

Charge Account

by David J. Weiss

West	North	East
S—K964	S—QJ	S—853
H—J83	H—9764	H—A
D—10	D—AKQJ97	D—6542
C—AKJ64	C—2	C—Q10875
	South	
	S—A1072	
	H—KQ1052	
	D—83	
	C—93	

E—W vulnerable, IMPs

West	North	East	South
1C	1D	3C	3H
4C	4H	5C	Pass
Pass	5D	Pass	5H
Pass	Pass	Pass	

TRICK 1: CK, 2, 5 3

TRICK 2: S4, J, 3, 2

Declarer now ruffed a club in dummy, led a trump and soon claimed. Who gets the charge?

Marshall Miles: "East is at fault. The five of clubs should mean that he can stand the obvious shift, which is spades. He should play the eight of clubs to discourage that obvious shift and West would have had no problem in finding the diamond switch. Some players play suit preference in a situation such as this, where it is rather obvious that continuing the suit won't establish any tricks. My tendency is to encourage a continuation when a shift to the most likely suit could be disastrous. It simply warns partner that, from my point of view, a passive defense is called for."

Steve Evans: "This hand was one which illustrates a lack of trust in partner. When West leads the high club, East, looking at solid diamonds in the dummy, would throw the club queen (his highest club) to demand a spade shift. Since East played a low club, he can't have the spade ace. Therefore, West should play a diamond, hoping his partner has the heart ace. The spade switch is right only if West cannot rely on partner to signal properly. By the way, the West hand is a reasonable one for an opening AK underlead. If East held the club queen (likely, given the auction), a spade return would beat the hand whenever South held the spade ace and East had either a trump honor or a diamond trick."

Our discussion this month contains two important lessons: (1) Discussions about basic signals are a must, even in a partnership consisting of two experts; (2) If you are declaring and dummy holds Qx opposite your singleton in the suit led, be sure to put up the queen if Steve was on your left.

Obviously, the panelists have divergent views about the proper signal to give with the East hand, as did the world-class players who had the disaster at the table. East knows that West will be shifting to spades unless some-

thing dramatic stops him. Marshall's argument is that encouraging the club continuation, when such a continuation is patently impossible, will send the crucial message that the obvious switch is wrong. Steve's view is that since a continuation is impossible, and both partners should know it, East's card specifically carries suit-preference information.

Both methods are playable, so long as the partners are in agreement. My view is that Steve's approach has somewhat wider utility. The difficulty in signalling creeps in when a continuation of the suit led is plausible, even though there is a singleton in dummy. Some card ought to suggest that East really wants a continuation. Thus, in the situation when the auction marks East with many cards in the suit, it is sensible to use one card to mean continue and two others to request specific shifts. Here the club queen or ten, whichever is East's highest, would promise a spade honor. The club five tells West not to hope for help in spades, and so West must try for something else. This method shows to advantage when West knows a shift is necessary, but does not know which shift to make.

Marshall's attitude method works well enough in the present case, where both partners can tell that a particular shift is highly likely; but on many hands it is unclear. I don't think it pays to try to vary signalling concepts depending on the sight of dummy; a card which asks for a continuation should always ask for a continuation. But it is possible to state the method in the form of a playable rule: When dummy makes it clear that a particular switch is likely, asking for a continuation is a way of saying, "Don't make that obvious switch, try the other suit."