

Bridges Squeezes: Easier And More Common Than You Think

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There are few things in Bridge more satisfying than making a loser vanish and an extra winner appear as if by magic! That is what squeezes are all about. This lecture will look at the squeeze that is most common and easiest to execute – known as the **Simple Squeeze**. (Let me or the Unit know if you want a second lecture on more advanced squeezes.)

First we need to stop thinking that squeezes are extremely rare and difficult plays that experts love to talk about but the rest of us can ignore with little loss. Not true!! Most likely in nearly every session of duplicate bridge there are several squeeze opportunities and it is not difficult to learn how to profit from them. It is even common to execute a simple squeeze without knowing what is happening, if you learn to set up the needed conditions for it – which we shall learn in this lesson and remember by using the acronym **BLUE**.

Definition: A *squeeze* takes place when a card you play *forces* one (or both) defenders to *throw* cards that make a card (or cards) of yours now good that would not have been good before.

Another way of looking at it is the following: A player has *idle cards* which do not matter if she discards one of them and *busy cards* which must be held to prevent declarer from making a trick with a card known as a *threat* or *menace* card. If declarer plays a winner (known as the *squeeze card*) that forces a defender to discard a *busy card* (because all the *idle cards* have already been played), then you have a squeeze. Note: If a defender throws a busy card by mistake (when a card or cards that would not have given up anything were available to play), it is called a *Pseudo Squeeze* – these happen surprisingly often!

We start by showing a few simple squeeze endings to clarify what a squeeze is.

In the following end positions the contract is Spades or Notrump, South to lead, one defender's hand worthless.

Example (a):

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠ —	♠ —	♠ —
♥ 9	♥ 10	♥ 5
♦ A K 10	♦ Q J 5	♦ 8 7
♣ —	♣ —	♣ 10

Example (b):

NORTH	WEST	SOUTH
♠ —	♠ —	♠ J 10
♥ —	♥ —	♥ —
♦ J	♦ Q	♦ —
♣ A J 3	♣ K Q 8	♣ 7 6

In (a) the squeeze card 10 of clubs is led and dummy pitches the 9 of hearts (West has no hearts). East is squeezed. The threats (cards that are not winners but could become winners if the defense pitches all controls in that suit) are the 10 of diamonds and the 5 of hearts. In (b) the lead of the J of spades forces West to throw the 8 of clubs and the lead of the 10 of spades completes the squeeze. The threats are the JC and JD in dummy. Note that switching West's cards to East and dummy has to pitch first and the squeeze fails. This is a positional squeeze example (in a) the squeeze would work if either defender held the key cards with the other worthless..

Often the best way to set up the squeeze position is to picture a 3. 4 or 5 card ending where you are playing your last long suit winner and one of the defenders must throw a card that sets up one of your threat cards. Visualize that ending position then try to make it happen!

Squeezes were described in a classic book by Clyde Love (Bridge Squeezes Complete, Dover, 1959). Love used a useful mnemonic **BLUE** that describes the needed ingredients for a Simple Squeeze.

B: One defender has **Both** controls stopping your **Threat Cards** from becoming winners. In other words, the defender is **Busy** in two suits, his partner being helpless.

L: You have winners for all the remaining tricks but one (the count has been *rectified!*)

U: At least one of your threats lies in the **U**pper hand (the hand above (or after) the defender being squeezed).

E: You have **E**ntries to get to any winner that has been established after the squeezed defender is forced to throw a control.

Whenever you have **BLUE**, it is possible to make a trick appear out of nowhere by squeezing one opponent. This often happens automatically, without you even picturing the ending. See this example from Love;

Exercise 1.

NORTH	
♠	6 5
♥	A K 4 2
♦	A J 8 3
♣	J 6 5
SOUTH	
♠	A 10 3
♥	Q 8
♦	K Q 7 4 2
♣	A K Q

Bidding:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1 ♥	P	2 ♦	P
3 ♦	P	4 NT	P
5 ♥	P	5 NT	P
6 ♦	P	7 NT	P
P	P		

West leads ♠ 9.

T. 1: East plays ♠ J.

Analysis 1.

