

# Hand 45 – Spingold Final 2019

By Maurizio Di Sacco

Bridge is a fascinating game as we all know, but sometimes it surpasses fascinating. When top class interpreters bring a spark of genius, and someone is superlative enough to recognise it, this fine player can fall into a trap that few mere mortals would contemplate.

It was the amazing case in the 2019 Spingold final. Our stars are Dutch champion Sjoert Brink and Norway's eminent Tor Helness.

Here are cards and auctions at the two tables:

**Board 15**  
 South Deals  
 N-S Vul

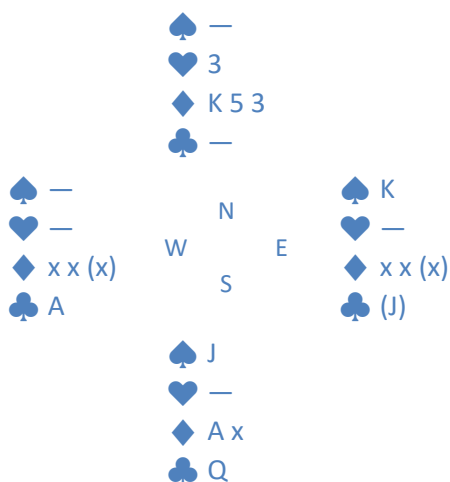
	♠ 6		
	♥ K Q 9 8 7 6 5 4 3		
	♦ K 5 3		
	♣ —		
♠ 8 4 2	N	E	♠ A K 9 7
♥ J 10	W	S	♥ 2
♦ Q 7 2			♦ 8 6
♣ A K 10 6 2			♣ J 9 7 5 4 3
	♠ Q J 10 5 3		
	♥ A		
	♦ A J 10 9 4		
	♣ Q 8		

West	North	East	South
<i>Brink</i>	<i>Helness</i>	<i>BasDrijver</i>	<i>Martens</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	3 ♦
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	4 NT	Pass	5 ♥
Pass	6 ♥	All pass	
	6 ♥ by North		
	Lead: ♠ K		

West	North	East	South
<i>Klukowski</i>	<i>Nowosadzki</i>	<i>Gawrys</i>	<i>Kalita</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	3 ♦
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	4 NT	Pass	5 ♥
Pass	6 ♥	All pass	
	6 ♥ by North		
	Lead: ♠ K		

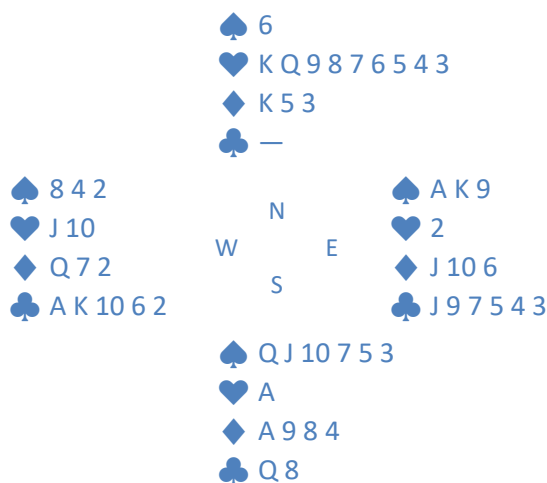
Both NS pairs bid exactly the same way, "easily" (I mean: roughly) to 6♥, but, as Edgar Kaplan used to say, then came the tough bit: bringing it home.

