

2023 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

APRIL 23, 2023 ■ ROUND 10

BY JJ LANG ■ ANNOTATIONS BY WGM KATERINA NEMCOVA



Ding Liren

Round Score
 $\frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2}$
Match Score
 $4\frac{1}{2} - 5\frac{1}{2}$



Ian Nepomniachtchi

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.

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi holds onto his one-game lead after another draw in the tenth game of the 2023 FIDE World Championship. With only four rounds to go, GM Ding Liren will only have two more tries to push for a win with the white pieces.

Considering the match situation, Nepomniachtchi was relatively happy with being

able to hold a pawn-down game against Ding's English. The opening resulted in a relatively obscure position that Nepomniachtchi had nevertheless encountered before (albeit from the other side). Ding had some promising chances, and even an extra pawn after the trade of queens, but Nepomniachtchi was able to defend with relative ease.

Indeed, the main takeaway from this game is that Nepomniachtchi is capable of playing precise, accurate defensive moves just as quickly and intuitively as he can attack. At several moments, there were many ways for Black to err with slightly passive or inaccurate play, but Nepomniachtchi did not even seem to take any of these "traps" seriously.

At some point, Ding is going to have to take more risks to play for a win in order to tie the match, but he is due the white pieces in the last round. So, we might be in for a few more cautious games. Or, Ding might decide to not put all his eggs in one basket, and start playing more ambitiously with the black pieces as early as tomorrow.

ENGLISH OPENING: FOUR KNIGHTS SYSTEM (A28)

GM Ding Liren (2788)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2795)

FIDE World Chess Championship (10),
Astana, 04.23.2023

Annotations by WGM Katerina Nemcova

1. c4 Nf6 2. Nc3 e5 3. Nf3 Nc6 4. e4

In their previous game in the English (game four), Ding played 4. e3 and brought home his first win in the match.

4. ... Bc5

This move looks risky, but there are no tactical problems for Black. The goal is to keep the bishop on the g1-a7 diagonal without losing as many tempi as the ... Bb4-a5-b6 transfer.

A passive choice, and one that I played in a recent game, would be 4. ... d6. The game continued 5. d4 Bg4 6. d5 Nd4 7. Be2 Bxf3 8. Bxf3 Be7 9. Be3 and looking at Black's restricted bishop on e7 and White's space advantage, White enjoys a nice position, which she won in Tokhirjonova – Nemcova,



KATERINA NEMCOVA

WGM Katerina Nemcova is a Czech-American women's grand-master who has played for the United States since 2013. She was the 2008

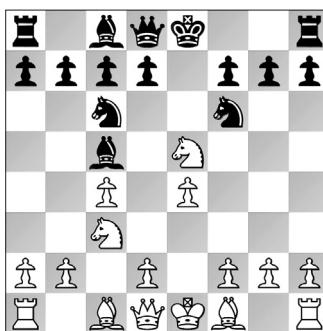
European Youth Championship in the Girls U18 division, and the runner-up in the 2007 World Youth Championship. Since then, she has balanced her playing career with education, first at University of Texas Brownsville, then Webster University, and now the University of Arizona where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in Communications.



Saint Louis, 2023.

The most popular move here is 4. ... Bb4, which is a well-liked choice by Abdusattorov. It has been recently played by many other players including Caruana, Aronian, Nakamura, So as well as Ding and Nepomniachtchi. Games usually continue with 5. d3 d6 6. a3 Bc5 7. b4 Bb6 when White enjoys an advanced pawn structure and more space. However, there are also weak dark squares in White's camp and no weaknesses in Black's camp. Many games end up in a draw.

5. Nxe5!?



An interesting trick and a key response to the ... Bf8-c5 move! White is clearing the center in hopes of enjoying a space advantage.

After 5. d3 d6 Black accomplished here exactly what he wanted: no tempi lost and the bishop is sitting on an excellent diagonal.

5. ... Nxe5 6. d4 Bb4!

A mistake would be 6. ... Bd6? 7. c5! (instead, 7. dxe5 Bxe5 8. Bd3 d6 would be playable for Black) when White is challenging the bishop

and putting pressure on both pieces now. After 7. ... Bxc5 8. dxe5 Ng8 9. Qg4, strategically speaking, White has a winning position. Black needs to defend the pawn on g7 and, with all of his pieces underdeveloped and no clear hopes of castling the king, White has a pretty straightforward plan for a win: finish development and attack!

