

THE SQUEEZE

An alternative to the elimination play as a method of developing an extra trick is the “squeeze”. To listen to experienced players talk, one might well imagine that the squeeze is the only possible way to make a difficult contract, but they are, in fact, a comparatively rare form of play, requiring very specific conditions in order to achieve success. The reason that experienced players discuss them with so much enthusiasm is that they are by far the most satisfying form of play. Despite the fact that they are rare, it is extremely valuable to learn the mechanics of the squeeze. There is no better method of understanding how to look for that crucial additional trick in borderline contracts.

There are many weird and wonderful types of squeezes but it is not the purpose of this article to expound on all the difficult variations, but rather to examine the basic requirements for the successful squeeze. Essentially the squeeze is a manoeuvre employed in the end-game, but the ability to visualise the end position is required right from the start of the play. Here is a very basic example...

Example 1

♠ 7 6 4 ♥ K Q 7 3 ♦ 9 7 6 3 ♣ K 8	W	E	♠ A K Q J 5 3 ♥ A 9 5 ♦ A J ♣ A 6
N		E	S
		2♣	P
P		3♠	P
P		7♠	All pass
			W
			2NT
			4♥

East’s raise to 7♠ over his partner’s 4♥ response was somewhat speculative, to say the least. A much better bid would have been 5NT, a grand-slam force asking his partner to bid 7♥ if he held two of the top three honours in the suit and 6♥ with less than two honours. He could then have ‘corrected’ to spades at the appropriate level. Fortunately for him, partner did hold ♥K Q.

South led the ♦K. Declarer could see twelve tricks on top (six ♠s, three ♥s, one ♦ and two ♣s). The thirteenth trick could only come from the long ♥s provided the suit broke 3-3. But what if the ♥s failed to break? Then the only chance would be if South held the length in ♥s as

well as the marked \spadesuit Q. If this was the position then South would be squeezed by the last \spadesuit .

Declarer won the opening lead and drew trumps in two rounds. He then cashed the \heartsuit A K and the two \clubsuit tricks. Finally he cashed three more rounds of trumps, discarding two \diamond s from the dummy. Assuming that South had started with four \heartsuit s, he would be forced to come down to this three-card ending...

\spadesuit - - -			\spadesuit 3
\heartsuit Q 7	W	E	\heartsuit 9
\diamond 9			\diamond J
\clubsuit - - -			\clubsuit - - -
S			
	\spadesuit - - -		
	\heartsuit J 10		
	\diamond Q		
	\clubsuit - - -		

When declarer plays his last \spadesuit , South is squeezed in the red suits. If he discards the \diamond Q, declarer will cash his promoted \diamond J before cashing the last \heartsuit . If he discards a \heartsuit , declarer can cross to the \heartsuit Q and cash the last \heartsuit to make his contract.

You may be wondering why declarer did not test the \heartsuit s by cashing three rounds of the suit, preserving the \clubsuit K as an entry to the long \heartsuit ? This would have failed because the three-card ending would have been...

\spadesuit - - -			\spadesuit 3
\heartsuit 7	W	E	\heartsuit - - -
\diamond 9			\diamond J
\clubsuit K			\clubsuit 8
S			
	\spadesuit - - -		
	\heartsuit J		
	\diamond Q		
	\clubsuit J		

Now when the declarer cashes his last \spadesuit , South can safely discard his \clubsuit J (or the long \diamond if he is already out of \clubsuit s). The discard from dummy will enable South to select the correct card to discard when a \clubsuit is led to the \clubsuit K. Effectively, the dummy has been squeezed before South. This has happened because cashing three rounds of \heartsuit s changes the status of the

suit from a “menace” to a second “threat” (see below), while leaving South with one too many “idle” cards (the last ♣). Here is the full deal....

			♠	10 2			
			♥	6 2			
			♦	10 8 2			
			♣	Q 10 9 7 5 4			
					N		♠
♠	7 6 4						A K Q J 5 3
♥	K Q 7 3	W			E		♥
♦	9 7 6 3						♦
♣	K 6				S		♣
							A 8
			♠	9 8			
			♥	J 10 8 4			
			♦	K Q 5 4			
			♣	J 3 2			

The ability to visualise the end-position is essential. Although it can be hard work, learning how to visualise the end-game will pay huge dividends in all types of contracts – not to mention the dramatic improvement in the way you defend. The end position above reveals the requirements for success at the point that the squeeze card is played:-

1. A “squeeze card” - the final spade.
2. A “menace suit” - the long hearts.
3. A “threat card” - the diamond Jack.
4. An entry to the menace - the heart Queen.

Either the menace suit or the threat card (or both) *must be over the defender who is being squeezed*. If the menace suit is held under the relevant defender then there must be an entry to the threat card which, in the case of the three-card ending, will always be in the menace suit.

♠	---				♠	3
♥	K	W		E	♥	A 10
♦	J				♦	---
♣	6				♣	---
				S		
				♠	---	
				♥	Q J	
				♦	Q	
				♣	---	

In this example, the contract is in no-trumps and the declarer has run his long ♠ suit to reach this three-card ending. When declarer plays the last spade he is planning to discard the useless ♣ from the dummy, regardless of South's discard. His play to the next trick will depend on that discard, however. If a ♥ is discarded, he will cash the ♥A followed by the ♥10. But if a ♦ is discarded, he will cross to the ♥K and cash the established ♦J.

