

Charge Account by David J. Weiss

		North		Neither vulnerable, Match-points	
		S—93			
		H—KQ754			
		D—Q32			
		C—K106			
West		East		North	East
S—A65		S—KQJ872		Pass	2S
H—AJ1098		H—63		Pass	Pass
D—76		D—5		5D	Pass
C—Q87		C—J943		Pass	Pass
		South		South	
		S—104		3D	
		H—2		4D	
		D—AKJ10984		Pass	
		C—A52		Pass	

Trick 1: SA, 3, K, 4.

Trick 2: HA, 4, 6, 2.

Trick 3: H9, K, 3, S10.

Declarer soon claimed. Who gets the charge?

Steve Evans: "East should not play the king of spades at trick 1. He should signal for a spade continuation by playing the 8. The king should be saved for suit preference situations, such as if East desired a heart ruff. West's play was technically correct when he trusted partner's signal. Clearly, West knew another spade would cash and beat the contract because no one opens 2S non-vul with seven to the KQJ10. But at matchpoint scoring, the extra undertrick is likely to matter, so West gets no blame and East gets 100%."

Marshall Miles: "I would divide the blame equally. East should not have signalled so violently. The eight would have been an unambiguous request to continue spades; while the king, being unnecessarily violent, should suggest a shift to hearts. So East is at fault for leading his partner astray."

"Nevertheless, West should reflect rather than blindly do what he thinks partner is suggesting. How could it cost to continue spades? It could cost if East had seven spades and a singleton heart, perhaps KQJ10xxx, x, xx, xxx. But surely, on this vulnerability, East would bid three spades whenever he had the rest of the spades."

"The other time a spade continuation would cost (at matchpoint scoring) is when East was void in hearts—so that he could not lead a heart himself after winning the second trick. But East couldn't be void in hearts. If South had, for example, xx, xxx, AKJ10xx, Ax, he would never bid four diamonds all by himself. If East had KQJxxx, —, xx, Jxxxx or KQJxxx, —, x, Jxxxx, he would not open two spades."

"Actually, it is hard to construct a hand on the bidding where East would hold a singleton heart (and one or more diamonds). If East should hold a singleton heart, however, he would return it at trick three since if West's side ace were in clubs, he would cash it before continuing spades. Consequently, West didn't need to play ace and another heart to get a ruff if East should hold a singleton."

East converted a trivial hand into a problem by playing "show and tell" in the spade suit. His play of the king was completely unnecessary, a play generated by habit rather than thought.

But West didn't know that East had erred. True, a heart void was unlikely given the auction; but unlikely is not impossible and West was forced to make the ugly choice between partner's having committed an aberration in the bidding or the play.

When the ace of hearts drew a heart from East, West could have shifted course, going back to cashing the setting trick. But this would have been an insult to partner. If East had held a singleton heart, it would have been necessary for him to signal by playing the spade king. East could not have waited for his partner to continue spades so that he could shift to his singleton because East did not know whether a second spade would live. The bidding told West how many spades East held, but it did not tell East how many West held.

When a player's error consists of placing faith in his partner's signals, it is hard to give him the charge. East merits this one.