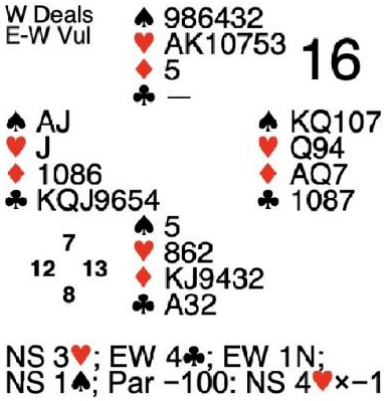
What We've Got Here Is:

FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE!

Most experienced players know that when declaring a notrump contract, one sometimes needs to execute a “hold up” maneuver in order to cut communications between the two defenders. Sometimes when defending a notrump contract, it is also necessary for a defender to give up a trick early in order to maintain communications with partner!

The following hand came up during the NABC+ Mixed Swiss Teams at the San Francisco Fall North American Bridge Championships:



West dealt and opened 1C and my partner bid 2C - a Michaels Cuebid showing both majors. East jumped to 3N, I passed and LHO passed, then partner bid 4H! Pass, pass, 4N, all pass with me on lead. Because I did not support my partner's suit in the auction, I must give her count, leading low from three small hearts, which in this case is the deuce. Dummy played the stiff jack, partner won with the king, properly playing lower of touching honors. Now came a critical decision: what to play at trick two?

Playing IMPs, we don’t care about overtricks. Above all, we must strive to beat the contract. Partner can figure out I started with an odd number of hearts because with a doubleton (either 82 or 62) I would have led high. It's clear I have either one or three hearts. If partner counts out the known hearts (six in hand plus one in dummy plus partner's odd number) declarer can be known to either hold all five remaining hearts (in which case the contract is unbeatable) or only three. If I have led from three pieces and hold the club ace, partner leading a low heart at trick two will sacrifice that particular trick while ensuring us five heart tricks and my club ace before declarer can set up what's needed to make the contract.

Partner is still kicking herself for not considering the heart distribution based on my count, instead making the fatal decision to cut me off by following up with the heart ace and a low heart. When I was in with the club ace, I had no heart left to lead to her hand.

FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE!

Another anecdote about a 6-6 hand, this one from regional top-flight teams. A pro was playing with a client who was in over her head in the strong field. Partner opened 1D, the client overcalled 1S and I, holding a seven-count with T9xx of hearts and a spade void, made a negative double. Partner bid 2H and the client now bid 2S. I Then bid 3H - all pass.

Turns out the client held: AKJTxx x – AKJTxx, 6-6 in the black suits and was cold for 4 spades opposite a yarborough.

After the hand was over, the pro said with astonishment, “You were 6-6?” She replied, “Yes I was 6-6 *and I had a void*”. I tried hard not to chuckle at this comment or the follow up by the pro, which was “You can’t sell out to the opponent’s part-score when you have game in hand”. Hard to argue with that.