

What They Didn't Bid

Milan Macura's Tuesday matchpoints tournaments are among the most popular on Funbridge. In one of these tournaments, I was the last to speak and I held the following hand:



All vulnerable, the auction began with three passes to me. I briefly considered opening a crafty 1NT. But at matchpoints, locating a major suit fit is especially important, so I opted for a standard 1♠ opening.

West doubled for take-out, partner jump-raised to 3♠ (a preemptive bid), East passed, and I had a decision to make. At IMPs, I would have bid game without hesitation—missing a vulnerable game is too costly. However, at matchpoints, opposite what might be little more than 13 random cards including a 4-card fit and given West's take-out double (suggesting a likely offside heart finesse), I seriously considered passing. Still, from past experience I knew Argine sometimes delivers surprisingly nice hands for these raises. In the end, I decided to “go with the field” and bid 4♠.

Everyone passed. West led the ♦K and dummy came down:

♠QJ764

♥1095

♦75

♣Q105



♠K9852

♥AQ84

♦A9

♣A9



Partner wasn't on the weak side of his bid, but the prospects still looked grim—we had likely losers in every suit. It seemed that my initial instinct to pass 3♠ might have been wiser.

Still, what chances did I have? Assuming West had at least one of the heart honours, I needed the opponents to open the heart or club suits to my advantage. On the opening lead, East played the ♦J (likely showing the 10) and I ducked to disrupt their communications. West continued with the ♦2 and I won the ♦A.

Next, I led the ♠8 to West's ♠A (East followed), and West switched to the ♥3. I played dummy's 10, East played the ♥K, and I won with the ♥A. I then drew the remaining trump with dummy's ♠Q, on which West discarded the ♥2. It was time to start counting.

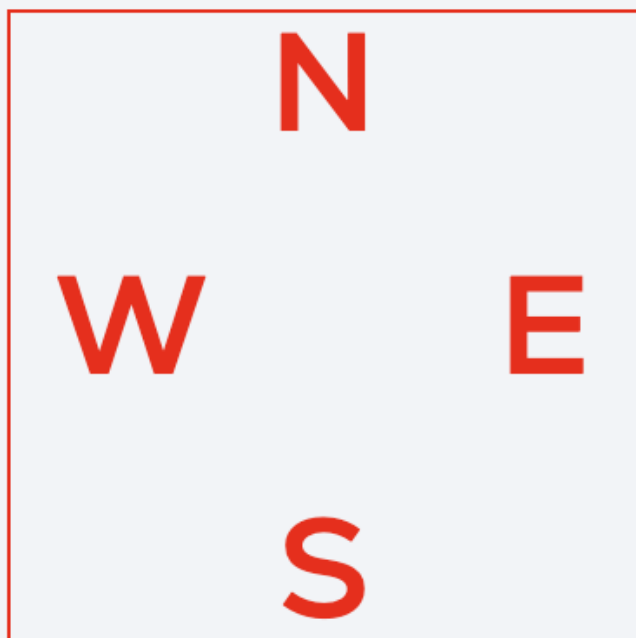
This was the position:

♠ J 7 6

♥ 9 5



♣ Q 10 5



♠ K 9 5

♥ Q 8 4



♣ A 9

Let's review the auction: both opponents had initially passed, yet West then made a take-out double. This suggests that West held close to 11 points, short spades and a three-suited hand. So far, West had shown 9 points—the ♠A, ♦K and ♦Q—, meaning East should have the ♣K. Based on West's high-low heart play (and given they use 3rd/5th leads), they likely began with four hearts, so they probably held the ♥J as well. The location of the ♣J was unclear.

