

## 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	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">W</span> <span>E</span> </div>	♠ 32 ♥ 76 ♦ J65 ♣ A76543
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West	North	East	South
	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	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">W</span> <span>E</span> </div>	♠ 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 ♣ —	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">W</span> <span>E</span> </div>	♠ 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	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">N</span> <span>E</span>  <span style="margin-right: 10px;">W</span> <span>S</span> </div>	♠ 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	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">W</span> <span>E</span> </div>	♠ AK6 ♥ 543 ♦ K43 ♣ Q543
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The contract is 6♠, and North leads the ♥K. Plan the play.