

CHARGE ACCOUNT

By David J. Weiss . . .

	North	
	S—A6	
	H—KQ97	
West	D—AQ96	East
S—QJ543	C—A104	S—K1087
H—2		H—A6
D—K832	South	D—J10
C—K96	S—92	C—QJ753
	H—J108543	
	D—754	
	C—82	

Both vulnerable, IMP scoring:

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1C*	Pass
1D*	Pass	1NT	Pass
2H	Pass	4H	Pass
Pass	Pass		

* = Precision Club

- Trick 1: SQ, A, 8, 2.
Trick 2: HK, A, 5, 2.
Trick 3: S7, 9, J, 6.
Trick 4: D2, Q, 10, 4.

With the fortunate fall of East's diamond honors, South had time to pick up trumps and lead toward the diamond nine. Which defender gets the charge for failing to establish the club trick?

Ed Davis: "East gets the charge. East knows that the hand cannot be defeated if declarer holds the king of clubs since declarer would then score four hearts, three aces, the diamond queen, the club king, and either a black suit ruff in dummy, the nine of diamonds, or an extra heart. Since the objective is to defeat the contract (IMPs), and West must hold the king of clubs to do so, East should shift to a small club at trick three. Note that a small club is necessary when declarer started with: S—x, H—J10xxx, D—xxx, C—98xx. Once East adopts a passive defense, West has no reason to start an aggressive defense."

Steve Evans: "West gets no charge on this hand. For all he knows, South could have: S—xx, H—J10xxxx, D—xx, C—Jxx, in which case a club return would give up the contract. East knew what to do, though. If declarer had the club king, he was always going to make the contract. East should return a low club at trick 3 to set up any necessary club tricks. Even a high spade at trick 3 would cost a trick if declarer had three clubs, because communication would be severed. The club queen would probably be fine except that prtne might unblock his king from Kx. So East gets the charge for not returning a low club at trick 3."

It's easy enough to see what East had in mind. By putting his partner in at trick 3, he wanted to induce a club shift from the side which would not risk a trick within the suit. Perhaps he even hoped that his partner would read suit-preference implications into the spade seven. He reasoned that if a passive defense were required, he would have cashed the spade king and exited with a trump. Therefore, West would know to try a club.

While part of this hypothesized reasoning is suspect—there can be no suit-preference attached to the normal count card in spades—the basic logic is sensible enough. The flaw is that there may well be no time to lose and East has enough information to know what assumption is necessary while his partner may not. If declarer has a six-card trump holding, East can see ten tricks for the offense once a diamond has been surrendered.

However, we must examine the case in which declarer was dealt only five hearts but was given compensation for his poor distribution in the form of the club king. In that case, would not the recommended club shift surrender the tenth trick immediately? Let us look closely at possible South distributions. If South held three spades, he would score four hearts, two clubs, one spade, two diamonds, and a spade ruff in dummy. If he held three (or more) diamonds, he would be sure to score the ace, queen, and nine of that suit for ten tricks. And if his hand were: S—92, H—J10xxx, D—xx, C—Kxxx, then his tenth trick would be a club ruff in dummy!

As there is no hand on which the defense can prevail unless West holds the club king, even if ~~he~~^{she} only has five hearts, East gets the charge for failing to find the trick 3 shift to that suit. His partner is relatively blameless, since a club play from his side risks surrendering an unmakeable contract when declarer has two diamonds and three clubs headed by the jack. The only possibility for West to save the day is for him to guess which error his partner has committed. East has not conducted an active defense, nor has he been maximally passive. The most passive course for East to follow, with S—K1087, H—Ax, D—J10x, C—Qxxx, is to cash the spade king and exit with a trump. (That passive defense would fail, though, if declarer had three diamonds rather than two.) I don't see why knowing that partner has not directed the defense should imply that a club shift from West is safe.