Canberra In Bloom Swiss Pairs

Squeeze fun and games

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During this online IMP pairs event, the following board had lots of theoretical interest for those who like squeezes and the defence against them:
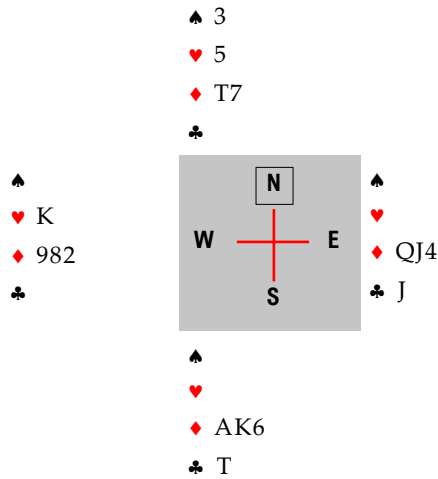
Board 45
Dealer N | Vul All

```
                ♠ KQJ97432
                ♥ 532
                ♦ T7
                ♣

♠ 5             N              ♠ 86
♥ KQJT97                       ♥ 8
♦ 982     W         E          ♦ QJ43
♣ 643           S              ♣ AKQJ85

                ♠ AT
                ♥ A64
                ♦ AK65
                ♣ T972
```

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	4	6	6	12	7
S	4	6	6	11	7
E	8	6	6	1	2
W	9	7	6	1	2

Par +1100 7♣X-4 W

The main interest is the play and defence, but consider the bidding first. I sat West and at our table I heard the auction proceed fairly quickly: 4♠ - 5♣- 6♠ to me. Given how confidently 6♠ was bid, I gave serious thought to sacrificing in 7♣. Eventually, however, I decided it was too big a position to take – we were also vulnerable, it was surely going for at least 1100 and there was no guarantee that the field would be bidding 6♠, so the datum could well be a lot lower than that. Plus it was not even guaranteed that 6♠ would make – we might have a defensive trick in hearts as well as clubs or something. So I eventually passed and was very glad I had when 6♠ did go one off – a lot better than conceding a large penalty in 7♣!

But now let's switch our attention to the play in 6♠ by North, which Deep Finesse tells us can be made. On the normal ♣A lead it looks like you have 2 heart losers. So what happens? The hand plays out as a classic double squeeze. Declarer ruffs, draws trumps and ducks a heart (necessary to rectify the count). Then win whatever is returned and cash the ♥A if it's still there. Next, ruff a club back to hand and play lots of trumps. The end position becomes:

```
                    ♠ 3
                    ♥ 5
                    ♦ T7
                    ♣
        ♠                        ♠
        ♥ K            N         ♥
        ♦ 982     W        E     ♦ QJ4
        ♣              S         ♣ J
                    ♠
                    ♥
                    ♦ AK6
                    ♣ T
```

When declarer plays the last spade, East has to hold onto the ♣ J so must discard a diamond. South now throws the ♣ 10 and it is West's turn to feel the pain. Having to hold the ♥ K to prevent declarer's ♥ 5 becoming a winner, West too discards a diamond. Now the ♦ 6 scores the last trick!

Note the cashing of the ♥ A earlier. This is known as a "Vienna Coup" which is effectively an unblocking play. Try playing the hand through without doing this and you'll see the endgame doesn't work.

People familiar with squeezes might now start thinking – ah, but the defence can attack the entries and break up the double squeeze by leading diamonds twice. True – suppose East leads a diamond. Now if declarer won that and tried ducking a heart the defence could play a second diamond, which cuts off the later entry to the ♦ 6 we saw above, so the squeeze would fail. Maybe declarer should duck the ♦ Q lead? Same again – the defence can play a second round to cut the squeeze entry (although see later).

OK, so what about a different attack? Suppose East leads the singleton heart. Declarer can't duck a heart this time or will suffer an immediate ruff, so has to take the ♥ A. But a trick still needs to be ducked to rectify the count. Now that can't be done in hearts, or West will cash two tricks. So after drawing trumps, declarer must lead a high club from dummy and discard a heart! East wins that but has no more hearts so the same end position develops (with everyone having one fewer diamond if East exits a diamond).

So do two diamond leads break up the squeeze? Yes, but not in a way that beats the contract! East must lead ♦ Q (otherwise declarer can run it to ♦ 10). Assuming declarer ducks, on the second round of diamonds (necessary as we have seen to break up the squeeze) East will have to lead the ♦ J to squash the ten. But now declarer wins and is left with ♦ 65 in dummy; West has the ♦ 9 and East ♦ 43. So there's no need for a squeeze at all - declarer can simply ruff ♦ 5 to hand and set up the ♦ 6 in dummy as a winner to beat East's ♦ 4!

Therefore, whatever the defence try, 6 ♠ when played by North can be made. But Deep Finesse can't make it played by South. Why not? The answer is again a diamond lead. West can lead the ♦ 9. Whatever happens, the threat of the ♦ 10 in North is neutralised. If it is played on the first round then on the second round East is now able to exit a *low* diamond because North's ♦ 10 is no longer there and West has the ♦ 8. If it's not covered, East can later exit ♦ Q to squash the ten on the second round. In both cases the second round of diamonds breaks up the squeeze, but still preserves East's ♦ J to prevent declarer ruffing the suit good.

Note that almost all of this is double dummy. In the real world, East is always going to lead a top club. Also in the real world, leading a club and discarding a heart is highly unlikely as it's playing hearts to be specifically 6-1.

A nice simple little hand!

Although that squeeze didn't actually happen at the table, one did eventuate on this board – somewhat unexpectedly. But it was the thinking that led up to the squeeze which was really interesting.