No better is 7. ... Ng6 8. cxd6 cxd6 9. Bd3, as this position is also very ugly for Black. White's next moves can be h2-h4-h5 to further attack the g6-knight. White can also castle and finish development while enjoying a beautiful position and a pair of bishops.

7. dxe5 Nxe4 8. Qf3

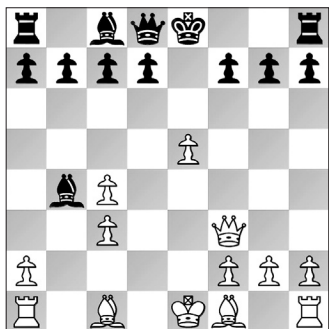
The most theoretical move in this position.

An alternative for White is 8. Qd4. After 8. ... Nxc3 9. bxc3 Be7 10. Qg4, we end up in a similar position to the game. Black needs to decide whether to play ... g7-g6 or ... Ke8-f8, and I believe it requires a high level of positional understanding to know where to place White's queen (g3 or e4?) and whether Black's bishop is better on e7 or c5.

8. ... Nxc3

The other capture, 8. ... Bxc3+?!, causes two problems. First, Black is losing the pair of bishops in an open position. Second, Black is left with an undefended knight in the center. After the logical 9. bxc3 Ng5?! (counterintuitively, 9. ... Nc5 is a much better move as after 10. Be3 Qe7 11. Qd5 White's advantage is minimal) 10. Qg3 Ne6 11. Be2 b6 12. f4, White is for choice.

9. bxc3

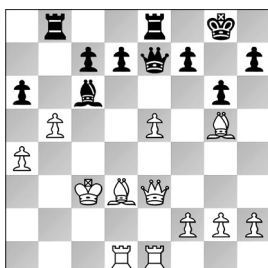


How do you feel about this position? On one hand, White has a messed-up pawn structure with four islands and, on top of that, doubled pawns on the c-file. On the flip side, one of these pawns is attacking the bishop, which has to waste a move to get into safety, and then White has a space advantage with lots of open lines for its pieces. For example, White's queen can attack the g7-pawn, the bishop can get to d3 with a nice diagonal, and White's pawn on e5 is controlling the f6- and d2- squares, prohibiting Black from easily developing his pieces.

9. ... Bc5!?

Both players moved fast until this was played. Nepomniachtchi chose an alternative to the prominent ... Bb4-a5 move and Ding started thinking. This retreat is the second-best option according to the engine, but certainly still a promising choice. During the press conference, Ding confessed that this move came as a "total surprise."

More common is 9. ... Ba5, with the idea of keeping pressure on the c3-pawn. However, White is scoring well in recent games and that may be a reason why Nepo decided to go for a different move. Play continues 10. Bf4 (White fails to create threats with 10. Qg3?!, and Black can continue his development. For example: 10. ... Qe7 11. Qxg7?? Bxc3+ 12. Bd2 Bxe5 is dominating) 10. ... 0-0 11. 0-0-0! (this move was first played by Carlsen in 2019) 11. ... Qe7 12. Kb2 Rb8 13. Bd3 b5 14. cxb5 Bb7 15. Qh3 g6 16. Qe3 Rfe8 17. Rhe1 Bc6 18. a4 a6 19. Bg5 Bxc3+ 20. Kxc3

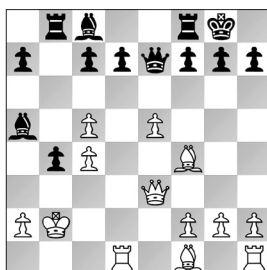


POSITION AFTER 20. Kc3

20. ... Qa3+ 21. Kd2 Qb4+ 22. Ke2 Qg4+ 23. Kd2 Qb4+ 24. Ke2 Qg4+ 25. Kd2 Qb4+ and the players agreed to a draw in Carlsen – Caruana, Douglas, 2019.

Later, 13. Qe3 was tried in 2022, and after 13. ... b6?! 14. Bd3 Qe6 15. Qg3 Re8 16. Rhe1, White won on move 49 in Niemann – Mamedyarov, Saint Louis, 2022.

