

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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15. Squash Techniques, Part I: Intra-finesse

No, this column is not going to be about summer cooking recipes although I do write a blog about my cooking adventures and recipes (interested readers might check that out here: <https://partyinyourtummy.wordpress.com/>). What I will discuss here is how to make more tricks as a declarer by squashing opponents honor cards. Squashing is a generalized card-play technique and a major advance in that technique came from the brilliance of Brazilian bridge superstar Gabriel Chagas. Chagas is a member of the elite group of world class bridge players who has won the so-called “triple crown” (I believe there are only 8 in the world) of World Olympiad Teams (1976), World Pairs (1990) and Bermuda Bowl (1989).

In 1974, the so-called BOLS Bride tips competition started and world class players contributed to this BOLS tips for about 20 years. Chagas wrote about a squash technique in 1974 which he called “intra-finesse”. This technique is considered as one of the major advances in card-play techniques in recent history. Mike Lawrence discussed this technique and paid tribute to Chagas in his book, “How to play card combinations”. I will introduce you to this technique with a specific example. Consider this layout of a suit:

Example 1. (From Chagas’ work)

Q 8 5 3 (dummy)

A 9 6 2 (you; declarer)

You need 3 tricks from this suit to make your contract. You realize that if the suit breaks 4-1 or worse you cannot make 3 tricks. So you discard that possibility and focus on 3-2 breaks. If the King is with West, the way to make 3 tricks is to play the A first and then to the Queen.

Now consider the situation when you *suspect* from the bidding or from other considerations that the King is with East. How to make 3 tricks now? Chagas realized that the only way to make 3 tricks now if West has started with honor doubleton (like Tx or Jx) and if he finds a method to squash that doubleton J or T. Let me put the complete layout for you.

	Q 8 5 3 (dummy)	
J x		K T x
	A 9 6 2 (you; declarer)	

In the above lay-out the J and T can be switched without any change in the proposed card-playing methodology. If you start with the A and then small to the Q, you will end up losing two tricks to the K and T.

So, don't start with the Ace if you suspect the K is with East. Start with a small card from hand (the 2 in this case) and if West plays small *play the 8*. It will lose to East's T. And the lay-out of the remaining cards now becomes:

J	Q 5 3 (dummy)	K x
	A 9 6 (you; declarer)	

So far you have lost one trick. At this stage enter dummy in some other suit and now try the *finesse* by playing the Q. Whether East covers or not West's J will be *squashed* and you will end up losing no more tricks. Observe that for this method to work the declaring side must have *both the 8 and the 9*.

Let's try another example from Chagas' work.

Example 2. (From Chagas' work)

J 5	A 9 2 (dummy)	Q T 7 6
	K 8 4 3 (you; declarer)	

You are missing Q, J, and T and you can lose only one trick! You can play for magic holding like doubleton QJ or QT or JT in one of the opponent's hands but that chance is low. Note that you do have both the 9 and 8 and so intra-finesse is a possibility.

Trick 1.	Hook the 9, loses to the T. Lost 1 trick.
Trick 2 (later in the game).	Play the A squashing the J.
Trick 3.	Play the 2 from dummy and hook the 8.
	You have lost only one trick in all.

Example 3. (From Chagas's work)

T 5	J 9 4	K Q 7 3
	A 8 6 2	

You are missing K, Q, and T and you can lose only 1 trick. Chagas's magic will make you achieve this.

Trick 1.

Hook the 9, loses to the Q. Lost 1 trick.

Trick 2 (by a later entry to dummy).

Play the J squashing the T.

If East covers, play the A and later hook the 6.

If East does not cover hook again you are sitting with A 8 over East's Q 7.

Net effect? You have lost only one trick in all.

Example 4. (From Mike Lawrence's book "How to play card Combinations")

	A 7 2	
K T 6 5 4		J 3
	Q 9 8	

You are missing K, J, and T and you need to make 2 tricks to make your contract. But yes you have both the 9 and 8 so Chagas' magic is possible. You suspect that West has length in the spade suit as he made a 1S overcall.

Trick 1.

Hook the 9, loses to the T. Lost 1 trick.

Trick 2 (by a later entry to hand).

Play the Q hooking for the K and squashing the J.

You have made your two tricks.

Summary: To develop a shaky suit with 3 intermediaries missing, you might resort to the intra-finesse technique of Gabriel Chagas if you have both the 9 and the 8. (In rare occasions the doubleton honor that you are trying to squash might come in the form of Honor-9 or Honor-8 doubleton and in those special cases you do not need both 9 and 8 but 9 and 7 or 8 and 7).

As I have stated earlier, intra-finesse falls in the general category of squash techniques in card play. In Part II of this column, I will discuss other squash type layouts.