ARA Event Observer Report

Observer Name:
Paul Chang-Richardson

Observer State of Residence:
Ontario, Canada

Event Name:
Montréal Riichi Open 2026

Event Location:
Salle de la Reconnaissance (D-R200), Pavillon Athanase-David, 1430 Rue Saint-Denis, Montréal, Québec (Canada), H2X 3J8

Event Date:
October 3-4, 2026

Number of Participants:
72 participants registered (2 DNF); 70 in final standings. One player did not show for the entire event; the other DNF was a player who played through Day 1 and did not attend Day 2.

Substitute players were rotated in for replacing the players that did not finish (i.e., different subs played depending on the hanchan round).

Event Schedule Summary: *(Days played, number of rounds, finalist rounds, time per round, etc.)*
Two days of tournament play, 8 hanchan in total (5 on Day 1, 3 on Day 2). After 6 hanchan of pure cumulative point play, a Top 4 cutoff was performed, separating the four highest scorers from the rest of the tournament. The scores for the Top 4 were reset to 0. Hanchan 7 and 8 were then played with the Top 4 competing amongst themselves, and the rest of the participants in their own pool for positions 5 and on. The time limit for all hanchan was 90+0.

The event venue was open in the evening before the tournament for early badge pick-up as well as free play. There was no free play at the end of the tournament due to venue constraints (the room needed to be vacated by 6 p.m.).

Names of Officials/Judges:
Tournament Organizer: Loïc Roberge
Head Referee: Grant Mahoney
Referees: Victor Savard-Arseneault, Philippe Ouellet
Substitute Players: Sébastien Bouchard, Alessandro Chiari, Jean-Claude Bianchet, Adrien Arseneault, Alexandre Poisson-Shahzad

Communication to Players: *(How were announcements, standings, pairings etc. communicated to players during the event?)*
General announcements and updates were made both at the start of each day, as well as on the tournament's Discord server, pinging all participants. Announcements in the server were made in both official languages of Canada (English and French). There were also housekeeping announcements made by tournament staff (usually the tournament organizer) before the start of a given hanchan. Announcements made in person at the event were made in English.

Seatings for a given hanchan and standings were tracked and displayed using a Google Sheet that was shared with tournament participants through the Discord server. While seatings for the next hanchan were always updated quickly (usually able to be checked immediately upon finishing a game), the standings sometimes took longer to update (particularly at tournament completion; see below).

Prizes:
1st and 2nd place: Trophy
3rd through 8th place: Medals

Additional prizes (Mahjong Soul keychains) were provided for different placements at the event (e.g., second-to-last place, closest final score to 0, etc.).

Catering: No full meal catering was provided at the event. Coffee, tea, water (both bottled and canned sparkling), and a variety of snacks (e.g., granola bars, fruit gummies) were provided for participants who wanted them. There were ample food options available upon exiting the venue along the street.

Tournament Atmosphere:
The tournament atmosphere was welcoming and cordial. Players were in good spirits for the weekend, and the staff were respectful and helpful in all interactions. There was a mix of player skills to be found at the event, ranging from tournament veterans to multiple first-time participants for a mahjong tournament.

The tournament was widely attended, with players travelling from Canadian cities such as Ottawa, Toronto, and Waterloo, as well as across borders from multiple states in the US (e.g., New York, Massachusetts, Chicago, Minnesota, Washington). From my understanding, this level of attendance was a record for the event, and the staff should be proud of what they were able to accomplish in bringing together this number of people.

There was a waiting area that was well separated from the tournament room by a long hallway. Players would congregate in this area after their games and socialize about their matches – it was a good way for players to blow off a bit of steam post-game.

Complaints and Issues:

There were three main issues that were brought to my attention by multiple players over the course of the event, and a number of minor concerns that were either brought up by an individual or noticed by the observer. They will be split into two sections as follows:

Main Concerns:

1. Noise levels / player etiquette during matches.

   The noise levels surrounding the event can be broken down into two types: out-of-game noise, and in-game noise (a player etiquette issue). Regarding out-of-game noise – it was frequently commented upon that players, upon finishing their game, could be quite loud in finalizing scores, interacting with judges, and leaving the room. Furthermore, it was a regular occurrence that players would not move fully to the waiting area described earlier and instead choose to hold loud conversations with other participants who had finished their matches in the hallway. This sound would bleed into the tournament room, potentially disrupting players still in their matches.

   Regarding in-game noise – a number of participants commented on players conversing more than what is necessary during a game (i.e., usually between hands but sometimes during), slowing things down while also potentially disrupting other players around them. While this may be understandable from first-time tournament goers who are still learning their way around this kind of event (as I experienced directly with two first-time participants (both great!) at one of my tables), it's less understandable when the player(s) is/are those that have participated in a mahjong tournament before.

   There was also a repeat occurrence of a player who would also loudly exclaim if they made a chombo, loudly discuss with the judge when this occurred, and not reduce their volume until the judge had left.

   To the credit of the tournament staff – they made every effort to try and reduce noise levels. They would regularly usher people out from the hallways into the waiting areas, and announcements were made at the start of every hanchan, reminding *all participants* not to talk excessively during the game and to keep volume levels down. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem like these warnings were very well heeded.

