

The Objective of Chess

Part 5 – Rapid Checkmates: Fool's Mate, Scholar's Mate; Three-Move Mate

Introduction. Some opening moves and pawn advances by one of the players may present the opportunity for a rapid checkmate on his or her King. Each of the rapid checkmates thus exhibits the difference between a **forced checkmate** (a player cannot escape a mating net) and an **opportunistic checkmate** (a player presents a checkmate opportunity to the other player that would not otherwise exist). Many beginners, not knowing the basics of playing chess, often fall prey to a rapid checkmate. Doing so is nothing to be ashamed of when just beginning to play chess.

Doing so shows only that the player has not yet learned the concept of **pattern recognition** on the chessboard. The player has not, often because of an eagerness to start "playing chess," taken the time to learn which moves of pieces and which pawn advances made when playing White or Black will subject the player to a devastating loss. Fortunately, most beginners who do fall prey to rapid checkmates learn not to do so again after the first one. However, some take a few more crushing experiences before the point hits home: certain combinations of moves in the opening are downright foolishly devastating. Equally important is that the player must be able to utilize pattern recognition not just to avoid a rapid checkmate, but throughout the game of chess.

The rapid checkmates represent the best examples for congealing into focus many aspects of combining rules, basic principles, and concepts for playing chess. Pattern recognition is the key basic elemental concept for effectively moving pieces and advancing pawns, whether alone or in combination, to accomplish a player's intended goals in his or her game plan - by creating threats and launching attacks, creating effective defenses, checking, checkmating, drawing, or stalemating as may be appropriate during the game. Tactical and strategic play revolve around effectively being able to do so while playing the game. The importance of keeping focused on the Foundation for Playing Chess: Pattern Recognition, Developing a Plan, and Execution of the Plan, neither can be overstated nor overemphasized.

The two most commonly encountered rapid checkmates are: (1) the two-move mate called **Fool's Mate** - Black mates White; and, (2) the four-move mate called **Scholar's Mate** - White mates Black. A less common rapid checkmate is a **three-move mate** (no specific name) comparable to Fool's Mate for White against Black.

I. Fool's Mate.

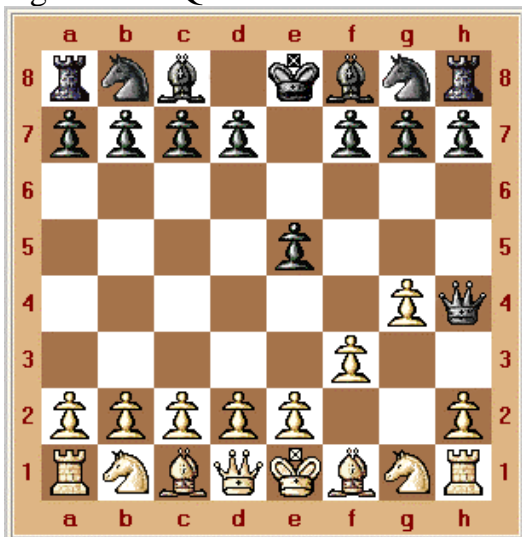
This rapid checkmate is the quickest mate possible in chess. The mate is only possible by Black against White. The mate is comprised of two pawn advances by White, and a pawn advance and move of Black's Queen to checkmate White's King. There are eight possibilities of pawn advances and then the move by Black's Queen to checkmate. This is the reason why often Fool's Mate is described differently on various websites and in chess texts. The eight possibilities are:

- 1.f4 e5 2.g4 Qh4#
- 1.f4 e6 2.g4 Qh4#
- 1.f3 e6 2.g4 Qh4#
- 1.f3 e5 2.g4 Qh4#
- 1.g4 e6 2.f4 Qh4#
- 1.g4 e6 2.f3 Qh4#
- 1.g4 e5 2.f3 Qh4#
- 1.g4 e5 2.f4 Qh4#

The following diagram shows the checkmate position for the last line above for Fool's Mate.