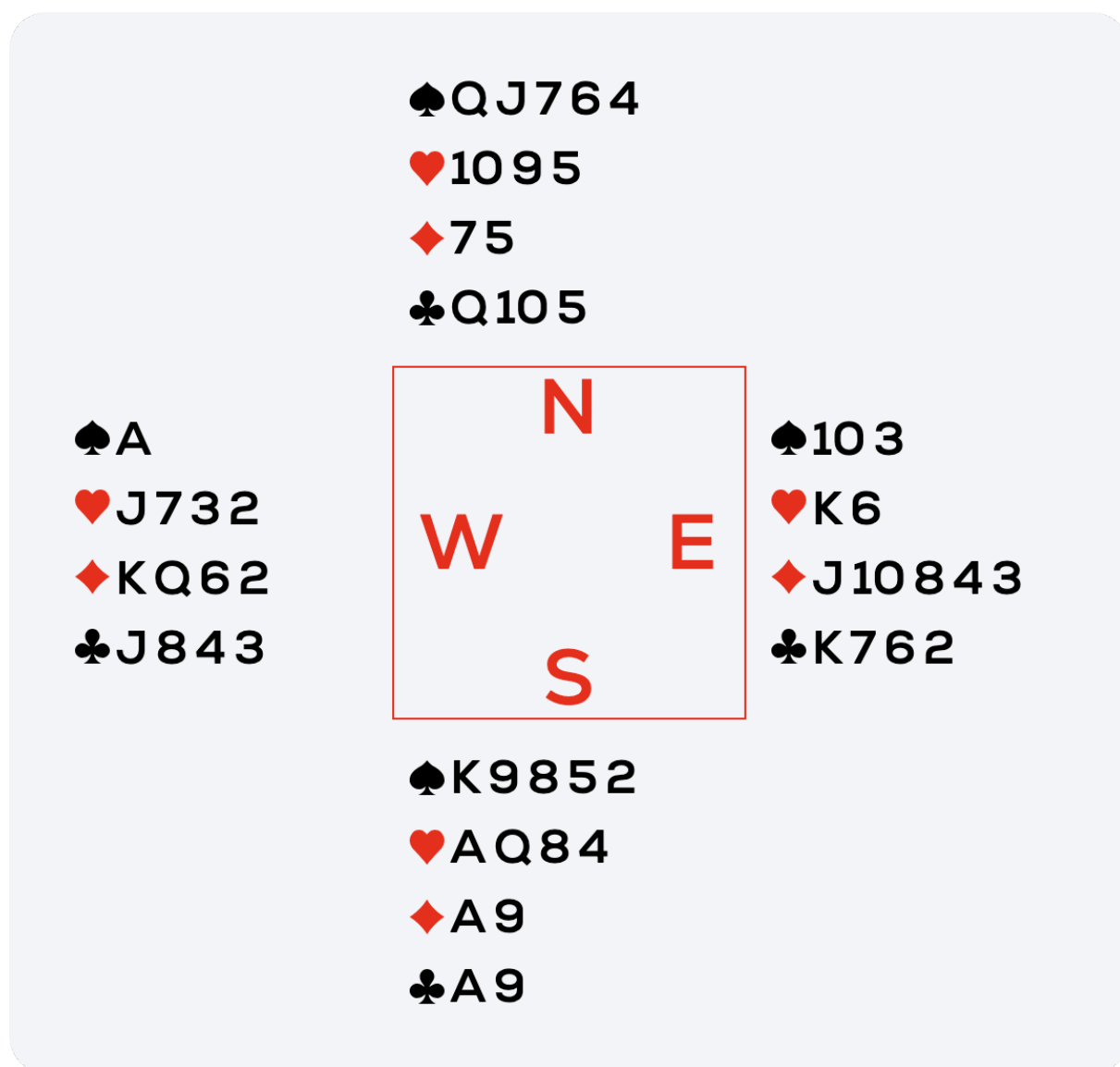
One idea was to try the ♣Q from dummy. If East only had the ♣K, they might not cover, fearing that I held the ♣AJ doubleton, in which case covering would give me three tricks. But East could count too. They had seen West's high-low in hearts and would know that I held four, so a heart discard on a club wouldn't help. They would likely cover accurately.

I still had a heart loser (assuming that West held the ♥J), but maybe I could avoid losing a club if I could force the opponents to lead clubs for me or give me a ruff and discard via a diamond.