WEST	
♠	9 8 7
♥	J 7
♦	10 6 5
♣	8 7 4 3 2

EAST	
♠	K Q J 4 2
♥	10 9 6 5 3
♦	9
♣	10 9

You need 13 tricks and you have 12 top tricks. Your only hope is to somehow make a 4th heart trick (but one of the defenders has to have at least 4 hearts, each of which can beat your 4th heart – or else you can hope to make a second spade trick (but the K and Q are still out and higher than your 10).

What about squeeze possibilities? If one defender has both the K and Q of spades and also 4 or more hearts then that that defender has busy cards for **B**oth your threats and his partner does not matter. From the opening lead, you assume the K and Q are on your right. So, if that hand also has four or more hearts you have **B** and **L**. Your QH is an **E**ntry in the **U**pper hand to the 10 of spades if the Q and K are thrown.

So, play all you winners outside of hearts and only look for the K and Q of spades. Your 4 card ending will be:

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AK42
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10 3
Q 8
-
-

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West either had to throw 2 hearts ending up with the KS and 3 hearts and your 4th heart is good – or West pitched both the K and S of spades and your 10S is good!. The squeeze works and all you have to do is watch for spades higher than your 10.

Here are a few more examples of simple squeezes. The first is taken from Wikopedia.

This is an example of a **Simple Squeeze**:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <p>♠ AJ
♥ K
♦ -
♣ -</p> | <p>South leads the ♠A, and West is squeezed in hearts and spades. If he discards the ♥A, North's ♥K becomes a winner. If he discards either spade, North's ♠J becomes a winner.</p> |
| <p>♠ KQ
♥ A
♦ -
♣ -</p> | <p>Note the following features of this position:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The count is Rectified – that means declarer has only one loser to eliminate. Three cards remain, and declarer has two immediate winners (the ♣A and ♠A) plus one winner that will be established by the squeeze (either the ♥K or the ♠J). • The ♥K and the ♠J are the Menaces or Threats. • Both menaces are positioned so that the squeeze card forces West to discard a Busy Card (either a spade or the AH) before you have to throw on of your threat cards. • The ♠A is an entry to the promoted menace card. You have to be able to get there for the squeeze to work! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West has no idle cards when you play the ♣A and what he throws is what you keep in dummy, since dummy plays after West. A squeeze won't succeed if you squeeze yourself first, before the defender plays! |

This is a **positional** squeeze, because if West's cards are transferred to East, the squeeze fails (you no longer have **U**). Now one of the menaces must be discarded from dummy before it is East's turn to play. If the ♥K is discarded, East can safely discard the ♥A (provided West still has a heart higher than South's 6). If the ♠J is discarded, East can safely discard a spade. In other words, you squeeze dummy before you squeeze the defender with the important busy cards!

Let's look again at what you usually need for a **Simple Squeeze**: An end position where you have winners for all but one of the remaining tricks – this means you have to lose all of your unavoidable losers except the one you are trying to squeeze out of the defense – this is called **Rectifying the Count**. You need to have at least 2 **threat** cards and one defender is holding the controls keeping those threat cards from being winners. *And that defender has no more **idle** cards so he must throw a control when you play your squeeze card.* Finally, the defender being squeezed has to throw a control before you are forced to throw one of your threat cards! If he plays after you have to discard one of your threat cards, he just throws that control and avoids the squeeze.

Sounds like you need a lot – but it comes up much more frequently than you would think and all you have to do much of the time is run your long suit and watch the defender discards carefully. Counting and keeping track of how suits split will usually tell you who can be squeezed and then you just have to rectify the count and cash your tricks in the right order.

Some Examples from Austin Games

Here's an example from the 5/14/2009 open game.

Austin # 1)		854		
		KJ9		
		KQ62		
		KQ8		
		<u>NORTH</u>		
A972			J3	
54	<u>WEST</u>		7632	<u>EAST</u>
84			J10953	
A7532			J9	
		<u>SOUTH</u>		
		KQ105		
		AQ108		
		A7		
		1064		

South opened 1NT, North bid 3NT and West led the ♣3. Dummy won the ♣Q and played a spade to the K which West ducked. South led a heart to dummy's J and played another spade, covering the J with the Q and West won the A. West now led the ♣2 and South guessed correctly by winning the ♣K, dropping East's J (if East had the ♣A he would have won it at trick 1 and returned a club!).

