

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;"> W E </div>	♠ K7654 ♥ 32 ♦ AK2 ♣ K102	♠ A2 ♥ AJ954 ♦ 76 ♣ Q987 ♠ 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!)