

## Simple Squeezes and Other Declarer Play Techniques (June 21, 2021)

The simple squeeze is the most basic form of a squeeze play in the game of contract bridge. It is a squeeze against one opponent and gains the declarer one trick.

Example 1.

	AJ	
	K	
	—	
	—	
KQ		7
A		5
—		8
—		—
	4	
	3	
	—	
	A	

When declarer cashes the ace of clubs, West is squeezed in the major suits. Whatever he discards, then the declarer gets the rest of the tricks. The key factor is that West has to **discard** before North. If West throws the ace of hearts, South discards the jack of spades. If West throws either the king or queen of spades, South discards the king of hearts.

To review, a simple squeeze occurs when you have two threats against the same player. The declarer needs to have winners to cover all the remaining tricks but one. When the simple squeeze works, the declarer wins all the remaining tricks.

Example 2.

	9	
	AJ	
	—	
	4	
KQ		8
KQ		652
—		—
—		—
	5	
	8	
	—	
	AK	

In example two, West holds all the important cards (busy cards) in two different suits. South has three of the last four tricks. When South cashes the ace of clubs, West can throw either the king or queen of spades. But, when South cashes the king of clubs, West is squeezed. If he throws the other high spade, declarer can toss the jack of hearts. He wins the ace of hearts and the 9 of spades. If West throws the king or queen of hearts, declarer can toss the 9 of spades. His A/J of hearts takes the remaining two tricks.

The opponent to be squeezed must hold important cards (known as “busy” cards) in more than one suit. The declarer has lost all of his losers but one. When this situation occurs, we say “the count has been rectified.”

NOTE: The squeezed opponent must not hold any “idle” cards, i.e., ones that could be safely discarded (disposed of). Example three illustrates what can happen if this should occur.

Example 3.

	8	
	<u>AJ8</u>	
	—	
<u>Q</u>		<u>654</u>
KQ		<u>3</u>
9		
	J	
	<u>5</u>	
	76	

In example three, the squeezed defender holds the queen of hearts, an “idle” card. When South plays his jack of spades, the squeeze fails because the timing is wrong. West still held an “idle” card he could play when the jack of spades is led.

Let's look at a complete hand and see how you can execute a squeeze play.

Example 4.

A  
QJ8632  
K3  
A954

Contract: 4S

Opening Lead: ace of diamonds

6  
A107  
AQ974  
J732

J102  
95  
J108652  
106

Bidding: 1S (2D) 2H (4D)  
4S ALL PASS

KQ987543  
K4  

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KQ8

With the opening lead of the ace of diamonds, is there a play for 7S?!!

Losers: Spades = maybe 1  
Hearts = 1  
Diamonds = 0  
Clubs = 0

Play of the Hand:

- 1) Ruff ace of diamonds.
- 2) Play ace of spades

NOTE: Since spades are not 4-0, you have 8 spades, 1 diamond and 3 clubs off the top-- 12 tricks. You have all winners but one. Your threat cards are the king of hearts and the fourth club in the dummy. If the opponent who holds the ace of hearts, also has the fourth club, he will be squeezed.

- 3) Cash king of diamonds.
- 4) Play club to king.
- 5) Run all the remaining spades.
- 6) Cash your remaining clubs.

Seven spades made; but, alas, not bid.

Here are some possible ways you can go wrong:

- a) by trying to lead a small heart early in the hand;
- b) by NOT cashing the diamond king early; or,
- c) by playing the top clubs after pulling only three rounds of trumps. You must cash ALL of the spades prior to playing your clubs; thus, removing all of West's "idle cards".

## Defense Against a Squeeze Play

Is there anything which a defender can do to stop declarer from stealing an extra trick using the squeeze play?

Squeeze defense is very difficult because the defenders often don't realize they are in trouble until it is too late. If a defender expects that declarer has most of the ingredients for a squeeze, it is occasionally possible for the defense to:

- a) Duck when the declarer wants him to take a trick (he is trying to rectify the count); or,
- b) To force the declarer to use up a critical entry for a squeeze early in the play of the hand.

But, effective squeeze defense is much harder than squeeze execution; most often, taking place “post-mortem”.

In Conclusion:

Squeeze plays are important in difficult-to-make high level contracts and in matchpoint play where the taking of one more trick than generally achieved by the field is a real difference-maker likely to result in a top board. The opportunity to employ a squeeze play arises sufficiently frequently enough that it is essential to learn if one aspires to become an advanced player.

At a later date, we can revisit the squeeze play if there is sufficient interest.

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## The Safety Play

The safety play is very much what the name indicates, a means of protection against a bad break. For example, one line of play may have the prospects of winning five tricks in a suit. But, if you attempted to win these five tricks and the cards broke badly, you might find yourself taking only three tricks.

Assume that you needed only four of the five tricks. In that case, it would be most unwise for you to attempt to win the maximum—if there were a safer way to guarantee that you will win four tricks. This is the theory behind the safety play.

Below is a very simple illustration:

AQ1082

K7

J4

9653

If you need all five tricks, play for West to hold the king and another spade and finesse the queen. But, suppose your queen loses to the king, what do you do the next time?

