

Simple Slams

Chapter 7 : Squeezes, show ups and pressure

Most slams that are sensibly bid are not difficult to make. Not that care doesn't need to be taken when you play them. You should ensure that you give your slam every possible chance of making, but more often than not, you'll be able to just take your tricks with simple declarer play. Many slams will be played and made with unnoticed errors, when a more foolproof line could have been taken in the eventuality of a bad break which never eventuated. But then I have also seen slams dropped by unlucky experts who try to allow for a 5-0 break but fail to allow for a 3-2! In reality, if your slam bidding is accurate, you'll have little difficulty in making them. Sometimes you'll need to use your declarer skills to make difficult slams, but there will also be times when, because of the nature of many small AND grand slams, you'll be able to execute an automatic squeeze without knowing you're doing it, when the extra trick is required. But whether squeezes end up working automatically or not, you should make yourself familiar with the basic squeeze techniques for times when your slams require that extra trick that cannot be obtained otherwise.

The first hand is a good example of a slam that's easy to bid and that plays itself, despite the pressure that an imaginative defender can put on at trick one.

Dlr S NS VUL

	♠ J 10 6 4 3	
	♥ K Q 4	
	♦ 9 7	
	♣ 6 5 4	
♠ A Q 8 2		♠ 9
♥ J 9 8 7 5 2		♥ A
♦ 4		♦ A K Q J 8 3 2
♣ A 8		♣ K Q 10 3
	♠ K 7 5	
	♥ 10 6 3	
	♦ 10 6 5	
	♣ J 9 7 2	

Let's have a look at the bidding first. When West opened 1H, East was quite right to ask for aces immediately and then bid 7NT. East COULD have gone through the motions first by bidding 3D and THEN asking for aces, but they weren't going to find out any more were they?

Every East should be able to see that if partner has two aces, there is only ONE realistically possible loser, a CLUB. Even if West happened to have a VOID in diamonds, they need to break 5-1 or 6-0 for that suit not to run, so that leaves only the clubs IF West does not have either the king of spades or king of hearts. East can of course continue with asking for kings, but finding NONE in the West hand should make absolutely no difference if they follow the same reasoning. The clubs will run for four tricks if the jack drops in one, two, or three rounds, OR if a club is led.

On South's particular holding, the club lead against a GRAND slam is crazy, and can only give a trick away if that is possible. But even a more sensible South might have led a club from a holding like 9 7, trying to find a 'safe' lead.

So, all in all, a logically minded East should not be able to envisage ANY realistic losers at all, and bid 7NT in utmost confidence. At one table, where the bidding was slightly different, East having jump shifted to 3D and West having bid 3S (no, after a jump shift, the bid is NOT a reverse, though a No Trump rebid should still show 15-16 in conventional Acol), South was on lead against 7NT. Given that YOU knew that West had hearts and spades and two aces, and East had bid 7NT after jump shifting in diamonds, what would YOU lead? Have a think about it while I analyse the play of the hand on the 'best' lead of a heart.

(Hands repeated for convenience)

Dlr S NS VUL

♠ J 10 6 4 3

♥ K Q 4

♦ 9 7

♣ 6 5 4

♠ A Q 8 2

♥ J 9 8 7 5 2

♦ 4

♣ A 8

♠ 9

♥ A

♦ A K Q J 8 3 2

♣ K Q 10 3

♠ K 7 5

♥ 10 6 3

♦ 10 6 5

♣ J 9 7 2

When declarer sees dummy, they can count twelve tricks immediately. Declarer can also see that after cashing all the diamonds and the top three clubs, there will be only two cards left in dummy and two in declarer's hand: the AQ of spades opposite the nine, and declarer's second card will be the ten of clubs. If the ten of clubs is not good, and even the dullest of declarers can be sharp enough to watch to see if the jack has fallen, then declarer can as a last resort take the spade finesse. All this adds up to virtually a 100% grand slam.

