

ARA Event Observer Report

Observer Name: Allen Z.

Observer State of Residence: Pennsylvania

Event Name: North American Open 2024

Event Location: Crowne Plaza San Francisco Airport Hotel in Burlingame, CA

Event Date: Aug 31-Sep 02, 2024

Number of Participants: 132

Event Schedule Summary: *(Days played, number of rounds, finalist rounds, time per round, etc.)*

3 Day tournament consisting of 75+0 minute rounds (Players who did not make the Top 32 cut played for 2 of the 3 days):

- 8 Hanchan scramble followed by a cut to Top 32
- 2 Hanchan set play for Top 32 determining Top 16, with remaining players playing 2 additional hanchan for final placement
- 2 Hanchan set play for Top 16 determining Top 8
- 2 Hanchan set play for Top 8 determining Top 4 finalists
- 2 Hanchan set for 1-4th place

Points were reset for each of the post-cut sets in the Top 32. The top 2 in each set advanced to the next cut.

Names of Officials/Judges:

Head Judge: Jeff T

Judges: Bichen W, Nels J, Hawnlay S, Jai S

Subs and Additional Staff: Billy J, Charles L, Xu L, Masa Y, Kenji B, Junko N, Dan B, Jimmy W

Communication to Players: *(How were announcements, standings, pairings etc. communicated to players during the event?)*

Standings were shown on the Event Page on the PacificML website. The standings were updated shortly after the conclusion of each round.

Pairings were accessed through the player's profile on the PacificML website.

Announcements and additional communication took place through the PML Riichi Mahjong Tournaments Discord Server.

Prizes:

The winner of the tournament earned a seat for WRC Tokyo 2025. Trophies were awarded to Top 4 and medals were awarded to 5th through 8th place.

Players also were able to claim prizes from the prize table, consisting of various mahjong-related goods such as pillows, keychains, etc.

Additional prizes were raffled off during the tournament.

Catering:

Water was provided by hotel caterers in dispensers directly outside of the ballroom. Cups were provided but participants were required to have their own closed container to carry any beverages into the ballroom.

Tournament Atmosphere:

The tournament atmosphere was relatively serious and competitive with players vying for a seat at WRC 2025, but still friendly and sportsmanlike. A heightened importance was placed on competitive integrity in this tournament.

Complaints and Issues:

Towards the end of the 8-hanchan scramble, the PacificML website began having issues loading due to the number of players attempting to view the updated standings. This also caused issues with players being able to find their pairing for the 8th hanchan, needing to ask staff for this information.

Observer note: While it is convenient for people to be able to view all tournament information from their phones, it would also be ideal to have this information additionally displayed in the tournament room for players, as some may have issues with internet/data connection, phone battery, etc.

A player received a chombo for having too few tiles at their first discard of a hand.

Observer note: It is good sportsmanship for players to ensure that the dealing process completes correctly; if a player is missing tiles during the dealing process, it can also be said that the other players have taken tiles out of turn and have skipped that player, so there may be some shared fault amongst the players.

During the second hanchan of the Top 32 set, players were not allowed to reference notes on the scores from the first hanchan of the set during the game to determine their point conditions for advancing. Correction was made on the next day for the following sets, as clarification was received that this was allowable and did not constitute a foreign object in the WRC rules.

Some players accustomed to a 75-minute timer in hand-shuffle tournament matches felt that the 75-minute timer was too long for a tournament played on automatic tables.

Observer note: A 75-minute timer on an automatic table may be analogous to the WRC-recommended 90-minute timer for hand-shuffle games. While many matches ended well before the timer, I observed many games taking the full allotted time.

While the timer shown on the projector was easily visible, it would be ideal if the timer could be shown on an additional wall, or if people were not seated with their backs directly to the screen. It is inconvenient to need to turn one's body to see the timer during a game.

Observer Personal Summary:

I received few critiques from other players during this tournament. Having a tournament run entirely on scoring automatic tables was highly welcomed by the players. Alongside the extended 3-day schedule, this environment worked well to provide great tournament conditions for the North American Open. The event ran fairly close to the planned schedule, with ample time planned for a lunch break to make up for the slight delays. Players enjoyed the side events for day 3 as well as the free play available each day. The tournament staff was also very attentive to player needs and questions.

I appreciated the more serious and competitive, yet still positive, atmosphere of the tournament. I noticed less chatter than at other tournaments and the tournament ruleset was strictly adhered to. This included a directive to remove any smartwatches and significant penalties being issued for any devices ringing during games, though some may feel that the 30 point penalty is perhaps overly harsh. I did not notice any issues caused from running the tournament on automatic tables, even alongside players who are not used to regularly playing on them. I did not observe any issues with tables erroring, though occasionally point sticks would need to be nudged in the tray to have them all read correctly. The main clarification that players needed was that they were required to place point sticks on the table to mark the honba count in addition to having the honba displayed on the table. This does cause the point count to be slightly off in the score display, and in one close all-last situation there was a player request to put the honba sticks back into the point tray so that the true scores would be displayed.

In regards to the venue, the hotel ballroom space worked quite well. The water catering service was convenient and refreshed consistently, though perhaps better communication should have been provided earlier to direct attendees to bring refillable containers as the provided cups could not be carried into the room due to being a spill hazard. The venue being in a hotel, with an affordable hotel block, was convenient for attendees and seemed to prevent issues with players being late in the morning. The ballroom had dividers which were effective for preventing any noticeable noise carryover from the side event room into the partitioned tournament room on the third day.

Overall, NAO 2024 was an excellent competitive experience well-suited for the distinguished importance that this tournament held in the WRC qualification system. It is clear that the organizers and staff worked hard to make this event successful.