Situation a) Maybe you play the ace and East is void. Now, you cannot avoid losing another trick to West's jack. The original holdings might have been:

AQ1082

J74

K

9653

NOTE to defender: False card by playing the 7 when the declarer leads a small card.

Situation b) If however, you decide to finesse again the next time, it is possible that you will lose to the jack. The original holdings might have been:

AQ1082

74

KJ

9653

NOTE to defender: False card by playing the 4 when declarer leads a small card.

In other words, if luck is against you and you misguess the situation, you will be lost. To guard against such a misguess, the absolute insurance play is the ace first. In situation a, you would drop the singleton king and your play would win all of the tricks. In situation b, you would drop the jack and your troubles would be over. You make four out of five possible tricks in the suit.

But, what happens if when you play the ace and two small cards fall. Reenter the South hand and lead a small card toward the queen. If West follows with either the jack or king, your troubles are over. If West shows out, you will lose two tricks to East's king-jack. But, then there was nothing you could ever have done about it.

The **safety play of the ace** in the above example guarantees that you will make your contract if it is possible to make. This play protects you against a possible misguess which would result from a trick one finesse of the queen.

Note: Doing a safety play applies where you can afford to lose one trick but cannot afford to lose two.

A safety play many times deliberately sacrifices one trick in order to run the least possible risk of losing two tricks. Failure by the declarer to exercise caution in what are considered normal situations has led to staggering losses at the bridge table.

Finally, certain combinations in the safety field have become standard. Mastering safety plays requires steady practice to fix in your mind all the outstanding cards in the suit. An hour of private practice with one suit will help more than weeks of actual play. Some of the safety plays may at first appear to go against your natural instincts; but, upon study you will begin to observe the soundness of the safety play.

Safety plays are frequently employed in the play of notrump contracts? Can you spot a safety play to ensure your contract in the following hand?

86

A

AKQ1095

9754

Contract: 3NT

Opening Lead: 2 of hearts

AQ543

K873

63

AQ

You need only 5 tricks in diamonds; but, the heart opening lead has removed an entry to the dummy's hand. If you cash the AKQ of diamonds, you risk defeat when one defender holds four diamonds to the jack. The **safety play** is to lead the 10 of diamonds at trick two. When it loses to the jack, the remaining diamonds are all good. The key here is that you still hold a diamond in your hand in which to get to the dummy.

Let's look at another example. See if you can spot the safety play needed to make this hand.

742  
AK5  
J754  
753

Contract: 6NT

Opening Lead: Queen of hearts

AKQJ  
106  
AK832  
AK

You need four tricks in diamonds. The sure line of play is to win the heart lead in dummy and play a low diamond. If East follows with the 6, you finesse the 8!! If West wins this trick, the remaining diamonds are now good. If West should show out, your safety play will prevent East from winning two diamond tricks and setting the contract.

If there is sufficient interest, we can look in more depth at the safety play in a subsequent lesson.

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Next Week: The Lebensohl Convention—Part I

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Let's end by looking at last week's assignment. Although this hand is very similar to example three in the lesson, I still included it because I wanted you to see another situation in which you could use the “kickback” key card ask bid as well as use cue bids to show first or second round controls.

Many thanks to Chuck Bricken for sending in the following response to the hand.

7632  
A102  
KQ8  
A65

Contract: 6H

Opening Lead: Ace of Spades

8  
AKJ65  
AJ4  
KQ76



Bidding:	1H	2C
	3C	3H
	3S	4C
	4D	4S
	5H	6H

#### Bidding Notes:

Because the pair is playing Flannery, North makes a 2/1 game-forcing response bid rather than bidding 1S, holding 4 spades. After the heart suit is agreed, South's bid of 3S is a slam-inviting control bid showing a first/second round control (Italian System). The ensuing bids of 4C and 4D are similar control bids. The bid of 4S is "Kickback" asking for key cards in hearts. South's response of 5H shows two key cards, plus the queen of hearts. North places the final contract in 6H.

#### Analysis of the Hand:

Counting losers in the South hand, there is an unavoidable spade loser and a club loser. The club will not be a loser if the suit breaks 3-3 (36 % of the time) or, if one opponent tosses a club if he holds four of them. Trying to trump a club loser is not a good play—trumps will have to be drawn first so as not to risk having a club winner trumped; and, there won't be a trump left in dummy with which to ruff.

Counting losers in the North hand, there are 4 spade losers, three of which can be trumped. There are no outside losers in the other suits. Therefore, this hand should be played as a **dummy reversal**. This plan has a good chance of working since the five outstanding trumps will break 3-2 about 68% of the time.

#### Play of the Hand:

- 1) West wins the ace of spades and continues with the king.
- 2) Ruff with the 5 of hearts.
- 3) Lead 6 of hearts to the 10, pulling one round of trumps.
- 4) Lead another spade and ruff with the king of hearts (unblocking)
- 5) Lead the jack of hearts, drawing a second round of trumps.
- 6) Lead a small club to the ace.
- 7) Lead dummy's final spade and ruff with the queen of hearts.
- 8) Lead a small diamond to the king.
- 9) Lead the final trump and throw away your little club.

Six Hearts bid and made. Bravo!