The older move, 13. ... b5!, likely still offers Black better chances. After 14. c5 b4 15. c4, we reach a complicated position.



POSITION AFTER 15. c4

Interestingly, although this position looks quite double-edged, Nepomniachtchi himself has two recent wins in this line for White. 15. ... Bb7 16. h4 b3 17. a3 f6 18. Rh3 fxe5 19. Bxe5 d6 20. cxd6 cxd6 21. Bd4 Qxe3 22. Bxe3 Be4 23. Bd3 and Nepo won on move 44 in Nepomniachtchi – Xiong, *Chess.com*, 2020.

Nepo's other win came after 15. ... b3 16. a3 f6 17. f3 Re8 18. Bd3 Bb7 19. Bf5 Bc6 20. Qd3 fxe5 21. Bxh7+ Kh8 22. Bd2 Bxd2 23. Rxd2 Qxc5 24. Re1 Re6 25. Be4 Rd6 26. Bd5 and Black resigned on move 53 in Nepomniachtchi – Aronian, Kolkata, 2019.

10. Qg3 Kf8!

Black needs to guard the pawn on g7 and all other options are worse than this one.

A mistake would be 10. ... 0-0? 11. Bg5!? (going for the Exchange with 11. Bh6!? is definitely lucrative) with an interesting option for White to go for an attack instead of an Exchange. After 11. ... Be7 (not 11. ... Qe8? 12. Bf6 g6 13. Qg5! winning) 12. Bh6 g6 13. h4!? Re8 14. h5 d6 15. hxg6 hxg6 16. Be2 Black has major problems on the h-file.

11. Be2 d6!

Black needs to develop his pieces, and targeting the e5-pawn is a nice bonus to this move.

12. Bf4

While 12. 0-0?! looks natural for White, it is inaccurate. Black can take advantage of the unguarded bishop on e2 by playing 12. ... Qe7! 13. Bf4 when an interesting (and wild!) line could unfold after 13. ... dxe5 14. Bxe5





f6 15. Bxc7 Qxe2 16. Rae1 where Black has a nice resource with 16. ... Bxf2+! 17. Qxf2 Qxf2+ 18. Rxf2 Bd7 19. Bd6+ Kg8 20. Re7 Bc6, and although Black's rook on h8 looks very sad, there are opposite-colored bishops on the board making it difficult for White to press for advantage.

12. ... Qe7 13. Rd1

A useful move for White. One would wish to castle here instead, but that would allow transposition to the previously mentioned drawish line, and Ding would be hardly happy with that result.

13. ... h5!?

An aggressive move typical for a player like Nepomniachtchi. Black is considering the ... h5-h4-h3 attack, while allowing his rook to do something more than just sit in the corner. This move has already been played in an online event, and it was actually Nepomniachtchi who was on the receiving end.

Less accurate is 13. ... dxe5?! because it allows an active bishop in the center that will target both the g7- and c7-pawns. After 14. Bxe5 f6 15. Bxc7 Bf5, the position is far from clear, but it is simplified for White and Black has no reasons to opt for this.

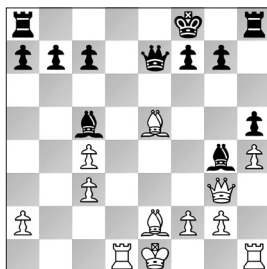
14. 0-0

A healthy move. White is finishing development while keeping the tension in the center.

After 14. exd6, which way would you recapture? One is a promising draw, while the other gives you no promises for survival.

Correct is 14. ... cxd6 (not 14. ... Bxd6?? 15. Rxd6!! cxd6 16. Bxd6 winning) 15. Bxd6 Bxd6 16. Qxd6 Be6 and Black is happy here. His next plan is to put more pressure on the c-file, and that should give him enough compensation for the pawn.

In the only game in the database, after 14. h4, White (who, once again, was Nepomniachtchi!) decided to immediately stop Black's plan with 14. ... dxe5 15. Bxe5 Bg4



POSITION AFTER 15. ... Bg4

with a complicated position. After 16. Bxg4 hxg4 17. Kd2 Re8 18. Rhe1 Qd7+ 19. Kc1 Ba3+ 20. Kb1 Qf5+ 21. Ka1 Qc2 22. Rb1 f6 23. Rb3 Rxe5 24. Reb1 Re2 25. Rxa3 Rd2 26. Qxc7 Rd1 27. Qb8+ Kf7 28. Qxb7+ White eventually won in 49 moves in Nepomniachtchi – Cardoso, Chess.com, 2020.

