

## ARA Event Observer Report

**Observer Name:** Mike Lee (Mirby)

**Observer State of Residence:** Philadelphia, PA

**Event Name:** Sparrow's Nest Open 2025

**Event Location:** Sparrow's Nest Studio, 35 W 35th St 12th Floor, New York, NY 10001

**Event Date:** December 6-7, 2025

**Number of Participants:** 64

**Event Schedule Summary:** 2 days, 4 hanchan (75+0) a day, no cut, cumulative scores

**Names of Officials/Judges:**

Rob Carmosino (Head Judge)

Netty Yee

**Communication to Players:** General announcements were made over Discord. Standings/Pairings were available on the World Riichi App, as well as a static webpage (<https://wr.mahjong.ie/static/sno2025/ranking.html>)

**Prizes:** Medals for 1-8, as well as a 'prize wall' for all participants based on final placement

**Catering:** Water was available. Other drinks (soda/tea) and small snacks available for purchase.

### **Tournament Atmosphere:**

Overall the atmosphere was fun and lively. It was the first major event held at the new space. The streaming setup was impressive and professional looking. On Day 2, the atmosphere became a bit more strained because of delays (expanded upon below).

### **Complaints and Issues:**

Despite having 2 bathrooms (as opposed to 1 at their last venue), there were still constant delays on the next hanchan start due to waiting for people to finish. At one point the bathroom overuse started causing the tank refilling to slow down, which compounded the problem further. Sophie had to constantly remind participants to utilize the facilities earlier (between hanchan) to speed up the process.

There were also delays caused by other factors. Both days had a late start on the first hanchan of the day due to participants arriving late. On Day 2, the 3rd hanchan (post lunch) was delayed due to a single player not returning from lunch on time. All the tables were delayed about 5 minutes, and that table itself was delayed another 15 or so until they showed up. I believe a penalty was levied on that particular instance, but I don't believe any were given out for people being late at the start of the day (I could be wrong on this).

There were constant loud noises caused by the radiators (for the heating). At regular intervals, there would be a loud "clanging" sound that sounded like a coin bouncing around the inside of a metal pipe. Spoke to the tournament organizers and was told that there was nothing they could do. There was also a separate noise that was occurring within the streaming room that was distracting to the participants.

There were a number of complaints about Dave's WRL presentation given out after the tournament ended, but before prizes were distributed. While it is not uncommon for tournaments to have announcements about future events, typically they do not last as long as this one did, nor come accompanied by a powerpoint presentation. Additionally, there was not any opportunity given for other clubs to announce their own upcoming events.

There was a bit of confusion regarding how the streaming table was chosen. Rather than having a dedicated table assigned ahead of time, a table was chosen prior to the hanchan starting. This required taking extra time to both have the streaming table's players move from their original spot

to the streaming room, and the players from table 16 moving to that table's old spot. There were also a number of times where a table that was assigned for streaming was announced on Discord, only to be changed soon after.

Speaking on personal experience on the streaming table, there were a couple issues I experienced. The first was that, while I typically play with my left hand, I was explicitly told I could not. I have experience playing on streams and understand the hand placement needed to prevent blocking tiles from view while playing, but being prevented from doing so at all was rather disconcerting. There was also an inconsistency caused by the streaming organizers for the dealer selection at the start. While every other table I played at used the standard WRC shuffle for determining player's starting seats and winds, we were told to stop it halfway so that a particular seat would be pointed east for ease of stream. It would have been much more fair to let us complete the process, then rotate our seating as necessary for this requirement. Per another player at my table's comment on this afterwards, "the stream should never be more important than the competition".

The 'prize wall' being distributed in player ranking order is another issue that was brought up. Waiting for your turn to choose from a dwindling set of prizes, or just having to wait in general or risk losing out because you have travel plans, can lead to bad feelings. Prizes should be distributed in a faster manner (in parallel) or given out in other ways (door prizes).

There were also minor complaints regarding the size difference of the tiles and general shuffling capabilities of the autotables. This was mostly mitigated by reminding participants to shuffle the tiles briefly prior to pushing them into the well.

### **Observer Personal Summary:**

Overall, I felt the tournament was a successful one. Sparrow's Nest Studio's new place is spacious, and being able to participate in a fully automatic (table) Mahjong event is great fun. Having participated in many past events held by USPML, I feel a lot of the same issues have cropped up (start of day delays, bathroom issues, lack of other community announcements) at each event, which unfortunately mars the otherwise great effort by the organizers (Ann and Sophie) and judges (Rob and Netty) this time around.

It was unfortunate to have the experiences I did while on the streaming table, but it was an impressive effort to make it happen in the first place. I believe more training needs to happen for the stream organizers to understand how to balance the competition while ensuring proper knowledge is imparted regarding on-screen etiquette. The stream itself was a joy to watch afterwards, and it was something that made our regular meetup back home more exciting, as our members were able to cheer on our participants on stream while it was going live.

I hope that the issues that were mostly out of their hands (radiator noises and bathroom flow) are things that can be addressed for the future.

Ultimately, I will still continue to participate in events held by USPML. It would be nice if time/opportunity were given to other clubs to announce events. While it's understandable that a WRL-focused event would not want to advertise events regarding Saikousen, being able to hear about the upcoming tournaments in DC or OK would have been good for the community.