

CHARGE ACCOUNT

by David J. Weiss

		North	
		S—874	
		H—A83	
		D—AK54	
		C—A95	
		East	
		S—J109	
		H—K10942	
		D—Q108	
		C—Q10	
		South	
		S—5	
		H—J5	
		D—J932	
		C—J76432	

Neither vulnerable, match points

South	West	North	East
Pass	1S	Dbl.	2S
3C	3S	4C	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Trick 1: SK, 4, J, 5. Trick 5: SQ, 8, 9, C6.
 Trick 2: SA, 7, 10, C2. Trick 6: D3, 7, A, 8.
 Trick 3: C3, 8, A, 7. Trick 7: DK, Q, 2, 6.
 Trick 4: C5, Q, 4, K.

After this unblocking, declarer lost only a heart trick and thus made his contract. Who gets the charge?

Steve Evans: "West is primarily to blame in this debacle, although I think East's play was not well reasoned. After East's play of the spade jack at trick 1, West should have shifted to a heart at trick 2. This would have been required if declarer has S—x, H—Jxx, D—QJx, C—Jxxxx. Certainly by trick 4 it was obvious that East wanted a heart return, based on his spade plays. So West's defense was just wooden. East's unblocking of the diamond queen was playing his partner for S—AKQxxx, H—xx, D—J97, C—Kx. This was possible, although West would have to hold specifically J97 of diamonds. My opinion is that, assuming West is not asleep, he would certainly have led hearts with nothing in the suit. East's play, however, could have been right; so West is primarily to blame."

Marshall Miles: "East is completely at fault. He played his partner for an improbable holding — specifically J97 of diamonds and a doubleton heart, not including the queen. If West had that holding, he would tend to shift to a heart either at trick two or trick five, because it couldn't cost anything if declarer had 1-2-4-6 distribution or 1-3-3-6 distribution. In the latter case it couldn't cost even if declarer had K109 of hearts because he would be able to discard a heart on a long diamond."

The defense would have been easier if West had shifted to a heart with his actual holding. But from his point of view it was not logical to shift. If declarer had his actual distribution, there was no discard coming. If declarer had 3-3 in the red suits, a heart shift could be costly if declarer had H—J10x, D—Qxx.

Perhaps it is unreasonable to expect East to encourage a heart shift at the second trick when he holds H—K109xx and to discourage a heart shift when he holds H—K9xx. But if East wanted a heart switch he made the wrong signal. The jack of spades should encourage a spade continuation and the nine should encourage a shift—which could only be to hearts.

West's opening lead should have been the queen of spades, but his actual lead had no effect on the defense."

Here we have a deal on which East knew what he wanted his partner to do—with his holding, a heart switch could not lose and might gain—but he couldn't get West to do it. The first question to resolve then, is whether East's carding called for a heart shift. Usually, suit preference signals take precedence over attitude signals when there is a singleton in dummy and it is obvious that some shift is necessary. Here, though, the singleton is in declarer's hand; but still, the auction has told both defenders the exact lie of the spade suit. In this situation then, it seems useful to play that the middle card—here the ten—should ask for a continuation and the other cards should suggest which shift seems advisable.

When West failed to get the message at trick one and continued spades, East issued it again with the spade ten. This was an unambiguous call for hearts, issued because East feared declarer's pattern was 1-3-3-6. When West got in again with the club king, he deliberately ignored East's signals, because from his perspective, no pattern was to be feared. Ignoring partner is dangerous for partnership morale, and West's analysis was not quite accurate. If declarer had Jxx of diamonds and any three hearts, he could arrange to avoid a heart loser by crossing to dummy in clubs and leading a diamond toward the jack. The contract would then go down one instead of two.

At East's crucial juncture, he knew partner had chosen to ignore his signals. Which of the possible red suit holdings would be more likely to induce this stubbornness: H—Jx, D—J97 or H—Qxx, D—xx? Probably the latter holding, i.e., the actual holding, because with three diamonds West would have been afraid of declarer's having three also, and splitting out the suit. So even though South's free bid may have suggested that he had the heart queen, East should not have unblocked the diamond. He knew West had made a mistake, but he should have figured out which mistake was more likely. Both defenders share the charge, and the moral of this disaster is that it pays to do what your partner wants you to do. Life is easier that way.