

Here, a recent online game continued 17. Nd6 b6 18. Be4 Rd8 19. Nxc8 Rbxc8 20. Rxd8+ Bxd8 21. Rd1 Bf6 22. Rd7 a5 23. e3 g6 24. Rb7 Bd8 25. Bd3 Kf8 26. Bc4 a4 27. Kg2 axb3 28. axb3 and the players agreed to a draw in Nakamura – So, *Chess.com*, 2023.



17. ... Rd8 18. Rxd8+ Bxd8 19. Rd1 Be7 20. Nd7 Bxd7 21. Rxd7 Kf8 22. Bxb7 Rd8 23. Rc7 a5 24. Rc4 Bb4 25. Rc2 Rd2 26. Rxd2 Bxd2 27. e3 Bb4 28. Kf1 Ke7 29. Ke2 Kd6 30. Kd3 Be1 31. Ke2 Bb4 32. Kd3 Be1 33. Ke2, draw.

RUY LOPEZ, MARTINEZ VARIATION (C84)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2795)

GM Ding Liren (2788)

2023 FIDE World Chess Championship (15.4), Astana, 04.30.2023

Annotations by GM Elshan Moradiabadi

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Be7 6. d3 b5 7. Bb3 d6 8. a4 Bd7 9. h3 0-0 10. Be3

Nepo's team might have told him about his chances in game two, and he is back with the hope of getting some advantage out of the opening.

10. ... Na5 11. Ba2 bxa4 12. Nc3

This time Nepo chooses the mainline.

12. ... Rb8

I am not a major expert in this position but 12. ... c5 deserves some attention.

a) White's best move is probably 13. Bg5, but after 13. ... Rb8 14. Bxf6 Bxf6 15. Bd5 Rxb2 16. Nxa4 Rb8 17. Nc3 Qc7, this seems fine for Black.

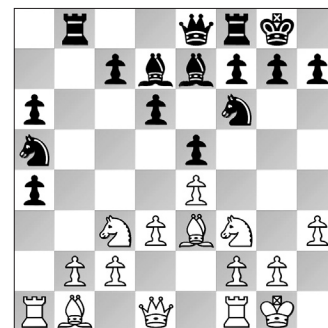
b) Like the game, White could try 13. Bb1 Qe8 14. b3 a3 15. Rxa3 Nc6, but Black should be fine here too.

c) The most ambitious try with 13. Bd5 is even worse, as after 13. ... Nxd5 14. Nxd5 Rb8 15. Bd2 Nc6 16. Rxa4 Nb4 17. Nxe7+ Qxe7 18. Ra3 Nc6 19. b3 Rb6, this is not even good for White since Black has some plans with ... f7-f5 now.

13. Bb1

I think Nepo, in a Russian comment, mentioned that he had analyzed this position after Matlakov lost to Guseinov in the following game.

13. ... Qe8!



Ding seemed ready for this.

Matlakov eventually lost, despite having a fine position out of the opening after 13. ... c5 14. Nxa4 Qc7 15. Nd2 d5 16. Bg5 d4 17. c3 Bb5 18. Qf3 h6 19. Bh4 Rfc8 20. Rc1 Qd8 21. Bg3 Bd6 22. Qd1 g6 23. Bh4 Kg7 24. Qf3 Be7 25. Bg3 Nd7 26. Ba2 Qe8 27. Bd5 Bg5 28. Rd1 in Guseinov – Matlakov, Baku, 2015.

14. b3 c5 15. Nxa4 Nc6

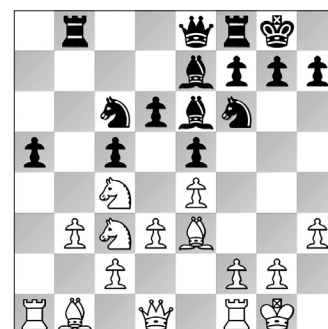
Now we have a similar position to the ones I was suggesting for Black after an earlier ... c7-c5.

