

Charge Account

by David J. Weiss

North		E-W Vulnerable, Board-a-Match			
S—AK72		North	East	South	West
H—953		Pass	Pass	1C	Pass
West	D—J10	East	1S	Pass	2NT
S—93	C—10432	S—Q854	3NT	Pass	Pass
H—A1072		H—Q64			
D—9764	South	D—KQ853			
C—985	S—J106	C—6			
	H—KJ8				
	D—A2				
	C—AKQJ7				

Trick 1: D7, 10, Q, 2.
 Trick 2: D5, A, 4, J.
 Trick 3: CA, 5, 2, 6.
 Trick 4: CK, 8, 3, S8.
 Trick 5: C7, 9, 10, H4.

Trick 6: C4, H6, CQ, 53.
 Trick 7: CJ, H7, H3, HQ.
 Trick 8: SJ, 9, A, 4.
 Trick 9: H3, D3, HK, HA.

Since the defense could take only two more diamond tricks, declarer had time to score his heart trick. Who gets the charge?

Steve Evans: "This is really a very easy hand to defend. West knows exactly what is going on and knows declarer can do nothing about it. Therefore, it would be a really good idea to tell East what is happening. West should play the heart 10 at trick 6 and the diamond 6 at trick 7. Then East knows exactly what his partner has and can defend accordingly. He doesn't need to agonize over the defense because his partner has made it easy. On the actual hand, East didn't know who had the heart ace so he took the safe way out and pitched a diamond at trick 9. Maybe East should guess better but since his partner had already made the right choice at trick 1, he probably didn't want to jeopardize the result. Besides, if West had the heart ace, he should have made it patently obvious to everyone."

Marshall Miles: "I would assign 70% of the blame to West. None of the blame is for East's discard at the ninth trick (even though it cost the setting trick). All of the mistakes had been made earlier!

"At trick two, each defender should know the exact diamond holdings. West should know that declarer couldn't have the king of diamonds or A32. East should know that declarer couldn't have the nine. East can see right away that he can't guard the hearts and keep the long diamond (nor does he need to guard hearts, since declarer can't hold both the ace and king). So East's first three discards should be the four, six, and queen of hearts. That clearly tells West to save his heart guard, and that is all West needs to know. West's first discard should be the ten of hearts to show that his heart honor is the ace, rather than the king. West's wishy-washy discards—a low spade and the next-to-lowest heart—are consistent with his holding KJxx of hearts, and this was board-a-match scoring. On the fifth club, West should complete his high-low in hearts and East must finally discard a spade.

"At this point, declarer does not know the spade position. Probably he **should** read the exact distribution and simply cash the ace-king of spades, making his contract if West has Qx and avoiding a two-trick set otherwise. But he might take the spade finesse, in which case East would lead a diamond to West's nine to let him cash the ace of hearts, then run the diamonds for a two-trick set. There was no need for East to signal that he had spades controlled or for West to signal that he did not. That only helped the declarer.

"East started the defense off by not being very deceptive, but that probably made no difference. West's failure to make a clear-cut signal in hearts was inexcusable. Declarer would know that the ace of hearts was missing and should know West's exact heart holding, so West did not have the excuse that he was trying to be deceptive."

This hand illustrates the excruciating nature of board-a-match scoring. A small error by West laid a trap for East and East fell in with a crash.

East did not touch a wrong card until trick 9. He knew the diamond lead had struck gold and gathered more information trick by trick. East's first pitch, a spade, was correct, although there was no need to signal the queen (however, there are elements of bluffing to consider). At that point it was his safest pitch since he did not know the club position yet. When the third club was led, East knew declarer had 14 points in the minors, so he couldn't have both high hearts. This made it safe for East to pitch all of his hearts. Then at trick 8, East knew that declarer was aware of the spade position. Thus it was risky for him to pitch a spade at trick 9 because if declarer had the heart ace, the whole spade suit would come in. Giving up on the set by pitching a diamond, though, would surely hold declarer to his contract, thus capitalizing on what East knew had been a fortunate opening lead; there was even still an extra chance that West had the ace and jack of hearts.

West made a killing lead and then relaxed. He knew the diamond lie and could count eight tricks for South. He knew East had the spade queen since he would not pitch from a weaker holding. Evidently he was reluctant to signal in hearts because he wanted to induce South to play hearts before cashing his winners to try to get down two. This plan was not only greedy but silly, because he could foresee that his partner would have to keep three spades and three diamonds. It was obvious that declarer would cash all of the clubs before turning to the majors, and that East would consequently come under pressure.

Therefore, West should have foreseen that only East could guess wrongly and he should have signalled as loudly as possible (with the heart ten) and as early as possible (at trick 6). At IMP scoring, this advertising would be unnecessary because East would have no alternative but to play his partner for the heart ace. Interestingly, IMP scoring would transfer the guessing to South, who would have to decide whether to take the spade finesse or try for a squeeze-endplay.