CHARGE ACCOUNT . .

By David Weiss

	North S—KJ953		N-S vulnerable, IMP scoring			
***	H—K		South	West	North	East
West	D-K9643	East	2C*	Pass	2D*	4H
S—A87642	CK9	S———	Pass	Pass	4S	Pass
H-107		H— A J986542	5C	Pass	Pass	Dbl.
D-102	South	D—XJ85	Pass	Pass	Pass	
C—J43	S-Q10	C—5	*Precision			
	H—A3					
	D-Q7		Trick 1: SA, 3, H2, S10.			
	C-AQ108762		Trick 2: S8, 5, C5, SQ.			
		-		: H4. 3.		

And so, despite a brilliant beginning, the defenders allowed the contract to make. Who gets the charge?

STEVE EVANS: "West's play of the spade 8 is a clear error. After trick 2, East will know all of West's cards in spades. Therefore, West should lead the spade 6, indicating his lack of interest in either red suit. East, however, had a 100% play in the diamond ace. There is no way partner could possibly have the heart ace and the diamond queen. So East hould cash the diamond ace and then lead a heart. West gets charged because his play was clearly wrong, but East gets the majority of discredit because he was looking at the setting trick and failed to cash it."

ED DAVIS: "West made a mistake (10%) when he led the eight of spades for partner to ruff. Since West had no preference for which suit East returned, the right choice is the six of spades. No doubt West thought that East had the ace of hearts and that the eight of spades was making it clear that West did not want a diamond return; however, with West guaranteed to have at least five spades since South pulled North's 4S bid, it is impossible that the middle spade would mislead East.

"East made a mistake (90%) when he returned a heart rather than cashing the ace of diamonds. Since the diamond is sure to cash (South would hardly pass 4H with 2-4-0-7 distribution), East should have taken his ace to defeat the contract before leading a heart for West to supposedly win with the ace or ruff. Since this is not difficult to work out, East's actual return was probably more masochistic than lazy. Additionally, if East was going to return a heart, it should have been the suit preference queen rather than the four since East wanted a diamond return and not another spade which he could not ruff.

"Nearly all of the charge goes to East since not cashing the ace of diamonds is a clear and costly mistake."

Bridge is really a very tough game. On this deal, East was brilliant in the auction. His Lightner double, somehow correctly interpreted by West (or was the ace of spades simply the lead that catered to whatever East's intentions were?), inspired the only defense that would beat the contract. A world-class performance by a world-class pair.

And yet, the defense achieved an embarrassing result. The panel has cogently argued that two of the cards played by the defenders were wrong. I disagree. The culprit was West and his crime was playing the careless spade 8. East's only error was in trusting partner. There are two hands on which a heart return is necessary and East assumed his partner was confirming possession of one of them. Either West had the heart ace, leaving South with a minimum distributional opener (S—Q10, H—10xx, D———, C—AQJxxxxx), or West was void in hearts, leaving South with a powerful hand such as: S—Q10, H—A10xx, D———, C—AQJxxxxx. While if Ed were South, he might open the first hand 5C, surely the 2C opener is not bidding bizarrely. And on the second hand, Ed would be wrong to double 4H with such powerful controls; it must be better to make a forcing pass and hope to reach a club slam. East defended well, choosing the careful heart 4 to request a diamond rather than a spade return after partner scores the heart trick. True, East expected that this diamond would be ruffed by South; but no harm would be done (in contrast to the diamond at trick 3).

The spade eight was as careless as the heart four was careful. There is no conceivable way for that card to help. Surely East did not need to be told to cash his hypothetical heart ace with the bare king in dummy. With five spades to choose from, and with that freedom of choice known to his partner, West found the only card that could induce a disaster. Since West's error could never be justified, while East's purported error could have been a necessary play, West gets the charge. I exonerate East completely.