

Back Rank Mate

Chess

The most common checkmate at every level, and how to prevent it.

A castled king trapped by its own pawns.

1

Recognise the pattern

King on the back rank, three pawns in front, no escape square.

2

Look for the file

An open or half-open file to their back rank.

3

Remove the defender

Often a deflection or a sacrifice on the defending piece.

4

Deliver mate

Rook or queen to the back rank.

PREVENTION

Play h3 or h6 early — 'luft'

Keep a rook on the back rank

Notice when your last defender is overloaded

Back-rank weakness underlies a huge share of tactics — many combinations work only because of an unprotected back rank.