

CHARGE ACCOUNT

by
David J. Weiss

	North	
	S-3	
West	H-QJ9	East
S-KJ764	D-K10642	S-Q1082
H-A1073	C-A832	H-654
D-QJ5		D-73
C-9	South	C-Q1054
	S-A95	
	H-K82	
	D-A98	
	C-KJ76	

IMP scoring, N-S vulnerable.

The auction:

East	South	West	North
P	1C	Dbl	1D
P	1NT	P	3C
P	3NT	P	P
P			

The play:

- Trick: 1 — Spade 4, 3, Q, A.
2 — Diamond A, 5, 2, 3.
3 — Diamond 9, J, K, 7.
4 — Diamond 4, heart 4, diamond 8, diamond Q.
5 — Spade K, club 2, spade 10, spade 5.
6 — Spade 6, club 3, spade 8, spade 9(!).

Declarer now took the club finesse and made 3NT. E-W were playing Journalist-style leads, in which the lowest card (not 4th-best) is led from a good suit. Well?

The Charges:

The panel gleefully attacked the intelligence of our poor defenders. I have omitted these remarks in favor of their useful technical comments. Incidentally, East and West were not beginners, in fact, they were a pair of Italians named Benito and Arturo . . .

Steve Evans: "I blame East. As West I would play the same way. When partner plays the S10, I would expect he has S9 or S9x left. In either case underleading the SJ is the indicated move. From East's point of view, he should know he is never going to get on lead, so he should play the S10 to the first trick. This will make it clear to West that East holds the queen.

At trick 5, East should play the 8, not the 10. The 8 will suffice for unblocking purposes, and it's conceivable West could have KJ74, in which case playing the 10 blows a trick. The only reason West would be wrong to lead a low spade is that he's playing South for 4 spades, whether this is possible depends on declarer's bidding style."

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Paul Maier: "It is helpful to agree that the play of the J calls for the 10 (at trick 5). If East knew this, then he must have at least 4 spades to drop the 10 when not asked to (since only then would it not blow a trick). Without this logical convention East might have "built a fence" around the situation and played the 8 at trick 5. On a higher level, the S2 could have been played at trick 5 had it been preceded by the D7, D3, H6 at trick 2, 3, 4; all of these would have been suit preference cards screaming for spades. When the S2 appears at trick 5 and partner chose to scream for spades the situation should be crystal clear in any language! Another method of West asking East to unblock would be to play his high diamonds in the order Q, then J at tricks 3 and 4, then follow with the spade K and J. This sort of play has been discussed in the Bridge World by Journalist, who calls it "alarm clock" (to wake partner). Also better than what occurred would be for East to play the club Q at trick 4."

Marty Shallon: "Clearly the S10 was not the optimal play at trick 5. This leaves the 8 and 2 as options. The 8 would almost certainly show Q82, so this leaves the S2. While not necessarily showing the ten, this play does show 4 spades and thereby allows partner a chance to solve the problem.

There is a better method to handle situations such as this. At trick 2, East should play the D7. This play at trick 2 of a hand does not show count in diamonds; but instead, shows the highest honor missing in spades.

The most common example of this method is when West holds A10xxx. He leads low and finds xx in dummy. Partner plays the J and declarer wins the K. Who has the Q? If East plays low to the suit led by declarer at trick 2, then he does not have the Q; and when West wins the lead he must try to put partner in. If East plays high to the suit led by declarer at trick 2, then he has the Q and then defense is clearly mapped.

On the given hand, West must hold the SK because of the lead of the 4. East does not hold the SJ because of his play of the SQ. Therefore, the play of the diamond 7 at trick 2 must show the S10. Knowing this, West can safely lead the S6 at trick 5. Note that this may be the only way to beat the contract if East started with Q10x of spades."

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The panel's comments this month are very instructive. Cashing solid suits is probably the most difficult recurring defensive problem, and it is certainly the most embarrassing when blown. As the comments emphasize, solutions entirely within the critical suit are obscure. Paul's repeated suit-preferences, and Marty's special trick 2 signal (borrowed from Dorothy Hayden's Bols Bridge Tip) are intelligent ways to communicate outside the suit led.

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On the actual hand, I think the panel did not give West his due. Holding the heart ace, he need have no fear of blocking the spade suit, and so should not have risked underleading the J at trick 6. However, since defenders do not always have the luxury of an extra ace, it is extremely important for partnerships to solve the theoretical and practical problem for cashing out their suit.