

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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18. Squash Techniques, Part II

As I have mentioned in part I of this topic, in order to develop a shaky suit with several intermediaries missing, one needs to play in a way such that some of these opponents' honor cards are squashed. One such technique is called Intrafinesse and was discussed in part I. In this column I will discuss some other layouts that are a mixture of squash and finesse.

Example 1. A problem posed in this month's (September 2012) Bridge World magazine

J 9 8 7 6 (N)
A 2 (S)

You need 3 tricks. What is the best possible line of play?

The first step in this process is to visualize the *relevant* layouts. Often you will have clues of the layout from opponents' bidding or from the count of other suits. For our purpose we will neglect all those extraneous information and focus only on the suit in question. We will also ignore any issues with entry problems.

You can convince yourself that if the suit breaks 3-3 (lower probability than a 4-2 break) you can play practically any way you want and you will make your 3 tricks. So it is the 4-2 break that you need to consider thoughtfully.

In that context of 4-2 break, consider the A and then small to the Jack play. This play will work very well when either defender has Tx, KT, QT, KQ. However, if West has a low doubleton (3 possibilities: 43, 53, 54) this play will not produce 3 tricks. Here is that bad yet very relevant layout:

4 3 or 5 3 or 5 4 (West)

K Q T x (East)

To handle this layout, you need to play the J from North hand! That's fine for this layout you might say but what happens to those other layouts that I have mentioned earlier such as Tx, KT, QT, KQ in one of the hands. Again, you can convince yourself that playing the J first makes no difference in those special layouts compared to playing the A first.

I felt pretty good working on this problem from the Bridge World magazine and then I

remembered that Rodwell has a similar problem in his book. I went back and re-read that Rodwell calls this play *Sky Marshall Finesse*. He points out that playing the J also wins when Kx or Qx is in front of the A2. And then ... he says something even more interesting: playing the jack also wins when West has

KQxx KTxx or QTxx

and erroneously covers the Jack! So here is the most important lesson then: do not cover that Jack with the above holdings.

Is the Jack play guaranteed to work always? Nothing is guaranteed in this game, my friend. The Jack play is inferior to the Ace play when any defender has a singleton honor. Rodwell estimates that the Jack play has a 72% chance of producing 3 tricks.

Example 2. Rodwell picks up this example from a real play in 1989

A 4

K T 8 7 5 3

You need 5 tricks. If there is a magic holding of QJ doubleton you of course make 6 tricks. Your chance of making 5 tricks is a pretty high 79% if you run the T first. When West has stiff Q, J or 9 this play works well. However, it works spectacularly well (as in the example in the real match that Rodwell discussed in his book) when East has a stiff 9.

Example 3. This one showed up in real life (in BBO, so you may call it virtual life)

A K T 6

J 5

Need *all four* tricks when no stiff Queen exists. Play the J and hope that East has the exact holding of 9 8 7. *Squashing three important cards!*

And yes, Rodwell covers that one in his book too.

References:

1. Bridge World magazine ---- September, 2012, page 66.
2. Eric Rodwell, "The Rodwell Files".