

CHARGE ACCOUNT . . . By David Weiss

North		N-S vulnerable, IMP scoring			
West	S-95	South	West	North	East
S-J6	H-A54	Pass	1H	Pass	Pass
H-KQ10962	D-AJ953	1S	Pass	2S(?)	Pass
D-KQ104	C-K96	Pass	Pass		
C-A	East	Trick 1:	HK, A, 8, 7.		
	S-87432	Trick 2:	DA, 8, 2, 4.		
	H-8	Trick 3:	D3, 6, 7, 10.		
	D-86	Trick 4:	CA, 6, 4, 2.		
	C-Q8754	Trick 5:	HQ, 4, C5, H4.		
		Trick 6:	H2, 5, S2, J.		
		Trick 7:	S3, A, 6, 5.		

Declarer now played trumps from the top, then led a club to the king. Another round of clubs from the dummy produced an eighth trick. Who gets the charge for allowing this silly contract to come home?

Steve Evans: "East clearly didn't understand how to defend on this hand. With 5 trumps, he should encourage his partner with the club 8 at trick 4. When his partner switches back to hearts at trick 5, he must have no more clubs. Therefore, he must be 2-6-4-1; because if he were 1-7-4-1, he would still be bidding (why he wasn't on this hand is beyond me anyway). If partner is 2-6-4-1, the defense is obvious; ruff partner's heart, give him a club ruff; ruff the next heart and give partner another club ruff. This beats the hand with no problem and declarer can do nothing about it."

Marshall Miles: "I don't think that either East or West did anything bad on defense. Part of the problem was caused by West's cowardly bidding. All he needs to find his partner with is two red jacks to make three hearts, and he couldn't even risk a two-heart bid. That made it hard for East to visualize West's distribution. Incidentally, at trick seven it was too late for West to set the hand. If he had given his partner a club ruff, declarer would play one high trump, picking up the jack, and could not be prevented from ruffing a club in the dummy. So if the hand were to be set, East had to trump the queen of hearts at trick five (or West had to lead a low heart, asking East to ruff).

"It is unreasonable to expect West to lead a low heart, playing his partner for the singleton eight. Should East know that West had the singleton ace of clubs as a result of its being played at trick 4? I don't think so. For one thing, with ten red cards, West would probably bid over one spade. So I don't blame either partner for the defense, even though it wasn't double dummy."

Experts certainly are a prejudiced lot. Our panelists castigate West for failing to bid over one spade and, I admit, I agree with them. Yet East-West cannot make eight tricks and they were in a position to obtain a plus score against two spades. I don't know if North would have bid over West's action, so why don't we simply admit that West made a "well-judged" pass? The auction should not have affected the defense.

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The defense failed because East was napping. When declarer played ace and a diamond at tricks two and three, East should have been perplexed. Why were trumps not being drawn? Why didn't declarer try to score five spades (spurning a possible finesse in trumps because of the bidding), two red aces, and the club king? Even if declarer was fishing around for overtricks, it would seem natural to start the trumps. The only logical alternative is that he cannot afford to play trumps because he has balanced on a four-card suit. That is scarcely bizarre.

Next East should have thought about the diamond plays. It was clear that West had king-queen-ten-x. With the expected 2-5-4-2 pattern, why would West cash the club ace? True, the actual pattern is not consistent with most people's idea of sensible bidding; but here West, looking at the dummy, cashed the club ace. Bidding is personal, strongly subjective, but defense is subject to rational analysis. East should have ruffed the heart queen.

West also could have beaten the hand, and the heroic (and very risky) play of leading a low heart after cashing the club ace was not needed. The defense could have prevailed if they had simply cashed the diamond queen at trick 4. The difficulty in finding this winning path is that it is seldom right to do what declarer seems to be doing. West's fear is that declarer, with a trump holding such as AK (Q?) xx, is trying to single home his low trumps in case spades split badly. West could not know that declarer was simply punting, just hoping for something good to happen. Cashing the club ace obtains a set on most hands where a set is available, and it should have sufficed here. East gets the charge because East was in a position to know what was going on.