

August 2016

For those of you unlucky enough to have missed congress at Hazyview then let me tell you it was one of the best ever. It had everything – pleasant surroundings, great ambience, good food and an exciting team final. Throw into that meeting old and making new friends, and then some sparkling bridge and you end up with lots of fun. Always on the lookout for fresh hands I can write about I thought this tournament would be a good source of stories but if the hands were there they slipped by me unnoticed and the few that did catch my eye ended up as hand of the day in the daily bulletin. Going into the penultimate round of the Championship Pairs we are playing against one of the top women's pairs and I have other things on my mind – we have already received a slow play warning and the tournament director has her beady eye on me. We still have two boards to play in the set and I am hoping we can finish them quickly. As South I pick up this hand.

Bidding

Dealer East
NS vul

South	W	N	E	S
♠ AKQ2			pass	2NT
♥ 92	pass	3C(1)	pass	3D(2)
♦ A53	pass	3S(3)	pass	3NT
♣ AK108	all pass			

- (1) Puppet
- (2) 4 cards in one or both majors
- (3) Hearts

Things are looking up, the bidding has been fast and straightforward – hopefully the play will prove the same. West leads the ♥K and dummy goes down

North

♠ 86
♥ A643
♦ K864
♣ 732

Plan your play

Initial Analysis

I have eight top tricks and need to generate the ninth. Clearly the Club suit is more promising than the Diamond suit as apart from the 3-3 break, it offers additional chances

- a) East may hold the queen and jack in which case I can successfully finesse the 10
- b) West might hold a doubleton honour in which case cashing the top two clubs followed by a small club to the 10 works

Statistically I don't think there is much to choose between these two plays but I think I will go for the former as if it works and the clubs are 3-3 I will make 10 tricks. Well that was quite a quick decision so back to the hand. I don't think I can block the heart suit but there is no real advantage in winning with the ace early either so I duck the first trick and when West continues with the queen I duck this too East following with the 7 and 8. The TD approaches our table. "Is this your last board?" she demands. "No, we have one more after this" I reply rather sheepishly. "Then you better hurry up!" Well that shouldn't be a problem as I already have a plan, but that goes out the window when West continues with the ♥J and East discards a small diamond as do I. "Gosh!" I think to myself (that's not really the word that came to mind but I have toned down this article as I have been led to believe that children may be reading it). I should have remembered that these girls were playing upside down signals.

Plan your play now.

Further Analysis

The club finesse could still work, so could playing West for the singleton or doubleton honour. I could also play for a club break hoping East started with the queen and being careful to lead up to my honours twice (simply cashing the top two honours gives East the opportunity to discard the queen). Any other thoughts? Well yes, here's one and I think it might prove significant: East failed to throw a spade. Think about this, East knows I started with exactly four spades but failed to discard one, why was that? If she had more than four spades a spade discard here is almost automatic and if she started with less than four spades, given that her highest spade is no more than a jack, a spade discard will again do the defence no harm, much better to keep cards in the minor suits where declarer's holding is still unknown. I think East started with exactly four spades, and using the same logic to deduce her diamond holding, the fact that she has thrown a card in this suit with four in dummy suggests she started with five. Perhaps I'm wrong about this but if I'm right I feel a squeeze coming on and if I'm going down then why not take the scenic route? I need West to cooperate so that I can rectify the count, but why shouldn't she? I lead the fourth heart from dummy and East throws a club and so do I. West wins and as planned plays her last heart. I throw a diamond from dummy, East throws a diamond coming down to three and I throw a second club. West exits with her singleton diamond, East follows (now down to two) and I win with my ace. Here is the seven card ending I'm anticipating

	N	
	♠ 86	
	♥ -	
	♦ K8	
	♣ 732	
W		E
♠ xxx		♠ xxxxx
♥ -		♥ -
♦ -		♦ Qx
♣ xxxxx		♣ x
	S	
	♠ AKQ2	
	♥ -	
	♦ 5	
	♣ AK	

I cash the ♣A and as expected everyone follows. I then cash the ♣K and East drops the queen! This has gone pear shaped, is it possible East has come down to a singleton diamond and the ♦ 8 will prove to be my ninth trick? It's too late now to come up with another plan so I play to the ♦ K West following, and hold my breath. To my surprise East now goes into the tank and eventually lets go of a spade. When I cash out my spades the ♠2 turns out to be a winner.

Here is the full deal

	N	
	♠ 86	
	♥ A643	
	♦ K864	
	♣ 732	
W		E
♠ 1075		♠ J943
♥ KQJ105		♥ 87
♦ Q107		♦ J92
♣ 64		♣ QJ95
	S	
	♠ AKQ2	
	♥ 92	
	♦ A53	
	♣ AK108	

Final Analysis

When the tournament is over I think about this hand again and realize I have overanalyzed it at the table - it sufficed for me to decide to play East for four spades. If this should prove to be the case then as East is known to have started with two hearts she must hold at least four cards in one of the minors and it doesn't matter which one as in the end game the threat cards in these suits are both sitting in dummy. There must be a name for this squeeze and I will check out Ottlick the ultimate expert on squeezes, but until I find its official name I'll call it the Bees Knees Squeeze which is totally meaningless but has a nice ring to it. I thought I was squeezing East in Spades and Diamonds when I played my last club, but in fact I was squeezing her in Spades and Clubs when on the next trick I cashed the ♦ K.

This month's tip is thanks to that brilliant but flawed bridge player, Terence Reese. Paraphrasing his words he observed that often the first discard by a defender will be from a suit where he knows his holding is longer than that held by declarer or dummy. It's the corollary to this observation that put me on the right track on the above hand, and that is that a defender will not shorten his holding in a long suit when he knows declarer or dummy holds an equal or longer amount (Spades). We can add a third rule to these: a defender may choose to discard from a short suit in the knowledge (or hope) that his partner started with an equal or longer holding than he, which again was the case in this hand (Diamonds). Of course as always there are exceptions to these rules but I leave those for you to work out for yourselves.