

The elimination endplay

Advanced declarer play is more an art than a science. There are coups, squeezes, and endplays, with goofy names like ‘winkle squeeze’ and ‘dentist coup,’ invented so that after pulling one off by accident and having it explained by the local expert bridge player, you can say to your friends: ‘I thought I was done for, until I caught Sharon in a double wombat. Boy was she livid!’ We’ll start with the elimination endplay. Put yourself in West’s shoes for this deal:

♠ QJ1098 ♥ KQ ♦ 543 ♣ AJ4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> W E </div>	♠ K7654 ♥ 32 ♦ AK2 ♣ K102
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West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2NT†	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

† Jacoby.

North leads the ♦7. It appears that we need to guess the location of the ♣Q to avoid losing one trick in each suit. No reason to be hasty about it: we take the ♦A and play a spade. North takes the ace and returns a spade to the king, leaving us with

♠ J109 ♥ KQ ♦ 54 ♣ AJ4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> W E </div>	♠ 765 ♥ 32 ♦ K2 ♣ K102
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We play the ♥K, to which North wins the ace and returns a heart. Now we cash the ♦K and exit our last diamond, leaving

♠ J109 ♥ — ♦ — ♣ AJ4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> W E </div>	♠ 765 ♥ — ♦ — ♣ K102
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Whoever wins the lead will be forced to lead into our two-way club tenace, or surrender a ruff and sluff, providing our 10th trick. Here is full deal:

♠ QJ1098 ♥ KQ ♦ 543 ♣ AJ4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> N E W S </div>	♠ A2 ♥ AJ954 ♦ 76 ♣ Q987 ♠ K7654 ♥ 32 ♦ AK2 ♣ K102 ♠ 3 ♥ 10876 ♦ QJ1098 ♣ 653
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This play succeeds because declarer is able to void himself in hearts and diamonds before forcing the opponents to win the lead. It is crucial to clear the hearts before the diamonds: if we play on diamonds first, the opponents can cash the ♥A and put declarer back in with a heart in the end position.

Can the defense do anything to prevent this? If they attack the diamond suit three times, before declarer has shed his hearts, the endplay will fail. In this example, North can play diamonds whenever he is on lead, but since he has only two diamonds, the endplay cannot be stopped. Even if the defense manage to thwart the possibility of an endplay (if North had a third diamond, for example), West can always fall back on taking the club finesse, so this line of play is superior to trying to guess the position of the ♣Q.

An endplay often sets up when declarer and dummy have near mirrored distributions, so that both can void themselves of side suits simultaneously. Test your understanding with this one:

♠ A2 ♥ A102 ♦ AQJ1097 ♣ AQ	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> W E </div>	♠ K43 ♥ KJ9 ♦ 86543 ♣ 32
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West	North	East	South
2♣	2♠	Pass	Pass
3♦	Pass	5♦	Pass
Pass	Pass		

The lead is the ♠Q. Upon seeing the dummy, you make a mental note not to berate your partner after the hand. Plan the play. (Note: assuming South is not void in spades, there is a 100% line of play!)

The strip squeeze

Last time, we whetted our taste buds with the endplay, that dastardly technique of forcing your opponents to impale themselves on their own tricks. This time, we look at the strip squeeze: the idea is to force an opponent to discard something they don't want to. The squeeze play is so named for the British duke who, after falling victim to a primitive version of the squeeze executed by a well-known Italian professional during the finals of the 1929 *Pont Tournoi International Duplicate* in Monaco, attempted to strangle the declarer. Let's see how high we can raise our opponents' blood pressure with this deal:

♠ A54 ♥ KQJ1098 ♦ AK2 ♣ 2	W E	♠ 32 ♥ 76 ♦ J65 ♣ A76543
West North East South 4♥ 2♠† Pass Pass 4♥ Pass Pass Pass		

† Weak.

