ARA Event Observer Report

Observer Name: Victor Savard-Arseneault

Observer State of Residence: Québec (Canada)

Event Name: Toronto Riichi Open 2026

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

Event Date: August 8-9, 2026

Number of Participants: 90 (5 DNF[1])

Event Schedule Summary: *(Days played, number of rounds, finalist rounds, time per round, etc.)*
The tournament began with 6 hanchan of cumulative play. After hanchan 6, positions 9+ kept their score and played two more cumulative hanchan, while the top 8 players had their score quartered, were matched against each other using snake seeding[2] and played two more hanchan to determine positions 1-8.

The event used the 2025 edition of the World Riichi Championship ruleset with the following modifications:

- Lower penalties
- 80+1 time limit

With the exception of games 3 and 4 on the first day, games consistently started 5 to 15 minutes after their scheduled start time. For games 1 and 2, this can be partially explained by the fact that campus security unlocked the doors for the organizers later than they were supposed to in the morning.

[1] One player dropped out of the tournament after round 4, three others left after round 6 and one more left after round 7
[2] Hanchan 7: [1,2,7,8] [3,4,5,6]; Hanchan 8: [1,3,6,8] [2,4,5,7]

Names of Officials/Referees:
Johann Tutor – Tournament organizer

Jeremy Lyn – Head referee
Rob Cayea – Referee
Simon Chen – Referee
Matthew Rappaport – Referee
All referees were non-playing.

Danielle Duhaney – Substitute player
Yu Chen Song – Substitute player
Irene Tao – Substitute player
Ritwika Bhattacharjee – Substitute player
Varmanaa Rajakulendran – Substitute player

Daniel Tutor – General assistant
Wing Chung – Additional volunteer

Communication to Players: *(How were announcements, standings, pairings etc. communicated to players during the event?)*
Announcements were made by the head referee before the start of play on both days, as well as occasionally between rounds. Apart from greeting players and reminding them of the tournament structure, there were also reminders related to the ruleset and some points having to do with etiquette, such as guidelines for shuffling.

A timer was visible on the projector during rounds. The head referee also made announcements when there were 60, 30, 15, 5 and 0 minutes remaining for the current round.

Table assignments were available on the tournament website, as well as on sheets that were taped to the walls in and around the tournament room. All pairings and standings were also available in a google sheet, which was linked on the website, the tournament Discord server and on the back of every participant's tournament badge via a QR code. The standings were updated all at once after every round.

Prizes:
The tournament winner and runner-up each received a trophy, and positions 3-8 received medals.

There were also other mahjong-themed prizes, such as M.League merchandise; the top 8 players got to pick one item each, and the rest were awarded to random participants in a raffle.

Catering:

No catering was provided at the event. However, there was an abundance of food options within walking distance of the venue.

Water, coffee and other refreshments were also available free of charge.

Tournament Atmosphere:

As the largest riichi event ever held in Canada, the tournament had a fun, positive atmosphere and was fairly competitive. The main tournament room had more than enough space to accommodate everyone; however, there were some problems with the temperature and noise level (see the complaints and issues section for more details). On top of the usual countdown, the start of every round was marked by the sounding of a chinese tongue drum, which added a nice "ceremony" aspect to the event.

The majority of participants were from Canada, with more than half of that group coming from the host club's greater region. Among them, there was a mix of experienced and newer players, with a good number playing in their first tournament.

Besides tournament activities, there was also free play on Friday,[3] Saturday and Sunday evenings, as well as the traditional butter churning on Sunday, which many repeat attendees have come to expect.[4] During the prize ceremony, Daniel Tutor gave the head of the Capital Riichi Club a Maple Leafs-themed present, as Toronto won the last Canadian Classic.[5]

Complaints and Issues:

This section will be split into two parts: major issues and minor issues. Major issues were reported by several players, whereas minor issues were less severe in nature and/or were reported by fewer people.

Major Issues

The noise levels were consistently a problem, with post-game discussions taking place right outside of the main room. This problem was made worse by the fact that the closest space that could serve as a waiting area was next to a large bay window, creating a severe greenhouse effect. The organizers tried to counter this by encouraging participants to go downstairs between games instead, but the fact that it was slightly more out of the way and that the amount of seating near the bottom of the stairs was limited meant that most participants elected to simply stay in the main hallway.