So, let's take stock: 5 tricks have been played and you have won 2 clubs, 1 heart and 1 spade and lost 1 spade. You have 3 more heart winners to cash, 1 spade and 3 diamonds – that adds up to 11 winners with 7 yet to come out of the last 8 tricks. Where can you get another trick? What threats do you have? The ♠5 might be good if spades split 3-3 – but it is certainly a threat. So is the ♣10 or dummy's ♣8 and also the 4th ♦ in dummy – the diamond 6. Who has the controls stopping these threats from being winners? If you were counting, you know from the lead and later play that West had 5 clubs. West also almost surely has 4 spades (from the play of the spade J by East the second

time you led the suit). You have seen 1H already in West's hand so he has at most 3 diamonds and East controls the 4th round of that suit. We can't squeeze East since all East has that matters is diamonds. But West has to guard both spades and clubs and can be squeezed. All you need to do to squeeze West is cash your hearts and diamonds in the right order. What is the right order? Try to picture the end position where you cash your squeeze card. You have to be able to get to whatever threat card has been established and that will tell you how to cash your tricks to preserve an entry (if needed) – it takes practice, but it will get easier over time.

Here's the solution: Cash your hearts, pitching the useless 4th diamond from dummy. Then cash the A and K of diamonds leaving you in dummy with this position

	8		

	Q		
	8		
	<u>NORTH</u>		
97			---
---	<u>WEST</u>	EAST	---
---			J109
A			---
	<u>SOUTH</u>		
	105		

	10		

You now play the Q of diamonds, pitching the club 10 from your hand. If West throws a spade, your 10 and 5 are both good. If West throws the club A, you cash the club 8 and take the spade 10 for the last trick. Making 6NT!!

Note that you can't cash the spade 10 earlier– you would have no entry back to your hand at the end. You also have to save the club 8 in dummy because it ends up being the threat card, not the club 10 which you have to pitch on the squeeze card.

All this seems hard even when you see all the cards. But don't despair, it often happens automatically when you rectify the count and just run your long suit. When it matters which order you cash your tricks, sometimes you'll miss the correct squeeze position. Afterwards, when you learn to spot what went wrong, you'll be on the way to doing it right much more often. The key is counting, watching discards and picturing what the end position you're hoping for will have to be when you play the final squeeze card.

Austin # 2
2/6/2016 Open
game

Q
AK976
1042
Q852

NORTH

The auction, with East the dealer, went
2S – P – 4S - P –P –P. East is declarer in
4S.

South led the 3H and North, after
winning the KH, lead the QS.

AJ742
2
AQ98
K106

WEST

EAST

K109865
J105
K3
43

It is now too late for the defense to get
the AC! See if you can plan the play to
exercise a simple squeeze against South
and take all the rest of the tricks

SOUTH

3
Q843
J765
AJ97

Answer: East wins the KS and ruffs a heart with the JS. Next, a trump to dummy and another heart ruff. Re-enter declarer's hand with dummy's last trump and play off all the trumps. When the last trump is played dummy has K3 of diamonds left and the 43 of clubs. South must either pitch the club ace or a diamond. If the club ace is not pitched, dummy saves 4 diamonds and they take the last 4 tricks – making 6!

Here's an example from the January 2016 Austin Sectional.

Austin #3)
AK4
10864
K986
Q9

NORTH

South plays in 4H and East had bid clubs.

QJ85
92
J10742
A3

WEST

EAST

62
A5
Q53
KJ10765

West leads the AC followed by the 3C.
East plays a third club (the J) hoping
West has a higher trump than the 10 in
dummy.

After declarer ruffs and leads a trump
East wins and tries the 6S.

SOUTH

10975
KQJ73
A
842

Everything needed is present to set up a
squeeze on West if you proceed
correctly. Plan the play!

Answer: After the defense takes 3 tricks, declarer 9 winners and must avoid a spade loser to make the hand. You can hope that the QJ of spades drop (not very likely) or that the QJ10 of diamonds are in one of the defenders hands and fall setting up dummy's 9 of diamonds provides the 10th trick. You were careful when you played two rounds of trump to keep the 3H as a board entry and, after cashing the AD, you go to dummy with dummy's last trump and play the KD (pitching the 5S) and ruff the 8D.