2. Gameplay experience of substitute players.

   While some substitute players had an understanding of tournament mahjong play, push/fold judgements, etc., from feedback I received this was not consistent across the substitute players. It's unclear what level of training or practice the substitute players may have had leading into the event in order to be appropriately prepared to fill in seats as a competitive player.

In particular, one substitute player was identified as not fully understanding the rules involved with tournament play and also making strange plays, such that it was disruptive to tournament participants trying to play for certain goals at a table. For example (following list are instances reported by other participants):

- In all last with time remaining on the clock, the dealer wins the game. The sub player begins preparing to count and record scores, thinking that the game was over, not realizing that dealer win in all last continues the game.
- In a match, the sub player made three open kan calls (i.e., sankantsu as a valid hand on board), yet upon reaching exhaustive draw, this player was noten. It feels strange that plays like this would be made without having an explicit goal (e.g., yaku, point total) in mind.
- In a match, the sub player discards 2-bamboo. Upon drawing the next tile, they spend time looking at it, looking exasperated, sighing heavily, and then discarding the 3-bamboo. The play makes sense; the etiquette does not.

For a future iteration of the Montréal Riichi Open, I would recommend ensuring a full vetting/assessment of substitute players in advance, coupled with preparation events (e.g., practice sessions, workshop, etc.) to ensure all sub players are on the same page in understanding tournament mahjong before going in (particularly if this would be their first time in the role / at an event).

3. Choice to use Top 4 cutoff for Hanchan 7 and 8 / full point reset of Top 4 players.

While less of a concern than the two previous points, multiple participants left comments regarding that only the top 4 players would move on to a playoff. Typically for an event of this size (i.e., 64 or more players), players anticipate that top 8 will make a playoff, and players felt that top 4 cutoff is quite strict. I would recommend future events consider widening their playoff cut.

There were also comments regarding the full point reset of the Top 4 players. If an event wants to reward consistent play across the entire tournament, a full point reset upon making the playoffs feels at odds with that. Deciding the final results of an event over only two hanchan feels like it introduces even higher variance to the results than what is already present in a game of mahjong. I would recommend future events consider not fully resetting points for those in a playoff and rather perform a percentage cut of the scores.

Minor Concerns:
In no particular order:

- A couple of players commented on the hanchan length (i.e., 90 minutes + 0), preferring a shorter game clock even with the +0 modifer.

- A couple of players commented on the requirement to complete the all last sheet at the "5-minute remaining" mark, feeling that it was disruptive to the flow of the game and potentially preventing one final hand from being played. Instead of strict enforcement of this, I think an announcement regarding leaving completion of the sheet to game state and table discretion would have been beneficial.
- I found the map on the tournament webpage on reaching the venue from the metro to be a little confusing; a photo guide may have been helpful.
- A couple of the tables had issues – one was convex (i.e., folded in the middle, leading to a significant peak preventing the mat from lying flat), one was concave (i.e., sagged in the middle leading to tiles sliding towards the centre).
- Equipment tracking at the tournament could be improved (i.e., having a full check-in, check-out system for volunteers) – there was confusion during teardown if one equipment volunteer managed to get their own set back.
- An anonymous complaint stated that "things took too long at the end". Indeed, there was at least a 30-minute delay from the end of the final hanchan to the start of the awards ceremony, and even then, final standings were not updated in a way that players could see until much later in the evening.
- I would *highly recommend* rethinking how the non-top 8 awards are done, both in name and execution. For example, providing a prize to the person in second-to-last place is really contingent on that player being a good sport and being in good spirits about how their event went. Calling it "The Booby Prize" on top of feels like kicking someone while they're down.

Compliments

Despite the issues outlined above, I really cannot understate how well the event ran. Check-in was efficient and the tournament started on time each day (with only minor delays occurring due to time overruns later in the day). I also received explicit compliments regarding the referees – consistent and clear rulings across the board, and no reports of judging errors. The staff should be congratulated for having such a high-quality crew monitoring things.

The location (i.e., being directly linked to Berri-UQAM station in downtown Montréal) is *so* good. Numerous unique food options nearby and easy transport to other areas of the city made it fun to get a larger group of players to go grab a meal afterwards. Great venue choice, and I hope they explore similar options for the next year.

Equipment selection in terms of tiles and mats was great. Every table was either an AMOS set or equivalent urea resin material. No tiles felt light, lacked density, etc. – game feel was consistent across tables in my experience.

There were also little things that elevated the playing experience. For example, the use of laminated all last sheets, coupled with a dry-erase marker, made updating all-last sheets easy (and I'm certain also helped with printing logistics and not having to print off six billion copies of all last sheets).

Observer Personal Summary:

All things taken into consideration, I would consider the Montréal Riichi Open 2026 to be a success. The staff should feel proud of what they've accomplished in putting on this event, and I couldn't be happier for them seeing how their participant list exploded in size this year. I particularly enjoyed getting to meet and share the table with multiple first-time tournament goers. Based on the quality of the event that was put on here, I hope they will be back to this tournament next year (and maybe others too!).

I certainly know that I'll be back next year (and I'll be trying to organize a pilgrimage to Alfa, you see if I don't)!