Your leisurely worries about missing slam are replaced by a familiar feeling of panic after north leads the ♥4 and you see the dummy. South takes the ♥A and returns a heart, ruining your hopes of ruffing a spade in dummy; North follows with the 5♥. After taking the last trump, on which North discards a spade, you have to find a way to avoid two spade losers and a diamond loser with this remaining:

♠ A54 ♥ 1098 ♦ AK2 ♣ 2	W E	♠ 32 ♥ — ♦ J65 ♣ A7654
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Rather than hoping for the ♦Q to drop, it is better to try and catch North in a spade–diamond squeeze. We cash the ♦A, all following (and no ♦Q appearing); now comes the ♣A and a ♣ ruff, North following to both rounds. It seems that our squeeze may have worked, though we can't be sure. Did you catch it? We then cash our remaining hearts, pitching clubs from dummy, while North discards spades, and are left with:

♠ A54 ♥ — ♦ K2 ♣ —	W E	♠ 7 ♥ — ♦ J6 ♣ 76
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If North has the ♦Q and no more clubs, then our contract is secure. We lead the ♠A and another spade to North: with any luck, he is forced to lead a diamond away from his ♦Q, while we ready our cell phone to get a picture of the steam coming out his ears. Here was the full deal:

♠ KQJ1098 ♥ 54 ♦ Q109 ♣ 98	N W E S	♠ 32 ♥ 76 ♦ J65 ♣ A76543
♠ A54 ♥ KQJ1098 ♦ AK2 ♣ 2	♠ 76 ♥ A32 ♦ 8743 ♣ KQJ10	

The 'strip' part, where we cashed our clubs and hearts, was necessary to take away North's safe exit cards: if we try to give North the lead in spades while he still has clubs, he will exit in clubs and leave us stranded. Looking back, it was when we played off our final ♥ that North found himself in a pickle, holding KQJ10♠ Q10♦: if he pitches a spade, he can be endplayed, while pitching a diamond leaves the ♦Q unguarded. Of course, the onus is on declarer to realize his opportunity: in this case, the bidding is a big hint to the distribution.

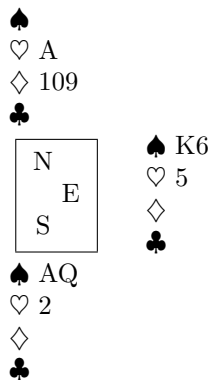
Whatever happened to that British duke? He was banned from playing any form of bridge for life, and thereafter devoted himself to understanding every possible form of the squeeze technique, so that he might set the broken shards of his pride back into one piece. Here is a puzzle from his archive:

♠ QJ10987 ♥ AJ ♦ AQ2 ♣ A2	W E	♠ AK6 ♥ 543 ♦ K43 ♣ Q543
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The contract is 6♠, and North leads the ♥K. Plan the play.

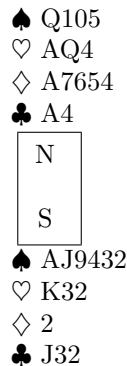
The trump coup

Of all the tools declarer has available, the trump coup is among the rarest and most delicate. Like flying pigs, quantum computing, and a three-way with Beyoncé and Jessica Alba, a naturally occurring trump coup is something most of us will never see. The situation where it arises is simple enough: lacking enough trumps to take a finesse, we use another suit to take the finesse for us. A trump coup is more like a squeeze than an endplay: after stripping an opponent of safe exit cards, we force him to play a trump that might otherwise have won a trick. The endposition looks something like the following (spades are trump, and West is out of them):



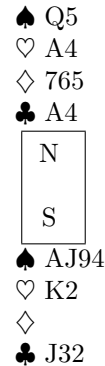
We must win all three tricks, and have the lead in our own hand. When we lead a heart to the ♥A and a diamond off dummy, East is forced to ruff, effectively finessing his ♠K, even though the dummy has no trumps remaining!

The easy part is this last step: in practice, getting down to the above position is the hard part. Let's see an example:

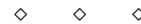


The contract is 6♠ by South, and West leads the ♦K; we win the ♦A, and ruff a second diamond in hand (this will be important later), East signalling high low. We had better figure out whether or not

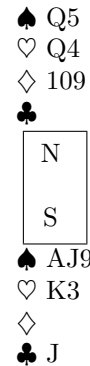
spades are breaking: after a heart to the queen, we run the ♠10, but West discards a diamond: we are down to



What now? (Stop: before you keep reading, see if you can work out where this is going.)



If we use dummy's remaining trumps to finesse the ♠K, then we won't have any trumps left in the dummy to ruff a club. So we ruff a diamond back to hand, play a club to the ace, and exit a club, leaving



Suppose East wins and returns a heart. We win in hand, ruff our last club, and take a second spade finesse. Now, assuming East has a heart remaining, we cash our last heart and play a diamond off the board, completing the coup. The position with three cards to play is (nearly) identical to the example endposition above.

In this hand, declarer must hope for the right distribution: otherwise there is no way to make the contract. Ruffing diamonds was necessary to shorten declarer's trumps: declarer must come down to the same distribution as East for the coup to work.

