

CHARGE ACCOUNT

by David J. Weiss

	North		Both vulnerable, IMP scoring.			
	S—KQJ764					
	H—952		South	West	North	East
West	D—8	East	4NT*	Pass	5C	Dbl.
S—92	C—AJ7	S—A53	5D	Pass	Pass	Dbl.
H—KQ104		H—AJ873	Pass	Pass	Pass	
D—J7	South	D—43	4NT* = pre-empt in unspecified minor			
C—108532	S—108	C—KQ4				
	H—6					
	D—AKQ109652					
	C—96					

Trick 1: HK, 2, 3, 6.

Trick 2: H4, 5, A, D2

With the club ace still in dummy, declarer easily took the necessary tricks, conceding only the spade ace. Who gets the charge?

Marshall Miles: "West gets the charge. My first thought was that East shared the blame since he could overtake the first trick and shift to the king of clubs. But this would be disastrous if West had led from Kx of hearts. It could also throw away a trick for no good reason if declarer should hold —, xx, AKQxxxx, 10xx, for example.

"If East had held four hearts, there would have been a chance for a misunderstanding. East might show distribution and West would interpret it as an attitude signal or vice versa. But when both signals coincide (and the three either shows an odd number of hearts or asks for a shift), East shouldn't risk throwing away a trick to prevent West from doing something foolish. If West shifts, it is obvious that he should shift to a club."

Steve Evans: "East gets the majority of the charge on this hand, although West certainly was not without blame. East knew what to do at trick 1, either the defense needed two hearts and one spade or it needed one trick in each side suit. By trying to cash two hearts, the defense would prevail only if the first defense was required. However, if the second defense was needed, clubs must be led at trick 2. I'm sure that East thought that playing the heart 3 at trick 1 was good enough to ensure a club shift, and it should have been. However, that was lazy defense. East knew that the club shift was correct and should have led the club king at trick 2 after overtaking the heart at trick 1. His partner would give count in the club suit and after getting in with the spade ace, he would know whether to cash the heart or the club.

"West certainly deserves some of the charge. His defense catered to declarer having the spade ace and three hearts, which is impossible on the bidding. It was much more likely that a club shift was required. In fact, if declarer had the club queen, the only winning defense would be for East to duck the first heart and for West to shift to a club. On this deal it was quite easy for either defender to defeat the contract but East gets more of the blame because he was looking at the setting tricks and should have known the best way of cashing them."

The seeds of this disaster were sown during the auction. Apparently West thought East's first double showed a club suit, and so a club shift could not gain and might allow a critical sluff. East, on the other hand, had lead direction in mind, with the added fillip that if N-S were going to play 5C, they had to do so doubled. Even though our defenders were a world class pair, they can hardly be subject to criticism for not having discussed this particular auction. However, West's own club length suggests that the length hypothesis he clung to was a doubtful one since his partner could not have had more than KQxxx.

The auction directly affected the card play. East did not overtake the heart because he "knew" a club switch would be forthcoming, while West was just never going to risk playing a club. Neither defender catered to the possibility that partner misunderstood the bidding.

To assign the blame appropriately, let us examine the defensive prospects from each player's perspective. West surely knew that partner's heart 3 suggested a shift and it was clear which suit was desired. Furthermore, the shift would be necessary if East held Kx or Kxx of clubs whenever declarer had a singleton heart. Yet the club play was not without risk. What if declarer had 3-2-8-0 pattern with solid diamonds? If that pattern existed, would East be signalling for a club switch? Yes, because from East's point of view the club play would be needed if declarer's pattern were 1-2-7-3; only a early club switch puts the declarer down two instead of one. Even worse, if declarer were 1-1-8-3 or 2-1-8-2, a heart continuation would allow the contract to be made. So East would be asking for a club shift even when it would be right for West to continue hearts. Therefore, West's defense was not idiotic, even though it was uninspired.

What about East's problem? East knew that overtaking the heart to shift to a club was not likely to cost the contract, although it might give away an extra undertrick. Holding only three clubs, he did not have to give much concern to the 3-2-8-0 pattern which would make that line of defense disastrous. The club shift would simplify the defense, leading to a sure set unless East would not be able to get the count in either black suit. Even then he might guess correctly. Does East have to worry that partner has led a doubleton king? Aside from the obvious consideration that this would be unlikely, it is inconsistent with East's understanding of his own bidding. Surely his partner would not choose a bizarre lead when he had himself indicated that a club lead would be safe. East's defense was not idiotic, since a 300 point undertrick would have come about if his partner had switched to a club on a deal on which declarer had two hearts and three clubs (even on such a deal, if declarer had a spade void and the eight of diamonds were an entry, the defense would be helpless). But East was greedy in a situation where greed was unlikely to pay off, and he deservedly paid a heavy price.