

## 25.6.19

### Easy Peasey but pork's off the menu ...

This week's hand has a couple of interesting bidding points but mostly it's a simple illustration of that most revered of bridge plays – the squeeze.

You're South, as dealer you pick up:

♠ K Q 10 9

♥ Q J 10 4

♦ K Q J

♣ A 10

You open 1H and hear a 2C response from partner. You then bid 2NT. This is the 'modern' style, showing 15-19 pts with the 2NT being game-forcing. The argument is that the traditional Acol rebid of 2NT showing 15-16 pts is hardly ever passed, so there's actually no need to jump to 3NT with 17-19 pts. Just bidding 2NT gives you a bit more space to pin the final contract.

Anyway, you then hear 4NT from his partner. Hopefully you're not thinking that this is Blackwood -- it's not. Or at least it's 'Blackwood but not as we know it' as they used to say when Star Trek was worth watching. A 4NT bid over a previous no-trump bid is a *quantitative* raise. It's asking for a shoot to 6NT if you're a maximum for your previous no-trump bid. If you're not, you pass. Well with 18 pts you're near the maximum so you want to be in 6NT. The actual South who played the hand neglected to show his Aces on the way. When he accepted the invitation, he should show his one Ace by bidding 5D. This means he has the maximum partner requires for 6NT but he's just letting partner know how many Aces the two hands hold, in case there are two Aces missing. In fact, North was rather counting on this, though it didn't matter as things turned out.

♣3 was led by West and the North hand went down as:

♠ A 3 2

♥ A K 7

♦ 8 7 6

♣ Q J 6 5

Showing the South hand again:

♠ K Q 10 9

♥ Q J 10 4

♦ K Q J

♣ A 10

That lead is fortunate maybe, but presumably it means that the Club finesse is working, though the finesse can only be done one time. You let the club lead run to hand and the 10♣ wins, East having played 9♣ and now you have decent chances. There are four hearts, three spades, two clubs and two diamonds off the top -- eleven tricks, one short. That should be alerting you straight away to squeeze possibilities because squeezes usually happen when you just need that tricky one extra trick.

Well, if Spades are 3-3, or the ♠J falls in two rounds, you're in the money. If they're 4-2 or worse, ♠J in the long hand, you might still drop K♣ under A♣. but don't try that just yet. You could of course

just take a guess at which hand the ♠J is in and finesse against it. The odds of playing that way are worse than playing for the 3-3/ (4-2 with ♠J dropping) break so you need good grounds for playing for one specific hand to hold ♠J. Look at the position now. Yes, if Spades break 3-3 you have your tricks but there's another chance. If they are worse than 3-3 and the hand with the long Spades also holds K♣ you have that hand by the short and curlies.

Notice you have two *threat* cards or *menaces*. The Q♣ in dummy is a threat in the unlikely event that a defender dumps his K♣ as a discard. The ♠9 in hand is also a threat because if the defender throws too many Spades away as you're cashing tricks in the other suits, he will allow your 9♠ to make.

Be careful not to cash the three top Spades to find out whether the Spades are 3-3 because then you're snookered – the squeeze won't work even if the long Spades and K♣ are in the same hand. In fact, you can't afford to cash any Spades because if you do the squeeze can be *broken up* as they say (I won't explain that here). Aficionados of squeeze play will see that you can actually cash ♠K in hand and take a spade return in hand, after the A♦ is taken by the defenders. You will need to play the squeeze differently, in a more complex way but I'll ignore that here. Just don't cash any Spades yet.

You must now knock out the A♦ by playing off the K♦. This will surely be taken by the A♦ won't it? This is known as *correcting the count*. In most squeezes, you need to give up all tricks you can afford to lose – in this case one. This ensures that when you put the thumbscrews on one of the defenders, he has no spare cards to ease the pressure. So with A♦ gone, you take the return. You can now cash A♣ to see if the K♣ drops – it doesn't. You note here that West follows with ♣2 and East plays ♣7. Cash one Spade in your hand, not the A♠ in dummy because you need this as an entry to dummy to get to that threatening Q♣. You then cash your two Diamond winners and three Hearts. When you cash the fourth Heart, if one hand started with 4+ Spades and the K♣, they are now down to three Spades and the K♣ and they are busted. Either black card thrown will give you your contract.