16. Nc3?!

This move keeps the b1-bishop and the a1-rook out of the game at a sensitive moment.

Though preferable, 16. c3 does not yield much, as after 16. ... Be6 17. Bc2 Nd7 18. d4 cxd4 19. cxd4 exd4 20. Nxd4 Nxd4 21. Bxd4 Bf6 the position fizzles out to a complete 'nada'.

16. ... a5 17. Nd2 Be6 18. Nc4



18. ... d5?

Ding gets carried away.

More reasonable was 18. ... Qd7 19. f4 exf4

20. Bxf4 g6!, but this is a hard move to see. 21. Bh2 Nh5 22. Ne2 Bxc4 23. dxc4 Bf6 24. Ra2 Be5 25. Bxe5 Nxe5 26. Rxa5 Qe7 followed by ... Rb8-a8 and White still has issues with his b1-bishop.

It is a bit surprising to see that Black is better after 21. Bh2 Rfe8 22. Ne3. In this position the engines give some advantage to Black, suggesting the way to proceed is by dillydallying with ... Kg8-h8, ... Qd7-d8 and then eventually ... Nc6-d4. While the line is inhuman, we can at least agree that Black has a good position due to the horrendous position of White's bishop on b1.

19. exd5 Nxd5 20. Bd2?

It is already a sign that Nepo is not himself anymore. He has made as many inaccuracies in this game as he has made in the past three games combined. This move is plain wrong.

Instead, he should try 20. Nxd5 Bxd5 21. c3 f5 22. f3 Rf6 23. Ra2! with a balanced fight.

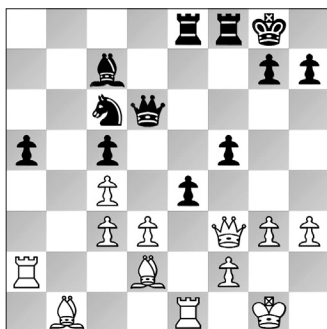
20. ... Nxc3?!

Black misses a more direct shot with 20. ... Nf4! 21. Bxf4 exf4. This is totally winning. If the knight on c3 does not move, ... Be7-f6 is a major threat and, if it moves, then ... Be6-d5, with the plan of ... Nc6-d4, and ... f4-f3, looks unmistakably crushing. 22. Na4 (or 22. Nxa5 Bf6 winning) 22. ... Bd5 23. c3 (or 23. Nc3 Bxc4 24. bxc4 Bf6 dominating) 23. ... Qd8 24. Nd2 Qd6 25. Nb2 Qg6 and Ding is for choice.

21. Bxc3 Bxc4 22. bxc4 Bd8 23. Bd2 Bc7 24. c3

Finally the b1-bishop's problem is solved and the game begins to fizzle out into a drawn position until...

24. ... f5 25. Re1 Rd8 26. Ra2 Qg6 27. Qe2 Qd6 28. g3 Rde8 29. Qf3 e4?!

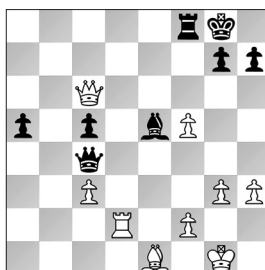


Ding wants to win at any cost! I wish there were no engines out there so that I could give two exclamation mark for this move's bravery!

A more prosaic line would be 29. ... Kh8 30. Qd5 Qf6 31. Be3 Ne7 32. Qxc5 Bd6 33. Qxa5 f4 34. Bc5 Bxc5 35. Qxc5 Nf5 36. d4 with equality.

30. dxe4 Ne5 31. Qg2 Nd3 32. Bxd3 Qxd3 33. exf5 Rxe1+ 34. Bxe1 Qxc4 35. Ra1?!