If any of the four conditions outlined above are not met at the moment the squeeze card is played, then the squeeze will be inoperable. Careful timing of the play is essential – note the order of play in the first example. After drawing trumps, declarer cashed the ♥A K. If either defender had held ♥J 10 doubleton, then declarer could have made his contract simply by crossing to the ♥9 and then returning to the ♣K to cash his master ♥. If the trumps had broken 3-1 and declarer had thoughtlessly cashed his two ♣ tricks before turning to the ♥s, he would have been unable to return to the table to cash the master ♥ if South had held ♥J 10 doubleton. To be defeated by this distribution would be unforgivably careless. Good play demands consideration of all the possibilities, rather than simply playing out the cards and hoping for the best.

More often than not it is the auction that provides a clear indication that a squeeze is the best line to make a tricky contract. In this next example, South enters the auction and gives the game away.

Example 2

♠	Q 5		♠	J 6
♥	A 10 6 5	W	E	♥ K J 9 8 7 3
♦	A 4 2			♦ K 10 3
♣	A 5 4 2			♣ J 7
	N	E	S	W
	P	3♥	X	4♥
	All pass			

At favourable vulnerability, East elected to pre-empt in second seat. After South made a take-out double, West decided that defending a 4♠ contract had much better chances than defending 3♠, so he put the pressure on North by raising his partner to game. North declined the invitation to make a dubious vulnerable sacrifice and the auction ended there.

South cashed the ♠A K and then switched to the ♣K. At this point declarer was not very happy with the contract, since he had already lost two spade tricks and looked set to lose a trick in both minors. Still, 3♠ would have been a very good contract for North/South, conceding four tricks at most. But were there any prospects for making the contract?

Firstly, if the trump suit did not break then North was more likely to hold three trumps because of the auction. This could be tested safely by laying down the Ace first. Although South was marked with the ♣Q it would not be possible to end-play him because the ♦9 was missing and therefore a genuine finesse position did not exist. When in with the ♣Q, South would be able to exit safely with either a ♦ honour or a third ♣. The only remaining possibility was the squeeze.

Although the ♣J was a possible threat card, there was no menace suit available, assuming that South held both the missing ♦ honours. Or was there? It struck declarer that the only possible menace suit was the ♦s, but that an alternative threat card was the ♣5. This would require South to hold at least four ♣s as well as the missing ♦ honours. Declarer must ruff a third round of ♣s, leaving the last ♣5 in dummy as the necessary threat. Then he could run the trumps, expecting to arrive at this four-card ending.

♠ - - - ♥ - - - ♦ A 4 2 ♣ 5	W	E	♠ - - - ♥ 7 ♦ K 10 3 ♣ - - -
S			
♠ - - - ♥ - - - ♦ Q J X ♣ 10			

If South had started with four ♣s and both ♦ honours, then he would be squeezed by the final trump. Declarer thought that North was very likely to reveal any interest he might have in the ♦s by his discards on the long trumps. In the event, declarer was able to get an accurate count of the hand and by the time the last trump was played he knew that the squeeze was virtually sure to succeed. He ducked the ♣K and won the good continuation of the ♣Q with the ♣A. He immediately ruffed a third ♣ and crossed to the ♥A. South showed out on the first round, discarding a ♠. Declarer took the marked ♥ finesse and played a further three rounds

of the suit. South discarded a second ♠ and two ♦s. North discarded a ♦ and a ♠. The final ♥ was the squeeze card and South discarded yet another ♦. Declarer confidently discarded the small ♣ from dummy, which had achieved its purpose. He was confident because North had already discarded a ♦. Since the declarer could not make the contract if either of the defenders now held all three missing ♦s, he simply played a small ♦ to the ♦A and claimed the last two ♦ tricks when both defenders followed.

♠ 10 8 7 4 3
 ♥ Q 4 2
 ♦ 7 5
 ♣ 9 8 6

♠ Q 5	N		♠ J 6
♥ A 10 6 5	W	E	♥ K J 9 8 7 3
♦ A 4 2			♦ K 10 3
♣ A 5 4 2	S		♣ J 7

♠ A K 9 4
 ♥ - - -
 ♦ Q J 9 8 6
 ♣ K Q 10 3

Could the defence have done anything about this? Perhaps. If South leads out the ♣K before cashing the two ♠s, declarer's timing goes awry. If he ducks the first ♣ and South continues with the ♣Q, declarer must play a third round of ♣s and discard a losing ♠ from hand. If declarer ruffs the third ♣ instead, he will have succeeded in setting up the last ♣ as a threat, but he will not yet have dealt with his ♠ losers. As the cards lie this will not matter, since South will be forced to guard all three suits and will still be squeezed on the last ♥. If the ♠ honours had been divided, however, South would still have had an "idle" card, which could be discarded on the last ♥.

This last point is well illustrated by the next example, where it is crucial that declarer should lose his losers early before applying the squeeze.

Example 3

♠ K J 10 ♥ Q 8 7 2 ♦ A 10 8 4 ♣ A 7	W E	♠ A Q 9 8 7 4 ♥ ----- ♦ 9 5 2 ♣ K Q 4 2
----------------------------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------------------------------

N	E	S	W
3♥	4♠	P	5♥*
P	6♠	All pass	

*Trial bid, agreeing ♠s.

South led the ♥5. Declarer raised his eyebrows a bit when his partner's hand came down, since he had assumed that the 5♥ trial bid would show a much stronger ♦ suit. On reflection, however, he acknowledged that it was probably his own fault. He was not strong enough to make the jump overcall of 4♠ but should have settled for the more descriptive 3♠.

