

# ARA Event Observer Report

## **Observer Name:**

Ty Broun (HamHamShazam)

## **Observer State of Residence:**

Arkansas

## **Event Name:**

DC Riichi Mahjong Open 2026

## **Event Location:**

Hilton Alexandria Old Town: Main Ballroom

1767 King St, Alexandria, VA 22314

## **Event Date:**

March 28-29, 2026

## **Number of Participants:**

160 signed up. 156 Official count at the start of Hanchan 1.

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

Day 1 - Saturday, March 28th

Registration: 8:45 am - 9:45 am

Opening Ceremony: 9:45 am - 10:00 am

Hanchan 1: 10:00 am - 11:30 am

Hanchan 2: 11:45 am - 1:15 pm

Lunch Break: 1:15 pm - 2:30 pm

Hanchan 3: 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm

Hanchan 4: 4:15 pm - 5:45 pm

Hanchan 5: 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Day 2 - Sunday, March 29th

Check in: 9:00 am - 9:45 am

Hanchan 6: 10:00 am - 11:30 am

Hanchan 7: 11:45 am - 1:15 pm

Lunch Break: 1:15 pm - 2:30 pm

Hanchan 8: 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm

Hanchan 9: 4:15 pm - 5:45 pm

(top 4 split off for 2 Hanchan here)

Hanchan 10: 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Award Ceremony: 7:45 pm

Freeplay available Friday 6:00 pm and Saturday after Hanchan 5

10 Hanchans 75+0 timer. Hanchans 9 and 10 had top 4 split off for a 2 Hanchan set while the rest played for 5-8 prizes, ARA points to 39<sup>th</sup> place, and additional prize wall tickets.

<b>Round 1</b>	<b>A (160)</b>					
<b>Round 2</b>	<b>A (80)</b>			<b>B (80)</b>		
<b>Round 3</b>	<b>A (80)</b>			<b>B (80)</b>		
<b>Round 4</b>	<b>A (56)</b>		<b>B (52)</b>		<b>C (52)</b>	
<b>Round 5</b>	<b>A (56)</b>		<b>B (52)</b>		<b>C (52)</b>	
<b>Round 6</b>	<b>A (40)</b>		<b>B (40)</b>		<b>C (40)</b>	<b>D (40)</b>
<b>Round 7</b>	<b>A (40)</b>		<b>B (40)</b>		<b>C (40)</b>	<b>D (40)</b>
<b>Round 8</b>	<b>A (40)</b>		<b>B (40)</b>		<b>C (40)</b>	<b>D (40)</b>
<b>Round 9</b>	<b>Top 4</b>	<b>A (32)</b>	<b>B (32)</b>	<b>C (28)</b>	<b>D (32)</b>	<b>E (32)</b>
<b>Round 10</b>	<b>Top 4</b>	<b>A (32)</b>	<b>B (32)</b>	<b>C (28)</b>	<b>D (32)</b>	<b>E (32)</b>

### Saturday Side Events

Mahjong Tile Sculpture Contest, Mahjong Bar Trivia, Mystery Fighting Game Tournament, Anime Music Quiz

### Names of Officials/Judges:

Judges	Staff
Harrison Corp (Head Judge)	Kyle Pittleman (TO)
Thomas Wong	Ali Neyers
Dustin Fries	Grant Allvin
Kate Li	Saige (Nick) Cockrell
Sean Pines	Yuki Melvin (only saturday)
Alex Campbell	Jack Kinsey (sunday only)
Max Inman	John Bailon (subbed for rounds 6-8, sunday only)

Shenet Yee	Max Wang (subbed for rounds 6-8, sunday only)
	David Horowitz (sunday only)
	Charles Manno

**Communication to Players:** *(How were announcements, standings, pairings etc.*

*communicated to players during the event?)*

Discord and a Script.google site. Access to said site and the schedule itself was also on the back of all player's badges.

[https://script.google.com/macros/s/AKfycbyltwl23Z\\_ilMxt8Mz4BSI-JcHxDn0INn0m8jrXArxS0xcIQFxD6uNavZDwo\\_KQXyPH/exec](https://script.google.com/macros/s/AKfycbyltwl23Z_ilMxt8Mz4BSI-JcHxDn0INn0m8jrXArxS0xcIQFxD6uNavZDwo_KQXyPH/exec)

**Prizes:**

1st: \$400

2nd: \$300

3rd: \$250

4th: \$200

5-8th: \$100

ament games will award prize tickets that can be spent on prizes on our prize wall.

Trophies for Top 4

Additionally, Players were given tickets for a prize wall based on placement. 1<sup>st</sup> was given 4 Tickets, 2<sup>nd</sup> 3, 3<sup>rd</sup> 2, and 4<sup>th</sup> 1, so All players were reviewing tickets. Prize wall items supported in part by Mahjong Soul. and M1A0.