After the ♠K lead and heart continuation - the identical sequence of play at both tables - it is easy to spot double dummy that declarer does not need to guess diamonds: spades are guarded by East, and both top club honours are in West's hand, so a simple (if you can call it "simple") double squeeze was pending (well, technically it is not exactly a double squeeze, since diamonds can be guarded by one player only, but the principle is exactly the same: you don't need to know who holds the diamond guard), and I can bet that had the declarers not been looking at the ♦J10, the board would have been flat. Just to make it clear, here is the potential position when North runs hearts:

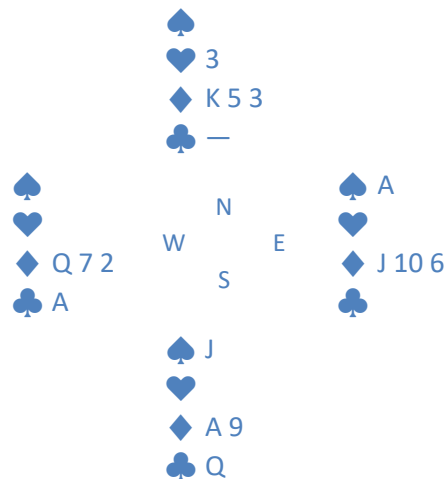


When North cashes his last trump, it doesn't matter who holds three diamonds: if it is East, he's simply squeezed in spades and diamonds, but in the scenario where the three diamonds are with West, when declarer ditches dummy's ♠J, he will be squeezed in the minors.

And to make it super clear, let's figure out a hand where declarer holds a combined seven diamonds instead of eight, and they split 3-3: a real double squeeze situation. Say, for example:



This would be the position in the four card ending:



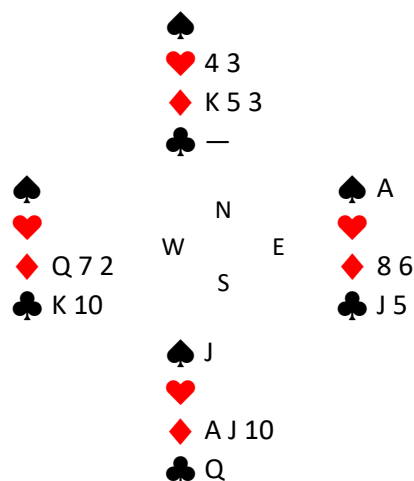
On the last heart East must pitch a diamond to keep the ♠A, but North throws the ♠J from dummy and West is squeezed in the minors.

And now a tip: take J10 of diamonds away from South's hand, and in both cases there's a winning defence: play a diamond at trick two, or *"if you can see that a double squeeze is pending, attack the double menace"*.

But, unfortunately for Helness and Nowosadzki, two players who can execute a double squeeze even when fast asleep, dummy held ♦J10, and to add to the problem, they were opposed by two top class defenders who, as we will see, played a very important role.

But let's look at how play continued. Both declarers presented dummy's ♠Q at trick three, ruffing it, then started cashing hearts.

Where Helness was at the helm, Brink pitched the ♣A at trick five, and had he been a normal player, Helness would have certainly taken it at full value and executed the pseudo-double squeeze. But Helness, evidently thought his RHO had false-carded, because in the following position



he led his penultimate heart from hand, East pitched the ♣5, and he discarded dummy's ♣Q, so destroying the double squeeze. West ditched the ♣10.

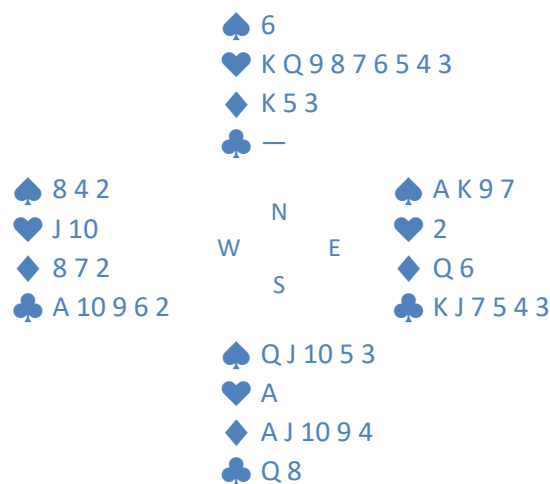
Do not think Helness a fool: put yourself in West shoes, and remove the ♣K from his hand. From this perspective, North must be void in a minor - otherwise bidding slam knowing that two aces are missing is a

nonsense - and you should give him the  $\spadesuit K$  - otherwise he cannot make the. So why not pitch the  $\clubsuit A$  trying to fool North?