The slam did not look particularly appealing, since even if he ruffed a ♣ in dummy before drawing trumps, he would still have only eleven tricks (five ♠s, one ♥ ruff, one ♦, three ♣s and a ♣ ruff). In any case there was no guarantee that the second round of ♣s would not be ruffed by North, since he was marked with at least a seven-card ♥ suit for his vulnerable pre-emptive opening.

If North held either 2-7-3-1 or 2-7-4-0 shape the contract would not make if he held a ♦ honour, since the dummy would be forced into making a crucial discard before him. On the other hand, it was far more likely that South would be the defender who held length in both of the minors, especially if the trumps broke evenly. Assuming this was true then South would be squeezed by the last trump, provided declarer disposed of his essential loser as early as possible. Since there were no realistic prospects of discarding enough ♦s from either hand, declarer decided that the squeeze against South had to be the best option.

He ruffed the opening lead in his hand and crossed to dummy with the ♠10. After ruffing a second ♥, he drew both outstanding trumps with the ♠K. Now he simply exited with a low ♦ to North's ♦Q. North returned the ♥A for declarer to ruff, on which South discarded a ♦. Declarer crossed to the ♣A and ruffed the last ♥, with South discarding another ♦. Finally he returned to dummy with the ♦A and led out the

last trump, discarding the last ♦ from his hand. South was now squeezed in ♦s and ♣s.

	♠		6 2	
	♥		A K J 10 9 6 4	
	♦		Q	
	♣		10 9 5	
♠	K J 10	N	♠	A Q 9 8 7 4
♥	Q 8 7 2	W	E	-----
♦	A 10 8 4			9 5 2
♣	A 7	S	♣	K Q 4 2
	♠		5 3	
	♥		5 3	
	♦		K J 7 6 3	
	♣		J 9 6 3	

Declarer knew that the squeeze would be successful because he had a complete count of the hand when he led out the final trump. North began with 2-7-1-3 shape (revealed by the play to the ♠s, ♥s and ♦s) and therefore South started with 2-2-5-4 shape and now held the guard in both of the minors. The relevant end position:-

♠	J		♠	---
♥	---	W	E	---
♦	10 8			9
♣	7	S	♣	K Q 4
	♠		---	
	♥		---	
	♦		K	
	♣		J 8 6	

Note that declarer's plan would have worked even if South had started with three trumps. The squeeze will now operate when declarer ruffs the last ♥. South can postpone the inevitable by under-ruffing, but this will just revert to the end position outlined above. Otherwise, declarer will return to the dummy with the ♦A to draw the last trump before playing out his established suit.

By losing his ♦ trick early while keeping the suit protected, the declarer carried out a manoeuvre known as ‘rectifying the count’. This is an essential requirement for any squeeze to work, since otherwise the relevant defender will always have a spare idle card to discard at the critical moment.

Once he had conceded his ♦ loser, declarer then had to find a method of extracting South’s idle cards. The only way to do this was to play the hand on dummy reversal lines, forcing South to discard his idle cards while declarer ruffed out the ♥ suit.

North should have returned a ♣ when in with the ♦Q, since this would have knocked out one of declarer’s entries before he had completed the dummy reversal play. Now declarer would not have had the entries to ruff out the ♥s and dispose of his second ♦ on the last trump. For this reason, declarer should have ruffed a third round of ♥s before exiting with a small ♦ from both hands. In this way he would have kept control of the timing.

Sometimes the potential for a squeeze exists but the declarer lacks the necessary squeeze card. The only possible escape from this dilemma is to enlist the help of an unwitting opponent. This next hand is a spectacular example of this type of play.

Example 4

♠	10 7 2		♠	A Q 4 3	
♥	A J	W	E	♥	Q 7 6
♦	A J 7 6 4			♦	K 5 2
♣	10 6 4			♣	A K 9
N		E	S	W	
		1♠	P	2♦	
P		3NT	All pass.		

South led the ♥10. The contract looked fairly straightforward, even though there were only seven sure tricks (one ♠, two ♥s, two ♦s and two ♣s). The ♦s would yield an additional two tricks (at least) provided both defenders followed to the first two rounds. Declarer won the opening lead in dummy with the ♥J and considered taking an immediate finesse in ♠s, but decided that this would be far too dangerous if the finesse lost and the ♦s did not break. Accordingly he switched to a ♦ to the ♦K and South showed out! Quite suddenly a relatively simple hand had turned very awkward. What to do?

Declarer could cross back to the dummy and try the ♠ finesse, but even if it worked he would still have only eight tricks. But a much better chance was to try and enlist the aid of South. The probability was that he had a five or six-card ♥ suit and if he could be persuaded to run it, there was a very strong possibility that North could be squeezed if he held strength in either or both of the black suits. Alternatively South himself might hold strength in both ♠s and ♣s, in which case he might well find himself end-played for the eighth trick after running the ♥s. If this was the case, he could then be squeezed by the play of the ♦A.

Assuming momentarily that South did hold a six-card ♥ suit, declarer's first consideration had to be his own discards. He could safely discard two ♦s, one ♠ and one ♣ from the dummy. From his own hand he could discard one ♦ and one ♠, but his discard on the last ♥ would have to be determined by North, who would also have to find four discards. With luck, declarer's play to the last ♥ would be marked by North's final discard.

