

Charge Account

by David J. Weiss

North

S—K852

H—A764

D—KQ3

C—53

South

S—J97

H—KJ10532

D—104

C—J2

Neither vulnerable, IMP scoring

North East South West

2D* Pass 4H Pass

Pass Pass

*4-4 in majors, 12-16 HCP

West

S—Q103

H—9

D—A8652

C—A1084

East

S—A64

H—Q8

D—J97

C—KQ976

Trick 1: H9, 4, 8, 10.

Trick 2: D4, 2, K, 7.

Trick 3: H6, Q, K, D5.

Trick 4: D10, A, 3, 9.

Trick 5: SQ, K, A, 7.

Trick 6: S4, J, 3, 2.

Declarer now went to dummy in trumps, pitched a spade on the diamond queen, and ruffed a spade. Dummy's last trump was an entry to cash the thirteenth spade. Eight tricks had become ten! Who gets the charge?

Marshall Miles: "West deserves 100% of the blame. It was right for West to return a spade (but not the queen) at trick 5, since he needed to find East with the ace to set the hand, but he did not need East to have the ace-jack. From West's point of view, East could have any of the following holdings in spades and clubs, allowing the hand to be set:

- | | |
|---------------|------------|
| 1) S—AJx | C—any |
| 2) S—Ax(xx) | C—Kx(xx..) |
| 3) S—Ax(xx..) | C—QJ(xx..) |
| 4) S—Ax(xx..) | C—Qx(xx..) |

If declarer misguesses. West should have led the three of spades, guaranteeing a high honor. If East had the ace-jack of spades, he would win with the jack and return a club. No defensive tricks would be lost. If East had the ace of spades without the jack, he would win the ace and return a club. Again, no defensive tricks would be lost.

East might wonder why West led a singleton trump with QJ10 or QJ9 of spades, but there was no reason to distrust the lead. East should have returned the six instead of the four of spades. The spot he led could have cost a trick if West, with QJ10x or QJ9x, had attempted to cash the third round. East was correct to return a spade since if declarer had held 2-6-2-3 with the club ace (a more logical hand for the bidding), the only defense was to cash the defense's spade trick and wait for the club."

Steve Evans: "The defense through the first four tricks was fine, but then both defenders erred. West's spade lead was correct but the queen was a stupid error. If West didn't have the club ace for an entry, he would need to play East for the AJ of spades. Since West can get back in, he should lead the spade 3. If East has AJ of spades, he can win and lead a club back to West for another spade through. In the actual case, East would win the spade ace and then the defense would cash two clubs. Another reason for not leading the queen is that declarer may misguess if a low one is led.

"East, upon winning the spade ace, should have asked himself why his partner had led a singleton trump. The reason could only be that he had no attractive lead, which would indicate that West held the club ace. West gets the majority of the blame because his crucial play was simply wrong, whereas East's error was inferential."

This deal serves as a shining example of why one should never concede even the most hopeless of contracts. The panel has correctly identified the key error. West's overly heroic spade queen is the sort of play which could have been necessary on some hands, but not on the one he held. Sometimes it is important to lead the queen from air; for example, if declarer held S—10xx, H—KJxxxx, D—xx, C—AQ, West would have to lead the queen from Q9x to give declarer an immediate guess. If declarer were missing the ten, the queen would equally be needed to allow East to score three tricks in the suit.

But holding the club ace himself, West knew that three tricks in the spade suit were not needed to set the contract. He had to play his partner for the spade ace (otherwise declarer would have six heart tricks, two diamond tricks and two spade tricks), but he did not need to play him for the spade jack. East could have saved his side by following Steve's logic concerning the opening lead, but how was he to know the spade queen was a blunder? From East's point of view, a poor opening lead is more likely than a middle-of-hand idiocy. If East had held super spades, he would have played the diamond jack at trick 4, so West's choice of which spade to lead had to be predicated on his own hand. This charge is all West's.