

Squeeze Plays 1

Adjusting the Count and Vienna Coup



Adjusting the Count

You should know by now that all things in bridge have their exception, and so does this, but it's 99 1/2 percent true that

a squeeze can create only one trick.

Remember, a squeeze works when a defender with too many good cards runs out of discards to protect them, so that eventually one of the valuable cards must be given up. So the declarer must make sure to eliminate all of the defender's spare discards. To ensure that this condition will exist, the declarer need only follow this prescription:

give up your losers early.

In practice, the defenders often find their tricks early all on their own, and they grab them, leaving declarer's job of losing them accomplished. But when the defenders have not yet taken their tricks, then the declarer must take care that they do. The process of giving the defenders the tricks to which they are entitled is called "adjusting the count."

♠ 4	♠ 9 3 2
♥ J 9 7 4	♥ K 6
♦ A K J 9 5	♦ Q 8 6 4 2
♣ K J 5	♣ A 6 2
	♠ 7 6
	♥ Q 8 3 2
	♦ 10 7 3
	♣ 10 9 8 4
	♠ AKQJ1085
	♥ A 10 5
	♦ -----
	♣ Q 7 3

West, who had earlier made a 2 diamond overcall, leads the diamond ace against 6 spades. Declarer has 2 top hearts, 1 top club, 1 heart ruff, and 7 trump for 11 total tricks. Declarer cannot try ruffing out diamonds, hoping for an opposing 4-4 split, because

West's overcall has shown that that shape doesn't exist. There is nothing for it, then, except to find a squeeze. This lead will establish your diamond queen as a one-card threat, but where is the two-card threat? It is not hearts because you are already counting on a heart ruff, and the heart 10 would not be a threat anyway unless West held the QJx of hearts. In fact, the two-card threat is clubs. It is disguised because the ace and queen are on different sides of the table, but that still will require West to hold onto Kx of clubs along with the king of diamonds. Do you know for an absolute fact that West holds the king of clubs? No, you don't. But you need him to hold it in order for the squeeze to work, which is your only chance to make the hand. Besides, West did make a two-level overcall, and therefore she is a favorite to hold the missing king.

Just one more important thing to think about, and that is adjusting the count. You will have to give them a winner somewhere along the line. How shall you do that? Your free loser is a club, but if you later play clubs, you will destroy your two-card threat. Is there no way to give them a winner early? In fact, there is. Just refuse to ruff the first trick, discarding your losing club trick here and now. Eventually you can create this:

-- -- K KJ	-- -- Q A6	-- Q --- 109
	5 -- -- Q7	

Now when South cashes the remaining trump, West is stymied. Because her diamond is an unquestionable winner, she must throw the club jack and hope that partner has an important club card. Instead, declarer will discard dummy's diamond and cash first the ace and then the queen of clubs, picking up the 12th trick on a squeeze play.

The Vienna Coup

Anything named a “coup” ought to be pretty fancy, and, indeed, many a player and many a writer has felt themselves dazzled by the Vienna Coup and lavished upon it a wealth of admiring adjectives. There is at least a little basis for their overstatements:

in order to conduct a Vienna Coup, you must deliberately set up a trick for the opponent, and then, before she can cash it, you squeeze it out of her.

I suppose such a cruel trick is indeed rather a nasty blow, or “coup,” as the French say it.

West, below, must take the rest of the tricks to make 6 clubs, but with 5 cards to go, South is guarding both spades and hearts. Perhaps this is too many good cards and South can be squeezed.

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

The club 5 is the squeeze card, the diamond suit has no apparent part in the squeeze, and the hearts are the two-card threat. And the one-card threat is _____? What is the one-card threat?

In fact, the one-card threat is the queen of spades. But it is concealed by the presence of the ace of spades. If you want to see the one-card threat appear in all its glory, just play a small spade to the ace. Voila! The one-card threat is now obvious. By the way, that was a Vienna Coup! Does it seem that you have established South’s spade king by playing the ace of spades? Well, you didn’t. South’s spade king has always been established by its position behind the spade ace. Cashing the ace of spades costs you absolutely nothing. But it does reveal the true nature of your squeeze by revealing the one-card threat. Now you just return to your hand with the ace of diamonds and play out your squeeze card, discarding from dummy the idle 3 of spades.

On the flip side, if you try to run this squeeze without cashing the spade ace first, you run across a nasty problem. Look again at our 5-card ending. Imagine cashing the diamond ace first and then the squeeze card. What will you discard from dummy? A heart discard destroys the two-card threat, but the spade 3 discard destroys your one-card threat because now the queen of spades can never become a trick. At heart, the Vienna Coup is just an unblocking play. You find the Vienna Coup whenever your one-card threat is hidden. You play the Vienna Coup to set up your one-card threat.

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

South reaches a 5 club contract despite a 2 diamond overcall by West, who leads and cashes the AK of diamonds and continues a third, ruffed high in dummy. Declarer still holds an apparent loser in spades. The only hope is either to find the queen of spades doubleton, or else to find a squeeze. Since the doubleton queen is a longshot, see if you can find a squeeze. Well, can you?

You can if you can locate the squeeze elements. The squeeze card is easy, the 5th club. The two-card threat must be hearts, and the one-card threat the spade jack. To establish the spade jack as the threat, you must first cash the AK, which, incidentally, is a Vienna Coup (big deal). Your squeeze will work if one opponent has the spade queen and the QJ of hearts (or just honor fifth if the other has honor doubleton). Because West is diamond heavy, it is East who will need to hold all the major suit guards. The chances of success are not astronomical, but squeezing is an improvement over simply catching a doubleton queen of spades (which, incidentally, you also play for when you first cash the AK).