The second consideration was threats and menaces. Obviously the ♦ suit is a menace against North, but at this stage it was not certain which was the threat card. Remember, for the squeeze to work either the threat card or the menace suit (or both) *must be held over the player who is being squeezed*. The best chance of the threat card is the third ♠ (in the event that North started with ♠K J X (X)). With either of these holdings North is more likely to discard ♣s on the long ♥s. Therefore the master ♣ would squeeze North out of his long ♠ and then a finesse of the ♠K could be taken, via the ♦A entry.

If North discarded ♠s rather than ♣s then the ♣9 would be the threat card if he started with ♣Q J X (X). If North held both ♣ honours to four (or more) ♣s then the contract was unlikely to make unless he also held the ♠K. Without the ♠K, North would have a spare idle card to discard on the last ♥. It was true, however, that South would be forced to return a ♠ after cashing the sixth ♥ if North held a five-card ♣ suit (since South discarded a ♣ on the ♦K) and declarer must return to hand with a ♣ to lead out his third ♥. At worst this line would guarantee eight tricks.

It was possible, of course, that South started with only five ♥s. If so, he would be able to cash only three tricks in the suit and North would be unable to discard more than one ♦ without setting up the suit for only one loser. Because of this possibility, declarer planned to discard the ♣10 from dummy on the third ♥. This served to isolate the potential ♣ threat in his hand. If North then followed to the third ♥, declarer would discard the last ♣ and a low ♠ from dummy on the fourth and fifth ♥s. The last ♥ would give North an impossible discard if he started with 2-3-

5-3 shape, with the ♠K and both ♣ honours. With this holding a second ♦ discard would be safe only if South then switched to a ♣, but then North could be end-played by another round of ♣s.

		♠	K 9 8				
		♥	8 3				
		♦	Q 10 9 8 3				
		♣	Q J 7				
♠	10 7 2	N		♠	A Q 4 3		
♥	A J	W	E	♥	Q 7 6		
♦	A J 7 6 4			♦	K 5 2		
♣	10 6 4	S		♣	A K 9		
		♠	J 6 5				
		♥	K 10 9 5 4 2				
		♦	-----				
		♣	8 5 3 2				

After winning the lead with the ♥J and cashing the ♦K, declarer took the ♥A. Returning to hand with the ♣A he exited with the ♥Q, discarding the ♣10 while North discarded a ♦. South then cashed three more ♥s. Two ♦s and the last ♣ were discarded from the dummy. North discarded a second ♦ and a ♠, but was clearly in difficulty on the final ♥. Eventually he discarded the ♠K, hoping that his partner held the ♠Q and could guard the suit. This was the position when the last ♥ was played:-

		♠	K 9				
		♥	---				
		♦	Q 10				
		♣	Q J				
♠	10 7 2	N		♠	A Q 4		
♥	---	W	E	♥	---		
♦	A J			♦	5		
♣	6	S		♣	K 9		
		♠	J 6 5				
		♥	2				
		♦	---				
		♣	8 5				

On the last ♥ dummy discarded the ♣6, North the ♠K and declarer the ♠4. South mistakenly thought his partner's final discard was a demand for a ♠ switch and he returned the ♠5. Declarer won with the ♠Q and North was squeezed for a second time by the ♠A. Eventually he parted with a ♣ and declarer could claim.

As the cards lie the declarer could have chosen a second route to make his contract. After crossing to the ♥A, a ♠ to the ♠Q would have held the trick. Careful play now assures the contract. A low ♦ to the ♦A forces a ♣ discard from South. Declarer can now play a small ♠ from the table. If North plays the ♠K, declarer will duck. North can cash his ♦Q now, but eventually he will be end-played to concede an overtrick to dummy's ♦J. If North plays low on the second ♠, declarer wins with the ♠A and cashes the ♣A K before exiting to North with either a ♠ or a ♣. North will make the ♠K, the ♣Q and two ♦ tricks, but will be forced to concede the remainder. However, if South had held the ♠K this line would have been a miserable failure.

The type of squeeze that North was subjected to is known as a 'progressive squeeze', because the hapless defender is initially squeezed out of a crucial discard and then squeezed again by the play of this discarded suit.

It looks as though South can prevent his partner being squeezed by exiting with a low ♠ to North's ♠K immediately after winning the ♥K. Declarer must be very careful to duck this trick, since otherwise the spade guard will have been transferred to the South hand. Now he will make 10 tricks since the ♠s break (three ♠s, two ♥s, two ♣s and eventually three ♦s because North will be thrown in with the third ♣ to lead into dummy's ♦ tenace). It is frustrating to be squeezed at the best of times – but it is infuriating when you are being squeezed by your partner!

Here is a second example of the progressive squeeze, but this time it is the declarer who applies the screw. The deal arose in a Teams event and provided the most significant swing of the match.

Example 5

♠	A 9 8			♠	Q 2
♥	A K 7 5 4	W	E	♥	J 3
♦	10 8 2			♦	A 9
♣	9 6			♣	A K Q J 7 4 3

N	E	S	W
	1♣	X	XX*
P	P	1♦	2♥
P	4♣	P	4♠**
P	4NT	P	5♥
P	6♣	P	P
6♦!	7♣!	All pass.	

*Re-double, showing 9+ HCP, but denying a fit.

**Advance cue-bid, agreeing trumps and showing first round control.

The auction ranks as one of the most aggressive that I have ever come across. It is characteristic of the uglier side of teams' play, where the side that is losing will often try anything to generate a big swing. There is little pleasure involved in playing a match that degenerates to this degree.

