

337. Sand Wedge

Playing online, I hold in first chair:

♠ Q 10 9 5 3 2 ♥ K ♦ K 10 8 ♣ Q 9 6

Red versus white, I decide to open **two spades** because virtually everyone my way will do the same. West, on my left, **doubles**. Partner jumps to **four spades**, and three passes follow. The full auction:

South	West	North	East
2♠	Dbl	4♠	All Pass

West leads the two of diamonds and dummy is not as robust as I was expecting:

♠ A J 8 6 4
♥ 10 9 4
♦ J 6
♣ K 7 4

♦2 led

♠ Q 10 9 5 3 2
♥ K
♦ K 10 8
♣ Q 9 6

There is no benefit in keeping the jack of diamonds in dummy, so I play it on the first trick and East takes his ace. There is a momentary pause before I see the three of hearts on the screen. West wins his ace and continues with the queen which I ruff.

I give some thought to the options in spades but decide to play spades to be one-one. When I lead the ♠10, West plays the king eliminating any guess. I return to hand by ruffing a heart.

Things have gone well so far. I have lost the two red aces and now have to avoid losing two club tricks. For the life of me, it looks like the diamond finesse may be my only chance to discard a club loser. I stall for time by playing a club to the king. It holds as expected.

I point my arrow toward dummy's diamond but my instincts are all against it. In light of West's takeout double, finessing East for the ♦Q must be three to one against. Is there any alternative? I have two side tricks, two trumps in my hand, and five trumps in dummy: one short of my contract. The run of spades will put pressure on West assuming he has both the ♣A and the ♦Q. I decide to cash the spades. Before the last one, this is what I visualize:

♠ 8
♥ —
♦ 6
♣ 7 4

♠ —	♠ —
♥ —	♥ —
♦ Q x	♦ x x
♣ A x	♣ x x

♠ —
♥ —
♦ K 10
♣ Q 9

On the ♠8, I throw the ♣9 from my hand. There is another long pause and finally I see the ♦9 from West. West has already discarded a diamond on an earlier spade, and the nine is his third diamond spot card. It is not too late to finesse East for the ♦Q, but I think West has stiffed the queen. I play a diamond to the ace and sure enough, the ♦Q appears. I have ten tricks.

The full deal:

♠ A J 8 6 4
♥ 10 9 4
♦ J 6
♣ K 7 4

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

♠ Q 10 9 5 3 2
♥ K
♦ K 10 8
♣ Q 9 6

Like the good golfer who keeps a wedge in his bag, every good player should have this elementary form of a strip squeeze in his repertoire. If multiple cards are earmarked in a single hand, think strip squeeze.

Two final points: None of this would have been possible if declarer had not unblocked the ♦J on the first trick. East could have broken up the squeeze by continuing a diamond at trick two.