

Charge Account

by David J. Weiss

	North				E-W vulnerable, match points		
	S—AK74						
	H—J53						
	D—A984						
West	C—72	East		North	East	South	West
S—J1093		S—Q865		1D	Pass	1H	Pass
H—K74	South	H—A109		1S	Pass	1NT	Pass
D—Q52	S—2	D—KJ7		Pass	Pass		
C—A106	H—Q862	C—KJ3					
	D—1063						
	C—Q9854						

Trick 1: SJ, A, 6, 2.
Trick 2: D4, K, 6, 2.
Trick 3: CJ, 5, 6, 2.
Trick 4: C3, 9, A, 7.

Trick 5: C10, S4, CK, C8.
Trick 6: H10, 2, K, 3.
Trick 7: H7, J, A, 6.

The defense had managed to set up declarer's club suit and heart suit! Who gets the charge?

Marshall Miles: "East is 85% at fault. Why didn't he return a spade at trick three? There was a remote chance that West had led the jack of spades from Jx, but this risk was very small compared to the risk of shifting to the jack of clubs. Declarer might have had Q109x or Q109xx of clubs and that would have worked out even worse (if possible) than it did. Surely West would continue clubs upon winning with the ace. On the actual hand, West probably thought East had KQJx of clubs when South didn't cover the jack.

At the sixth trick, East was consistent in still being afraid to lead a spade. West probably should have shifted to spades upon winning the king of hearts. East could not have AQ109 of hearts since with that holding he would lead the queen. Of course it was hard for West to believe that East wouldn't return a spade at trick three or trick six any time he had the queen of spades, regardless of length. And, it was hard for both defenders to realize that South had so little for his bidding."

Steve Evans: "The reasoning behind the defensive plays on this hand is somewhat hard to comprehend, especially since the correct suit was opened. East made what I think are errors at tricks 2 and 6. In both cases, it is hard to understand why he didn't just return a spade. Partner is marked with at least J10x of spades, which seems like a good reason to play the suit. The club shift at trick 3 could have been very costly, but on this deal it shouldn't have hurt anything. Why on earth East led a heart at trick 6 is beyond me; there is clearly little reason for that play.

West, however, is far from blameless. Looking at his club holding, why did he think partner led the club jack followed by the three? It certainly is possible that his partner held KJ93, and that would be a reasonable way to play the suit. If so, West's play of the ace at trick 4 was not likely to be a success. West's return of the heart at trick 7 was also not likely to be a brilliant maneuver. Since this was declarer's suit, it isn't likely that the defense would want to play another round of the suit. East certainly gets the majority of the blame because his defense was incomprehensible. West belonged to the school that always returns what partner plays without thinking. However, as a defensive tandem, it seems that they deserve each other."

This is probably the most dreadful defense ever to appear in these pages, or on this planet. With nine tricks easily available, our stalwarts allowed the contract to make. Although this effort seems hard to believe, it was reported by an eyewitness. Perhaps the explanation is that the defenders, who were really not a pair of novices, were trying to impress dummy and the kibitzers. Garozzo tends to draw a crowd and the honor switches from East suggest a quest for applause.

If we stick to technical rather than psychological analysis, it seems clear that East is the major culprit. To get this defense right, he had only to think clearly about the spade suit. East's first two plays were correct; but at trick 3 a spade return was correct and it could have been essential if South had normal high card values. East can tell that partner has either J10x or J10xx in spades; these would be normal holdings for the lead. The other possibilities can be ruled out logically; if West had J10 tight, declarer would have ducked the lead hoping for a 3-3 split, while if West had only Jx, the correct lead in dummy's suit would be small.

East could have gotten the defense all of its tricks by returning a spade any of the times he was on lead through trick 6. Poor West had to be in the dark, wondering why partner would never return his suit. He got caught up in the headline hunting when he played the club ace. The unblock would be needed only when East had KJxxx of clubs and no entry, and why would the jack be led first from that holding? West should simply have won the club ten and continued with the spade ten. But my heart is not in castigating West, for the right plays from the East side did not require deep analysis. This should have been a relaxing deal for West, but his partner kept him out of the rocking chair.