

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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31. Squeeze Play Demystified, Part I

Squeeze is an area of declarer play that draws admiration from Bridge players of all levels of abilities. Often intermediate or even advanced players hear mysterious terms like “rectifying the count”, “Vienna Coup”, “automatic squeeze”, “positional squeeze”, “Double Squeeze”, and come to the conclusion that these are beyond their skill level. In the next few columns on declarer play I will try to explain squeeze techniques in a simple fashion i.e. demystifying it.

Squeeze often shows up at the very late stage of the card play i.e. at the end game. Consider the following ending in a NT contract where your objective is to win **all** the tricks:

Dummy:	A J	---	---	J
	K Q			T 2
	---			---
	---			---
	Q			T
Declarer:	8 7	5	---	---

The declarer has the following winners: the 5 of Hs and the A of S. But she also has several *possible* winners: the Jack of Spades and the Jack of clubs. These possible winners at the end game are called **threat cards** --- they might become winners. The 5 of Hs on the other hand is a winner of a special type -- a winner on which the defenders must discard something. Our hope is that as a result of their discard of a *guard* some of the possible winners (i.e. threat cards) might grow up to be real winners. This special kind of winner such as the 5 of Hs here is called a **Squeeze Card**.

Observe what happens when South plays the 5 of Hs.

- 1) If West discards any S card, declarer discards the J of C from dummy and wins the rest by playing a S.
- 2) If West discards the Q of C, declarer discards the J of S from dummy and wins the rest by playing a S.

Thus there is no wrong discard from West; whatever he does declarer takes all the tricks. **West is squeezed.**

Also observe how important the S-A is to the declarer. Without that entry to the dummy the squeeze on West would not work.

How about if we switch the East-West hands?

Dummy:	A J	---	---	J	
	T 2				K Q
	---				---
	---				---
	T				Q
 Declarer:	 8 7	 5	 ---	 ---	

Observe what happens when South plays the 5 of Hs. East now can make his decision by looking at what dummy does --- he is discarding *after* the dummy.

- 1) If dummy discards any S card, East also discards a S card. Declarer cannot take all the tricks.
- 2) If dummy discards the J of C, East discards the Q of C. Declarer cannot take all the tricks.

East is not squeezed holding the exact same cards!

What you just observed is called a **positional squeeze**. The squeeze works on one defender but not on the other. **The most common setting for a positional squeeze is where the one card threat (the J of C in the above example) and the two-card threats (The A J of Spades) both lie in the same hand (dummy) opposite to the squeeze card (the H 5 which is with the declarer).**

In our next column on declarer play we will talk about the automatic squeeze which would work against any defender.

References:

1. The classic book on Squeeze play is by Clyde Love which has a theorem-proof type lay out (no surprise: Love was a math professor).
2. A generally more readable book is by David Bird (*Bridge Squeezes for Everyone*) which I plan to use as our textbook. I will add some supplemental notes from other sources as well.