14. ... h4 15. Qd3!

White is preparing some nasty tricks on the back rank if Black decides to capture the pawn in the center.

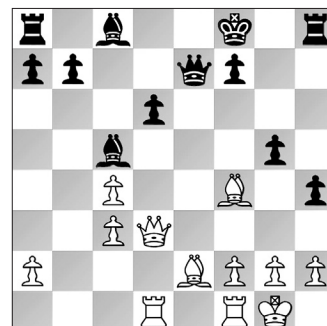
15. ... g5!?

Another aggressive move for Black. Nepomniachtchi is forcing a capture on d6 while creating some weaknesses in his camp.

A mistake would be 15. ... dxe5? 16. Qd8+! Qe8 17. Qxc7 when White is winning.

Instead, 15. ... Be6 is a normal-looking move that was expected by Caruana. His suggested continuation shows a somewhat balanced game: 16. exd6 Bxd6 17. Bxd6 cxd6 18. Qxd6 Rc8 with Black having compensation for the lost pawn.

16. exd6 cxd6!



A smart decision. Recapturing with the bishop would bring troubles after 16. ... Bxd6?! 17. Bxd6 Qxd6 (17. ... cxd6 18. f4!) 18. Qe3!?, and this is the big difference! Here, White is not forced to trade queens. Instead, White wants to keep them on the board so he can try to exploit Black's weakened king.

17. Bxd6

Ding decides to go for the endgame with an extra pawn, but a destroyed pawn structure.

The retreat with 17. Be3 was also possible, with the idea to keep the queens on the board. A complicated game would unfold after 17. ... Bxe3 18. fxe3 Be6.

17. ... Qxd6 18. Qxd6+ Bxd6 19. Rxd6 Be6

Finally, we got a few moves that are predictable for club players.

20. f4!

This move was the reason that Ding chose the endgame instead of the promising alternative of 17. Be3. However, Nepomniachtchi confessed during the press conference that he was prepared for such endgames.

20. ... Ke7

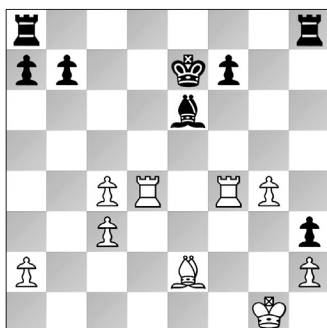
Black gains tempo by developing his king while targeting the white rook.

21. Rd4 gxf4

Black better capture this pawn before it becomes a strong weapon. For instance, after 21. ... Rag8? 22. f5!, White has a major attack on the black king.

22. Rxf4 h3

The only move that does not lose the pawn.

23. g4!?

A nice idea: White is keeping the kingside blocked while preparing a cool hideout on g3 for its king. This king will also attack the weak h3-pawn.

After 23. gxh3?! Rxh3, it is suddenly White's king who can be under attack.

23. ... Rac8 24. Kf2 Rc5

Black is activating his rook, allowing for future ... Rc5-a5-a3 attacks.

25. a4!?

An interesting reply by Ding. The pawn is not trying to go to a5 (that can never happen); instead, White is setting up a blockade for the black rook.

25. ... Ra5 26. Bd1

This was the idea! Black cannot get anywhere on the a-file now. The downside is that the pawn is on a light square, allowing for future attacks from Black's bishop.

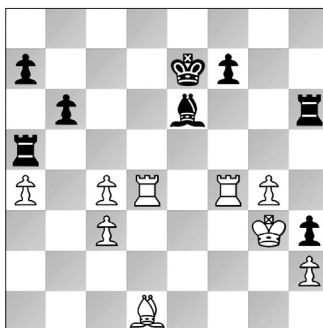
26. ... b6

Nepomniachtchi is patient while playing



moves that secure his position. White's plans of pushing c4-c5 are no longer on the table.

