

2023 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

APRIL 16, 2023 ■ ROUND 06

BY JJ LANG ■ ANNOTATIONS BY WGM JENNIFER YU



Ding Liren

Round Score

1 - 0

Match Score

3 - 3

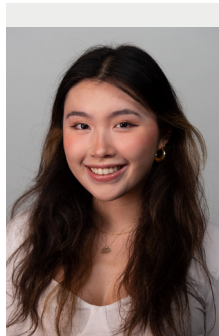


Ian Nepomniachtchi

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.
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!



JENNIFER YU

WGM Jennifer Yu is the reigning U.S. Women's Chess Champion, having won her first U.S. Women's title in 2019 at the age of 17. Her 2019 performance went down in history after scoring nine wins (and two draws) across 11 undefeated games. Yu is also the reigning U.S. Girls Junior Champion, having won the event in tiebreaks. Ironically, this was her first U.S. Juniors win, in her last year of eligibility, three years after winning her

first U.S. Women's Championship. Yu currently attends Harvard University, and is projected to graduate in the class of 2025.

Does chess have a “draw problem” at the highest level? Proponents of this argument will cite the 2018 match between GM Magnus Carlsen and GM Fabiano Caruana, which the former won in tiebreaks after 12 consecutive draws. But, more generally, they would argue, it is hard to muster up excitement for a match where the majority of the games end peacefully.

Indeed, the last time a world championship match could boast more than four decisive results was back in 2010, when GM Viswanathan Anand defeated GM Veselin Topalov 6½ - 5½ winning the final, and fifth decisive, game of the match. Carlsen's 2013 match against Anand consisted of four decisive results in 11 games (three for Carlsen), and Carlsen's win over GM Ian Nepomniachtchi last year also boasted four wins (all for Carlsen).

Entering the third rest day of the 2023 FIDE World Championship, Nepomniachtchi and GM Ding Liren have earned two wins apiece,

making for four decisive results in a mere six games. Classical chess is back, baby!

Surely, such unusual fireworks would be due to explosive, confrontational opening preparation? With Ding playing as white once again and his second GM Richard Rapport notorious for preparing off-beat variations, spectators were likely disappointed when Ding elected to open with the much-maligned London System. This opening gets a reputation for dull play, as White plays conservatively in the center and avoids direct confrontation.

After yesterday's loss, Ding had said in the press conference that he was particularly disappointed because he did not think he was playing (or feeling) poorly until he realized too late how much danger he was in. Perhaps his goal for today was to play for a simple draw and regain his composure on the next rest day?

Fast forward three hours, and worldclass grandmasters across multiple commentary streams were speechless, realizing that Ding's odd-seeming 41. d5!?! (which many engines called a mistake!) set up an absolutely genius mating net to close out an excellently played rebound game marked by superb accuracy and creativity. The game was also an odd mirror of the previous round, with White once again expanding on the kingside with a pawn moving from h2-h4-h5 and demonstrating the power of a queen-knight tandem in the ensuing attack.

Ding admitted after the game that he chose to play the London in part because he was not settled on what to play until right before the game, and that he elected to play for flexibility over an objective advantage. Nepomniachtchi elected to defend rather passively, and, as is often the case for the temperamental Russian, he moved quickly and with great commitment in several key moments, missing at least one chance to neutralize Ding's advantage in the process.

With eight games remaining, the match is once again tied. It is impossible to predict what will happen next, but for the sake of entertainment, hopefully the two challengers can continue exchanging blows.

QUEEN'S PAWN GAME (D02)

GM Ding Liren (2788)

GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (2795)

FIDE World Championship (6),

04.01.2023

Annotations by WGM Jennifer Yu

It was tough to guess what would happen



heading into the sixth round of the match. Ding has proven that he can quickly come back from a loss, and many people were excited to see whether he would push to equalize the score as the match neared the halfway mark.

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 d5 3. Bf4

London enthusiasts must be thrilled! Surprisingly this is the first time that the London has been played in any world championship match, although it isn't unexpected for this to be in Ding's repertoire.

3. ... c5 4. e3 Nc6 5. Nbd2 cxd4 6. exd4 Bf5 7. c3 e6 8. Bb5



Ding diverges from the most popular options, such as 8. Qb3 Qc8 9. Nh4 Be4 with an equal position.

8. ... Bd6 9. Bxd6 Qxd6 10. 0-0 0-0

We are only ten moves into the game, and yet there are few games left in the database. Interestingly, the majority of them are blitz games by GM Gata Kamsky, who has been a longtime proponent of the London. The position is calm and playable for both sides, with many different options and plans. Some

ideas for White are to centralize the knight on e5 and to push on the queenside to create weaknesses.

