SquareDeal: Tournament Hand Management Software

# Summary

SquareDeal is a piece of software for people that make sets of bridge hands for tournaments. It uses the well-known program BigDeal for actual dealing, but adds two things:

1. An easy way to make multiple sets of deals for various sessions using consistent naming
2. A way for participants to check the hands were dealt honestly and without any tricks by the organizer

Using SquareDeal a specific procedure is needed, with various phases, by organizer and participants. There is no actual need for participants to do anything, but if they want to check the hands after the tournament they need to do something even before the tournament.

I will describe the phases and in each phase I describe some parts of the software and/or procedures relevant at that phase. The phases follow each other in time, so will describe them after the heading T0, T1, etc.

This document will be released without the software first. The software is running, but needs some work to make it look good. The software is written in Perl(about 300 lines), and will be released both as source and as a precompiled Windows binary. It uses a modified bigdealx, currently called 1.3(BETA). My hope is that after some more modifications having to do with output file formats I will be able to release it as 2.0, but in any case the dealing part is the same as the old 1.2 version. No player should be able to figure out from the hands alone that this set of software is used.

For the random session keys in this document I use a secure random function[[1]](#endnote-1).

# At time T0

The tournament organizer(from this point on abbreviated to TO) starts thinking about the tournament and begins preparation. I envision this to be at least three weeks in advance of the first session of play, but maybe even earlier.

He starts up SquareDeal and tells it a new tournament is coming. He needs to supply a short name, to be used as filename prefix. Let us be original in this document and call it *test*. The program will now make two files, *test.sqd*, which contains the description of the tournament and will be published before the tournament and *test.sqk* which will contain the keys and will be published after the tournament.

There will be four options:

1. Set Tournament Name
2. Set Delayed Information Description
3. Add phase of tournament
4. Publish

The tournament name is just a string for description, and will not be used for any operational purpose. Something like “Bermuda Bowl 2023 Oct 2, Vatican City”.

The delayed information description describes which specific information will be used as delayed information. More about this later. Something like “DJI index September 29”.

Each tournament is expected to have various phases, like Round Robin, Quarter Final, etc. Each phase will have multiple sessions.

The information for each phase contains the following:

1. The number of sessions
2. The number of boards per session. This can either be a simple number, like 16, or a range, like 17-32. It can also be a list of things, like 1-16,17-32. In the latter case the program will cycle through this list, in this case 1-16 and then 17-32 and then 1-16 again.
3. The file prefix. This is identical to the normal one for BigDeal with one exception: any string of # characters will be replaced by at least the same number of digits for the session. So suppose the prefix given is bbrr## and we generate session 7, the file prefix will be bbrr07.
4. The description. A string, non-interpreted, that will be displayed when making the hands. Same trick with the # characters. Example: “Bermuda Bowl Round Robin #/23”

Apart from writing all this info in the description file the software will generate a (very) big random number for each session[[2]](#endnote-2), and stores it in the .sqk file.

The TO can enter and exit the program various times, and continue where he left off.

# At time T1

At a certain point the TO is finished with preparing the tournament. He chooses the publish option(#4) which terminates the first phase of the program. Now he receives a message telling him to publish the .sqd file and keep .sqk file very very secret.

Publishing the file can be done in various ways. I envision putting it on the tournament website and/or Emailing it to all participants. We will see how this turns out.

Keeping the key file very very secret would require at the least an encrypted USB stick or similar measure. Keep in mind that if the contents of this file would leak before the end of the tournament players will be able to generate the hands themselves before the session.

At this point interested players can do something. They can make a copy of the .sqd file as published. There is not a lot they can do with the file now, but the file contains a signature of all session keys, and they need that after the tournament to check. If they do not make a copy a devious TO could change the keys and repost the .sqd file with a new signature.

Time T1 could be the same day as T0, or much later, but it should be some two weeks before T2.

# At time T2

This is the point where the Delayed Information comes to life. What is the Delayed Information(DI) and why is it needed? The DI is any info, chosen by the TO, but such that everyone will be able to figure out that the TO could not have known it at time T1. A DJI index, the gold price, the drawing of the Italian state lottery, anything is OK, including combinations of things. The only rules:

1. The TO cannot have known the info at time T1. Preferably nobody should have been able to know it then.
2. At tournament time anybody should be able to know this information. Preferably it should stay known forever, for everyone to see.