A critical moment for Nepo, as 35. Rd2!! was a necessary move, but very hard to find. I cannot imagine anyone in Nepo's shoes could have found it given the clock and match condition. If Ding played 35. ... Be5 36. Qc6



POSITION AFTER 36. Qc6

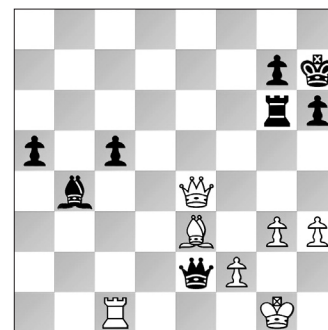
Then 36. ... Bf6 (not 36. ... Bxc3?? 37. Rc2 and White wins) 37. Rd7 h6 (not 37. ... Qa2 38. Kg2 and White maneuvers his bishop to e3 with a winning advantage) 38. Bd2 a4 39. Ra7 and White is better.

35. ... Rxf5 36. Bd2 h6

Back to equality.

37. Qc6 Rf7 38. Re1 Kh7 39. Be3 Be5 40. Qe8 Bxc3 41. Rc1 Rf6 42. Qd7 Qe2 43. Qd5 Bb4 44. Qe4+ Kg8 45. Qd5+ Kh7 46. Qe4+ A repetition ensues but... ..

46. ... Rg6!!

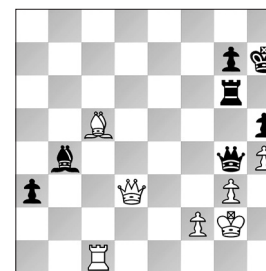


Ding tries to play for a win with under two minutes on his clock. This time around, his move does not even introduce any threat to his position!

47. Qf5?

Shocked by the move, Nepo reacts poorly.

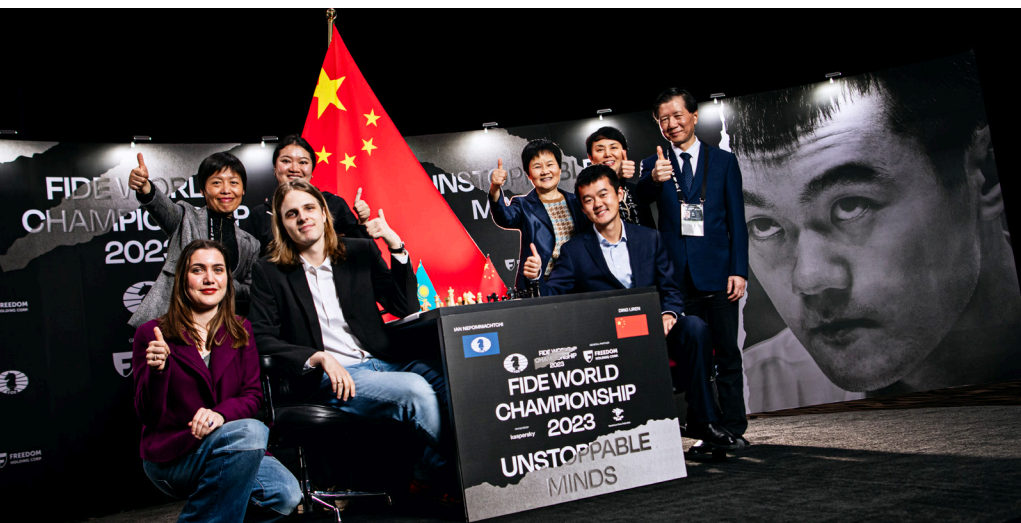
The best continuation was 47. h4 h5 48. Kg2 a4 49. Qf5 Qg4 50. Qd3 a3 51. Bxc5 with equality.



POSITION AFTER 51. Bxc5

But, again, how easy is it to play this with very little time on your clock? Going deeper, after 51. ... a2 52. Bd4 Qd7 53. Qe4, now it is clearer, but we are sitting here with engines running!