Since East/West were vulnerable, while North/South were not, East was faced with a difficult choice over the frivolous 6♦ bid. Clearly the contract had no chance, but equally 6♣ must be a reasonable contract and East/West would need to defeat 6♦ by at least six tricks if he elected to double for penalties. Since it was obvious that his ♣ suit would generate one trick, at best, this did not seem very likely. Eventually he decided to risk 7♣, since South held most, if not all of the outstanding strength and any finesse position was likely to be favourable.

South led the ♦K. Declarer was not at all happy when the dummy came down, since it was apparent that partner's ♦10 was likely to have been promoted in a 6♦ contract and that there would have been a good chance to defeat 6♦ by six tricks, particularly if the ♥ suit broke 3-3. Still, if the ♥ suit did break then 7♣ was laydown, since declarer would make one ♠, four ♥s and a ♥ ruff, one ♦ and six ♣s for all 13 tricks.

With only eleven tricks on top the grand slam did not look particularly promising. Declarer took a few moments to review the auction and then decided that he was probably the favourite after all. South was virtually guaranteed to hold all the outstanding strength (i.e. 12 HCP) and was likely to hold 4-4-4-1 or 4-4-5-0 shape, either of which would explain the aggressive take-out double. Regardless, seven rounds of trumps would reduce him to the point *where he must be squeezed in three suits* on the last trump. He could then be squeezed again by playing on the suit he elected to discard. In addition, he would be unable to discard from a four-card ♥ suit while the declarer held any trumps in his hand, since otherwise the ♥ suit could be ruffed out and established while the ♠A remained as the necessary entry.

A ♠ and two ♦s would be discarded from dummy on the third, fourth and fifth ♣s. Declarer would then select the final discard after South had already discarded. Here is the end position...

♠ A 9 ♥ A K 7 5 4 ♦ - - - ♣ - - -	W E S	♠ Q 2 ♥ J 3 ♦ 9 ♣ 4 3	
	♠ K J ♥ Q 10 8 6 ♦ Q ♣ - - -		

When declarer plays the sixth ♣, South is squeezed. If he discards either a ♠ or a ♦, declarer will discard a ♥ and squeeze South again by playing on the suit that has been established. A ♥ discard is just as simple. Declarer will discard the ♠9 from dummy and establish the ♥ suit by ruffing the third round. The ♠A provides the necessary entry to reach the ♥s.

	♠ 7 6 5 4 ♥ 9 2 ♦ 7 6 4 3 ♣ 10 8 2		
♠ A 9 8 ♥ A K 7 5 4 ♦ 10 8 2 ♣ 9 6	N E S	♠ Q 2 ♥ J 3 ♦ A 9 ♣ A K Q J 7 4 3	
	♠ K J 10 3 ♥ Q 10 8 6 ♦ K Q J 5 ♣ 5		

There is something very satisfying about making a contract that you have been pushed into by the opponents' daft bidding. At the other table the East/West pair settled for a very passive 3NT contract and somehow managed to make only eleven tricks for a score of 660. The

grand slam in ♣s was 2140, thus generating a net score of + 1480 and a huge swing of 16 IMPs.

Sometimes all of the conditions for a squeeze against a particular defender will exist, except that the threat card and the menace suit will both be in the hand under the defender. As previously stated a squeeze will not work in these circumstances, because the crucial discard will have to be made from this hand *before the relevant defender has had to choose which suit to unguard*. Effectively the hand containing both the menace and the threat is squeezed first. However, sometimes it may be possible to transfer the threat to the correct hand.

Example 6

♠	K 9 5		♠	A Q 10 8 4 3	
♥	8 4 3	W	E	♥	J 6 2
♦	A J 5 4			♦	Q 2
♣	A 10 2			♣	K 5
	N	E	S	W	
	1NT	2♠	P	4♠	
	All pass.				

South leads the ♥A and continues with a ♥ to North's ♥K Q. North exits with a trump to the ♠K. At first sight the success of the contract appears to rely on South holding the ♦K, but declarer knows that this finesse will not work since North is marked with all the outstanding strength for his opening bid. If declarer simply runs the ♠s, hoping that North will be forced into unguarding either the ♣s or the ♦s, he will fail. What he must do is cash the ♦A *before* the last trump is played. This transfers the ♦ threat from the dummy to his hand. This is the three-card ending.

			♠	---
			♥	---
			♦	K
			♣	Q J
♠	---	N	♠	3
♥	---	W	♥	---
♦	J	E	♦	Q
♣	A 10		♣	5

When declarer cashes the last trump, he can safely discard the $\spadesuit J$ from the dummy. Now North is squeezed, forced to choose between discarding his \spadesuit winner - correct, just in case his prayers are answered and it is his partner who holds the $\spadesuit Q$ and the declarer is operating a 'pseudo-squeeze' - or unguarding the $\clubsuit s$.

The hand illustrates how crucial it is to be able to visualise the winning end position. The trick is to initially try and picture the three-card ending. If the position envisaged does not provide a winning line, move on to the four-card ending, followed by the five-card ending and so on. Provided that the other conditions for a squeeze are in place, it should be possible to visualise an end position that will succeed.

If the declarer had failed to cash his $\spadesuit A$, this is the four-card ending that would have resulted.

		\spadesuit	---		
		\heartsuit	---		
		\diamond	K 10		
		\clubsuit	Q J		
\spadesuit	---	N		\spadesuit	3
\heartsuit	---	W		\heartsuit	---
\diamond	A J		E	\diamond	Q 2
\clubsuit	A 10			\clubsuit	5

Now when the declarer cashes the last \spadesuit , the dummy is squeezed before North. Whichever suit is discarded from the dummy, North will also discard. No matter how he plays, the declarer will have to concede one more trick.