Trump uppercut

This week, we'll take a break from the deceptive, selfish practices of declarer play, and focus on the finer points of cooperative defensive play. The 'trump uppercut' is a form of trump promotion, though a more apt name would be the 'trump one-two punch,' since there are two steps to the execution: one defender ruffs high, forcing declarer to ruff with a high trump trick – the right side jab – and in doing so promotes one of partners trumps to a winner – the left side cross. (The term 'Trump uppercut' should be reserved for when Donald Trump sucker punches Angela Merkel during the second year of his presidency.)

As West, you hold ♠1032 ♥AK92 ♦974 ♣432, and the auction goes

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♥	2♣	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

After some thought, you decide that the ♥A is the safest lead, despite partner's club bid, and down comes the dummy:

	♠ 9876
	♥ Q8643
	♦ KQJ
	♣ A
♠ 1032	N W
♥ AK92	
♦ 974	
♣ 432	

Partner plays the ♥10 and declarer the ♥5 to the first trick; partner's ♥10 looks like a singleton or doubleton, so there is no reason not to cash another heart, and all follow to the ♥K (declarer playing the ♥J). Now what? If partner doesn't have a minor suit trick coming, it seems there is no hope of setting the contract. Even worse, if partner has a spade honor, it won't win a trick, since declarer can finesse East in trumps.

We could lead another heart for partner to ruff, but what will that accomplish? Declarer will just overruff whatever East chooses to ruff with. But if partner does have a high spade, he can force declarer to ruff high, which will promote our ♠10! So we lead another heart, which partner ruffs with the ♠K, taken by declarer with the trump ace. Declarer can cash two top spades, but has to lose a trump to us

and a diamond to partner's ♦A in the end, for down one. Here was the full deal:

	♠ 9876		
	♥ Q8643		
	♦ KQJ		
	♣ A		
♠ 1032	N W E S	♠ K4	
♥ AK92		♥ 107	
♦ 974		♦ A32	
♣ 432		♣ QJ10987	
	♠ AQJ5		
	♥ J5		
	♦ 10865		
	♣ K65		

Lets take a moment and look at the situation from East's point of view. After dutifully signalling high low in hearts, partner led us another heart, which (it seems) he expects us to ruff. Since partner holds the ♥AK, declarer must have all the other missing points, so East can be reasonably sure his ♠K is dead in the water. Hoping for an uppercut seems like the best play. Even if, by some fluke, partner has the ♠A or ♠Q, the contract will be set no matter what, so it cannot lose to ruff with the ♠K. Note also that declarer's discard of the ♥J to the second trick makes it likely that he started with two hearts; and even if he has a third heart, it won't matter which trump we ruff with.

Suppose you hold ♠KJ ♥Q5432 ♦QJ105 ♣32 as East, and hear the following auction:

West	North	East	South
3♣	Pass	Pass	3♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Partner leads the ♣A and you see the following:

	♠ 9876
	♥ KJ6
	♦ 87632
	♣ Q2
♠ KJ	N E
♥ Q5432	
♦ QJ105	
♣ 32	

After the ♣K, all following, partner plays a third club, dummy playing a low spade. Plan your defense. How would your plan change the ♥2 was changed to the ♠2?

The simple squeeze

One afternoon, I sat down for lunch and picked up ♠AQJ43 ♥A ♦AQJ4 ♣AJ5 on BBO as West (with robot partner and opponents), and opened 2♣ in the first seat. The bidding proceeded:

West	North	East	South
2♣	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
5NT	Pass	6♣	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

North led the ♠7, and I had the following picture to consider:

♠ AQJ43	W E	♠ K1096
♥ A		♥ Q5
♦ AQJ4		♦ 62
♣ AJ5		♣ K10843

After South followed with a spade to the first trick, there was nothing to do, as far as I could tell: one of the finesses had to come home, and I could ruff a diamond in dummy. A small point: since the club finesse can be taken through either opponent, the diamond finesse should be taken first, since it will determine the location of the ♦K, which might help locate the ♣Q. Of course, I wouldn't be telling you this story if that plan was successful: both the ♦K and ♣Q were with North, and I chose to finesse the ♣Q through South, so I was down 1.

