

# ARA Observer Report

**Observer:** Harrison Corp (Suizo, DC Riichi Mahjong)

**Event:** USPML Sparrow's Nest Open 2024

**Location:** 36 W 36th St. 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018

**Date:** October 26-27th, 2024

**Players:** 63

## Event Information Sources

Pre-tourney and post-tourney information was shared with entrants via the USPML website, and the pairings were on the back of each player card at the event. The information posted can be found here:

<https://uspml.com/qualifier/index.html>

## Event Schedule Summary

Two days, 10 rounds (5 per day) of hanchan (60+0). There was no cut and scores were cumulative.

## Officials/Referees

Rob Carmosino (Head Judge)

Max Suddendorf

Nick Naimo (Day 1 only)

All officials were non-playing in accordance with US tournament standards.

## Communication

For major announcements and all other communications, they were made in person at the event in the main room. Timers were displayed at both sections of the main room and were visible from all tables. Announcements for the most part were not made on discord or website, unless requested by a player. Hanchan pairings were not made available online, and seat order was decided by players at table.

## Prizes

Medals were set to be awarded to top 4, but a printing error and a tie for 4th

led to medals for 1-5th being mailed out at a later date.

### **Catering**

Hot water and filtered water dispenser in main hallway, as well as bottled water available for attendees. Additional food and drink options very close to venue with long breaks between hanchans.

### **Tournament Atmosphere**

Serious undertones with it being the last chance qualifier for 2025 U.S. Invitational, but as a whole atmosphere was fun and very competitive.

### **Complaints or Issues Observed**

Only 1 bathroom at the event cause significant time between hanchans. The single file line moved at a snail's pace, but also the 'aggressive' hanchan timer was implemented to build in extra time for this issue. Partway through the event, some alternative options were made known, but I believe more could have been done.

Communication for tournament schedule as well as hanchan times was communicated poorly. Tournament schedule was not released until two days before the event, and times to be back were only verbally communicated when differing from official website unless requested.

Autotables seemed to correctly function, with two exceptions. A. an autotable right before hanchan 1 was not working, and delayed start time so it could be swapped. B. There were several autotables that had discolored 1 sou's. These tiles were custom made for Sparrow's Nest, and especially with yellow tile back variants on certain tables, it was clear to tell what was a 1s and what was not. This was pointed out to organizers, and to my best recollection at least two tables were fixed during lunch, with any additional tables pointed out being addressed by the end of day 1. As a table was pointed out to have this problem, the organizers seemed to handle the issue even when mid hanchan.

Additionally, there was a seating assignment error where 5 people were assigned to a table which wasted time.

Space was a problem in the venue, as 64 people and 8 tables was tight, especially on the bigger side. While there was some space to walk between tables and get to your seat, I felt they could have been positioned in ways to

get better walking routes between tables, that way not as many people would have to get up or scoot to let people by.

Leg room was tight for people who were taller or had bigger thighs, as there was physically not enough clearance below an autotable to fit under. Personally, I had to sit at an angle for most hanchan and have my legs situated at an awkward position to not sit far back from a table. It was suggested to the organizers to try and find some chairs lower to the ground that could be swapped to a seat upon request.

Hanchan timer had mixed reception. Some people felt that it was quick, some people felt that it was fine. More about that in the personal section.

Player felt that prizes being individual and ranked sequentially was bad, and that giving everyone something or doing parallelized prizes like Riichi Nomi Open would be better. Another player thought that prize ceremony was also subpar, and did not like how Dave “berated” a staffer during it.

Player thought that window shades should be opened so it felt “less like a prison”.

Player thought that score input was tedious and it would have been better to use an app already built for scoring.

Player thought that there were known issues with certain tables having “bugged shuffling, especially the ultima”. Suggested TO should announce hand shuffling before putting tiles in, in order to promote better practice.

Player thought that only one judge on the bigger side of the venue was doing score report, and thought that more staff should have been doing score reporting. I also noted multiple instances where I only saw one judge handling score reporting on one side. While space for walking limits this, I felt there could have been more effort to have additional staff finalizing score report sheets for tables.

Player felt that venue was too cold. To my recollection, while playing during several hanchans temperature was cold. After several people mentioned this to organizers, it seemed like AC was turned off and venue was noticeably warmer.

Player thought mahjong players are smelly and need to wear deodorant :(

An organizer was approached by a player who had nowhere to stay and was asked if said player could sleep on the couch in the venue for the night. The organizer felt that it put them in a weird spot of whether to house the player or have them out on the street for the night, and a question of organizer responsibility.

## **Observer's Personal Summary**

Being clinched for the invitational, I was excited to dry run the Sparrow's Nest before the big weekend and play in one of my favorite formats. As someone who has ran a tournament in the past year, I can sympathize with all the levels of planning and all the little things that slip through the cracks and can go wrong during the event. While there were a decent amount of issues, I truly do not believe there is any glaring issue that cannot be handled by the invitational in January. Some cases felt a little extreme, like an autotable not working and 5 people to a table, but hiccups are part of an event and in my opinion, they were handled with urgency and care.

The only major problem I would say genuinely worried me about the event were the discolored tile backs of certain sets, but this is a problem other tournaments have dealt with and to the best of my knowledge they were handled immediately upon discovery by staff. [To my understanding, the 1s were mixed around from different sets, so it was a matter of finding and pairing them to the correct set. I believe the one found mid hanchan just had that tile set replaced with one checked to be consistent that was on standby.] Another potential major problem is the singular bathroom, but this seemed to be the organizer's biggest concern and biggest point of interest to fix throughout the weekend, so I have high hopes a good compromise or solution will be found.

Once delays for the day ended, while there ended up being a lot of time between hanchans because of bathroom wait time, the tournament schedule was reasonable and plenty of time for lunch and freeplay post event. The prize ceremony day two was a bit of a mess, as it seemed the organizers had several things they wanted to accomplish without a concrete idea of how they would play/space out, but again I feel as though with thought this can easily be fixed for future events.

My one personal point of contention was the timer. While it had mixed reception, my personal experience was that there was not enough time. I would consider 11 hands of mahjong a full average game. Most games will end before, and any game going past 11 hands can be reasonably expected to not have time to finish in most events. Of the 10 games I played, to my best recollection ~2 finished naturally, ~2 more got to 11 hands but may not have finished, and only ~1 table had a pace of play problem where with a longer timer I do not believe I would have finished. That means half or more of my tables did not have time at what I would consider a reasonable pace to finish the game. This is further corroborated by the fact that very few if any tables each round finished before the timer was over. I would suggest trying to build a schedule around  $\geq 70+0$  minute timed rounds to give players a little bit more time to reasonably complete a game for any future event.

I want to reiterate that despite these problems, I thought it was a fun worthwhile event to attend that I would consider going to again in the future.