**Catering:**

Water Available in dispensers between the player lounge and the main ballroom. Starbucks in the hotel lobby as well as a small restaurant as well as the hotel snack shop. A plentiful variety of food establishments were also a short walk from the venue. Outside food and drink was not allowed in the play area but there was no shortage of places to sit and eat around the hotel.

**Tournament Atmosphere:**

Lively, upbeat, and intense. DC Mahjong loves their fanfare and the event was better for it.

You could tell that they wanted to do more than just host an event: they wanted to make sure everyone was having a good time on and off the tables. Day 2 did have some people petering out on some enthusiasm as some of the players with lower scores were congregated together but I do not think it was any worse than any scramble I have been a part of.

To counterbalance the complaints and issues listed, I am including something a player sent to me afterward that reflects how I and other felt about how things were conducted:

i think there were a ton of things done really well, especially the pairings / results google script that updated live and allowed us all to quickly view relative standings and clearly understand points movements needed for placement changes.

additionally, the judging staff were all extremely professional, fair, and quick with their judgments and player assistance requests. overall, i think the tournament was run very smoothly especially for how large it was.

## **Complaints and Issues:**

### **Scheduling:**

Most Hanchans on the first day started late by about 5-10 minutes. Hanchan 1 was delayed due to announcements and a small pairing fix. This domino'd into a shortened lunch, which was further shortened for the players whose games went long. This was further complicated by 2-3 tables discovering at Hanchan 3 that their set had tiles with noticeable black marks on them. This led to an overall delay while tables were checked and tiles swapped. Later on, other issues with "marked" sets were handled by delaying their start time from the official timer, ensuring the majority of players were in and out on time.

Day 2 Hanchans had similar delays, though the last two Hanchans caught up to the schedule. Slight further delays occurred after the top 4 split in Hanchan 9 from the players who lost tablemates to the split. Judges used the aforementioned offset start strategy to mitigate the problem.

A couple of players came to me and expressed that the various announcements between Hanchans caused a lot of the delays. The first morning announcement did carry some new information but also carried information already covered in the etiquette meeting at 9:15 AM.

I do think that the issue stemmed more from delays caused by 1-2 games going long, thus preventing any players reentering the room until the next Hanchan, thus delaying the ~150

players out in the hall from getting pairings and coming back inside. However, this delay likely made players feel frustrated that they were doing things other than playing when sitting through announcements knowing things were already behind.

### **Marked Sets:**

As players came back from lunch and sat down for Hanchan 3, ~ 3 tables noticed that there were small but noticeable black marks on tiles on their sets. After some deliberation and a delay for all matches called by the head judge, sets were swapped out and the round started late. Initially thought to be an issue with one of the sets lent by players, there were at least 2-3 more times this came up in later Hanchans. After some discussion with staff, our best guess was that it was excess ink from the gel pens provided for the all last/final score sheets that were the source of the issues. The standing theory was that players would accidentally get ink on their hands after filling out the all-last paper, then unknowingly applied it to a tile during the rest of the game. This theory was solidified only after the end of the tournament, so let this be a warning to future TOs to avoid gel pens.

### **Judging:**

A complaint was sent to me post-tournament concerning a specific judge. I have copied it below.

My name is [Redacted], and I was a player at the DC tournament. I would like to file a formal complaint regarding one of the judges, [Redacted].

Throughout the tournament, I found their behavior to be disruptive and unprofessional. Based on my experience, I believe their conduct should be reviewed before they are allowed to serve as a judge in future ARA-qualified tournaments.

Below are two specific incidents:

During my final game (Game 10) with [Redacted], [Redacted] approached our table mid-game and began walking around while filming players' faces, hands, and gameplay using their personal cellphone, without any prior notice or consent. This was unexpected and distracting, and it negatively affected the game environment and player performance. They began filming around the time I declared riichi, stood behind [Redacted] while recording their play, and stopped only after [Redacted] dealt in.

After Game 3 was announced to be delayed by five minutes due to a tile replacement issue (which ultimately lasted over ten minutes), [Redacted] attempted to issue me a warning for using the restroom before the game began. I questioned whether this was

|appropriate and asked the head judge, Harrison, for clarification. He then instructed  
|[Redacted] to stop issuing such warnings, as the game had been officially delayed.

During Hanchan 3, a table had an odd incident that turned into a chonbo when a player discarded a tile after calling riichi before realizing that they could have ankan'd the tile. In trying to redact the discard, a judge was called over. The question on whether or not they could keep the tile for ankan (no) was complicated when the player preemptively flipped a kan dora tile. Thus, a chonbo was given for revealing information.

During Hanchan 4, table 38 called a judge to make a noise complaint on table 37. The player reporting this to me said that they weren't sure if the judge even addressed the issue because the noise continued for the rest of the Hanchan.

One player complained that the awarding of extra game time due to chonbos differing before and after time expired was upsetting some people. Specifically, the awarding of an extra hand post timer, rather than additional time, seemed inconsistent to them.

