A squeeze without the count

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Conditions for a squeeze normally have to be just right. You need the last free winner in one suit (the *squeeze card*), a *long menace* (winner and threat card) in another suit in the hand opposite, a *short menace* (a threat card on its own) in a third suit in either hand, an entry card to the long menace, and the ability to take all the tricks bar one without the benefit of the squeeze (often referred to as the “rule of N-1”).

Further winners can often be added without changing the nature of the squeeze, but in general the layout must be as described, or the squeeze does not operate. Take for example the layouts shown below:

(a)

	♠ KQ ♥ ♦ Q ♣	
♠ 5 ♥ 3 ♦ ♣ 6		♠ AJ ♥ ♦ 10 ♣
	♠ 9 ♥ ♦ 4 ♣ 8	

(b)

	♠ 9 ♥ ♦ 4 ♣ 8	
♠ 5 ♥ 3 ♦ 10 ♣		♠ AJ ♥ ♦ ♣ 6
	♠ KQ ♥ ♦ Q ♣	

West is on lead and needs to make the remaining tricks. Identify the ingredients of the squeeze: ♥3 is the squeeze card (the last free winner), ♠AJ is the long menace in the hand opposite, ♦10 is the short menace. Note that there is an entry to the long menace in ♠5, and that declarer could take two of the remaining three tricks without resorting to any squeeze play.

The layout in (a) is known as a *positional squeeze*, because it works only against one opponent – the one lying under the long menace. When the squeeze card is played, North must unguard one of the two suits, dummy discards the other and takes the last two tricks. Note that it will not work if you move the North cards into the South hand, because dummy must choose a suit to unguard before South. In (b) the short menace is in the same hand as the squeeze card. This is called an *automatic squeeze* because it will work against either opponent.

Note also that no squeeze will operate if West has another trick to lose, as the defender will have a free discard to make on the squeeze card.

(c)

	♠ KQ ♥ ♦ Q7 ♣	
♠ 5 ♥ 3 ♦ ♣ 62		♠ AJ ♥ ♦ 106 ♣
	♠ 9 ♥ ♦ 4 ♣ 98	

(d)

	♠ 9 ♥ ♦ 42 ♣ 8	
♠ 5 ♥ 3 ♦ 106 ♣		♠ AJ ♥ ♦ ♣ 62
	♠ KQ ♥ ♦ Q7 ♣	

In (c) and (d) West can make only two tricks with the two natural winners.

However, it is sometimes possible to squeeze an opponent out of a trick and then give up a later trick. In the Bearn qualifying heat in September 2005 at the Club I was dealt the following West hand (matchpoints, W dealer, NS vulnerable):

♠ AK10983 ♥ AQ10 ♦ 4 ♣ K73	♠ QJ54 ♥ K74 ♦ AQ85 ♣ 842

W	N	E	S
1♠	2♦	4♠	P
P	P		

North led a trump, and I saw that ten tricks were laydown, with an eleventh available if North held the king of diamonds. In addition, if North holds five other diamonds (or J109 and one other diamond) and the ace of clubs, I seem to have the elements of a squeeze – a squeeze card in either spades or hearts, an unusual long menace in the ♦8 (after a finesse of the queen and the ace have removed any cards South may have in the suit), a short menace in the ♣K, and an entry to the long menace in ♦4. Unfortunately, the rule of N-1 poses a difficulty – even with the finesse I have only eleven out of the thirteen tricks, in other words N-2.

The usual solution to this problem is to duck a trick early on (known as *rectifying the count*) so that I have eleven certain winners and can squeeze out the twelfth for what I hope will be a good matchpoint score. However, in this instance I cannot duck a club without giving up more tricks in the suit and defeating the object of the exercise.

Luckily, I recognised that this was one of the situations where the squeeze would work anyway. I ran all the trumps discarding a heart and a diamond, then played the king and ace of hearts. This was the position with the last heart to play:

	♠ - ♥ - ♦ KJ10 ♣ AQ	
♠ - ♥ Q ♦ 4 ♣ K73		♠ - ♥ - ♦ AQ8 ♣ 84
	(immaterial)	

I led the ♥Q (the squeeze card) and North had no good discard. If he throws a diamond, I discard a club from dummy, finesse the ♦Q, cash the ♦A8 and give up the last trick. If North discards a club I throw a diamond from dummy, duck a club to his ace and make the last three tricks with the ♣K and the ♦AQ via the finesse. Twelve tricks.

As the count cannot be rectified, this is known as a *squeeze-without-the-count*.