Now let's have a look at that lead problem. One South found the quite brilliant lead of the seven of spades! This was not silly but well thought out. The ace was almost certainly in dummy, and the only chance seemed to be to put declarer to an immediate test. If declarer had other possibilities of making WITHOUT the spade finesse, they would surely take the alternate line. Declarer DID! Like any other declarer, they worked out that the chances of dropping the jack of clubs were much better than the 50% spade finesse. In fact FAR MORE than a 50% spade finesse, since South would surely NOT have led a spade AWAY from the king against a grand slam! Declarer rose with the ace and proceeded to run off all the diamonds. Poor South! South kept four clubs and the king of spades, but when declarer now cashed the ace of hearts, South had no answer. Reluctantly he let go a club, and declarer made the last four tricks with her clubs.

This, I guess, was NOT justice, but many other declarers may well have tried the clubs BEFORE the ace of hearts, effectively blocking themselves off from the queen of spades as a potential trick and allowing South to discard the king of spades when declarer later led the ace of hearts.

You might have noted that on this hand, declarer did not need the ten of clubs. Any LITTLE club would have sufficed, since South had the FOURTH club as well as the king of spades. The number of possibilities of making thirteen tricks when you have twelve on top are always increased if you have a basic knowledge of squeezes. The East that bid to 7NT did so because she allowed for the possibility of making the TEN of clubs. Had she held KQ32 in the suit, and had they been a squeeze expert, would no doubt have recognised the extra possibilities of a squeeze, not to mention the possibility that West, having opened the bidding, may well HAVE the jack of clubs anyway. On this particular slam, the spade finesse works, and even the worst declarer would have made the contract, but change the cards round and you might find that even if NORTH has the king of spades, there are thirteen tricks there in No Trumps or Diamonds on a squeeze, without a finesse needed at all. South's clever spade lead forced declarer into what is termed a 'Vienna Coup'. Instead of trying the spade finesse, declarer cashes the ace at an early stage. That leaves the queen as a 'threat card'. The diamonds are run, and then the heart ace cashed. There are now four cards left. If one defender has four clubs and the king of spades, the obvious happens. If one defender has the king and queen of hearts and four clubs to the jack, same thing, with the heart jack being the threat card.

Dlr S EW VUL

	♠ J 10 7	
	♥ 8 6	
	♦ 8 5	
	♣ Q J 6 5 3 2	
♠ Q 9 6 4 3 2		♠ A 5
♥ A K J 10 2		♥ 9 4
♦		♦ K Q J 6 3 2
♣ 8 4		♣ A K 7
	♠ K 8	
	♥ Q 7 5 3	
	♦ A 10 9 7 4	
	♣ 10 9	

This is not a good slam for EW, nor are many sensible bidders likely to bid it, but when West opens the bidding, East can be forgiven for getting carried away. As long as East chooses the CORRECT slam based on the information they receive from West, the slam will in fact MAKE. Whether that is justice or not, who can say? The bidding SHOULD go:

W	N	E	S
1S	NB	3D	NB
3H	NB	3NT	NB
4H	NB	4S	ALL PASS

East's jump shift, marginal because of the quality of the diamond suit, should be enough to get West interested if there is a possible slam on. West is not interested because of the diamond void and poor spades, so just bids their hand to get to the most sensible game. The final bid of 4H clearly must be based on a 6-5 or 5-5 distribution, so East should be happy to sign off in 4S. However if East starts with a quiet 2D and West later shows what must be at least 6-5 in the majors, East might well ask for aces and put West into 6S. This in fact makes as long as West takes the only possible line in trumps by playing ace then the five, and later finesses hearts on the FIRST round by running the nine. On a club lead this is necessary: two rounds of spades puts South in and South continues with a second club. Declarer has no more entries to dummy, and with South having FOUR hearts, TWO finesses are necessary. What a BRILLIANT card East's nine of hearts is! The KQJ of diamonds are quite useless! Yes, without the KQJ of diamonds the slam still makes, but not without the nine of hearts! Declarer can lead the nine from dummy and be able to repeat the finesse before drawing trumps. Talk about lucky! But if you did bid such a slam and made it on repeated club leads, maybe you deserved a top score!