Can declarer do anything else? Of course, I could have chosen to take the club finesse through North to make 6♠. Here was the full deal:

	♠ 7		
	♥ KJ1064		
	♦ K97		
	♣ Q762		
♠ AQJ43	N W E S	♠ K1096	
♥ A		♥ Q5	
♦ AQJ4		♦ 62	
♣ AJ5		♣ K10843	
	♠ 852		
	♥ 98732		
	♦ 10853		
	♣ 9		

Pressing the GIB button, I was surprised to see that EW can make 7♠ on any lead! Let's see how that can be done double-dummy: as the title would suggest, it will be through a simple squeeze, against North in the red suits. Since we can see all the hands, we start by playing all our trumps and the ace of hearts, and then collect all the clubs, ending in dummy. Before the last club is played, this is the position (South's hand is irrelevant):

♠ —		♠ —
♥ K		♥ Q
♦ K9		♦ 6
♣ —	N W E	♣ K
♠ —		♠ —
♥ —		♥ —
♦ AQJ		♦ —
♣ —		♣ —

When East plays the ♣K, West lets go the J♦, and North is squeezed. If he pitches the ♥K, our ♥Q is established; and if he pitches a diamond, the ♦A drops the ♦K and our ♦Q becomes the 13th trick.

Try your skills with this example:

♠ Q82	W E	♠ AKJ10976
♥ A2		♥ 3
♦ AKQ8		♦ 32
♣ A542		♣ Q63

You are West, and the contract is 7NT. North leads the ♥K. You will make the contract if the ♣K is singleton, or if some opponent has ♦J109 tripleton, both of which are highly unlikely. Can you see a way to improve your chances?

The dummy reversal

One evening at my local bridge club, I picked up ♠A32 ♥AK432 ♦432 ♣AK as East, and opened 1♥ in the third seat. The bidding proceeded:

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Unhappy as I was to have my contract stolen – and by my own partner no less! – I obediently put down the dummy when North led the ♠Q, and sat back in my chair. It had been a stressful week: clients from a real estate deal in Hong Kong were getting antsy to close, Liz had taken the kids to her mother’s for the weekend, leaving nothing but a vaguely passive aggressive post-it note, all while my personal assistant had been on vacation in Morocco. Granted, diplomacy had never been my strong suit, but I was starting to suspect a conspiracy.

So perhaps I could welcome a moment’s respite. As luck would have it, my paranoia was confirmed when partner uttered a lame excuse about a family emergency and scuttled away to make a phone call, leaving me to play the hand so as not to incur the wrath of the director upon realizing we had to play a late board. Here is what I had to deal with (now sitting West):

♠ K7654	W E	♠ A32
♥ 5		♥ AK432
♦ K54		♦ Q32
♣ J432		♣ AK

We may as well assume the spades are breaking, since otherwise two spade losers and two diamonds will be enough to hang us. (The astute reader will note that we could bank on two diamond tricks coming home, but that is an unnecessary long shot.) Even still, the spade lead seems to spell doom: we needed both little spades to ruff our club losers! We might get away with one club ruff, but unless the ♣Q drops, the opponents will take a club, two diamonds and a spade.

Having read the title of this column, I decided

to embark on a dummy reversal. After winning the spade lead, I played the ♦K, losing to North’s ace, who returned a spade to my ace. I followed with the ♥A and a heart ruff, ♣A and another heart ruff, and finally the ♣K and a third heart ruff, leaving

♠ —	W E	♠ 3
♥ —		♥ K
♦ 54		♦ Q3
♣ J4		♣ —

This is the position with only 2 more tricks to collect (we have only lost the ♦A). We now cash our red suit tricks: assuming the spades split 3-2, there will be one trump remaining, so either the ♥K and ♦Q both hold, giving us 10 tricks, or an opponent ruffs one of them, setting up our small spade.

The breakdown: we didn’t have the timing to take care of our losers in hand, so we chose to play dummy’s hand as the master hand. For the beginner, ruffing dummy’s cards isn’t supposed to help: only losers in the master hand matter. Advanced declarers count winners, not losers: in this hand, the dummy reversal line of play can see two spades, five hearts, two clubs and a diamond (10), while the ‘usual’ line has four spade tricks, two hearts, one diamond, and two clubs (9).

When my partner returned to the table, I proudly told him of my success with the dummy reversal. He was not impressed: ‘Don’t be stupid. Just because the dummy had to take over for declarer doesn’t make it a dummy reversal.’ Not receiving any assistance from my opponents, who were discussing the advantages of trump leads, I emitted the loudest sigh I could muster and prepared to move for the next round.

See if you can figure out the winning line on this hand:

♠ A75	W E	♠ J82
♥ AKQ103		♥ J987
♦ 2		♦ A743
♣ AKQ3		♣ 92

The contract is 6♥, and North leads the ♦K.