Why do we need it? If the hands for the sessions would only depend on the session keys the TO could plan them in advance. As we will see later the DI modifies the session keys in a major way. As long as the info in the DI contains a reasonable number of bits(20 or so) it becomes difficult for the TO to change statistical properties of hands. Even very suspicious players would be satisfied with 40 bits. Picking 6 from 49, say a Lotto type game produces about 24. Combine that with the DJI and you are in a very safe zone.

Anyhow, at time T2 the TO calls the program again and sets the now known DI. The players can look up the number if they wish, but can also do that later.

# At time T3

Tournament time is almost there. The duplication room is being set up and the TO needs to generate hands. Call the program and use the generate hands option. You can specify a phase, and within the phase one or more sessions. Session numbers can be a single number(make one session), a list like 1-10(make the first 10 sessions), or a \* meaning all sessions.

The TO has no choice now, the hands will follow straight from two(three) pieces of information, the session key, the DI(and a reserve set number). This normally finishes what you can do. There is however one emergency option: if as a TO you screw up, or someone from your staff does it could be that in hopefully rare circumstances the hands for a session leak out(it has happened that hand records from session 4 were distributed after session 3). So there has to be a way to make reserve hands. This option exists, you can even make an infinite amount of reserve sets.

Having made reserve sets however the TO is obliged to tell the players this. This can be done now and/or at time T4. A TO that needs to do this more than once per 5 tournaments is either very sloppy, or he is still rigging hands.

A reserve set is made using the session key, the DI and the reserve-number.

# At time T4

The tournament is finished. The TO now publishes both the updated .sqd file and the .sqk file. He also states if he has used reserve sets and which. Here his responsibility stops.

Interested players can now download these files and run the software themselves. The software will check the signature of the keys(or they can use standard SHA-256 software) and the players can now make all the hands of the tournament, comparing them to what they actually played. Any mishap here requires investigation and detailed explanation by the TO.

Hopefully it will never come to that, and furthermore before starting to accuse TO’s it would be a good idea to check the software. Contact me at [sater@xs4all.nl](mailto:sater@xs4all.nl), maybe I screwed up.

# Connection to BigDeal

This software uses the bigdealx version of BigDeal. Normally the ReadMe states that you should not. Given that I claim I know what I am doing I still use it.

There are three modifications:

1. BigDeal used a 160 bit hash of an owner string as extra entropy. Because now the TO and the suspicious player have to use exactly the same starting value I cannot use this owner string.
2. Normally using dangerous flags to BigDealx causes it to scream and convince you not do it. We changed it not to scream when using the right flags.
3. Normally BigDeal in the x version complains very loudly of regenerating sets of hands. With this software regenerating sets of hands can happen easily if you just lost your session 3 of phase 2. Now we do not.

Implementing these three changes was done by adding a -W option (Wizard…) with a string as argument. This string is the first half of the session key(about 175 bits for a 160 bit hash). The other half of the session key, and the DI and the reserve numbers are added with -e switches.

So, pointing you to the BigDeal online info, the hands in BigDealx with -W string are now generated by running the following three things through a RIPEMD-160 hash:

1. The 160 bit hash of the first half of the session key
2. The 160 bit hash of the second half, plus the rest
3. An increasing counter

After that all other normal BigDeal things happen.

# File formats

The formats of the .sq? files are:

Test.sqd

TN Test Tournament  
KH 2a138794640b2f3580390e1b5866277fd074f29069c4e2c80751e4c94c03cee3  
DI DJI April 13  
SN 23:1-16,17-32:testrr##:Round Robin # of 23  
SN 7:14:testfin#:Finals # of 7  
PU

