

CHARGE ACCOUNT

David J. Weiss

	North	
	S-AJ	
West	H--J5	East
S-Q1086532	D-A7542	S-74
H-A1097	C-K762	H-Q32
D--		D-KJ109
C-103	South	C-Q985
	S-K9	
	H-K864	
	D-Q863	
	C-AJ4	

N-S vul, IMP scoring

The auction:

South	West	North	East
INT (13-15)	3S	3NT	P
P	P		

- Trick 1: H9, J, Q, K (9=0 or 2 higher)
 Trick 2: D3, S8, DA, D9 (S8=Roman discard showing heart strength)
 Trick 3: D2, DK, D6, S2
 Trick 4: H3, 4, 10, 5
 Trick 5: HA, C2, H2, H6
 Trick 6: H7, C6, S4, H8

The unsuccessful unblock did not really cost the contract, since East would have been squeezed in the minors anyway. Who gets the charge?

Steve Evans: "This hand is a difficult one to defend and I'm sure there was some yelling when South won the heart 8 at trick 6. However, it's not immediately clear where the defenders went wrong. East seems much more to blame because he had enough information to know what to do while West had no chance. From West's point of view declarer might be able to take 9 tricks (3S, 1H, 2D, 3C), so it seemed reasonable to play partner for five hearts. East, however, after two tricks, knew his partner had 7 spades, A109x of hearts, and 2 clubs. If East wins the diamond at trick 3 and plays a heart, either declarer will have a fourth heart on power or else East will be squeezed in the minors. That defense will work only when West has 5 hearts, which should be impossible, given the auction. But if East wins the diamond at trick 3 and plays a heart, the defense will come out on top because there's no squeeze. And if declarer tries a third diamond, the defense takes 2 diamonds and 3 hearts."

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Marshall Miles: "West should get 40% of the blame for his opening lead. Obviously, there was guessing to be done, but a spade lead would almost surely be right when the suit was split 7-2-2-2 as in the actual case, and it might work out in other cases (like when dummy has a singleton honor)."

The hand was mis-analyzed when it was played. (ed.: *Marshall is confessing the history of this hand . . . can you guess whether he was East or West?*) West contended that East should either play the ten of diamonds at trick three or else return a diamond at trick four to let West know that diamonds were doubly stopped. East thought two heart leads would be necessary if West held A1096 of hearts instead of A1097. Actually, the contract cannot be defeated if East ducks at trick three since South can then lead hearts at each opportunity. This forces West to cash out, squeezing East, or, if West refuses to cash the fourth heart, cuts the defender's communication and allows establishment of the long diamond.

Because he can foresee the squeeze if the hearts are cashed, East should return a spade at trick 4 since he knows that West cannot have started with more than 4 hearts. It is not an easy hand, but since a spade return is correct, East should get 60% of the blame.

The panel has done a pretty good job analyzing a difficult hand. East made the last mistake; not returning a spade at trick 4 was a clear error. Failing to foresee an impending squeeze is rarely a chargeable offense, but in this case East should have known the entire distribution.

However, West made a simple hand hard by attempting to be brilliant. The spade lead was normal and automatic, only Italians are smart enough to know when abnormality is right. Had West led a spade, East could not have gone wrong.

The squeeze aspects of the hand are perhaps more difficult than our panel suggests. Marshall claims that East cannot afford to duck the diamond at trick 3, for then heart leads by declarer will see him home. Steve says ducking the diamond is all right, and I believe he is correct (but only at double dummy). If South plays hearts after the diamond is ducked, West can defeat the contract by playing clubs both times (who would find this defense?). Either defender could have beaten this hand by playing spades at the earliest opportunity, and both should have done so.