Dummy's 9D is not good but you are pretty sure West has the remaining diamonds. It is also likely West has 4 spades to the QL8 since you have seen almost all of East's cards and can hope the remaining unknown card is a small spade.

So West has **B** and you have satisfied **L**, **U** and the KS is **E**. Your threats are the 4 or 10 of spades and the 9D. Play off all your trumps and come down to 97 of spades. Dummy will keep the AS of spades if West keeps the JD. Otherwise, the 9D will be good and dummy will keep that card and the AS.

How can you go wrong? By not managing your entries which are needed to get to dummy and ruff the third round of diamonds or by playing both the A & K of spades early and then not having an **E** entry back to dummy after you play all your trumps.

A hand from the 12/11/2015 open game.

Austin #4)

A
QJ8632
K3
A954

South plays in 4S and West (Vul) had bid diamonds raised to 4 pre-emptively by East.

NORTH

6
A107
AQ974
J732

WEST

EAST

J102
95
J10865
106

West leads the AD. Plan play to make 7S!

SOUTH
KQ987543
K4
-
KQ8

Answer: Ruff the AD and play the AS. Since trump are not 4-0, you have 8 spades, 1 diamond and 3 clubs off the top – that means you have all but one trick for sure and **L** is satisfied. Your threat cards are the K of hearts and the fourth club in dummy. If the opponent with the AH also has the fourth club he will be squeezed when you come down to A94 of clubs in dummy and KH, Q8 of clubs in hand. Just make sure you cash dummy's KD at trick 3 and come back to your hand with a club to run all the spades. Note that you have **U** on either defender so it does not matter which one holds the 4 clubs and the AH for the squeeze to work. But you have to wait until the end before cashing all your clubs.

Ways to go wrong: Trying to sneak the KH by early in the hand or not cashing the KD early or playing the top clubs after pulling 3 rounds of trumps.

Squeeze Defense

What about defending against the squeeze – is there anything a defender can do to stop declarer from stealing an extra squeeze trick?

Squeeze defense is very difficult because the defenders often don't realize they are in trouble until it's too late. Of course, in some hands all the defense has to do is cash their winners immediately – but that does not apply many other cases. When a defender suspects declarer has most of the ingredients for a squeeze it is occasionally possible for the defense to attack "**L**" or "**E**". Ducking when declarer wants you to win a trick (to rectify the count) can work. Or by making declarer use up the critical entry for a squeeze early in the hand, the defense can thwart declarer (see Austin #3 - if East had led spades at trick 3 and again when in with the AH, the squeeze would fail).

But effective squeeze defense is much harder than squeeze execution and most often takes place in the post-mortem.

Summary

- 1) By counting suits and high cards and watching discards carefully, try to determine which defender has the controls that stop your threat cards from being winners. Think about whether you can set up the **BLUE** ingredients for a simple squeeze.

- 2) Count your winners and lose all the tricks you must lose except the one that you hope to eliminate via a squeeze. This is known as “rectifying the count” and is the “**L**” in **BLUE**.

- 3) Try to picture the (usually) 3, 4 or 5 card ending when you will play the final squeeze card and an opponent with “**B**” will be forced to throw a busy card (before you are forced to throw one of your threat cards – the “**U**” in **BLUE**). If you can visualize that ending, then cash tricks in the right order to get to that end position. Make sure that you have entries to be able to get to any threat cards that become winners (the “**E**” in **BLUE**).

- 4) When in doubt, after rectifying the count, run your long suit, watching discards. Good things will often happen, including both squeezes and pseudo squeezes. Don’t give up even if you know all the ingredients for a real squeeze are not present. Defenders have a hard time pitching on your long suit and will often succumb to a pseudo squeeze. MORAL: When in doubt after “**L**” is in place – RUN YOUR LONG SUIT and watch the discards carefully.

- 5) Squeeze defense is very difficult and often involves either refusing to help declarer rectify the count or attacking a critical entry needed for the squeeze.

- 6) Simple squeezes are not that difficult and occur often (despite the best defense or with help from the defense). Remember **BLUE** and visualizing the end position after “**L**” or at least running all your long suit to see what good things might happen.