		\spadesuit	J 7 2		
		\heartsuit	K Q 9		
		\diamond	K 10 7		
		\clubsuit	Q J 8 4		
\spadesuit	K 9 5	N		\spadesuit	A Q 10 8 4 3
\heartsuit	8 4 3	W		\heartsuit	J 6 2
\diamond	A J 5 4		E	\diamond	Q 2
\clubsuit	A 10 2		S	\clubsuit	K 5
		\spadesuit	6		
		\heartsuit	A 10 7 5		
		\diamond	9 8 6 3		
		\clubsuit	9 7 6 3		

South's defence was flawed. He should have recognised from the outset that there was a danger that his partner might be squeezed and led anything but the ♥A. The 9 of either minor would have killed the possibility of a squeeze from the word go. But having led his unsupported ♥A, failing to switch to a minor at trick two was distinctly poor. By cashing their ♥ tricks from the off, all the defence achieved was to rectify the count for the declarer, while at the same time making it very easy for him to work out the correct line.

Even if South had underled his ♥A at trick one, the contract can still be beaten. When North's ♥Q holds the trick, he can exit with a trump at trick two. Now when declarer tries the squeeze North will have a spare idle card in the ♥K to discard. He will still be able to guard both minor suits while retaining an exit card with the ♥9. Declarer does best to try to eliminate ♥s to rectify the count. North will play the ♥9 on the second round and if declarer ducks the ♥J, South will overtake with the ♥10 and (hopefully) switch to a ♦. Even if declarer does go up with the ♦A, he will be unable to run all the trumps without establishing South's long ♥ suit. Meanwhile North will keep his ♥K until the last moment and eventually the defence will come to three ♥ tricks and a trick in one of the minors, or the ♥s will become established for four tricks.

The type of play illustrated by declarer's play of the ♦A is known as the 'Vienna Coup'. Essentially what happens is that a winner is deliberately established for a particular defender (e.g. the ♦K) so that he can be squeezed out of it later.

A more common difficulty that arises in squeeze play is that both defenders may have a guard in the suit that provides the potential threat.

Example 7

♠ J 4 ♥ 10 9 6 3 2 ♦ 10 4 2 ♣ A J 4	W	E	♠ A K Q 9 8 3 2 ♥ 7 ♦ J 8 ♣ Q 9 6
N P	E 4♠	S All pass.	W

South led the ♦K. When North encouraged with the ♦9, South continued with the ♦Q and a third round to North's ♦A. Declarer ruffed this and paused to review the prospects. They were not good. Even if South held

the ♣K, declarer would only be able to cash two ♣ tricks. Since he could not avoid losing a ♥ trick, the contract appeared to be doomed.

There was one chance, however. If South did hold the ♣K and also held at least four ♥s, the ♥10 could be a threat so that South could be squeezed in ♥s and ♣s. The contract had no chance if either one of these conditions were not met, so declarer decided to play for it. There was an additional problem in that North's ♥s would also have to be eliminated, since otherwise he would also be able to guard the suit. Careful timing was essential.

After ruffing the third round of diamonds, declarer must exit with a ♥. If South won and returned a ♣, declarer would trust to luck and run this round to his ♣Q. If South returned a ♠, declarer would win in dummy with the ♠J and ruff a second round of ♥s. He would then play a small ♣ to the ♣J and, if this held, ruff a third round of ♥s. Then he would run the remaining trumps. This is the end position he was playing for.

♠	---				♠	9
♥	10	W		E	♥	---
♦	---				♦	---
♣	A 4		S		♣	Q 9
			♠	---		
			♥	A		
			♦	---		
			♣	K 7		

With luck, when declarer lays down the last trump South will be squeezed. Playing out the ♥ suit until one defender is left guarding the suit is following a manoeuvre known as 'isolating the threat'. Proper timing of the play is vital, of course. After the third ♦ is ruffed in hand, declarer must exit with a ♥ immediately. Any other play removes an essential entry from the dummy and the contract will fail.

As with most squeezes, the position arises as a play of last resort. The difficulty is not in the execution of the squeeze – but in recognising that the possibility exists in the first place. Many players would give up far too early on this type of hand. They would probably play South for ♣K X doubleton and bemoan their luck when the King does not drop on the second round. Whenever you are faced with a difficult hand that seems to have no genuine chance, try to visualise a possible distribution that would work and then play for it. Sometimes the opponents will hold this shape and you will have brought home the 'impossible' contract.

♠ 10 5
 ♥ K Q 4
 ♦ A 9 7 6 3
 ♣ 10 8 2

♠ J 4		N			♠ A K Q 9 7 6 4
♥ 10 9 6 3 2	W		E		♥ 7
♦ 10 4 2					♦ J 8
♣ A J 4		S			♣ Q 9 6

♠ 7 6
 ♥ A J 8 5
 ♦ K Q 5
 ♣ K 7 5 3

There are occasions when it is not possible to know precisely which defender is being squeezed, even though it is apparent that one of them is suffering.

Example 8

♠ 6 5					♠ A J 7 4
♥ K Q 4	W		E		♥ A J 9 8 6 3
♦ A K 9 6					♦ 7
♣ A K Q 2					♣ 6 3

	N		E		S		W
			1♥		P		2♦
	P		2♥		P		4NT*
	P		5♥		P		7♥

East's 1♥ opening was pushy, particularly as East/West were at unfavourable vulnerability. Hardly surprising that West bid on to the grand slam after his partner's opening bid, once he had confirmation that his partner had both major suit Aces. Fortunately East played the hand a lot better than he bid it.

