

CHARGE ACCOUNT

by
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Even at the highest levels, bridge is a game of errors. Some errors are blunders, but others are subtle and interesting. Occasionally a partnership cannot determine where the train went off the track. When you have a defensive situation in which you think partner erred, but partner foolishly thinks you made the mistake, send it to the Bridge News for arbitration. But beware — the panel may give both of you the charge!

CHARGE ACCOUNT HAND #1

	North	
	Q6	
	J73	
West	A10964	East
K1074	A109	AJ85
A		965
Q83	South	KJ7
K7543	932	Q82
	KQ10832	
	52	
	J6	

Matchpoints, neither side vulnerable. The auction:

West North East South

West	North	East	South
1C	P	1S	3H
3S	4H	4S	P
P	5H	Dbl.	P
P	P		

The play:

- Trick 1: Spade 4, 6, J. 2.
- Trick 2: Spade A, 3, 7, Q.
- Trick 3: Club 2, 6, K, A.
- Trick 4: Heart 3, 6, K, A.
- Trick 5: Club 4, 9, Q, J.

~~Declarer now pitched a diamond on the club 10 and went down only two. How could this disaster have been averted?~~

The Charges:

All three of the panelists pointed out that after the first trick, East knows his partner's hand to be S: Kxxx H: A D: ??(?) C: K????(?). Based on West's bidding, he should have in addition to the known honors, either the DQ, the CJ, or both. But the ways in which they catered to the unknown cards differed dramatically.

Paul Maier: "The problem is trivial. West's card at trick 2 must be suit-preferential. His play of the spade 7 requested a club shift; had he instead played the 10, he would have been calling for a diamond. Since West should know from the auction that his partner has the diamond king, he should have directed the defense in that direction."

Marty Shallon: "The proper return at Trick 3 is the spade 8. When West wins the heart A, he will switch to a diamond. When East wins the diamond K he should then switch to the club 2. In this way, the defense will score all five of its tricks. This defense also works if South is 1-3 or 3-1 in diamonds and clubs."

Steve Evans: "The defense that will always work is for East to underlead the spade A so that West can return a diamond. West should return a diamond because if East doesn't have the diamond K he would cash the spade A and lead a club no matter what his holding in clubs was."

West's defense seems eminently correct. He had no choice about his plays to the first four tricks. At trick five, he had two things going for him by leading back a club; by the above reasoning East denied the diamond K by returning a club, and also South would have to be hopeless not to have played a club at Trick 4.

The entire blame lies with East in that he should return the spade 5 at trick 2. In his defense, most players would cash the spade A without thinking and then guess wrongly by leading a club. However, the worst play at the table was clearly South's heart lead to trick 4."

All of our expert defenders would have defended optimally had their partners been clones. Real-life partners are sometimes less in tune. Paul Maier, who thinks that all cards are suit-preference, had no problem, while Steve and Marty tried to anticipate the difficulty from both sides of the table. Marty's solution (note his delicate, suit-preference spade 8) seems like the least subject to misinterpretation by West, but if declarer leads a club to the nine after ruffing the third spade, the defenders will have to be careful. East should return a heart after winning the club Q in this variation, for that will force his partner to return a diamond unless he has both K and J of clubs. Perhaps, then, Steve's underlead at trick 2 is best, since West will know he has been put in to lead a diamond; why else would he be placed on lead? After winning the diamond K, East can safely return the club.