

David J. Weiss

	North		
	S: J8		
West	H: K975		East
S: A92	D: 432		S: 64
H: 10	C: KJ53		H: AJ862
D: AQJ7			D: K86
C: 108742			C: Q96
	South		
	S: KQ10753		
	H: Q43		
	D: 1095		
	C: A		

Both vulnerable, IMP scoring:

South	West	North	East
2S	P	P	P

Trick 1: H 10, 5, 6, Q

Trick 2: S K, A, 8, 4

Trick 3: C 4, 5, Q, A

Declarer now crossed to the spade jack, pitched two diamonds on the high clubs, and thus made an overtrick. Who gets the charge?

Steve Evans: "Both players made serious errors on this hand. The first was East's. The heart 10 must be from a singleton or doubleton. In the first case, grabbing the ace and returning the heart 8 is bound to work well. Even if the lead was from a doubleton, the play won't cost because declarer can't pitch a loser on the heart king without playing trumps first. However, West could still have set the hand in a number of ways. For once, there was no rush to snatch the trump ace since two ruffs are hardly possible. Also, if East has the heart AJ, as seems likely from the play to the first trick, West doesn't need any ruffs. So a duck of the first spade will defeat the contract. Finally, West could simply return a passive spade instead of the dangerous club. The defense has nothing pressing to do, and West can tell that any finesses declarer will take are doomed to fail."

Marty Shallon: "West gets the charge. He should know the heart distribution. The play at trick one suggests that East began with AJxx or AJxxx in hearts; he would not have ducked with 6 hearts or without the jack. The bidding places declarer with no more than 3 hearts, and so, Qxx must reside in the South seat. This means that declarer is likely to have exactly three major suit losers, and 4 minor suit cards.

At trick 3, then, West should return a trump. This takes away the entry to dummy, and at least three of the minor suit cards must be losers unless declarer began with a club holding of Ax, Axx, or Qxx. In the first two of these cases, the contract can never be defeated. In the third case, East would have defended differently by winning the heart ace at trick one and then cashing his singleton ace of clubs."

Since East had only one crucial play to make, in order to charge him, we must examine it. On the actual hand, his duck should not have cost. However, if South held KQxxxx, Qxx, xx, Ax, then taking the heart ace and going for the ruffs provides the only means to a plus. On the other hand, declarer could have held AKxxxx, Qx, xx, xxx. Then grabbing the first trick allows declarer to make an unmakeable contract with a correct (and easy) guess in the club suit. These considerations argue that East had a guess, and on balance, I think he was right, since it is only when declarer has a super-maximum that his play hurts. West, on the other hand, had two chances. Taking the spade ace immediately seems to me an atrocious play. It never gains in comparison to taking the second spade. Returning the club is also foolish. Presumably, he hoped for AQ doubleton in his partner's hand, but deeper reflection should have revealed that even the magic holding would not lead to any extra undertricks. West, who was playing in a world championship, defended in his sleep.