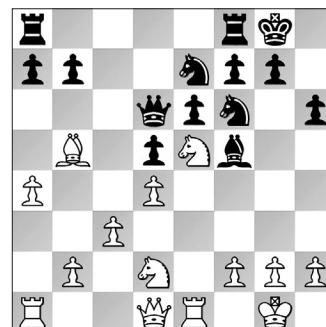
11. Re1 h6

The two previous moves are commonly seen in these types of pawn structures, with the rook creating support for a knight on e5 and the h-pawn push allowing for a timely bishop retreat.

12. Ne5 Ne7

Avoiding a knight exchange. The position might become uncomfortable for Black if the bishop is allowed to capture the c6-knight. Black's dark squares are weak and the d2-knight can relocate to the tempting c5-square via Nd2-b3-c5. It's understandable why Nepo would want to avoid the long-term repercussions of the trade.

13. a4



A multifunctional move that defends the bishop from any ... Qd6-b6 ideas while opening up the possibility of pushing the a-pawn up the board to create queenside weaknesses in Black's camp. This idea is crucial to creating a stronghold on c5 for the knight, as it



locks in the b7-pawn, which is a weakness that White exploits later in the game.

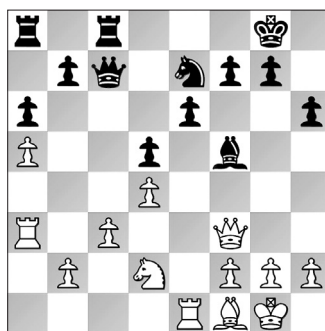
13. ... a6

An interesting idea is 13. ... Qb6 in order to avoid the creation of weaknesses on the queenside. Black instead played this move much later, after White's a-pawn was traded off. By playing it now, Black would momentarily halt White's queenside push and threaten ... a7-a6. Now, after 14. Nb3 a6 15. Bf1 a5, Black can stop White's a4-a5 push. Although Black gives up the b5-square, he successfully prevents the loss of space and the loss of control of the c5-square that would've occurred once White pushed a4-a5. In other words: giving up the b5-square is probably worth it. Black also has the option to take his time and maneuver his minor pieces such as with ... Ne7-c8-d6, where it has control over the center as well as ideas to jump onto the c4-square.

14. Bf1 Nd7 15. Nxd7 Qxd7 16. a5!

This fixes the queenside and creates the permanent b-pawn target for White to attack. This is a common idea when there's a pawn push like ... a7-a6, as it prevents the b-pawn from moving forward, in turn allowing White to take control of the c5-square since there are no more possibilities of Black pushing ... b7-b6 to kick the knight off of its quasi-outpost.

16. ... Qc7 17. Qf3 Rfc8 18. Ra3



Although this move looks strange, there's several different ideas behind it. One is that White has the option to add extra support to the a5-pawn, such as in the case of a Nd2-b3 maneuver to get to c5, when Black might play ... Ne7-c6 and White can now play, e.g., Qd1-a1 to provide backup for the rook on the a-file. The rook has other useful functions on the third rank as well, which we will see later on in the game with Ra3-b3, adding extra pressure on the b7-pawn. This also opens the possibility of a b2-b4 pawn push.

Another reasonable idea would be to prepare the b2-b4 push by protecting the c3-pawn with 18. Rec1, followed by maneuvering the knight to c5, with a clamp on the queenside. After 18. ... Bg6 19. b4 Nf5 20. Nb3, White should be in control.

18. ... Bg6

A smart "waiting move" that opens up the f5-square for the knight and preemptively

responds to any attacks on the bishop such as g2-g4 pushes that now will no longer come with tempo.

19. Nb3 Nc6 20. Qg3 Qe7

Although the position is evaluated as only slightly better for White, it's hard for Black to find productive moves here. This move avoids the queen trade, after which White could have maintained his pressure on Black's queenside. However, now Ding has time to improve on his position further.

21. h4

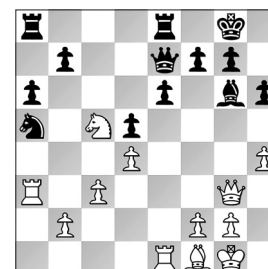
No rush! Ding takes the time to grab space on the kingside.

21. ... Re8 22. Nc5 e5

An active move hoping to create some counterplay and chances.

After something like 22. ... Rac8 23. b4 White can comfortably push on for the rest of the game.

It is important to not play 22. ... Nxa5??



POSITION AFTER 22. ... Nxa5??



This move doesn't work because after 23. Rxa5 b6 24. h5! would illustrate another reason why the h4-pawn push was so useful.

a) After 24. ... Bxh5 25. Nxe6 fxe6 26. Rxd5! exd5? 27. Rxe7 Rxe7 28. Qh4 the tactics work out in White's favor.

b) Instead, if 24. ... bxa5 then simply 25. hxg6 and Black's kingside will fall apart soon.

c) Finally, after 24. ... Bh7 25. Nxe6 fxe6 26. Rxd5 exd5 27. Rxe7 Rxe7 28. Qd6 then White is winning.

