

# Charge Account

## by David J. Weiss

North		E-W vulnerable, IMP scoring			
	S—Q9832				
	H—75				
<b>West</b>	D—6	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>East</b>
S—76	C—AJ984	S—KJ104	Pass	Pass	1H
H—KJ3		H—AQ92	2H	Dbl.*	Pass
D—J42		D—Q108	Pass	Pass	Pass
C—107652	<b>South</b>	C—Q3			
	S—A5				
	H—10864				
	D—AK9753				
	C—K				

Trick 1: **HK**, 5, 2, 4.  
 Trick 2: **H3**, 7, **Q**, 6.  
 Trick 3: **D8**, **A**, 2, 6.  
 Trick 4: **DK**, 4, S2, D10.  
 Trick 5: D3, J, S3, **DQ**.

Trick 6: **HA**, 8, J, C4.  
 Trick 7: H9, **10**, C2, C8.  
 Trick 8: **D9**, C5, S8, S4.  
 Trick 9: **D7**, S7, C9, S10.

With West having pitched a spade, the last trump now inflicted a squeeze in the black suits against East, and so declarer's spade 5 took the fulfilling trick. Who gets the charge?

**Marshall Miles:** "West is at fault. It is unfortunate that his opening lead was not the three of hearts, although it could be right to lead the king. But leading the three of hearts at the second rick was a big mistake. A trump shift looks best. It could lose a trick if East had Axx of diamonds, in which case it would be better for East to return a low diamond. A more likely possibility is that South has ducked with Axx of hearts, in which case it might be costly not to shift to a trump. While a trump shift seems the most logical, a club shift looks better than the heart continuation.

"At the sixth trick, East had to guess what to do, and I don't blame him for playing the ace of hearts. He should never have been faced with this problem.

"Still later in the hand, West made another mistake, probably because he didn't visualize what might happen. Declarer had shown four hearts and six diamonds. East could not hold more than four spades, so declarer must have two spades and one club or three spades and no clubs. West should discard nothing but clubs. This would also give East the best chance to hold the right cards if declarer had Axx of spades and discarded down to the stiff queen in the dummy with AJ of clubs."

**Steve Evans:** "West was the major culprit on this deal. His opening lead was abominable. It is unlikely on the bidding that fast action is called for and blowing his only entry at trick 1 made the defense much more difficult. If partner had a singleton club and needed a ruff to beat the contract, West no longer has an entry. Continuing with a heart at trick 2 was also stupid but had no effect on this hand.

"East had the next chance, at trick 4. He should certainly not want to be on lead and declarer would likely have finessed the diamond jack if he had it. If East had thrown the queen, a two-trick set would have ensued.

"The final error was West's pitch of the spade at trick 9. I find it hard to be too critical of this play, but the distribution is marked and West should worry about a squeeze on his partner. I tend not to assign too much blame for an opening lead, but on this hand the choice was the major reason for the demise of the defense."

I, too, blame West, yielding a rare unanimity of opinion. His crime was as much arrogance as it was technically poor play. After the bizarre opening lead (poor not only because it takes out West's only entry, but also because it gives East no count information about the heart suit), East told West, via the heart deuce, to shift. Notice that *any* shift easily defeats the contract! To be sure, signals are suggestions rather than commands, but West ought to have realized that his partner knew more about the hand than he did.

I'm not inclined to give any blame to East. Although he could have unblocked in diamonds, such a play is never risk-free. Surely, East did not imagine that winning the third diamond would put him in a bad position. Heart exits were available. Why would his partner have raised hearts (and led the king!) with only three of them unless he had more of the outstanding high cards; for example, the club king? When the ace of hearts felled the jack at trick 6, East had a chance to make a brilliant play. Knowing that declarer had ten red cards, East could have returned a low club. If East credits South with the spade ace, this switch cannot cost the contract. Here it would have broken up the squeeze. Missing the master stroke is not, however, a chargeable offense.