Test.sqk

1,1:B1oGWihtYumKlpGatFw6Axv4v7TBBBINksWhVFzpzAAvea3qfvhZddkg00tL  
1,2:ypY9fWFCzqaD1LiCEK6Xg03znnv6lMf1e9exXykYtlbnppc4B4oKGmzaSVxU  
1,3:U2USDtPp3DH3xX1Ea3y1UhHauYLuygFl0j58EZUiQPbMy71IudKKjupcizpk  
1,4:XowkYV4E0n1WHqIdKvveekduCGjEocAIOTMkb7fB1GdYVWYDR8FNO9czOxmE  
1,5:IwSnFLD45Rq7plDVQHYHpOn88EWs2RgeqgMH8ZeBcIJ36GrfqLLDdgXWFrmM  
1,6:nSHSiZbrFJyGA6NCkBTyrsXwjdGJzF3lxWK4pdCfael6UQz4QrSnN7NZZGMb  
1,7:wqKrPVsN1aXrb1ZjOUCEBafP2xvOUsIdcPh8ennV6wh9MmTHNyfEJ5YorASW  
1,8:b77BJNly34jrxiKYqXALIEOmoK5mck27ugcv1rg5j8qqtn9JKHoRDwsj2HkF  
1,9:tJ12G7NodX33R0i12DcVxjfT115rrGlhQQuHtIBsvZ6pyvBw5Nbrd7tNephK  
1,10:JGKagH9CAmVlSPqfd3vAoPNTVm2L4l3FaTQRHwjf7RGH0XfTf9ATh85LhTC5  
1,11:USvmUOaXChBiVIYOQkPTV6VwHLT4jIxhdO6vALMWUjcPWYaWX2iZfRuYqF2o  
1,12:dv9L9aYfL9HEa9r99fxTCJTAevlkbQufna34ZpGgptkISC2Nc2WzcihLX8Qi  
1,13:NZnvPV7D1rbnaEXew52mqqYOAbz9tVRrihnexaGe4vORhW3z45fvrOcwykRN  
1,14:1RoVkXTYog7gllaFsFKe74szI1SIFKNZ0WbEnjbI5sKcBvL3OcZaUXs20GuK  
1,15:GIjsWBJR2ti04dQ6ZUsYpWbEuRQv4gDih5Qw9f2psvqLPt4gJLVQTNYOCd7H  
1,16:KJ4nNjboFutOWdYDgcFscERu4Rky0xRx8BWM0SylnLJG0NqdYAtWC7JILuIw  
1,17:Oa5na6xnetUKdURlpAAZefWQc3halZHLgGIVjdk7ZkhshIAagbzYKRdYAyUi  
1,18:5ObZvlRRm27EnsEP2KsMu5R3QtIHG8PnQbmRQuOkxE8XDSvajgeUJD8x6Qxj  
1,19:cfSIUG2EdpqrBaeSPCC6rEGV4WXHLlFCgSN3xiWdQZanaaeNC6xg40gyFilB  
1,20:e7T7FFu0eKcpGAiLfHKHogJaT2WJUqSUlYjgxvJZa5ugXTATeUGZb77m3V9I  
1,21:CNVfA6TMypBxeFT5D3K1sHUMRddlvoUis6quAse28F5ctTTd6FUW3BkayHof  
1,22:KFdz3l0eeZGsLDHNs2OB0f4cG09xUlXPUlPk9He8rEf4Afbx06WJa9K2tI2v  
1,23:zKRAG1ZzrAlSClOiPh8oaqKMq9u5q6CVJwKIlDxmnYM5u90tT6xz0HsIXyPq  
2,1:WKirJbd9ibhLwd4ueUDtWFSP1oErsKRopM1Erwy387xuKGB0RgmwhOJIZNjv  
2,2:Bb65fAaN0mi5JhCKVU2MFjzKev7WEyfnRbTIWsX6WV65E0tCVmbCqwjXpBNn  
2,3:BVDqXOEDr6hAuJVLKJ8LsL57uVvQbI7QpPhZ3AcRGgZWi0OAeQ3hFpkGC3Mq  
2,4:AR1Gu2QxOjLTzVttUHXFrWUqvFcYOVkjhENgtke2BdEW5PYcu3EjM4g1hUuC  
2,5:rNpUiGfmcH7isNOnOSkONEMI2mwCN55jbVgRjHVZciUnD0ty41UacTaIF14k  
2,6:F9zF3AugyAbyQYnbfSUwZ3QK7ZgHSa2PYcW3ZZ02wAam2cN6Fr1YWn2THixM  
2,7:56BDv9PZ2eQxVu5ZHHysffvsUVKQcKBxHbB7DDyOJbx2avwZaICdK641Wgdb

For the keyhash I use the SHA-256 function. The annoying detail you have to figure out is the line termination. On Unix type systems line termination is \n or NL, while on DOS like systems it is \r\n or CRLF. Normally you could not care less, but for this keyhash it is important you do it consistent. I chose to use the DOS like convention.

# Conclusion

This will say something smart later.

1. perl Bytes::Random::Secure::random\_string\_from function which is supposed to use the OS secure random generator [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. 60 characters with 62 possibilities equals about 357 bits [↑](#endnote-ref-2)