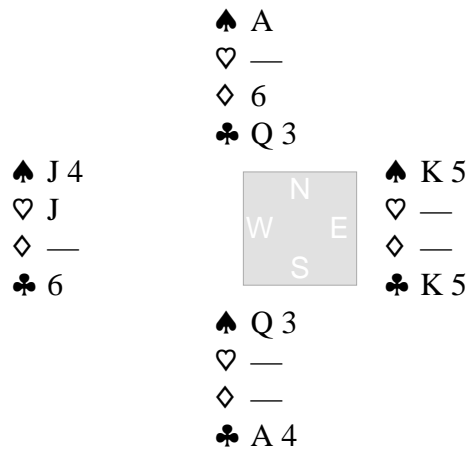


As South, you declare at notrump, with the lead in dummy. Half the cards shown for West are actually with East, but you don't know which. The ♦ 6 is good. What is your play for all four tricks?

An end position similar to this came up at the regional tournament in Warwick, RI.

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The simple play is to hope East has both black kings [as above]. First cash the ♠ A, an unblocking play called a *Vienna coup*; this allows the threat in the other hand (♠ Q) to be cashed, if it becomes good. Then play lead the ♦ 6. If East plays the ♠ K, discard the ♣ 4 and claim. If East discards anything else, then discard the now-useless ♠ Q. With East reduced to two cards including the ♠ K, the ♣ K will fall under the ace, making the ♣ Q good. This is a fine *automatic*, positional, simple squeeze: just watch for the ♠ K; you can't go wrong when East has both black kings, even if one king was singleton all along.

If the East and West hands are swapped, the squeeze should fail, because West discards after you, and can do the right thing. However, if East holds onto the ♠ J, West may play South for that card, and unguard the ♣ K. People do make mistakes under pressure, but usually West will simply discard what you discard.

A more advanced play is the *criss-cross squeeze*, which operates against either opponent who holds both black kings. Don't cash the ♠ A; just lead the diamond and discard the ♣ 4.

This squeeze is not automatic. You have to guess which king is now singleton, which may require guessing who has the kings. Strong players make the last discard as if without a care in the world. Seeing the problem coming, they may stiff one king a trick earlier, to confuse you. Most players show their agony; it's likely their discard stiffed the king in that suit.

To play for a singleton ♠ K, cash the ♠ A, and lead to your hopefully good hand. Similarly, to play for a singleton ♣ K, cash the ♣ A and lead to the hopefully good dummy. This is the criss-cross.

Unfortunately, on the actual deal, the black kings were divided, so there was no squeeze of any kind. Each opponent guarded their king, and declarer lost the last trick. Again, sometimes both opponents do protect the same suit (spades here), presenting you with a trick in the other suit, just for making the effort.