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[3] Free play on Friday was organized in a separate location (a 10-minute walk away from the event venue).

[4] Since its first edition in 2023, the Toronto Riichi Open has always featured makeshift butter churning on site after the tournament hours.

[5] The Canadian Classic is a yearly casual inter-club riichi tournament pitting Montreal (+ Ottawa) against Toronto (+ Waterloo), held in December on online platforms.

The ambient temperature in the main tournament room was at an acceptable level most of the time, but occasionally got uncomfortably warm (most noticeably during game 4 on the first day). The organizers initially tried to counter this by adjusting the AC temperature, but later realized that the thermostat they had access to was non-functional.

If the organizers are able to find another suitable room on the TMU campus, that could perhaps solve both of these problems, as the venue has no major issues outside of the above two and is in a very convenient location.

There were also many complaints about the schedule. Some were about people not linking the 80+1 time format (emphasis on the +1), but most were rather about the fact that the organizers seemingly did little to enforce the planned schedule. As mentioned earlier, games consistently started multiple minutes late (even though the time deficit didn't increase through the day), partially due to the fact that organizers were not especially proactive about encouraging people to be seated at their table early and/or applying late penalties. It is however worth noting that a good part of the delay on day 1 came from the aforementioned campus security issue, as well as an unusual number of no-shows forcing the organizers to generate new pairings for the first 6 rounds.[6] Multiple participants complained about the post-tournament prize raffle as well, saying that it took too long and that the organizers could perhaps pick random participants in advance rather than in real time using a wheel randomizer, or figure out some other solution to streamline the process.

Minor issues

In no particular order:

- One tile set with black-back tiles wasn't properly cleaned, leaving some tiles with discernable markings. It is worth noting that due to the nature of the set, leaving no markings after cleaning it is quite difficult. One participant also complained that these tiles felt "cheap" and "not good to play with". This was addressed by the organizers pretty much immediately, as it was swapped out for another tile set after the first round.
- AMOS Compasses were available at every table. After round 1, a participant asked if dice should be kept on the dedicated space on the compass rather than on the mat to the dealer's right. The head referee said to keep the dice on the compass, but implied that both were fine. Multiple participants complained about this, saying that the dice should constitute the "only source of truth" when it comes to indicating the current dealer, and should thus always be kept on the mat to the current dealer's right.
- An unspecified number of players outside of the top 8 experienced repeat pairings in games 7 and 8.
- Multiple participants expressed their disappointment at the fact that there were only 8 games, rather than 9 or 10, especially considering the event's relatively large size.

[6] Problems at Toronto's airports (as well as elsewhere) during the afternoon and evening on Friday led to an unusually high number of flight cancellations. Many players were able to book a later flight (some on Saturday morning) or switch to other modes of transportation, but in the end, this meant the participant count fell from 96 to 90 before the start of the first round.

- There were repeated complaints about silent calls. The head referee reminded players to properly vocalize their calls in an announcement, but multiple complaints were still made after that.
- One participant noted that the snake seeding used for hanchan 7 was non-standard. This tournament used [1, 2, 7, 8] [3, 4, 5, 6], whereas a more standard configuration is [1, 4, 5, 8] [2, 3, 6, 7]. They complained that in this configuration, at table 1, 7th and 8th mostly play against each other, and it makes catching 1st/2nd quite difficult.

Apart from the point about the placement of the dice, no issues with referee decisions were reported to the observer.

It is worth noting that in previous editions of the tournament, getting into the venue was a problem, as the doors were always locked. A `@door` role had been created on the tournament Discord server to deal with this, with participants having to ping the role to get organizers to come down and let them in. This year, (paid) volunteers were stationed at the door at all times, eliminating this problem.

Observer Personal Summary:

Despite the aforementioned issues, I would consider the Toronto Riichi Open 2026 to be a clear success. Although there were delays, they were not that significant, and the tournament ran smoothly overall. The organizers' previous experience was obvious, and they did a solid job putting the event together again this year. Despite its issues with the noise level and ambient temperature, the venue is excellently located and was more than spacious enough for everyone.

I will be back next year, and I know many others will too.