

Solution to the problem hand

Although this hand was presented as a problem in discarding, it's an equally interesting learning hand from the declarer's perspective. My apologies if the spot cards do not match what you played this morning. I left my copy of the hand at the bridge center. The hands have been rotated to make South the declarer.

Dummy: ♠AQ5
♥84
♦K63

West: ♣AKJT3 East:
♠JT64 ♠983
♥KJT2 ♥963
♦JT97 ♦54
♣Q ♣98752

Declarer: ♠K72
♥AQ75
♦AQ82
♣64

Auction: South – West – North – East
1NT – P – 4C – P
4S – P – 6NT – P
Opening lead is the ♦J.

Most declarers will count out twelve top tricks – until they discover the bad club break. They will then reevaluate the hand and decide the likelihood of success lies with this plan.

- Play four clubs, putting pressure on West, who must find three discards; then
- Play the remaining top diamonds, hoping for a three-three diamond break – or an error in discarding; finally
- Play spades, ending in dummy, and taking the heart finesse – an option made more attractive by a West who discards the ♥2 early.

Playing a long suit hoping the opponents make a mistake is a technique called a *pseudo-squeeze*. It works so frequently that many players don't realize it's not a true squeeze. The opening lead suggests that the diamond suit is not breaking three-three, but it doesn't hurt to try. Add the 50% finesse success rate to this mix, and most players would feel the odds of taking twelve tricks would be good. There is a guaranteed line of play, though, that doesn't require a defender's error or an onside king.

When playing a contract in which you're short one trick, always consider an *endplay* – a topic worth a few lectures in itself. With the exception of seven-level contracts, all endplays require that declarer lose a trick. True squeeze plays are one class of endplay, but this hand uses another endplay, the *throw-in play*, in which declarer loses a trick at the right time to the right defender. Here's the sure play.

- Play the top clubs, discarding two hearts from your hand, and carefully watching West's discards.
- Play your top spades, ending in dummy. If all the spades are now accounted for, play the ♦K and lead a **diamond** from dummy and win in your hand.
- Now, it's time to lose your trick. Play your last diamond. West will win, but he has nothing left but hearts. He'll have to lead a heart to your last two cards, the ♥AQ!