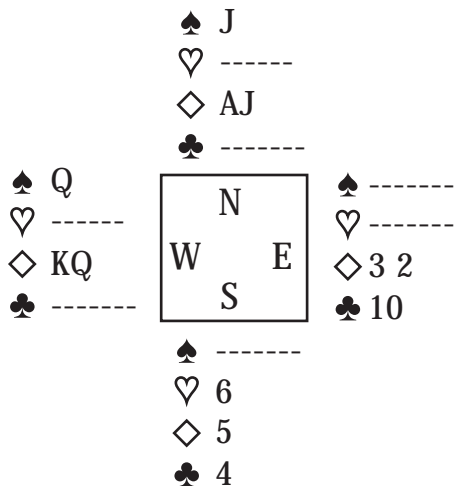


# Squeezes



Of all the advanced card plays, the squeeze brings the most delight and satisfaction. I know of no player who regards the use of a squeeze as just another routine play. Even very good players take pleasure in discovering and executing squeezes. Advancing students who can discover and carry out a squeeze play with full knowledge of what they are doing will almost certainly feel that they “have arrived,” and the resulting boost to their confidence may mark a sudden and dramatic improvement in all facets of their bridge play.

A defender can be squeezed only when he holds, what turn out to be, too many good cards. He knows that what he holds is valuable. He knows to save and hold on to those cards. But all of a sudden, the declarer compels him to discard just one of his precious lovelies, and at that point his entire collection crumbles into useless dust. Let’s look at a couple of examples:



Declarer, playing in a heart contract, must take the rest of the tricks, but his apparent winners are only the 6 of trump and the ace of diamonds. West, on the other hand, holds a good spade trick and the mighty KQ of diamonds, sure to force a diamond winner. But West has too many good cards for her own good. For what is West to do when South leads her 6 of hearts? If West discards her queen of spades, then declarer will discard dummy’s diamond jack and have an ace

and a good spade in dummy. But if West, instead, keeps the spade queen and tosses a diamond, then declarer will discard the jack of spades from dummy and hold two winning diamonds. West has no way out whatsoever.

Let us dissect the elements that made this squeeze play against West work. First notice dummy’s spade jack. It is a loser, but it compels West to hold onto the only card that can beat it. We say that the jack is a “threat.” It threatens to become a winner if the control over it is discarded. Because the jack carries this threat all by itself, we call it a “one-card threat.”

Notice also dummy’s AJ. This jack is also a loser, but it is held in combination with the ace. The jack can become a winner only when the ace can capture any card that can beat the jack. This two-card threat compels defenders to hold not just a critical card, but guards to it as well. Because the two cards work in combination, they are called a “two-card threat.” Every squeeze play must employ both a one-card threat and a two-card threat. Sometimes the two-card threat must actually be a three- or even a 4-card threat. The extra length generally arises to solve a transportation problem.

In addition to the one- and two-card threats, declarer requires a “squeeze card,” which is to say, a winning card in a third suit upon which the key defender must discard. In our example the squeeze card was the heart 6, which we said was trump. Very often the squeeze card is a trump for the simple reason that trumps are typically a long suit and declarer has one left at the critical time. The squeeze card does not, of course, have to be a trump, but it is almost always the last card in what was originally a long suit. So when we say declarer needs a squeeze card, we could generally say that a squeeze requires declarer to have some sort of long suit somewhere, usually in his own hand, but sometimes in dummy. Since this card

is usually a trump, the casual player who does not understand squeezes will generally not play her last trump out at the crucial time because it appears, instead, to be a card she must hold onto. But as you can see in our example, it must be played in order to compel a discard that initiates the decay of the defenders holding.

Notice also in our example hand that declarer requires transportation to dummy in order to capitalize on whatever card it is that has become good. In this example the “transportation card” is the ace of diamonds. Indeed, the transportation card is quite often the top winning card of the two-card threat.