DIAGRAM OBJ-5A: Fool's Mate

1.g4 e5 2.f4 Qh4#



It is doubtful that anyone who has fallen into this rapid checkmate, falls into the mate again. In Fool's Mate, the sole and exclusive important pattern recognition is White advancing his or her two pawns on the Kingside in a manner that opens the black diagonal from h4 to e1 for the Black's Queen to move, attack/check, and checkmate White's King. This rapid checkmate can occur only if the players make the requisite

pawn advances and move by Black's Queen necessary to result in the checkmate. However, White does not need to advance his or her King's Bishop pawn (the pawn in front of the Bishop on the Kingside) two squares vertically forward, but instead could have advanced it only one square and the same result would occur. Similarly, Black did not need to advance his or her King's pawn two squares, but instead could have advanced the pawn only one square and still opened the diagonal for Black's Queen to move and checkmate. However, White must advance the King's Knight pawn two squares to open the diagonal into White's King.

Additionally, the order of advancing the pawns is not important because each player must make the requisite pawn advances opening the diagonal for Black's Queen, or else Fool's Mate cannot occur. It matters not the slightest amount of consideration how the players reach doing so. Therefore, the recognizable pattern is the pawn advances by the players, and neither simply advancing pawns and moving a piece, nor the order in which they are done. Similarly, the pattern recognition dictates that there would be more than one set of pawn advances and move by Black's Queen that would result in Fool's Mate.

II. Scholar's Mate.

The first mention of Scholar's mate occurs in Arthur Saul's "Famous Game Of Chesse Play" (first published in 1614). His book provided classifications for different kinds of mate, including stalemate, and Scholar's Mate, and Fool's Mate.

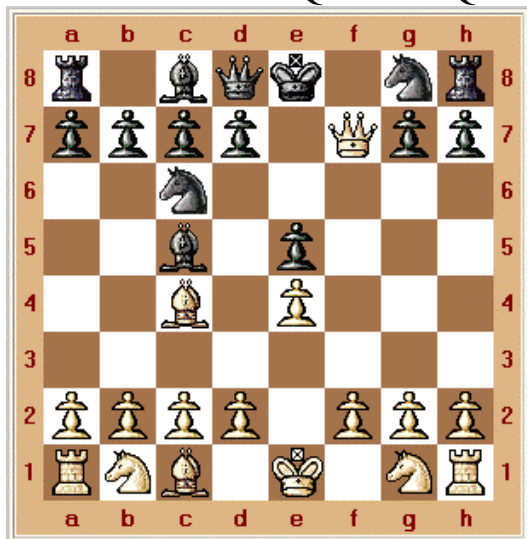
[sources: www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Lab/7378/oldtexts.htm & www.chess-poster.com/english/chesmayne/brief_notes_on_the_history_of_chess_1600.htm]

Scholar's Mate is based on what is called a "**trap**" in chess. "What exactly is a 'chess trap'? ... [The definition of] the word 'trap' ... by The Merriam-Webster Dictionary [includes] ... 'something by which one is caught unawares'. The Oxford Companion to Chess says 'trap, generally an attractive line of play that is less advantageous than it appears and which may have been deliberately set as a temptation by the opponent. As much could be said of many possibilities in a game, and there is no precise definition of a trap, nor is the element of temptation essential. When one of the great contemporary authorities on chess says, 'there is no precise definition of a trap', we have no choice but to return to Merriam-Webster. ... 'something by which one is caught unawares'. Yes, that's it. A chess trap has a large element of surprise: the trapped player didn't notice anything special, but the position is suddenly, completely, irrevocably lost." [source (quoted/paraphrased): chess.about.com/library/weekly/aa03h09.htm]

This is true of all of the rapid checkmates - being "caught unawares," as in the many more traps in chess than occur in the rapid checkmates. Learning the rapid checkmates therefore provides a base upon which a player is able to engage in pattern recognition for many other chess traps.

So what is Scholar's Mate, and how does the concept of a chess trap come into play? As the definition states ... the Black player is caught unawares. Black fails to recognize a structural position weakness at f7. The same occurs in Fool's Mate where the White player fails to recognize that advancing the King's Knight pawn two squares opens the diagonal from h4 to e1, allowing Black's Queen to checkmate from h4. In Scholar's Mate, Black also fails to appreciate the significance of moves by White's Bishop and Queen, lining them up to attack/check and checkmate Black's King from the f7 square that is undefended. The following diagram shows the checkmate position for one of the many possible lines leading to Scholar's Mate. Naturally, as more pawns and pieces are moved out from their home squares and brought into play on the chessboard, generally is an exponential increase in the ability to create attacks and threats, as well as checkmating an opposing King.