The position will be something like this:

♠ A 3 ♥ ♦ ♣ Q J (N)	
	♠ J 5 4 ♥ ♦ ♣ K (E)
(S) ♠ K 10 9 ♥ 10 ♦ ♣	

You cash ♥10 and throw ♣J from dummy. East must now give up a trick. The squeeze would also have worked against West.

Note that you don't need to keep a careful count of the cards being thrown. If you don't see the K♣ appear, you know that the Q♣ is dead meat, it can't help you and you can just run off your two winning Spades hoping that all the remaining Spades drop (you'll surely notice the ♠J fall, even if you didn't notice a Spade being discarded), and the last Spade in your hand brings home the bacon.

Sadly, though South did his best by playing it this way at the table, no bacon was forthcoming because West had underled the K♣ (what a guy!) but East had four Spades to the ♠J. West just held onto his K♣ and East held onto three Spades so neither of the threat cards turned out to be very threatening. South now tried for the 3-3 Spade break and had to give up the last trick to East's ♠J. But had the Squeeze worked, South would have been looking good, wouldn't he?

Not quite so good, because the squeeze could still have been defeated if the A♦ is in a hand with at least three Diamonds. Now the A♦ can be held off twice. It would have been a brave South who played off the third Diamond to correct the count. He would have been gambling that the hand that got in with A♦ didn't have a fourth Diamond to bring down the contract and that the Spades were, indeed, 4-2 or worse. Then he would have been in the lofty position of telling his partner that he played the hand in the only realistic way possible to make the contract despite having bumped into some excellent defenders.

And he might also have to explain to his partner why he didn't, at the end of the play, just play East for ♠J, taking the Spade finesse in the South hand. That way, he doesn't also need K♣ in the East hand.

As the play went, when the A♣ was cashed, both defenders followed. South should have noted that West, who had led a club originally, played high-low. This seems to suggest he started with five clubs. If this was the case, East must have had only two clubs. Both defenders followed to three rounds of Diamonds, marking East with at least 3 Diamonds. Three rounds of Hearts were cashed, both defenders followed. And when the fourth round of Hearts was cashed, East threw a fourth Diamond. The squeeze could not have worked on East, because, looking at the layout above. East either now has two Spades and K♣ left or three Spades. He never started with four Spades and K♣. Also, it could not have worked on West because when the fourth Heart was cashed, he threw a low (ish) club. He was not forced to give up either a Spade or K♣.

So the option at that point was to cross to the ♠A and lead one back to hand. Then it's crunch time. Put the ♠9 in for the brilliant, late finesse or take the ♠Q for the mundane 3-3 break, dropping the ♠J in the West hand. What's your play?

And before you make it, you might like to reflect whether you should have quickly put Q♣ in on the opening lead, because only a cool and rather deadly East would have played 9♣ under Q♣ without batting an eyelash if he had ♣ K 9 7.

Full hand, board 16 (transposed for exposition):

Travellers | Hands

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Dlr: West  
Vul: E/W

♠ K Q 10 9  
♥ Q J 10 4  
♦ K Q J  
♣ A 10

♠ J 6 5 4  
♥ 9 6 2  
♦ A 5 4 3  
♣ 9 7

WEST

NORTH

16

SOUTH

EAST

♠ 8 7  
♥ 8 5 3  
♦ 10 9 2  
♣ K 8 4 3 2

18  
5 3  
14

♠ A 3 2  
♥ A K 7  
♦ 8 7 6  
♣ Q J 6 5

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Play it again

Board No 16 E/W Vul Dealer West