23. Rb3

White forces an exchange of pieces that opens up the center.

A clever, even more accurate, alternative is 23. b4!, defending the c5-knight while threatening to capture on e5.

a) After 23. ... e4 White can put pressure on Black's center without allowing chances of counterplay on the queenside like in the game, and after 24. f3 e3 25. Ra2 the e3-pawn will fall at some point.

b) If Black instead plays a waiting move like 23. ... Bf5 then 24. dxe5 Nxe5 25. Raa1 and Black has too many weaknesses to defend, as White is threatening Nc5xb7 and f2-f4.

23. ... Nxa5 24. Rxe5 Qf6 25. Ra3 Nc4

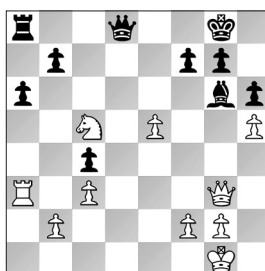
Or 25. ... b6 26. Nd7 Qc6 27. Rxe8+ Rxe8 28. Ne5 and White is better.

26. Bxc4 dxc4 27. h5?!

A good alternative is 27. Nxb7, as after 27. ... Qb6 28. Nd6 Rxe5 29. Qxe5 Qxb2 30. Nxc4 White has a solid extra pawn.

27. ... Bc2

A critical moment. Black could have played 27. ... Rxe5! 28. dxe5 Qd8!



POSITION AFTER 28. ... Qd8!

This is the clever idea behind the trade of rooks, creating counterplay. This move takes advantage of the now-awkward position of the a3-rook that would much rather be on the back rank defending against a possible perpetual check.

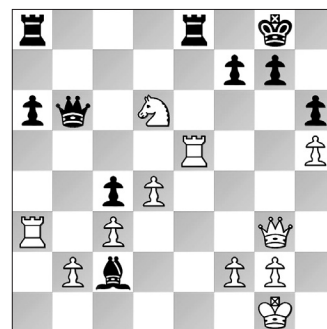
a) White can try 29. Qf3 Bc2 but after 30. Ra1 (Or 30. Nxb7? Qd2! 31. Ra1 Bd3 with good chances of holding a draw due to Black's active pieces) 30. ... b6 31. Nb7 Qd3 there is nothing.

b) White has no edge after 29. hxg6 Qd1+ 30. Kh2 Qh5+ 31. Kg1 Qd1+ 32. Kh2 Qh5+ 33. Qh3 is equal.

28. Nxb7

The b7-pawn finally goes down. At a quick glance, it looks like Black can get the material back quickly, but some clever tactical ideas work out in White's favor, keeping the advantage.

28. ... Qb6 29. Nd6!



A monster square for the knight, attacking the c4-pawn and creating ideas of a kingside attack.

29. ... Rxe5

Not 29. ... Qxd6?? 30. Rxe8+ ending the game instantly.

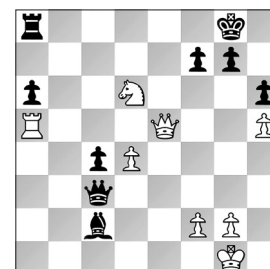
30. Qxe5 Qxb2 31. Ra5

White's rook is getting back into the game and now he is threatening the deadly Nd6-e8.

The immediate 31. Ne8? doesn't work because of 31. ... Rxe8! 32. Qxe8+ Kh7 and there is no way for White to prevent the perpetual check while still defending the rook. After 33. Ra5 Qc1+ 34. Kh2 Qf4 White is better.

31. ... Kh7

A useful move to get the king off the back rank and out of some tactical troubles. Ding uses this time to improve his pieces further. After 31. ... Qxc3??



POSITION AFTER 21. ... Qxc3??

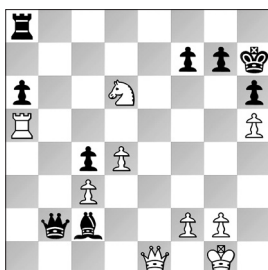
White's attack works now, with 32. Ne8! f6 33. Nxf6+! gxf6 34. Qd5+ Kg7 35. Qb7+ and Black can resign.

32. Rc5?!

The idea is that after 32. Ne8 Rxe8, then 33. Qxe8 no longer comes with check, allowing Black to play 33. ... Qc1+ 34. Kh2 Qf4+.

Even worse is 32. Nxf7?? Rf8 33. Nd6 Qb1+ 34. Kh2 Rxf2 and Black is back in the game.

Instead, White should have played 32. Qe1!