DIAGRAM OBJ-5B: Scholar's Mate
 1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Nc6 3.Qf3 Bc5 4.Qxf7#



It is important to learn as rapidly as possible the pattern of the Scholar's Mate. There are four reasons for doing so.

1. Avoiding checkmate is very easy (and rightly should be in the early part of a chess game), requiring simple application of basic principles. At the same time, though, it **requires a player taking a broader view of the positioning of pieces and pawns on the chessboard, and the opportunity for creating threats and attacks, because Black and White must think along converging avenues on the chessboard.** In this rapid checkmate, along the b4 to f7 diagonal, and vertically in the f-file from f3 to f7.

2. In easily avoiding Scholar's Mate, Black may be able to begin a hunt to seize and capture White's Queen. Bringing the Queen out on the third move, White may subject the Queen to being harried all around the chessboard by Black's minor pieces and pawns lessening greatly her effectiveness and severely wounding White's game. This provides the theoretical basis for another basic principle: **never bring the Queen out into play early in the game.**
3. While Scholar's Mate is easily avoided, the converging lines leading to the mate focusing on f7 highlight the concept of **inherent structural weakness** for certain squares on the chessboard relative to attacking, checking, and checkmating an opposing King. Scholar's Mate exhibits the importance of adequately defending and protecting f7 against an attack. A similar inherent structural weakness exists for f3, and attack against White's King.

The concept of inherent structural weakness for f7 and f3 provides one of the primary bases for the paramount concern for **King safety** in the opening and middlegame phases of a chess game. King safety is covered in other tutorials, including the King tutorial, and companion tutorial The Castle Move or Castling tutorial. An important adjunct basic principle is that the most natural defensive home for a King's Knight is at f3 for White, and f6 for Black. The positioning of the King's Knights on these squares provides important defense structure for the players' Kings in many common openings. Thus, in the line of play above if instead Black had moved his or her King's Knight to f6 on the third move, then White could not have done Scholar's Mate.

Focusing attention on the King's Knight highlights the importance of another basic principle - **development**...getting a player's Bishops and Knights into play on the chessboard (off their home squares), and into an effective position for offensive and defensive play. In Scholar's Mate, Black's development of his or her King's Bishop to b5 or alternatively development of his or her Queen's Knight to c6, whichever occurred as Black's third move, was not effective development. Neither would provide necessary defense for Black's King, would provide no immediate threat against White, and simply opened Black to White doing Scholar's Mate. Black's development was a blunder (represented by the symbol: ??), because Black is "caught unawares" leading to a rapid checkmate.

The above discussion provides a keen insight into playing chess - building upon a solid foundation of understanding, connecting, and interweaving

rules, principles, and concepts into a game plan designed to win a chess game. or reach one of the alternative objectives, draw or stalemate.

4. Learning the pattern recognition for Scholar's Mate also exhibits what I advocate is the overriding primary principle in chess: **combination**. In its broadest sense, combination means using a player's pieces and/or pawns together, combining moves and advances, either to create or take advantage of positional structural deficiencies and blocks afforded by where pieces and/or pawns are located, to relatively increase the power of pieces and/or pawns working together toward reaching a goal during the game.

III. Three-Move Mate.

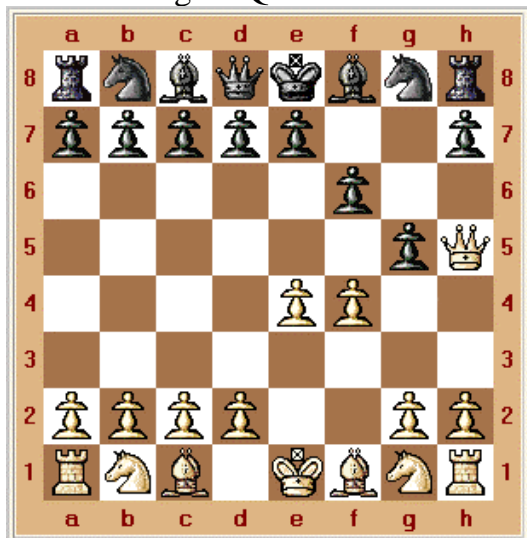
This rapid checkmate is less common than Fool's Mate and Scholar's Mate, but is comparable to the two-move mate that occurs in Fool's Mate. The reason is because teaching chess to beginners focuses notably on defensive and offensive struggles in the center of the chessboard during opening play in a game of chess. All of the most common openings centralize focus on the center of the chessboard. However, like Fool's Mate, this checkmate occurs because there is a failure by a player to centralize that focus by advancing pawns in a manner that exposes his or her King to attack/check and checkmating from a side (**wing**) of the chessboard. Such an attack is called a **flank attack**. There are more advanced openings based on flank attacks and theoretical bases for yielding control of the center of the chessboard, but both Fool's Mate and the three-move mate are not based thereon.