Brink is certainly a defender who is able to think far ahead into the play of a hand.

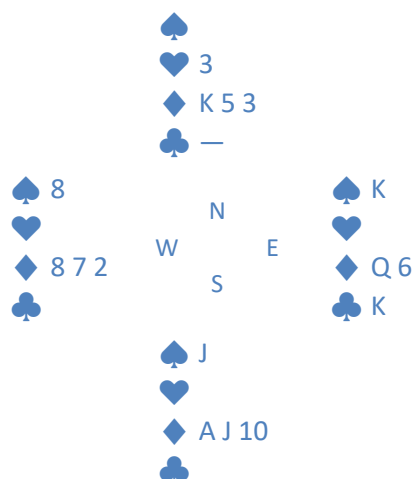
So here is the point that surely troubled Helness as he declared this slam: you can almost hear his brain whirring: "My fine opponent knows double squeezes perfectly well, so he knew what was coming, yet he, for some reason, has told me how to play the hand. Hmmm, really, should I believe him?" In other words, Helness was thinking along the lines of famous Virgilio's words in his Aeneid, where he refers to the legend of the Trojan horse to say "timeo Danaos et dona ferentes" (Beware of Greeks bearing gifts).

In other words, Helness played the hand for the following layout:

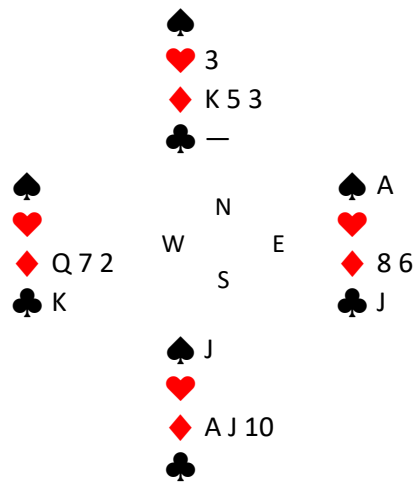


As he was not holding the  $\diamondsuit 8$  in his hand, Helness could not therefore afford to pitch a diamond from dummy, so he played the penultimate heart to watch East's discard. Hence his pitch of the  $\clubsuit Q$ .

And consequently, for the following four card ending:



After that, Helness didn't even cash his last heart: he immediately tabled the  $\heartsuit K$  and down he went when on the actual four card ending:



You can argue that by cashing the last heart the Norwegian would have learnt that East originally held two diamonds, so, playing with the odds, he could have guessed diamonds correctly. But remember: by that very early discard, he had already decided that Brink was trying to fool him, and had played according to the alternative layout depicted above in blue.

In the other room, Nowosadzki came to the same five card ending, but with one significant difference: in the real position pictured above West was holding  $\clubsuit AK$  instead of K10. So, the Pole knew that a double squeeze would have required West holding both club top honours, and decided, instead, to read East's distribution, than go for the odds. Accordingly, he pitched dummy's  $\clubsuit Q$  ( $\clubsuit 5$  from East and  $\clubsuit A$  from West) and tabled his last trump. East's  $\clubsuit J$  depicted him as the holder of a doubleton diamond, so declarer threw dummy's  $\spadesuit J$ , then proceeded to cash the  $\diamondsuit A$  and run the  $\diamondsuit J$ . Well done, but proper kudos to Brink for sowing the seed of doubt in Helness's mind.

Perhaps, Gawrys might have tried some deception too: let's say that in the four card ending, he had pitched a diamond instead of the  $\clubsuit J$ . That discard might well have convinced Nowosadzki that he had pitched from an original three card holding and he would likely have played accordingly.