

		North		
		S: Q93		
		H: J10		
		D: Q109852	East	
West		C: K8	S: J52	
S: A1074			H: A52	
H: KQ94			D: 63	
D: 7	South		C: Q10643	
C: J972	S: K86			
	H: 8763			
	D: AKJ4			
	C: A5			

Both vulnerable, IMP scoring

South	West	North	East	
1NT*	Pass	3NT	Pass	*15-17
Pass	Pass			

Trick 1: H K, 10, 5, 3

Trick 2: H Q, J, A, 6

With a heart trick now established, declarer easily made his contract. Who gets the charge?

Marshall Miles: "It is entirely East's fault. If West had no entry, he would lead a small heart at trick two. Only because he has a quick entry can he 'play safe' in hearts (after all, South could be concealing the deuce)."

Steve Evans: "This hand is one of those that requires complete understanding of partnership carding rules (usually these are never discussed). Whether or not one agrees with the HK lead, it seems like a reasonable choice; and after dummy hit, I'm sure West was pleased with his choice. At the second trick, West can play partner for A52, 8752, or 875 (in the latter two cases, the 6 could replace the 7). Given this understanding, West should lead the HQ to trick 2. East in turn should play the ace, since if West has KQ97 or KQxxx, the unblock is necessary.

Therefore, East played correctly, while West had a guess and went wrong. If the spots were a little different with, for example, East playing the 7, then West should lead low since East would not play the 7 from 8752."

As a moderator, I enjoy seeing the panelists disagree. I am going to add fuel

who erred, and the error was that he paid too much attention to the heart spots and not enough to the hand as a whole. Let us grant that the heart 5 was ambiguous. How can West hope to beat the contract given that his partner has 5-7 points? Consider the possibilities when partner does not have the heart ace. Can East have the KJ of spades? No, because declarer would snatch the heart and cash at least nine tricks in the other suits. How about AQxx(x) of clubs? This is a live possibility, because declarer would duck the heart before knocking out the spade ace. The early heart duck, hoping that West cannot find the killing shift, would be a sensible play because later the club switch would be obvious; South's best shot would be to find East with the spade ace and only a doubleton heart. Unfortunately, West can hardly afford to play East for the magic club holding, since declarer could easily have nine tricks in the minors.

No, West must play his partner for a red ace. If it is the diamond ace, obviously West's play at trick two should be a high heart. But the hand will be set only when East has four hearts; otherwise, South's fourth heart will be a stopper, and the defense will take two hearts, one diamond and one spade. Given the signaling methods proposed by Steve, West indeed has a guess, since partner could encourage with four small hearts. But is this a sensible signal? I think not; third-hand should encourage only with a relevant high card (here, the ace or nine), or with sufficient length that he can tell it's right for partner to bang down honors. With no auction to guide, a four-card holding could not be enough for a positive signal.

All of this analysis tells us that West's best shot is to play a low heart at trick two. This caters to A5 as well as to the actual holding, and beats the contract when it is most likely to be beatable. East's play was probably correct, since his partner's high heart continuation was justified only if the West holding were at least as good as KQ97(x).