

A FREE SQUEEZE BY ALAN HAYWARD

N	North				
	♠ AKQ5				
	♥ AJ2				
	♦ J10				
	♣ K1087				
S	South				
	♠ 84				
	♥ 843				
	♦ A872				
	♣ AQJ5				

W	N	E	S
			1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

- South upgrades, with great minor suit honors, and preempting the majors
- North gives up on slam, and with an overabundance of points chooses 3NT, as with so many HCP ruffs are probably not required
- West leads QH. Important to ask if opponents can lead Q for attitude and King for count. Either way we duck, and West makes life easy by continuing with KH anyway
- We have 3 spades, 2 hearts, 1 diamond and 4 clubs for 10. There's no work to do in spades, hearts, or clubs, although we may get an 11th from a favourable diamond position or a squeeze. We should start by ducking a diamond, *rectifying the count*.
- NB if East covers, we should cover and play a diamond to the 10, hoping for 9x diamond. We risk nothing, as we have the 8D as a stop, and the defenders may not even cash the 9, fearing they are setting up our diamonds.
- West wins the diamond and knocks out our JH.
- We have hopes defenders may have to discard spades and that our 5 of spades becomes good. So now all we have to do is cash clubs, *paying careful attention to spade discards*. We don't know it at the time, but we reach this position:

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	N North	
	♠ AKQ5	
	♥	
	♦ 10	
	♣ 7	
W West		E East
♠ J32		♠ 10976
♥		♥
♦ 54		♦ K9
♣ 2		♣
	S South	
	♠ 84	
	♥	
	♦ A87	
	♣ J	

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On the play of the 4th club, East has to either pitch their spade or diamond, either of which is fatal. Declarer now simply cashes the spades – continuing to count them. If all of the spades have gone after the Q then we cash our winning 13th spade. If not, we try a diamond to the Ace and see if our 7D comes good.

Importantly, note that this play is entirely risk-free – we started with 10 ticks, and simply by cashing winners in a sensible order and watching for spades, we created the possibility for a legitimate squeeze or a foolish discard for an 11th, without having to do anything particularly complicated or insightful.

The defence could have done better – but by playing a diamond early in the hand it was difficult for them to know what was going on.

Making 11 tricks was worth 95% of the match points in an online Funbridge tournament. 10 tricks was only worth 60%. A big gain for simply counting spade cards!