South led the ♦Q and declarer could count twelve tricks (one ♠, six ♥s, two ♦s and three ♣s). The thirteenth trick could only come from a squeeze, but the problem was that the declarer had no information about which defender should be the victim. What was certain, however, was

that one of the defenders held at least four ♣s. Since this was the only available menace suit whoever that defender was would be the one who had to be squeezed.

Assuming that South has made a safe lead rather than a foolishly aggressive one, he was likely to be holding length in ♦s headed by the ♦Q J 10. If he also held four or more ♣s, he could be squeezed by running the trump suit and then laying down the ♠A. This is the five-card ending that declarer envisaged...

♠	-----					♠	A J 7
♥	-----	W		E		♥	-----
♦	9					♦	-----
♣	A K Q 2		S			♣	6 3
			♠	-----			
			♥	-----			
			♦	J			
			♣	J 9 8 4			

When declarer leads out the ♠A South is squeezed, forced either to part with his ♦ guard or his long ♣. But what if it is North who holds the long ♣s? If so, he must also hold long ♠s, *since either the menace suit or the threat card must be held over the defender who is being squeezed*. If it is North rather than South who holds the long ♦s then the dummy will have to discard ahead of him and he will be able to discard from the same suit as dummy to defeat the contract. This is the six-card ending envisaged when North is being squeezed...

			♠	K Q			
			♥	-----			
			♦	-----			
			♣	J 9 8 4			
♠	6					♠	A J 7
♥	-----	W		E		♥	3
♦	9		N			♦	-----
♣	A K Q 2					♣	6 3

If it is South who has this holding, rather than North, the play of the last trump will squeeze him just as effectively. He will have to unguard either

the ♠s or the ♣s and the last ♠ can safely be discarded from the dummy. Declarer will now lead out the ♠A and the position will become clear.

The final consideration is the order of play. After winning the first round of ♦s, declarer should draw trumps, cash a second round of ♦s (using the ♣A as an entry if the trumps break 4-0) and ruff a third round of ♦s. This gives the additional chance that if South led from precisely ♦Q J 10 declarer's problems will be resolved, since he will be able to discard his three losing ♠s on the third round of ♣s and the ♦K 9. After ruffing the third ♦ declarer will play out his remaining trumps, discarding ♠s from the dummy. If either defender had to guard both ♣s and a second suit, the squeeze will succeed.

		♠	K 10 9 8 2		
		♥	7 5		
		♦	5 4 3		
		♣	10 7 5		
				N	
♠	6 5				♠
♥	K Q 4	W		E	♥
♦	A K 9 6				♦
♣	A K Q 2			S	♣
		♠	Q 3		
		♥	10 2		
		♦	Q J 10 8 2		
		♣	J 9 8 4		

After winning the ♦A and drawing trumps in two rounds, declarer cashed the ♦K and ruffed a ♦ back to hand. When the ♦10 failed to appear by the third round, declarer was reasonably sure that South had started with five ♦s. This placed North with eight cards in the black suits and therefore a ♠/♣ squeeze against him seemed more probable at this point. Since the trumps had broken 2-2, declarer simplified matters by cashing one round of ♣s before crossing back to hand with the last trump from the dummy, on which North discarded a ♠ and South a ♦. On the last two trumps South had no choice but to discard his two ♠s. When the ♠Q appeared, declarer knew that the ♠A would either fell the ♠K or would squeeze South in ♦s and ♣s. Well played!

No explanation of squeeze play would be complete without an examination of the 'double squeeze'. This type of play is termed a double squeeze because both of the defenders, in turn, are squeezed into

and North with the ♣K and declarer held a threat card in both suits. Therefore, neither defender would also be able to guard the ♦s.

Assuming that South won the first round of trumps and continued with a low ♣, declarer would play the ♣10 and ruff North's ♣J. Then he would run the trumps, arriving at this four-card ending...

		♠	---				
		♥	---				
		♦	Q 10 2				
		♣	K				
				N		♠	4
♠	---			W	E	♥	---
♥	J					♦	K 8 4
♦	A 9					♣	---
♣	Q			S			
		♠	---				
		♥	Q				
		♦	J 5 3				
		♣	---				

The exact distribution of the ♦ suit is not vital, since if either defender started with four or more ♦s they would still be unable to guard two suits. The hand would become a positional squeeze against that defender rather than a double squeeze.

When declarer leads out the last ♠, South knows that he must retain the ♥Q and so discards a ♦. Declarer can now safely discard the ♥J from the dummy, since its work is done. North is now squeezed. A ♣ discard promotes the ♣Q and a ♦ concedes three tricks in the suit.

Note that if either opponent switches to a ♦ when in with the ♠K, the double squeeze will no longer work. Declarer must keep the ♦A as an entry to the two threat cards, but the menace of the ♦ suit must be retained in his hand. Therefore, if the ♦K is knocked out too early, declarer will be unable to return to his hand to cash the established ♦. If the defence does switch to a ♦, declarer will be forced to rely on South holding precisely ♦Q J 10 or at least four ♦s. In both these cases a positional squeeze against South will still work.