POSITION AFTER 32. Qe1

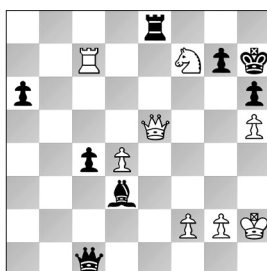
Going backwards in this position is the correct idea. Now that Black has multiple weaknesses that can't be simultaneously

covered, White has the time to defend his own weaknesses. 32. ... Bd3 33. Nxc4! Qb7 (or 33. ... Bxc4 34. Qe4+ winning) 34. Ne5 with a solid advantage.

32. ... Qc1+?

After this, Black loses his opportunities for counterplay. White's superior pieces and Black's weak king will be the deciding factor. Nepomniachtchi did spend nine minutes on this decision, but he still had 36 minutes remaining to Ding's 19 after he played it. It won't be easy, but after 32. ... Qxc3!, Black has some good ideas that may hold the position.

a) For instance, after 33. Nxf7 Bd3 34. Rc7 Qc1+ 35. Kh2 Re8!!

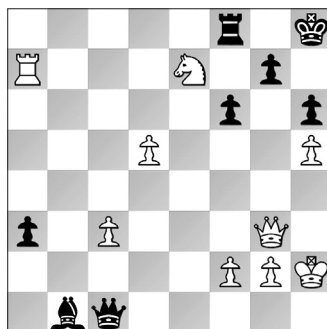


POSITION AFTER 35. ... Re8!!

This is the idea! The activated black rook is a game-changer, as after 36. Qg3 (Or 36. Qxe8 Qf4+ 37. Kg1 Qc1 with only a small plus for White) 36. ... Re1 equalizes.

b) After 33. Rc7 Qd2! 34. Rxf7 Qc1+ 35. Kh2 Qg5 everything is defended for now, and in the upcoming moves, Black can push his a-pawn to create some counterplay. After a queen trade, there are good chances for Black to hold the endgame.

33. Kh2 f6 34. Qg3 a5 35. Nxc4 a4 36. Ne3 Bb1 37. Rc7! Rg8 38. Nd5 Kh8 39. Ra7 a3 40. Ne7 Rf8 41. d5



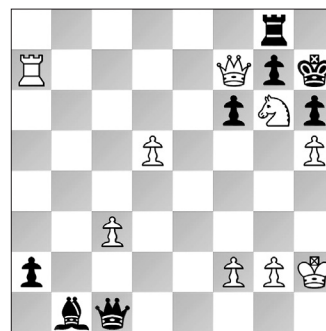
Preparing a very sneaky idea...

41. ... a2 42. Qc7!

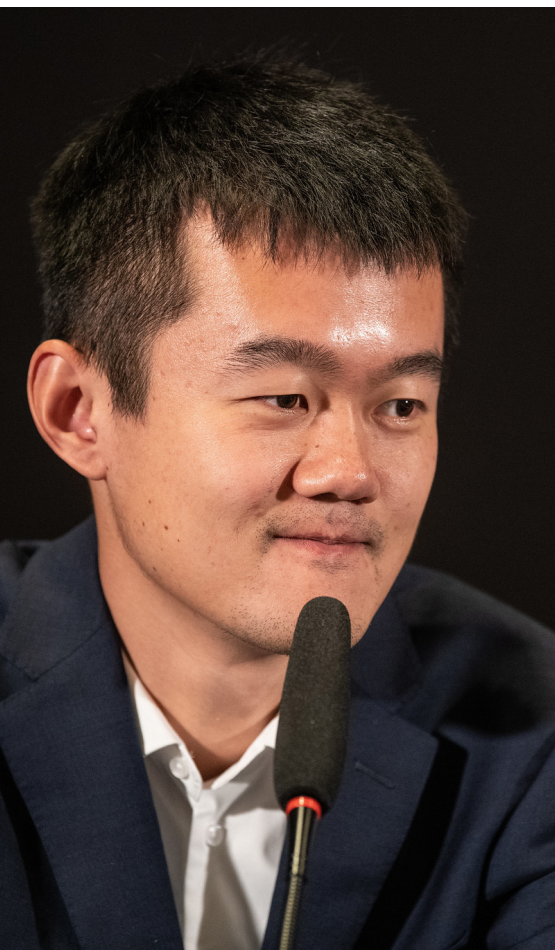


Forced mate is incoming! The d5-pawn takes away the escape square on e6 for Black's king in the situation where White sacrifices the queen for the rook.

42. ... Kh7 43. Ng6 Rg8 44. Qf7!, Black resigned.



Now, Qf7xg8 is coming with a beautiful forced mate. This concludes the first six-game stretch of the world championship match! Thoughts on whether the chaos will continue?



PHOTOS: FIDE / DAVID LLADA