

North

S—72
 H—A654
 D—J84
 C—K743

East

S—J109
 H—J103
 D—AQ1063
 C—Q10

West

S—Q
 H—KQ87
 D—K52
 C—98652

South

S—AK86543
 H—92
 D—97
 C—AJ

Both vulnerable, IMP scoring

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1S
Dbl.	Pass	2D	2S
Pass	Pass	3D	3S
Pass	-4S	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Trick 1: D2, 4, A, 7

Trick 2: Hj, 2, 8, A

Trick 3: S2, 9, A, Q

Trick 4: SK, C2, S7, S10

Trick 5: S3, D5, D8, SJ

Trick 6: H3, 9, Q, 4

Trick 7: HK, 6, 10, S4

When declarer ran off his trumps, West was squeezed in front of dummy's last heart and the club 4. Who gets the charge for West's incorrect cashout?

Marshall Miles: "West was 80% at fault. His discard of a club marked him with five. The question was whether he had 1-4-3-5 or 1-3-4-5 distribution. With no other clues, East should play him for four hearts since the double was made without many high cards. But East had another clue—a misleading one. At trick five, why didn't West discard his remaining heart spot instead of a diamond? If he did so, East would cash the queen of diamonds and lead a heart.

"The way I play, East should have returned the ten of hearts instead of the three; and if West had started with KQ8 (as he should have), he couldn't go wrong. But even if East had let the ten, West might still overtake and try to cash the king.

"East's 20% blame is for not returning a diamond, even though he thought his partner had four. If South were to ruff, he couldn't squeeze West since West doesn't need to keep both heart honors."

Steve Evans: "Cashout situations like this hand always seem to create more problems than they should. The opening lead and return seem pretty straightforward. Then when East gets on lead at trick 5, he must decide what order to cash tricks. His partner must be 1-4-3-5 or 1-3-4-5 because of the club discard. If the partnership plays 3rd and 5th leads (which I think are clearly best), East knows to lead a diamond so that partner can cash a heart. On the actual hand, East can still lead a diamond safely. Even if South ruffs it, he can't make 4 unless he has the heart queen. It doesn't matter if South also has the heart 9 because the hand is over and if partner had the 9 he would have signalled with it instead of with the 8.

“West is hardly blameless, though. When he won the heart queen at trick 6, what did he think his partner originally held in that suit? Looking at that dummy, East would be out of his mind to return a heart from J3 when a diamond or trump is safe. It's not as though dummy had a running club suit. So West should play his partner for the heart 10 and cash the diamond king.”

As the panel has observed, both defenders could have, and should have, done better. Each of them seems to have taken little notice of the auction. West could have cashed the diamond king routinely at trick 7, knowing that declarer had another diamond as East had opened a weak-2 bid. (I have been informed, as the panelists have not, that weak-2 bids in diamonds were available in the partnership.) And similarly, East could have returned a diamond at trick 6, knowing it would cash, because his partner, who bid with few high cards while vulnerable and facing a passed hand, must have a 1-4-3-5 pattern as Marshall argued.

Why did East return the heart 3 rather than the 10 at the crucial juncture? Apparently he thought he needed to save the 10, presumably to protect against the threat of a squeeze. He must have missed the inference about West's pattern and played his partner for a hand such as Q, K987, Kxxx, Jxxx; with this hand West erred in pitching a club rather than a diamond, but the error would not be fatal. East's plan was to let his partner win a heart trick and then exit with a diamond which would be ruffed. No squeeze would eventuate because West could guard clubs while East guarded hearts with his ten. The flaw in this reasoning is that returning a diamond rather than either the 10 or 3 of hearts will be superior. If declarer follows to the second diamond, he will be set a moment later, whereas if he ruffs the second diamond, no squeeze is ready to operate yet because the count has not been rectified.