	♠ 5 3		
	♥ 8 6 4		
	♦ Q 10 2		
	♣ K J 9 5 3		
♠ J	N	♠ A Q 10 9 7 6 4	
♥ J 7 3 2	W	E	♥ 9 5
♦ A 9 7 6			♦ K 8 4
♣ A Q 10 6	S		♣ 7
	♠ K 8 2		
	♥ A K Q 10		
	♦ J 5 3		
	♣ 8 4 2		

Declarer must be careful to overtake the ♠J with the ♠Q when North follows to the first round. Otherwise South will simply duck and the only safe way back to hand that does not break up the squeeze is to ruff a ♣. Unfortunately this would reveal the danger to an alert defender and South should have no trouble in switching to a ♦ when in with the ♠K. Ruffing a ♥ rather than a ♣ is also bad play, since now South can simply exit with the ♥Q when in with the ♠K, thus removing the vital threat card.

Like all hands that require a squeeze to bring home the contract, careful preparation is the key. When considering the possibility of applying the double squeeze, the declarer must be able to say to himself:- “The first defender must guard suit A and the second defender must guard suit B, since I hold a threat card in both suits. Therefore neither defender can guard suit C, which is my menace suit.” The opportunity to apply a successful double squeeze will always exist provided these conditions are met and the declarer has the necessary squeeze card.

More often than not the necessity for a double squeeze becomes apparent because a particular distribution has not materialised and the declarer is forced into some pretty fancy footwork in order to bring home the contract.

Example 10

♠ 9 8 6 4			♠ A K 10 5 3
♥ A K 8 6	W	E	♥ 7 4
♦ 8			♦ A Q 9 6 2
♣ A 10 7 3			♣ 6

N	E	S	W
	1♠	P	4♦*
P	4NT	P	5♥
P	5NT	P	6♦
P	7♠!	All pass.	

*Splinter, agreeing ♠s and showing 11-14 HCP.

Obviously the grand slam was decidedly optimistic, requiring the ♠s to break 2-2 or for a successful finesse to be taken against North, if the first round of the suit felled a singleton honour from South. In addition the ♦K must come down in three rounds. The idea behind splinters is to invite partner to investigate the slam if he is better than a standard opening. West's trump support was simply not good enough to invite a slam and he should have settled for 4♠. East would still have pushed on to 6♠ but would have not attempted the grand slam.

South led the ♣K. Declarer won with the ♣A and ruffed a ♣ to hand. Declarer then cashed the ♦A and ruffed a second ♦, felling South's ♦K in the process. This looked like good news, but in fact it was one round too soon. Now the ♦s could not be established by ruffing a third round, even if South could not ruff ahead. The contract seemed doomed, until declarer saw that he had the conditions for a double squeeze – provided the trumps broke 2-2. South was guarding ♣s and North was guarding ♦s. *Therefore neither defender would be able to guard the ♥s.* This is the five-card ending he envisaged...

		♠	---		
		♥	J 9 2		
		♦	J 10		
		♣	---		
♠	---	N		♠	10
♥	A K 8 6	W		♥	7 4
♦	---		E	♦	Q 9
♣	10	S		♣	---
		♠	---		
		♥	Q 10 5 3		
		♦	---		
		♣	Q		

Declarer cashed ♠A K and breathed a heartfelt sigh of relief when the trumps broke. He ruffed a third ♦, on which South discarded a ♣, and ruffed a third ♣ back to his hand. On the last ♠ South and the dummy discarded ♥s. North was now squeezed out of his ♥ guard, since he was forced to guard ♦s. Now the play of the ♦Q squeezed South, who was forced to discard either his ♣ guard or his ♥ guard. Whichever he discarded, declarer would discard the other suit from the dummy and claim the remaining tricks.

	♠	Q 7			
	♥	J 9 2			
	♦	J 10 5 4 3			
	♣	J 9 4			
♠	9 8 6 4	N	E	♠	A K 10 5 3
♥	A K 8 6	W	E	♥	7 4
♦	8			♦	A Q 9 6 2
♣	A 10 7 3	S		♣	6
	♠	J 2			
	♥	Q 10 5 3			
	♦	K 7			
	♣	K Q 8 5 2			

The great pleasure of squeeze play is watching the defender squirming while he is being squeezed. Believe me, it is twice as much fun when you have got both defenders in your grip!

Before closing, it is worth reiterating the points raised in this chapter:

- 1). For any squeeze to work, declarer must have:-
 - a). A threat card.
 - b). A menace suit.
 - c). A squeeze card.

Either the threat card or the menace suit (or both) must be *over* the defender who is being squeezed. There must be a connecting link between the two hands *in the menace suit*.

- 2). The three stages to operating any squeeze are:-

- a). Recognition.
- b). Preparation.
- c). Execution.

The most difficult of these stages is the first. Without the ability to visualise that the possibility of a squeeze exists, it is only possible to execute a squeeze when it is 'automatic' (i.e. whenever declarer runs a long suit and one or the other defender is automatically forced into making a crucial discard). Such a squeeze is carried out more by luck than good judgement, although many are quick to claim an inordinate amount of credit when they pull them off.

Preparation is also difficult, since careful timing of the play is essential. Sometimes you will be required to go through some unlikely contortions to prepare the ground (see **Examples 4 & 6**). Remember, a squeeze cannot be executed successfully until all essential losers have been conceded ('rectifying the count') and all idle cards have been extracted from the relevant defender(s).

By comparison, the execution of the squeeze should be straightforward, since all the hard work has been done. Time and again, however, I have seen the attempted squeeze fall at the last hurdle because the declarer has been afraid to lead out his last trump, because he will not be able to trump further losers. The point is that you should not have any further losers – if you do, *the squeeze will fail anyway because you have not yet rectified the count!* That last trump is usually the essential squeeze card – if you do not play it, the defender will not be squeezed!

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