ARA Event Observer Report

Observer Name: Loïc Roberge

Observer State of Residence: Québec (Canada)

Event Name: Toronto Riichi Open 2025

Event Location:
Podium, POD250 The Commons
Toronto Metropolitan University
380 Victoria St
Toronto ON M5B 0A1
Canada

Event Date: August 2 and 3, 2025

Number of Participants: 68 (3 DNF)

Event Schedule Summary:
Games were played over two days, with 4 hanchans on Saturday (day 1) and 4 hanchans on Sunday (day 2).

There were 6 hanchans of round robin. After that, the top 8 players faced each other in two hanchans. Their score was cut to one quarter of their cumulative score from the round robin. The rest of the field played for the rest of the positions (position 9 onwards) for the last two hanchans. Their score was not cut after the round robin. All tables were shuffled by hand.

Hanchans were run on a 80 minute + 1 hand timer.

The event ran on time for the whole two days.

Names of Officials/Judges:
Johann Tutor - Tournament organizer
Jeremy Lyn - Head judge
Kevin Nguyen - Judge
Simon Chen - Judge

All judges were non-playing.

Communication to Players:
Announcements were done by the head judge, Jeremy Lyn. They were done orally at first, but then a microphone was discovered in the room around the end of day 1, so Jeremy used that for the rest of the announcements instead.

Standings and pairings were updated in real time during both days. It was easy to find the information on Discord and on the website, that is something Toronto has done very well in this tournament.

Announcements were done more in depth at the beginning of each day, and then before each hanchan as necessary. The announcements touched on various topics: washroom availability, tournament schedule, free play availability, how to proceed with the score sheets and all last sheets, how wind drawing worked, the hanchan length and end conditions, tournament format, drawing a tile on the side to indicate tsumogiri tile clearly, as well as rule specificities such as pon vs chii timing, lower penalties vs full penalties, etiquette checks (being indulgent to new players, don't write on the mat or the tiles, don't mix a tsumo tile in your hand). For pictures taken on day 2, make sure you notify a staff member if you don't consent to it.

Prizes:
Trophies for top 2, medals for positions 3 to 8. Top 8 also got some goodies (colored mahjong socks).

There were some raffle prizes as well: white t-shirts were thrown in the crowd, and mahjong themed t-shirts were given at random.

Catering:
No catering was offered for lunch during the tournament. With the venue being in a prime downtown location, a large selection of restaurants was available within a small walking distance. On location, water bottles, coffee and soda (coca-cola) was offered all day long to participants.

Tournament Atmosphere:
For the tournament itself, it had a good, fun vibe and it was fairly competitive. There was plenty of space in the main playing room for all players. However, there were some problems with the level of noise during the matches (more on that in the complaints part). There was a good balance of strong, seasoned players and also of new players, with a good chunk playing in their first tournament, including non-locals. Hanchan starts were marked by ringing a kind of gong, which added a nice ceremony aspect to the tournament.

On top of tournament activities, there were fun events that were happening in the periphery of the tournament. This includes a surprise appearance of Daniel Tutor where he invited us to churn butter, and where he gave the head of the Ottawa club a cap of the Toronto Maple Leafs, as Toronto won the last Canadian Classic. There were also keychains on sale and free necklaces that were crafted on site, giving the event a better fun vibe overall.

Complaints and Issues:

The biggest issue that came out of the tournament and that was repetitively reported was the fact that some players barely shuffled (they would keep one or a few tiles in front of them, or would not rotate tiles in the shuffle at all). The judges were notified and an announcement on that effect was made at the beginning of hanchan 6. A player suggested that this kind of behaviour could be judged on, possibly with a small penalty. It could be a good thing to implement for future tournaments.

Some people have complained that the timer of 80 minutes + 1 hand was too long. While it aligns with the 90 minute recommendation of the current WRC rules, I can understand that it feels a bit long to players who play faster and tend to finish hanchans early.

There were a few moments where a person's phone went off during the hanchans. From my understanding, the judges did not react to these events happening. This is another kind of event that could be judged on in the future.

The noise levels were sometimes high in the room. Many sources contributed to the sound levels, including chit chat at the tables between hands, post-game discussions too close to the tournament room, and also the staff themselves a bit. Maybe part of the sound problem is due to the acoustics of the room.

Somebody complained that judges have been a bit slow to respond on some topics (including report). While it is the players' responsibility to make sure they call for Judge strong enough to be noticed, judges should also be on the lookout for events that would require their participation.

Some players outside of the top 8 had repeat encounters after the cut-off. It should be avoided if possible. A tool like a Social Golfer Problem solver that takes in prior input could help alleviate this problem. The organizers hoped to use such a tool (Luke Morgan's pairing tool) but ran out of time to test it, so they defaulted to Good Enough Golfers. I'd suggest tools like this one could be marketed and their adoption encouraged in the community, both making pairings in future tournaments better and improving support capability that the community at large would have for tournament tooling. It would be great to also have good usage documentation with these tools.

Finally, the venue itself had some structural problems in itself. As indicated higher, the noise levels could get high with post-tournament discussions right outside of the main room. This problem was amplified by the fact that the main post-tournament waiting area was under a window, which subjected it to a severe greenhouse effect. Also, access to the tournament building was restricted, which required the use of a @door ping on Discord. This last point has been accepted, so much so that "@door" stickers were given out to participants at the start of the tournament. These structural problems are counterbalanced by the fact that the venue is at a fantastic downtown location, so I believe that they are acceptable in this context. If anything, if the TORI club can find another suitable room in the TMU university, that could help solve some of the pain points mentioned.

Observer Personal Summary:

Overall, I found the tournament to be really fun and enjoyable. I was quite excited to come back to Toronto, as I've also been here in 2024. While I didn't enjoy as much success as I would have liked to, I had a lot of fun, saw some old friends and made new ones. The food in Toronto is very good, so that was another highlight of my trip. Little plus from last year: the tournament ran on a different weekend than Otakuthon (Montreal's anime convention), so I think this helped them have a better turnout.

I experienced some of the issues myself. Some players did not shuffle well at one my tables, as was reported by other players too. As a community, we could be more severe on game aspects such as obstruction and etiquette. I had the greenhouse effect problem a lot while I was in the waiting area too, but fortunately, the venue was big enough that we could take some nice walks inside the university, in fresher air. This was welcome for me. Also, there were two men's washrooms close to the main room that were closed over the weekend for maintenance. I expected this to be a problem, but it turned out that it wasn't, neither for me nor anyone else it seems, as I had no complaints on that effect.

I enjoyed the random events that surrounded the tournament organization, like the churning butter and the on-site necklace crafting. It might not be up everyone's alley but it gives a unique flavor to a tournament, and I welcome this wholeheartedly.

With all of this said, I want to thank the TRO organizers and staff for a great experience and I hope to be able to attend again next year.