

CHARGE ACCOUNT . . . By David Weiss

		North	Both vulnerable, IMP scoring			
		S—A97				
		H—KQJ5				
West	D—QJ96	East	North	East	South	West
	C—104	S—642	1D	Pass	3D*	Pass
	S—KQ105	H—94	3H	Pass	3NT	Pass
	H—10863	D—A74	Pass	Pass		
	D—K3	C—QJ973				*forcing
		South				
		S—J83				
		H—A72				
		D—10852				
		C—AK5				
			Trick 1: SQ, 7, 2, 3.			
			Trick 2: H8, 5, 4, A.			
			Trick 3: D5, 3, Q, A.			
			Trick 4: CQ, A, 2, 4.			

Declarer now gave up a second diamond and took nine tricks. The defense had failed to set up either of its black suits. Who gets the charge?

Steve Evans: "East gets full charge for not returning a spade at trick 4. Although sometimes defenders get confused when partner leads the Queen from KQ10x, East should not have any problem on this hand. Clearly, West must be looking for partner's entry when he leads a heart at trick 2. If West had QJ10 of spades, he would lead another spade because he must have an outside entry. If for some reason he chose not to lead a spade, he would try to hit his partner's suit by leading a club. East should return a club only if his partner has the club ace. But then South would have at most 11 HCP which would be exceedingly light for a forcing 3D bid."

Marshall Miles: "It is all East's fault. What holding was he playing for? Apparently he hoped that South held Kxx, Axx, K10xxx, Kx (leaving West with QJ10x, xxx, x, Axxx). But if those were the hands, South wouldn't duck the first spade. Furthermore, if West were to switch suits at the second trick, he would lead a club rather than a heart since West could see little chance of establishing a trick in hearts."

"For West to hold the first trick, and for him to shift to a heart, he had to have a diamond stopper and the king of spades. The ace of hearts was East's most likely quick entry since the reason for responding 2NT might have been that he was lacking a heart stopper. Another advantage in shifting to a heart is that it would suggest a lack of interest in developing tricks elsewhere."

The panelists agree that East deserves blame, and I share that view. But West is also at fault and I want to focus on his errors.

Firstly, it is foolish to lead the Q from KQ10x. With only a four-card holding, and lacking the nine, the lead could encourage partner to signal with a trick. The normal meaning of the queen lead is to ask partner to throw the jack; and if either North or South has four of the suit, this extravagance could be costly. Additionally, the queen lead risks confusion. East should have inferred his partner's holding but apparently did not. Had the correct card been led, the defense would have been easy.

While West's first error should not have cost—this time—his second error had a more serious effect. At trick 2, West played the wrong eight; he should have shifted to his highest club. This play is correct both technically and psychologically. If East's quick entry were in clubs, spades could be established before the diamond king was dislodged. While this reasoning applies equally to a quick entry in hearts, the club hope gives secondary chances. If declarer has the heart ace, five diamonds headed by the ace, and secondary club cards, the heart switch at trick two is fatal. On the other hand, even if declarer has great clubs, such as AQJ, he will have to attack hearts himself before he gets the diamonds going. By then, East will know to return a spade when he gets in.

On this deal, the correct play by West would have produced a bonus; the threat of establishing the club suit forces declarer to concede a club trick and therefore go down two. But this bonus is only a minor reward for a well-reasoned shift. The real point of the club eight is that it furnishes partner with the information he needs to defend accurately.