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This Week in Bridge

(497) Squeezes – The Basics

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Level: 7 of 10 (3 of 6)

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General

To state it simply, a squeeze occurs when we force an opponent to try to hold more cards than there are tricks left in the hand. This is done by having threat cards in multiple suits and forcing an opponent to unguard one of these suits. There are a large variety of different types of squeezes, but here we focus on how to use our threat cards to apply pressure and execute some basic types of squeezes.

The Simple Squeeze – Length

When we have a threat card in the dummy and a threat card in another suit in our hand, then if one player is the only one guarding both suits, they are open to being squeezed.

Example 1

♠ Axx

♥ KQxx

♠ KQxx

♥ Axx

If we reach this 7-card end position, then neither player can guard both the ♥ and ♠ suit - neither player can keep 4-card ♥ and 4-card ♠ when they have only 7 cards remaining. If one opponent held 4 cards in both suits, then they were squeezed on the previous trick and forced to discard (unguard) one of their stoppers in these suits.



Positional Squeeze

Some squeezes only operate on a particular opponent. These are called *Positional Squeezes* and are dependent on the location of our threat cards relative to the opponent's guards. Positional squeezes usually occur when both of our threat cards are in the same hand.

Example 2

♠ KQxx

♥ KQxx

♦ –

♣ --

♠ Axx

♥ Axx

♦ --

♣ Ax

If RHO has 4 cards in both of dummy's suits (the Majors) and we cash the ♣A, the squeeze will not work (in bridge language we say "the squeeze does not operate"). In that case, dummy is forced to discard before the opponent that is guarding the suits: the dummy gets squeezed before RHO does. If LHO is the opponent guarding both Major suits, then the squeeze operates, because on the play of the ♣A, LHO is forced to discard before the dummy (and they must unguard one of the Major suits) before dummy is forced to release one of their threat cards.

The way that we operate (play) this positional squeeze on LHO is by watching what they discard. If LHO discards a ♥, then we discard a ♠; if LHO discards a ♠, then we discard a ♥ (keeping the suit that they have unguarded).

Note: We may want to test one of the suits by playing it out to see if it splits 3-3 before cashing our ♣A, thus not making the mistake of discarding a winner in one of the suits if it is splitting 3-3.



The Simple Squeeze – Strength

Another way we can execute a simple squeeze is by having a threat card that is based on strength, not length.

Example 3

Imagine the following layout:

♠ –
♥ KQxx

♠ J
♥ Axx

The ♠A and ♠K are already played. If we reach the above position, we may squeeze either player if they are trying guard both suits because they have the ♠Q and 4-card ♥ suit. No player can hold both the ♠Q and 4-card ♥ in the 4-card end position. This squeeze does not require exhausting the opponents of all their ♠ in order to work. All it requires is a specific ♠ (the ♠Q) be in the same hand with the 4-card ♥ suit.

“Pseudo” Squeeze

Sometimes we can convince the opponents that they are being squeezed when they are not. In this case, they may choose to unguard the wrong suit. We call this situation a *pseudo-squeeze*.

Example 4

	♠ --	
	♥ Q532	
	♦ 3	
	♣ –	
♠ J		♠ Q
♥ JT		♥ 9876
♦ 76		♦ --
♣ --		♣ --
	♠ T	
	♥ AK4	
	♦ A	
	♣ –	

In a similar situation, where the ♠A and ♠K are gone, when we cash the ♦A, RHO might not realize that they need to guard the ♥ suit and that their partner can guard the ♠ suit. In this case they may keep their ♠Q and discard a ♥, giving us an extra trick. This is a pseudo-squeeze, giving the appearance of a squeeze and hoping the opponents make a mistake in the defense.



Conclusion

Squeezes are an extremely large and complex topic. There are many difficult books written on the subject. To become a better declarer, you do not need to master these complex plays, but you should try to add the basic versions of these as another weapon in your play arsenal both to help you “produce tricks out of nowhere” and continue to put pressure on the opponents in order to get them to misdefend the hand. Look for chances to start using squeeze techniques as part of your declarer play.