Board 27
Dealer S | Vul None

```
                        ♠ AJ964
                        ♥ Q8
                        ♦ J
                        ♣ AT862
        ♠ 5                         ♠ KQT73
        ♥ T32          N            ♥ A64
        ♦ AQT8765   W     E         ♦ 32
        ♣ J5           S            ♣ Q43
                        ♠ 82
                        ♥ KJ975
                        ♦ K94
                        ♣ K97
```

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	8	4	7	7	3
S	9	5	7	7	6
E	4	7	5	6	4
W	4	7	5	6	4

Par +110 3♣= S

Our auction proceeded P - 3♦ - 3♠ - P - 3NT. North stretched a bit to overcall, but does have shape so can hardly afford not to. South can hardly have more as a passed hand. So, as often happens, a pre-empt causes the opponents to guess a bit and land up too high. At least South chose 3NT and not 4♠ which East would surely have been doubling at the speed of light!

West decided to lead her singleton spade, knowing their partner must have quite a few (South hasn't raised and North hasn't gone back to 4♠). At this point you are thinking "thank God I'm only going off in 50's!" Perhaps wrongly, I ducked the lead to East's ♠10 and, unsurprisingly, East put a diamond through me. If the defence play perfectly at this point West can win the ♦Q and put East back in with the ♥A for a second diamond through. That will allow the defence to score a spade, a heart and 7 diamonds to hold me to 4 tricks and 5 off for -250!

Fortunately for me, of course West didn't know that her partner had the ♥A and she continued with diamonds to set that suit up. Believe it or not that was fatal! After winning the ♦K you knock the ♥A out. East wins and, with no more diamonds, tries the ♠K which is won by North. At this point the deal looks like this:

```
                        ♠ J964
                        ♥ 8
                        ♦
                        ♣ AT8
        ♠                           ♠ Q7
        ♥ T3           N            ♥ 64
        ♦ T87       W     E         ♦
        ♣ J5           S            ♣ Q43
                        ♠
                        ♥ KJ97
                        ♦
                        ♣ K97
```

The defence have won 4 tricks and declarer needs the rest. Clearly to have any chance of doing that you need all the hearts. How should you play the suit? In isolation when missing 6 cards in a suit they will break 3-3 36% of the time and 4-2 48% of the time. Here, because West has pre-empted it seems even more likely that they will be 2-4 and therefore more likely that East has the ♥10. So should you try low to the nine?

Not this time. But, interestingly, the reason is nothing to do with hearts at all! You need to look deeper into the hand. How could you make the rest of the tricks when you almost certainly have a club loser (ignoring the very lucky position of ♣ QJ doubleton somewhere)?   The answer can only come from a squeeze. And that squeeze can only take place against East, who we know has the ♠ Q left. Therefore the key thing to realise is that we need East to be the one guarding both clubs and spades – hence we need that hand to have at least 3 clubs.
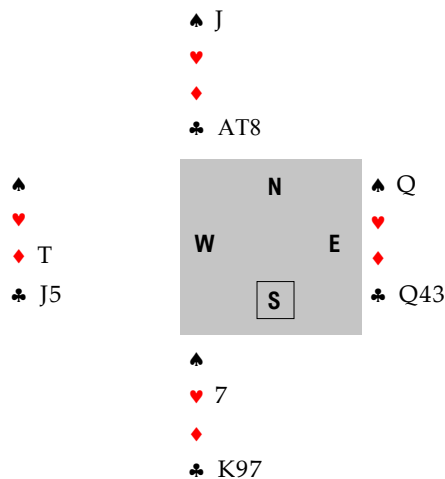
So now it's time to do some counting of the shape. We have seen West show out on the second round of spades and we have seen East show out on the 3rd round of diamonds. We therefore know the West hand is 1x7x and the East hand is 5x2x.

So let's put things together. If East did have the 4 hearts that we initially thought was more likely, then the shapes would be 1273 and 5422 so there wouldn't be room for East to have the 3 clubs we need. Even if we successfully finessed the ♥ 9 and ran our hearts West could just cling on to all 3 clubs and East comes down to ♠ Q and 2 clubs. We still lose a club.

What if East had 4 clubs? That's no good either because it means the shapes would be 1471 and 5224. Now unless East started with ♥ 10 doubleton the heart suit won't run anyway.

Therefore the only thing that is going to work is if East has exactly 3 clubs. In other words we need the distribution to be exactly 1372 and 5323. This in turn tells us that to have any chance of making the contract we actually need hearts to be 3-3 – even if that in isolation is against the odds.

When we try that we find, pleasingly, that it works and now the following end position arises:

```
                      ♠ J
                      ♥
                      ♦
                      ♣ AT8

        ♠                              ♠ Q
        ♥               N              ♥
        ♦ T        W         E         ♦
        ♣ J5            S              ♣ Q43

                      ♠
                      ♥ 7
                      ♦
                      ♣ K97
```

We cash our last heart and discard the ♣ 8 from dummy. East must keep the ♠ Q to stop dummy's ♠ J scoring so has to throw a club. Now we play 3 rounds of clubs and our ♣ 9 scores the last trick. 3NT making!

As an aside, although it would look very strange at the table, if East ducks the ♥ Q and wins the ♥ A on the second round of the suit, that will also scramble the squeeze entries. Declarer's only way back to hand for his winning hearts is then ♣ K but, as we saw above, that card was critical at the end as it was the entry to our ♣ 9. Without it East is discarding after North so is not in trouble.

Recognising squeeze positions is something that only comes with a lot of practice. But this hand was the first time I recall having seen a situation where you must make an inferential count in one suit (clubs) for the squeeze to have a chance – which in turn tells us how we need to play another suit (hearts).

In the space of a few minutes a hand that looked like being a horrible result turned into a very satisfying success. Just shows – you should never give up at this game!