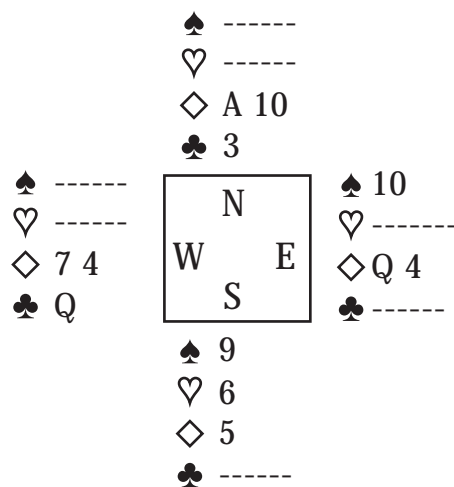
There is one final element we need to dissect from our example. Notice that this particular squeeze was against declarer’s left hand opponent. Because of this, the defender was compelled to discard in front of the dummy, so that declarer could alter her own discard from the dummy according to West’s action. Whenever both threats are in dummy (both the one-card and the two-card), only the left hand opponent can be squeezed. See for yourself. Imagine it is East who holds the spade queen and the KQ of diamonds. When declarer plays out the squeeze card, she will have to discard from dummy ahead of the defender. Now it is the defender who will alter her discard according to whatever remains in the dummy.

Summary of Squeeze elements

- a one-card threat
- a two-card (or longer) threat
- a squeeze card (remnant of a long suit)
- transportation to dummy (or, to the hand that holds the winning cards).
- if both threats are in the same hand, then the squeezed defender must discard ahead of the hand that holds the threats.

Sometimes declarer knows the defender holds the key cards. This would be the result of counting, or of clues gathered from the auction, from the lead, or from the play. At other times the count or the analysis has not been entirely certain, so that the declarer cannot be entirely certain that the squeeze will work. So we may say that some squeezes are certain and some squeezes are attempts. With squeezes, as with other types of play, you sometimes simply play for a card to be where you need it to be.

Let us now look at another ending position and examine it in terms of what we learned in our dissection of the first example:



Again hearts are trump and declarer is in her hand needing all of the remaining tricks. But her 9 of spades is not good, blocked by the spade 10. And dummy’s two diamonds are not good because East has the protected queen. Notice that it is East who has too many good cards this time, and so it is East who must be the target (or victim!) of the squeeze. Our prior analysis showed that if both threats are in the same hand, only the left hand opponent can be squeezed. But in this example, only the two-card threat is in dummy. The one-card threat is the 9 of spades in declarer’s own hand. Therefore, when declarer plays the squeeze card, the 6 of hearts, she simply discards dummy’s losing club (presuming West discards a diamond

and not the Queen of clubs!). But the pressure against East is relentless. If she tosses the good 10 of spades, declarer will next just cash the 9 and discard dummy's losing diamond on it. But if East throws a diamond instead, then declarer will just play to the diamond ace and fell East's bared queen, promoting dummy's last diamond to yet a third winning trick. To drop the diamond queen declarer will need to know that East has the queen, otherwise declarer has the option simply to try a diamond finesse.

And so we found in our second example all of the squeeze elements that we said must exist: the one-card threat, the two-card threat, the squeeze card, the transportation card, and, of course, the defender with too many good cards. Plus we observed:

The right hand opponent may be squeezed if the one-card threat is in the squeezer's own hand.

As a matter of fact, when the one-card threat is in the squeezer's hand, either opponent can be squeezed.

Thus we have now seen how the squeeze play works at just the critical moment when the squeeze card is led and the defender must necessarily discard and destroy her own hand. Remember the elements and nature of this critical moment, for these basic ingredients of it will be found in even the most complicated of squeeze recipes.

### Finding the Squeeze

But there is yet another problem to solve before you are ready to conduct your first real squeeze. You must be able to foresee the possible ending position from an earlier point in the hand so that you can take care to create the critical moment. How does a player looking at

a table full of cards know how to tell that a squeeze may be possible? Your chief clue is that you seem to be one trick short of fulfilling your contract. Squeeze plays can create exactly one trick. So when you are one short, look into the hand from the perspective of a squeeze, which is to say, see if you can discover the elements of the critical moment, the one- and two-card threats, the squeeze card, the transportation card. If you can find these, then a squeeze would seem to be your answer.

