

CHARGE ACCOUNT . . . By David Weiss

	North		Neither vulnerable, matchpoints:			
	S—A982					
	H—A73					
West	D—A94	East	West	North	East	South
S—K63	C—973	S—J104	Pass	Pass	Pass	1C
H—J1094		H—K865	Pass	1S	Pass	1NT
D—J1072	South	D—Q83	Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT
C—65	S—Q75	C—KJ8	Pass	Pass	Pass	
	H—Q2					
	D—K65					
	C—AQ1042					

- Trick 1: HJ, 3, 6, Q.
- Trick 2: D5, 7, A, 3.
- Trick 3: C3, 8, Q, 6.
- Trick 4: S5, 3, A, 4.
- Trick 5: C9, K, A, 5.

- Trick 6: C2, DJ, C7, J.
- Trick 7: H5, 2, 9, A.
- Trick 8: D4, 8, K, 2.
- Trick 9: C10, D10, D9, S10.
- Trick 10: C4, SK, H7, SJ.

Declarer now cashed all of the spades to make 6. While South's bidding and play seemed less than optimal, the defenders conspired to give him a most impressive result. Who gets the charge?

Marshall Miles: "Because South played the hand so illogically, it was hard for the defenders to tell what was going on. Both defenders defended badly. East made more errors, while West made the single most incomprehensible play.

"To start with, East should not duck the opening lead. East could tell that his honors were unfavorably located (KJx of clubs in front of South's suit, and if declarer had KQ doubleton of spades, he could take four spade tricks), and it is unlikely that he could eventually get an extra heart trick. It would be more logical to win the opening lead and attempt to develop tricks elsewhere. A diamond return is the percentage play; but a low spade return, playing declarer for Qx, would be a possibility.

"Then declarer played strangely. Why didn't he finesse the ten of clubs rather than the queen? After finessing the queen, why didn't he lead low to the nine rather than weakening himself with a spade lead?

"At the ninth trick, East should have discarded the jack of spades rather than the ten, as discarding the ten denied the jack. But that didn't excuse West's discard on the next trick. It couldn't possibly gain to throw away the high spade and to keep a low one instead."

Steve Evans: "East gets the majority of the blame because he did absolutely nothing to help partner. I think East made a clear error at trick one by not playing the king. All the duck tends to do is to confuse partner. At trick 9, East had an easy play to help partner—throw the heart king. He blew that chance, also. West was mesmerized by the heart suit and should have realized that declarer couldn't have the Kx of hearts left. If he did, he would have left himself without a spade stop after trick 4. West certainly merits some of the blame, but East gets the majority since he made the hand so mysterious."

Deals on which everyone but dummy does something dumb are hard to analyze. We can achieve understanding by looking at how the various errors cost. After the opening lead, declarer was entitled to ten tricks. He held himself to nine by bollixing up the club suit. As the panelists have observed, several of the defenders' early plays were peculiar and uninformative; but none cost materially until West threw the spade king. Had West only kept that card, his side would have taken the last three tricks. North would have been asking his partner why he took one less trick than the other declarers.

Apparently, West thought that South had the king and six of hearts remaining, so that his partner's echo was a count maneuver. West kept the small spade, relying on East to have the queen, in order to avoid being endplayed. This was silly from a psychological perspective, as South could scarcely risk not cashing the heart king lest East win the spade trick and claim. At least West was thinking, although his thoughts were paranoid. But if he had just looked at the spot cards, West could have avoided this embarrassing unblock. South has played five clubs and two diamonds. If he had four hearts as well, then he could have at most two spades. That would imply East had at least four spades.

Why then was the spade ten pitched? East couldn't have QJ104, or he would have thrown the queen, rather than the ten. Nor could he have Q10x4, or he would have thrown the remaining spot card rather than the 10. This argument shows that South could not have had four hearts, and so West could not be end-played. He might as well throw the spade six and subsequently collect his top.
