

Charge Account by David J. Weiss

		North		Neither vulnerable, IMP scoring.			
		S—J9864					
		H—Q9					
		D—KJ4		North	East	South	West
		C—J82		Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass
West		East		2H*	Pass	2S	Pass
S—A7		S—Q53		2NT	Pass	4S	Pass
H—1075		H—KJ642		Pass	Pass		
D—A98	South	D—107532					
C—Q9753	S—K102	C—void					
	H—A83						
	D—Q6						
	C—AK1064						

Trick 1: H10, Q, K, A.

Trick 2: D6, 8, J, 2.

Trick 3: S4, 5, 10, A.

Trick 4: H7, 9, J, 3.

Trick 5: D3, Q, A, 4.

Trick 6: D9, K, 5, C4.

Finding himself in dummy, declarer picked up the trumps and claimed. Even after the unfortunate opening lead, the defenders had several chances. Who gets the charge for missing them?

Marshall Miles: "East did nothing wrong. West's error was not obvious but he should have drawn an inference that East would have returned a club at the fifth trick if he could. Surely he would have with a small singleton, probably with two or three small. The only time he would not is with the king of clubs. However, the play at tricks two and three indicates that East has the queen of spades and he could not have the king of clubs on the bidding.

"Also, West could see the possible danger. He can't tell who has the eight of hearts, and if it is South, West's 'natural' club winner will go away."

Steve Evans: "West was a fool on this hand. He made three major errors and it took all three to allow the hand to be made. His opening lead was atrocious. I would choose to lead a club and wouldn't criticize a low heart, but the 10 is misleading and often costs a trick (as it did here). West's other obvious error was at trick 6. He should ask himself why East wouldn't lead a club. East can't have any points in clubs, so why would he lead a diamond up to dummy's king instead of a club? The answer is that he doesn't have any clubs, so that is what West should lead at trick 6. West's third error was at trick 4 and was more subtle than the other two. West should ask how the defense will beat this contract when declarer has almost all of the unknown high cards. On the play, East is likely to have the spade queen and West must hope he has the heart jack. The only correct play for West is the club queen. Not only will this work on the actual hand (any club does), but it will also work when East has a club singleton. Declarer will have no quick entry to dummy to take the trump finesse and West will get in with the diamond ace to give partner a ruff. On the actual hand, the defense will get two ruffs and beat the contract two."

The panel is certainly correct in charging West. His relaxed defense, based on the expectation of collecting one trick in each suit, could never have been optimal. When he won the spade ace, West knew declarer had three spades (if he had four, the defense was probably finished) and either two or four diamonds—East's deuce was certainly a count card. If declarer had four diamonds, then with the suit splitting, dummy's losing club would go on the long diamond. If declarer had five clubs and three hearts to go with his three spades and two diamonds (the actual case), then a club return was called for. It is only when declarer's pattern is 3-4-2-4, and his hearts are all small, that West's defense will work. But in that case, as Steve has correctly pointed out, the club queen will beat the hand because East will have a singleton.

But as is so often the case, a more thoughtful play by the other defender could have saved the day. When East won the heart jack, he knew he wanted a club ruff. But would partner know? The way to tell him was not to return a diamond, but to return a heart. East knew that declarer had the good eight of hearts tucked away and that a club could be pitched on it. Had he let West in on the news, even the sleepest of partners would have snatched the diamond ace and played a club. It would have been obvious that there was no other chance for the defense.

The danger in the heart return is that partner has led a doubleton. This would mean that declarer had four hearts, and so could ruff the small one in dummy, finesse in trumps and then later use the eight of hearts for a pitch. But West almost surely had to have three hearts, not two. He could have, from East's vantage point, at most two spades and three diamonds. If he had only two hearts, then he would have at least six clubs. With a six-card suit and the reasonable hand he was known to have, West would probably have risked a bid over 1NT. East should have found the winning play.