<b>NORTH</b>											
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	♥ A K 8										
	♦ Q 4 2										
	♣ 4 3 2										
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	N										
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♠ 2		♠ 5 4									
♥ QJ10975		♥ 6									
♦ A K J		♦ 1097653									
♣ 10 7 6		♣ J985									
<b>SOUTH</b>											
♠ A K J 7 6 3											
♥ 4 3 2											
♦ 8											
♣ A K Q											

South opened 1 spade and West overcalled 2 hearts. When North cuebid 3 hearts to show a limit raise or better in spades, South cuebid 4 clubs to show club control. Then, after North cuebid her heart control, South checked out keycards and finally bid 6 spades. West led the ace of diamonds to look at dummy and plan. Convinced by the auction that South must have a singleton diamond, West switched to the heart queen at trick two. After rising with the heart ace, what shall declarer do?

Declarer delights in the outstanding trump fit and is pleased with her own club suit,

but try as she may she can count only eleven winners. Being 1 trick short of the target is the indicator that you need something special to make it. Perhaps it could be a defensive error, perhaps it could be declarer deception, or perhaps, just perhaps, it could be a squeeze play. Let's explore for the elements of the critical moment of a squeeze. The lead of the diamond ace has left but the diamond king out against our queen. That means our queen is a potential one-card threat. The only two-card threat possible would have to be in hearts; we would have to hope that enough heart discards can be forced so that our 8-spot may be promoted to a winner. Our long spade suit surely will provide us a squeeze card. And now, observing that both threat situations are in dummy, the diamonds and the hearts, we know that the only opponent we can possibly squeeze is our left hand opponent.

Next we check to see if it is reasonable to suppose that the left hand opponent may be squeezed. Since she has overcalled hearts, she must hold at least 5, which means that East can have started with 2 at most. Therefore the two-card threat does indeed threaten West because only West has hearts that must be kept. Is it likely that West also holds the king of diamonds? Indeed it is reasonable to think so. If she does not have it, then she would have overcalled at the two level with only 7 or 8 points, which is less than usually expected. Moreover, the lead of an ace generally shows the king, and if the king were in East, would East not have given an encouraging signal at trick one to continue diamonds after the initial lead? Probably so. Yes, there is scarcely an element of doubt. West holds the diamond king and length in hearts, and therefore would seem to be prey for a squeeze.

To be sure, visualize the critical moment. You will have drawn trump and cashed the

clubs. Thereafter, you play out all but one of your trump. This leaves in your own hand the one trump (squeeze card) and two small hearts. In dummy it will leave the diamond queen and the K8 of hearts. In West it will leave the diamond king and the J10 of hearts. When you lead the final trump, West will either have to discard the diamond king or else give up a heart. It matters not which. You can see that the squeeze will work. So you proceed to do what you just thought through.

#### Summary of finding squeezes

- Observe that you are one trick short of your goal.
- Search for a one-card threat
- Search for a two-card threat
- Consider whether it is reasonable that one defender may hold control of all the key cards. (You may not always be able to tell. But remember that some squeezes are certain and some are attempts.)
- Consider whether the defender you are aiming at is in a proper position (if both threat positions are in dummy, you can only squeeze the defender to your left.)
- Think it through. What is the final critical position and can it be created by how you play the cards?

This method of looking for squeezes will help you find a great many of them. You should also look for the squeeze perspective in some similar circumstances: perhaps the only other line of play has but a small percentage chance of winning; or perhaps the theoretical percentages are good enough, but other clues suggest that the cards are not laying right. In such cases, a squeeze play may be lurking nearby, less obvious, but nonetheless present if hunted for. As you



gain experience you will find such squeezes more easily, and you will find more complex possibilities.