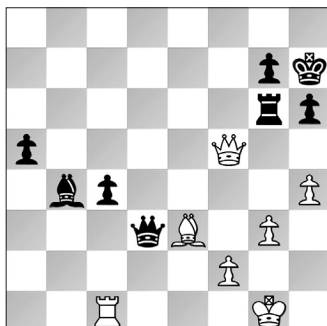


47. ... c4 48. h4??

The beginning of a dramatic end with the first blunder.

Close to balanced was 48. Qf4 c3 49. Qf5, when after 49. ... a4 50. Rb1 Qc4 51. Bf4 c2 52. Rc1 Qe6 53. Qxc2 a3 54. h4 Kg8 55. Qa4 White should be fine.

48. ... Qd3!



49. Qf3

Not 49. Qh3 c3 winning.

49. ... Rf6?!

No better was 49. ... Bd2 50. Rd1 c3 51. Kh2 a4 52. h5 Rf6, when Black wins without much of a fuss.

50. Qg4 c3 51. Rd1 Qg6 52. Qc8?!

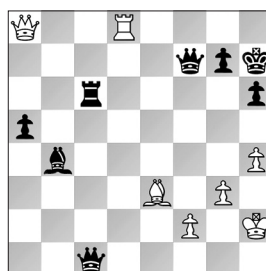
White loses a tempo, but he is losing anyways.

For instance, 52. Qe2 Re6 53. h5 Qe4 54. Qa2 c2 55. Rd4 Qxd4 56. Qxe6 Qd3 57. Kg2 a4 58. Bc1 a3 and White can resign.

52. ... Rc6 53. Qa8 Rd6?

This squanders substantial amount of Black's winning advantage.

Instead, Black had a win with 53. ... c2 54. Rd8 c1=Q+ 55. Kh2 Qf7!



POSITION AFTER 55. Qf7

This must have been the move that Ding must have missed with a minute on his clock.

54. Rxd6 Qxd6?!

Black loses a valuable tempo.

Precise was 54. ... Bxd6! 55. Qxa5 Bxg3! 56. h5 Qd3!. Again none of these lines are too hard for Ding, but with a minute on the clock and what is at stake, he can be forgiven.

55. Qe4+ Qg6 56. Qc4 Qb1+ 57. Kh2 a4?!

Now it is a draw!

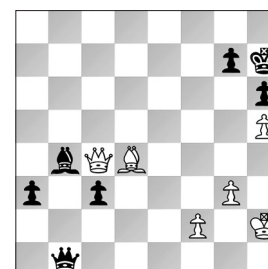
In a classical game, 57. ... Qf5 58. g4 Qf3 59. h5 Kh8 60. Qc8+ Kh7 61. Qc4 Be7 62. Kg1 Bf6 would likely still be a draw, but it is a better practical try. But Ding's choice is perhaps better for rapid, given the precision required from White to refute it.

58. Bd4 a3 59. Qc7??

And Nepo functionally resigns. If 59. Bxg7 was too complex to calculate, then 59. h5 was a very simple, intuitive move taking away the g6-square from Black's queen.

The best move was 59. Bxg7 Kxg7 and now White has 60. Qc7+ Kf8 61. Qc8+ Kf7 62. Qb7+ Kf6 63. Qb6+ Ke5 64. Qb8+ Kd4 65. Qd8+ Kc4 with equality.

The simplest was 59. h5



POSITION AFTER 59. h5

Now 59. ... Bf8 (not 59. ... a2?? 60. Qf7, when White has swindled the title) 60. Qf7 Qe4 61. Bxc3 Qe7 62. Qd5 is equal.

59. ... Qg6

The rest is easy. Ding Liren is the 17th world chess champion!

60. Qc4 c2 61. Be3 Bd6 62. Kg2 h5 63. Kf1 Be5 64. g4 hxg4 65. h5 Qf5 66. Qd5 g3 67. f4 a2 68. Qxa2 Bxf4, White resigned.

Congratulations Ding!