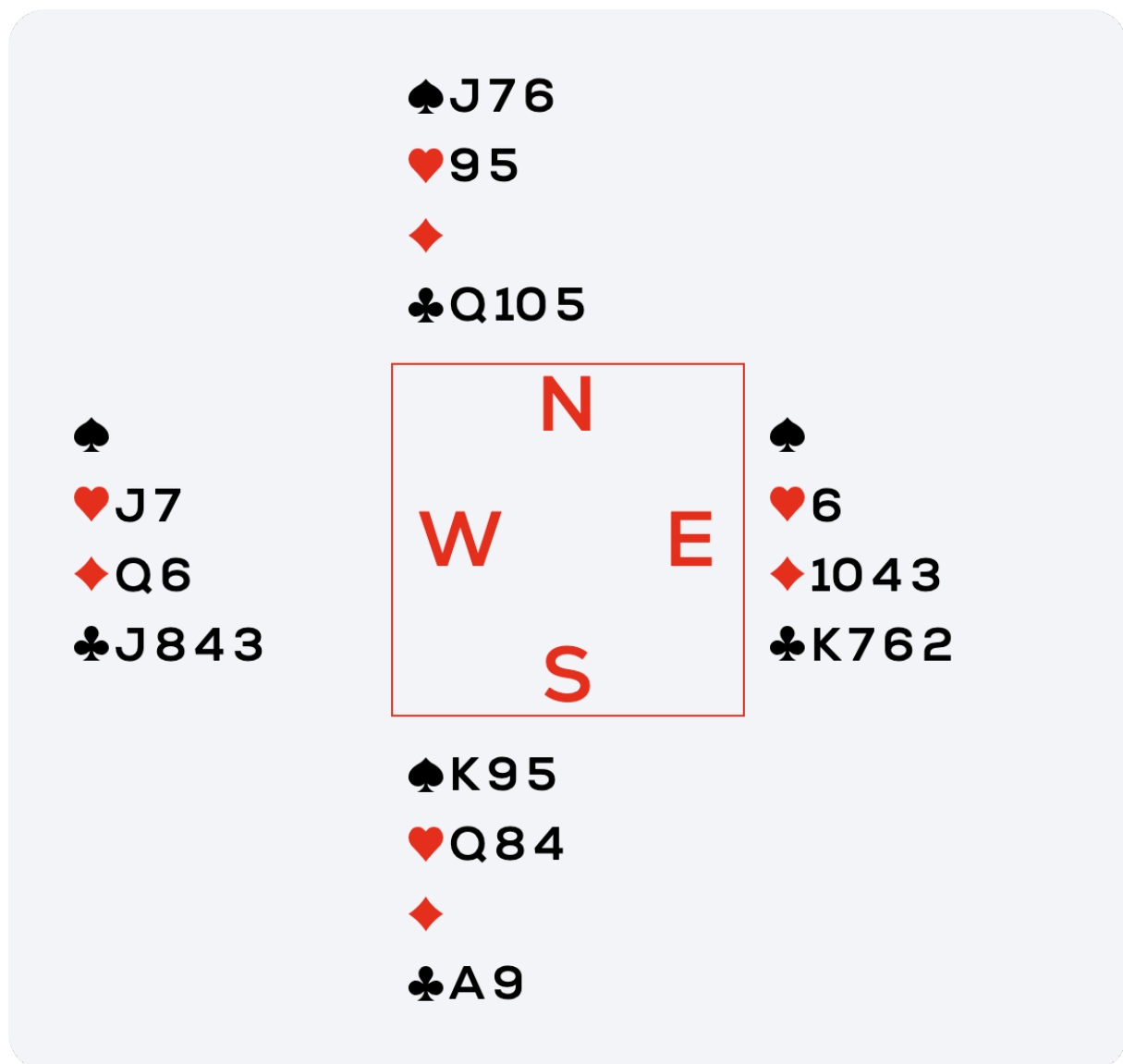
But then I noticed that West had just discarded a heart. This left him with only two hearts and made him ripe for an endplay.

From the above position, I led a heart from dummy to my ♥Q (East followed low), then another heart, which West won with the ♥J. Now, with only diamonds and clubs left, West exited with a club. Hopeful, I played low from dummy, East followed low and my ♣9 won! West had held the ♣J.

I claimed the remaining tricks. Here are the full hands:



This was the key endplay position:



A heart to the ♥Q and another to West's ♥J forced them to break one of the minors—either giving me a ruff and discard with a diamond or opening up clubs—, allowing me to duck into East's known ♣K.

The critical inference came from West's initial pass, showing East held the ♣K. So, when West played a club, there was no guess, just a hope that he held the ♣J.

Making 4♠ was worth 98%. Even stopping in 3♠ and making earned 82.3%. A large majority went down in 4♠ for a not-terrible 39%.

As so often happens, the main lesson is: listen to the bidding and draw the right inferences. Often, it's what *isn't* bid that provides the key.

P.S. At first glance, West's heart discard seemed to give away the contract. Holding onto a heart would have let him exit safely later. But even without the heart discard, declarer could still prevail by drawing 2 more trumps, catching West in a complicated strip squeeze. This line, however, is much more difficult, so West's discard was clearly a mistake.