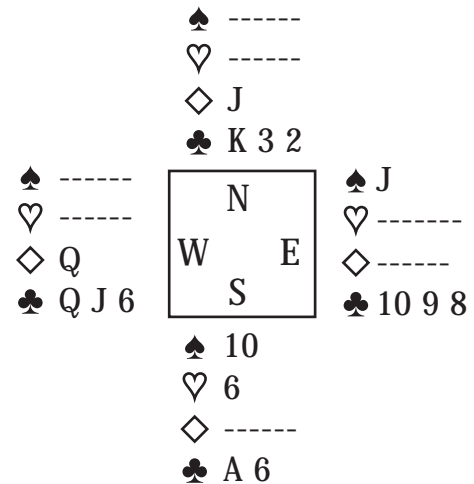
Please remember this very important point about squeezes:

You can gain only 1 trick by squeezing. Of course this implies that if you need two tricks, you must find another line of play, or else go down. But there are two additional observations to make. The first is this: although you can gain but 1 trick, squeezes are not used just to make slams. Perhaps you are in a game contract in a major and can find but 9 tricks. A squeeze play may indeed be the right method to gain the 10th. For that matter, you could be in a two-level contract with only 7 visible winners; the squeeze may create the 8th.

And one more very, very important point should be observed. Not only can you gain but 1 trick, but it is also going to be the last trick. You cannot squeeze with more losers to come thereafter. The squeeze works only when the defender's hand has been completely reduced to essentials. Therefore, all the other losers will have to come first. In the full hand example we looked at, the defender cashed an ace at trick one, and so eliminated the loser right off. In some cases, declarer wins the initial trick. If this happens, and if declarer then believes that she will utilize a squeeze play, then declarer MUST deliberately create and give up all other losers first. This process of giving up necessary losers first is called "adjusting the count." It amounts simply to taking all the slack out of the hand and of eliminating from the defender's hand all nonessentials that could otherwise be used as harmless discards. The final position of a squeeze play is tight. So tight it hurts, if you happen to be a defender.

### The Double Squeeze

Sometimes a squeeze tightens the noose against both of the defenders. This somewhat less common situation is called a double squeeze.



Take a close look. West holds the diamond queen to hold control over dummy's jack. In addition, West holds three clubs to the QJ and can apparently force a club winner. But when declarer plays her squeeze card, the 6 of hearts, West will discard a club anyway, hoping that East can beat the final club 3. And, indeed, what kind of threat is the 3 of clubs anyway? Isn't it too puny to serve as a threat? It can win only if both defenders throw away clubs. But the 3 of clubs, as you may have observed, will be enough. That is because declarer holds a second one-card threat, the spade 10 in her own hand. This second one-card threat works against East to compel the discard either of the spade jack or of a club. If both defenders keep their controls over the one-card threats, then both will, necessarily, have to discard clubs, and the club 3 will reign supreme. A declarer with a flair for the dramatic will throw the club 3 under her ace so that it will be the club deuce that wins the final trick. Cheeky.

Dissecting the double squeeze, we see that in addition to a two-card threat, it requires two separate one-card threats, one against the

left hand defender and one against the right hand defender. What's more, the one-card threat against the right hand opponent must necessarily be held in declarer's hand, while the one-card threat against the left hand opponent must be held in dummy. Since each defender must each hold one specific card, and since each specific threat against them must be located specifically in dummy or specifically in the hand – because of these strict requirements, you may not run into this situation as often. But the nature of the double squeeze must nonetheless be understood, because it does arise and may form the foundation of many a successful contract.

#### Pseudo-squeeze

The pseudo-squeeze, or false squeeze, should properly be regarded as a declarer's deception. It arises when no real squeeze is possible, and yet declarer has no true way to develop the last trick she needs. She therefore tries to create the appearance of a squeeze, as best as it may be manufactured, and then she runs her long suit forcing discards. This may cause either one or both of the defenders to believe that they are being squeezed. This sense of pressure may cause them to outsmart themselves and cause, as a result, a faulty discard that allows the hand to make. Notice that this play will not work against oblivious opponents who will have no idea whatsoever that you are mimicking a squeeze. Such a player may, however, be even more likely to make an incorrect discard.

In this lesson we have looked at the squeeze play stripped down to its basic elements. At first, finding stripped-down basic squeeze plays will be achievement enough for now, and a well-regarded achievement at that. But be aware that squeezes are not always stripped down. Some can wear such finery and

frillery that you can hardly recognize them for what they are. But there is nothing like experience and persistence for increasing your skills at squeezes. A new door of card play has just opened for you.

