

Bridge Yesterday--How I got fired.
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Once, long ago, I used to play bridge for pay, and I helped a lot of unworthy partners become Life Masters. But one day, one of these partners became so disgusted with my defense that he fired me forthwith, announcing that he was going to find a partner who "knew how to play bridge." Here is my hand:

West
S-KQJ10976
H-Q92
D-Void
C-K32

Playing against an expert pair with both sides vulnerable, I opened three spades. It went pass, pass, five diamonds, raised to six. I led the King of spades to see in dummy:

North
S-A854
H-K103
D-1065
C-964

The spade was ducked, East and South both following. What do you play now?

Evidently declarer ducked the spade lead partially for fear that it would be ruffed, but also to rectify the count for a possible squeeze. What does declarer hold? Obviously, seven solid diamonds and, you may as well assume, the aces of hearts and clubs, or the hand is unmakeable. Also, the hand can't be made if declarer has two low clubs along with the ace. So assume his hand is:

South
S-3
H-Axx
D-AKQJ982
C-A5

If you thoughtlessly play a second spade, declarer will ruff, cash the ace of clubs and then draw trumps, ruffing in dummy. He then discards his losing club on the ace of spades, ruffs a club arriving at the following end position:

West:	North	East	South
S-J	S-8	H-xxx	H-Axx
H-Q102	H-K53	C-QJ	D-98
C-K	C-9		

When declarer plays the diamond nine, you are forced to discard a heart; a spade discard obviously sets up dummy's eight as the twelfth trick, while discarding the club King not so obviously leads to an easy double squeeze: you have to hold the spade and partner has to hold a high club, so neither of you can hold hearts. On the last trump you are forced to discard another heart, and now a heart to the King picks up your Queen, and unless partner holds the Jack and nine of hearts, you are dead!

So your correct play at trick two is obvious: play a heart (the Queen is best). This ruins the double squeeze, and unless declarer holds the heart Jack the slam will go down. (In other words, partner only needs the heart Jack, not the J9, so you've doubled your chances of defeating the slam.)

It turned out that declarer held AJx of hearts, so my play of the queen made it easy for her, but being an expert she would have made the hand anyway on the squeeze. But my partner couldn't understand the squeeze; he steadfastly maintained that I had thrown the hand away with the heart shift, and fired me forthwith! I never played for pay again; if I was going to be inhibited from making the great play just to keep a customer, it wasn't worth it.

Some comments:

1. The reconstruction of declarer's hand was pretty easy. It doesn't really take an expert to do it, but it's something that the defender has to think to do. Perhaps that's one of the differences between an expert and a merely competent player: The expert stops to think.

2. The heart play at trick two would have actually lost the hand if declarers heart holding had been precisely AJ stiff. But that's against the odds, by better than 15-1. So play the odds.
3. To break up a double squeeze, always attack the "B" suit, the suit with threats against both defenders. This removes a vital entry.
4. Don't play for pay, it ruins the fun! If you need the money, get a legitimate job. If you're intelligent enough to be a bridge expert, you're intelligent enough to be a CEO, or whatever.