

Board of the Week 62

By Dick Chapman

This week I will give a board with no particular educational value, but you might find it interesting or even fun. Played in January, 2025, BBO casual pairs:

♠98	V: NS	♠AK65
♥AJ104	D: W	♥Q6
♦AK97		♦105
♣A74		♣KQJ83

I sat West and it's a pretty easy auction: 1NT-2C-2H-3NT-all pass. Would you make a slam try with the East hand? With the solid club suit, I probably would, but my partner did not and I won't second guess his judgment. At any rate, you get the spade queen as an opening lead. Unless clubs are 10-fifth in South, you have 12 tricks (2=3=2=5). As Gerald once told me, "play the contract you are in, not the one you wish you were in." Use any remaining brain cells to determine you can make 13. Give it some thought before reading further.

You are going to have to finesse hearts to even have a chance at 13, and you don't want to squeeze yourself playing clubs. So win the opening lead and advance the queen of hearts at trick 2. This holds, so you send a heart over to the jack, which also wins. North followed to both heart tricks. You have not improved from the original 2=3=2=5 12 tricks that you started with...or have you? Can you make 13?

You could lay down the heart ace and try to drop the king, but that's asking a lot of the cards. Besides, what's the rush? You have 6 black winners to play.

I will take over from here. I led 5 clubs. South followed to the first two then had to find three discards. I see a diamond, a heart, and another diamond. When South discarded a heart, I knew he started with five (South wouldn't blank the king*). I discarded a diamond and a spade on the fourth and fifth clubs.

Now I put down the spade king. Aha! South has to find another discard and I have the complete count of that hand: 1 spade, 5 hearts, and 2 clubs, thus 5 diamonds. From this I can "see" North with an original 6=2=2=3 shape. The only part of North's hand that is relevant is the diamond count (2). The hand now (see next column):

♠ ♥ ♦XX ♣	♠K ♥ ♦105 ♣
♠ ♥A10 ♦AK9 ♣	♠K8 ♦XXX ♣
♠QJ7432 ♥97 ♦Q4 ♣965	♠AK65 ♥Q6 ♦105 ♣KQJ83

♠98 ♥AJ104 ♦AK97 ♣A74	♠10 ♥K8532 ♦J8632 ♣102
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I scored 2 spades, 3 hearts, three diamonds, and 5 clubs.

Sad to say, our side lost 0.47 imps because three pairs in the 16-pair field did bid slam (two making 13, one 12). Five pairs including us were in 3NT making 13, three made 12, and 3 made only 11. You would have work really hard to make 11, since you can see 2 spades, 3 hearts, 2 diamonds, and 5 clubs from the very beginning. Two pairs were in a suit part score (it's BBO, don't try to figure it out).

Squeezes are always fun. If you are the squeezer, I mean; the squeeze** doesn't enjoy it so much. This one doesn't appear until after the heart finesse works. In the end, the heart 10 and diamond 9 are the threat cards. When I lead the squeeze card (the spade king), it's easy to discard the red suit that South doesn't discard. I am not an expert in this field (or any other field, for that matter), but I looked it up: this is a *positional, two-suit, material* squeeze: only South can be squeezed, there are threats (menaces) in two suits, and the opponent is forced to give up a trick when discarding. But in these cases, don't worry about terminology, just watch the cards and make your best play. Also: don't forget to enjoy the game. See you at the table.

*In a recent column published in our local newspaper, Barry Rigal observed that a defender who sees a squeeze coming might consider blanking an honor early in the play so as to throw declarer off guard. But that concept doesn't apply here because the earlier heart play, before the squeeze, has identified the location of the heart king.

South might consider covering the heart queen at trick 2. This won't help today, but it still might be the textbook defense.

**Ok, ok, squeezee isn't a word. But you know what I mean. Opponent, defender. Maybe victim ☺.