

	North	
	S—QJ	
	H—Q954	
West	D—76	East
S—85	C—KJ1092	S—A10742
H—72		H—J1086
D—AK10832	South	D—5
C—A87	S—K963	C—Q43
	H—AK3	
	D—QJ94	
	C—65	

E/W vulnerable, match points

East	South	West	North
Pass	1D	Pass	1H
Pass	1NT	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Trick 1: S8, J, 7, 6

Trick 3: C6, 7, 9, Q

Trick 2: H4, 6, K, 2

Trick 4: S4, 3; 5; Q

Declarer now knocked out the club ace and after running his club and heart tricks, established a diamond by leading to his queen. The defenders could score only four of their five top tricks. Who gets the charge?

Marshall Miles: "West is at fault. He should have won the ace of clubs at trick three in order to return another spade before all of East's entries were gone. From West's point of view, East might easily hold one more spade and one less club. As a practical matter, declarer would never guess to catch East's unguarded queen of clubs. East is not at fault in returning a low spade since he assumed that West had led the eight from three small."

Steve Evans: "Best defense on this hand would be for East to duck the club at trick 3. Declarer would play a heart to the ace and take another club finesse, losing to the queen. East should return a diamond and partner should play a spade to East's ace. Then East should exit with the heart jack. South will amass only seven tricks.

"The key to the defense is whether East can work out to duck at trick 3. Declarer must have 10 points in the majors and a few in diamonds since West didn't lead them. So West has the club ace, but does he have two or three clubs? The answer to this question is not available, but the play in the heart suit told East it didn't matter. West's heart deuce at trick 2 should have been a count signal. With West marked with three hearts, East 'knew' that declarer had no dummy entry, so there was no reason to duck the club. However, if West had shown a doubleton heart, East could not be certain that declarer had only two clubs.

"East should definitely return a diamond, not a spade, when he wins the club queen. Declarer can't have the diamond ace-king (count points), and partner probably needs a diamond lead. Then he can switch back to spades. West gets partial charge for not signalling in hearts although this probably didn't affect the result. East gets the major charge for not returning a diamond when in with the club queen; this would have held declarer to eight tricks."

This deal is curious in that it's easy to point the finger, but harder to see how the defenders can know enough to defend optimally. It's East's fault because West didn't touch a wrong card. After trick 1, West knows that his lead has failed to strike gold—East can hardly have passed throughout with six spades headed by an honor—but East does not know. From East's perspective, the eight could have come from three small and the suit will come home if East withholds his ace on the second round. So West should not win the club ace to shoot back a spade, because that sets up an extra trick for South rather than for East.

The way I would resolve this difficulty is to employ the Smith echo so often espoused here. West's first play in the suit attacked by declarer should convey information about the suit originally led. Thus West should play a low heart with a poor spade holding and a high heart with a good holding. In the present instance, the only possibilities are two small vs. three small, so East should be able to infer that spades are not going to be productive.

Is this sufficient for East to find the optimal defense of smoothly ducking the club? I don't know. The club count is not readable to East, so ducking would be a matter of a happy inspiration. Even if East goes wrong and wins the club queen, he must avoid the low spade return. I think the heart jack is the best return

because it clarifies the hand for West. The danger of a diamond return is that West might not cash his second diamond when he wins the club ace. After the heart return, East will eventually win the spade queen with his ace to lead his diamond and West will take his two tricks and put his hand back in the box.