Attacking the pawn with 26. ... Bd7 is premature. White has a strong reply: 27. Rd5! Ra6 (not 27. ... Rxd5? 28. cxd5 and White is very happy with his pawn structure) 28. c5 Be6 29. Rh5! and, suddenly, White's pieces become very active, guaranteeing excellent winning chances.

27. Kg3 Rh6!

A super GM-level move, and the computer's first line. It took Nepo a mere 40 seconds to play this! Caruana suggests that the idea is to defend the e6-bishop so the black king

can freely move to f8 when it wishes. For me and other mortals, such a move is very unexpected.

Less accurate was 27. ... Rh7 28. Rde4 putting the king under a pin. After 28. ... Rh8 (not 28. ... Kf8? 29. Rxe6 winning) 29. Rf5!?, White has more chances.

28. Rfe4

White is pinning the bishop and eyeing a great Rd4-d5 move. If Black allows this move, White will have excellent chances with this extra pawn.

28. ... Kf8!

Here we go. The king is happy to get out of the pin, allowing his bishop to control the d5-square.

A mistake would be 28. ... a6? 29. Rd5! when White is forcing a rook trade and liberating the c-pawn.

29. Rd8+ Kg7!

Not 29. ... Ke7? 30. Rd5! with the same old story. White has excellent winning chances here.

30. Ra8



White is putting pressure on the a7-pawn.

30. ... Rc5

A safe alternative was 30. ... Bd7!?, forcing more trades into a rook endgame.

31. Rxa7 Bxc4!

Nepomniachtchi is choosing the most accurate moves.

An instructive mistake is 31. ... Rxc4?. By trading the rooks, Black's bishop will have no protection and White will have chances with his material advantage on the queenside after 32. Rxc4 Bxc4 33. Rc7 Bd5 34. c4 Be4 35. c5 bxc5 36. Rxc5.

32. Rae7

White is bringing his rook back into the play. Several other moves were very possible as well, including Ra7-d7 or Bd1-f3.

32. ... Rhc6!?

Black is giving up his h3-pawn for White's c3-pawn.

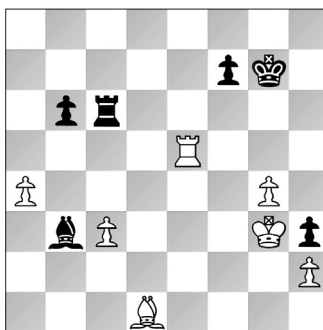
33. R7e5

Ding is trying to decrease the pressure on the c3-pawn before he captures the h3-pawn. That pawn is not going anywhere.

Another try would be 33. Kxh3 Be6 but after 34. Re3 Rxc3 35. Rxc3 Rxc3, Black is

still a pawn down, but White will be unable to make progress with his extra h2-pawn.

33. ... Rxe5 34. Rxe5 Bb3!



Another excellent and super-accurate move by Nepo. Afterwards, the position is equal.

Wrong was 34. ... Be6? 35. Re3 when White would accomplish exactly what he intended. The c3-pawn is protected and White's king can safely recapture on h3: after 35. ... Rc4 36. Kxh3 should be winning.

35. Bxb3 Rxc3+ 36. Kh4 Rxb3 37. Rb5 Ra3

Black is not going for the trade and instead plans on simplifying the position.

Losing was 37. ... Rxb5?? 38. axb5 Kf6 39. Kxh3 when White would be a pawn up and the game would be over.

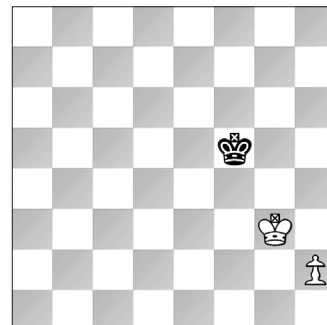
38. Rxb6 Rxa4 39. Kxh3 f5!

Even without this move, the position is equal. However, Black needs to know the theory behind defending two pawns against one. With the move on the board, the position is drawish in a forceful way.

40. gxf5

Or 40. g5 Rg4!.

40. ... Rf4 41. Rb5 Kf6 42. Kg3 Rxf5 43. Rxf5+ Kxf5



And we all know this! Black can simply get in front of this pawn to block the promotion and White will have no way of forcing the king away. The game is a draw.

44. h4 Kg6 45. h5+ Kxh5, draw.