### **Pairings:**

Going into Hanchan 2, I was surprised to see I was paired with one of the same players I was with the first game. I brought this to the attention of one of the judges, Kate, who told me that despite it being unlikely, it isn't impossible with the Swiss pairings. I had been told by the TO prior to this that it was effectively impossible until Hanchans 9 and 10. I didn't think further on it and proceeded with my game. Afterward, the Head Judge pulled both of us who got double-matched aside and apologized deeply for the mix-up. Turns out something did not function properly on that specific generation of pairings, and the duplicate was not only made, but not flagged. Additionally, the Head Judge acknowledged a second point of failure in the process when the judge I informed did not escalate it so they could modify the pairings. Personally, it did not bother me but it did reflect something in the code that needed fixing. I also did find it amusing that out of all the players it happened to the ARA observer. I did not hear of any further duplicate until Hanchans 9 and 10; players who saw repeat opponents also did not bring any complaints to me.

### **Player Opinions on WRC Rules:**

On Shohai rulings and Chonbos in general, a player sent the following to me:

|Two things about ruling in specific:

1. "touching the wall and calling is a chombo" in my opinion - and other players have agreed with the sentiment - it should only be a dead hand/chombo if the tile physically left the wall. It's very common for players to touch the wall and then realize the tile is

one they might want. This is especially true when players are trying to play faster to beat the timer.

There was one incident on one of my tables where a player (toimen) could not see that a player hovering their hand over the wall didn't in fact touch the wall, and that had to be confirmed by the other player (his shimocha)

Furthermore, I think it's unhealthy for the community and for the growth of our sport. Chombo'ing can be pretty traumatizing, and it happens the most to new players. I'm not sure if this is a rule that is making the game more fair or helping the game grow better, and there's also potential for this rule to be used aggressively by players to penalize others for small mistakes in order to get ahead in competition, going against the spirit of the game and sportsmanship

2. Discard before draw but it's noticed on the same turn (shouhai): the most common kind of chombo, and one that, in my opinion - as well as others I've talked about this too - is not damaging to the integrity of the game if it's noticed immediately, and can be corrected. I feel like it's in the spirit of the game and sportsmanship, and especially at opens with new players, to allow this kind of correction (notice on the turn that it happened, report to judge in case of multiple occurrences/3 strike system, allow for the correction to happen, resume game)

Chombos should be reserved for game ending mistakes, and a shouhai that is able to be corrected on the spot should be corrected so the game can continue as normal.

This is reflective of other comments I got on Shohai penalties. While some focused on the impact it has on players in a community and others simply questioning its purpose to the game, the common question was why it was a round-resetting 30P issue. Players pointed out that since no information is revealed, the round could continue with the offending player's hand being dead, at the very least. While I was writing this report, another player reached out and commented on the workload this put on the judges as an issue, and further expanded on the impact it could have on new players.

One Judge had the following to say on the accessibility/ease of use of the WRC documents:

As a first time judge, I wanted to complain that the WRC rules clarifications need to be added to the official documents. The app Kyle made was extremely useful but I still defaulted to referencing the rules as written just to be extra sure, and the mere fact that errors exist means I have to doubt what I read and cross-reference multiple pdf's. Not sure if y'all have any influence on that but it was the biggest thorn in my side this weekend.

## **Misc. Issues**

Friday night there was an issue with a player's body odor during freeplay. This was addressed during morning announcements and no further issues were brought to me about it.

The Blocks side event was canceled due to overrun from the other side events, and one would-be participant told me to put here that the cancellation was "the worst thing to ever happen."

One player expressed frustration with one of the back tables being right next to the larger speaker used for announcements and that the time calls made during the Hanchan were startling and almost made him chonbo by knocking over tiles at least once.

## **Observer Personal Summary:**

Despite the length of the complaints and issues section, I have to say that this was a fantastic event, perhaps one of my favorites I have ever been to. It was clear that DC Riichi Mahjong put their heart into all of it. One thing that stood out to me was that all parts of the event felt thought out, even when they were not going perfectly. They were very capable of adapting to make things work. Everyone was so lovely and welcoming and great attention was given to making sure we were having fun.

It was lovely being in DC in time for the cherry blossoms, despite the weather. The venue is very easy to get to from 3 different airports. The easy access to a variety of good food was nearly unmatched compared to other events I have been to and was a huge plus for me.

I think the Swiss system is very interesting and I think it has a big future in the sport. I could definitely tell that the mood would swing with how people moved about the room during the event: the higher tables containing the higher-performing players and vice-versa. Having to acknowledge poorer performance by moving farther back in the room had a noticeable effect on some. However, the aligning of people playing similar conditions made for more interesting play.

Free play is always one of my favorite parts of these events, but the extra side events were great. Special shoutout to Harrison's Mahjong Bar Trivia. It says something about how fun a game is when it can pull me away from mahjong free play.

I could go on and on for another page but I'll just say this: thank you, DC Riichi Mahjong. This was one for the scrapbooks. I flew halfway across the country and got pummeled like a pinata full of tenbo but still can say that it was one of the best tournaments I have been to. See y'all next time.