The three-move mate is only possible by White against Black. The third move is the earliest White can mate Black in a game of chess. Naturally, Black may be able to mate White on the third move because Black can mate White on the second move with Fool's Mate. However, this rapid checkmate is for White against Black.

The basic flaw discussed above for Fool's Mate and Scholar's Mate - being "caught unawares" - applies equally to this rapid checkmate. Black advances his or her f-pawn and g-pawn in a manner that opens the h5-e8 diagonal into Black's King, allowing White to checkmate from h5. Both Fool's Mate and the three-move mate are singular in focus...flank attacks along a diagonal line from a side/wing of the board, unlike Scholar's Mate involving converging avenues on the board. As pointed out above in the Scholar's Mate discussion, as the number of moves and pawn advances increases, then the possible lines leading to checkmate exponentially increase. Therefore, more than eight lines of play (the maximum number for Fool's Mate) can lead to this mate, but the possibilities are far less than for Scholar's Mate. The diagram on the next page shows the checkmate position for one of the possible lines.

DIAGRAM OBJ-5C: Three-Move Mate

1.e4 f6 2.f4 g5 3.Qh5#



If Black did not advance the f-pawn, or advanced the g-pawn only one square to g6 instead of two squares to g5, then White could not have done the three-move mate. A very simple defense against this rapid checkmate applying rules, basic principles, and concepts to develop pattern recognition.

Summary and Conclusion.

Avoiding the rapid checkmates lies in a player being able to observe and counter recognizable patterns of moves by opposing pieces and advances by opposing pawns that lead to disastrous checkmates of the player's King. A player in essence must develop an ability to "read the mind of the opposing player," no easy task.

The ability to do so becomes harder as the possible lines of play exponentially increase as pieces and pawns are positioned through moves and advances made to build and construct each player's game plan. Often beginners, and even seasoned players, fail to spot positions from which to do either forced or opportunistic checkmates, or traps that may lead to checkmate. Doing so may have an immediate consequence as occurs in the rapid checkmates, or more importantly during a game which may lead to later disastrous consequences. Traditional learning of chess emphasizes a focus on both simple/elemental checkmates, and forced checkmate patterns where the opposing player cannot avoid the checkmate no matter what he or she does. However, during a chess game an opportunistic checkmate may be presented.

Usually, not checkmating when one has an opportunity is not a sound way to play chess for obvious reasons. However, sometimes a better player playing a game against a lower level opposing player who errs and makes pawn advances opening up a rapid checkmate

situation will not take advantage of it. The player intentionally makes pawn advances or moves pieces so as to not checkmate. This is done out of courtesy and to allow the lower level opposing player to play out a more prolonged game and not suffer a quicker defeat. Then after the game, often the better player will take the time to show him or her where he or she went wrong and explain how he or she could have been checkmated earlier. If one is fortunate to encounter this, be grateful for there are chess players who will take the quick checkmate, say “thanks for the game,”“ and be on their merry way...leaving the checkmated opposing player in frustration, humiliation, and bewilderment. I am not a fan of playing this way, yet each chess player has to develop his or her own sense of chess etiquette.

Hopefully, the above gives a keen insight into the importance of the role which pattern recognition has to do with winning and losing a game of chess. Developing an astute awareness of pattern recognition is not only important for creating threats and attacks, checking and checkmating, but also for determining whether to seek an alternative to checkmate - resignation, draws, or stalemate, to which we turn our focus in Part 6.

Part 1 – Checkmate and Checking

Part 2 – Attacks and Threats

Part 3 - Checkmates (simple and complex); Anatomy of Mate/Patterns; Mating Net; Pattern Recognition

Part 4 – Simple Checkmates and Controlling Squares

Part 6 - The Alternatives to Checkmate – Resignation; Draws; and Stalemate

Mark Lowery’s Exciting World of Chess