

ARA Event Observer Report

Observer Name:

Joseph Mullin

Observer State of Residence:

Iowa

Event Name:

Heart of America Riichi Tournament (HART)

Event Location:

Residence Inn Kansas City Airport
10300 N Ambassador Dr, Kansas City, MO 64153

Event Date:

May 30-31, 2026

Number of Participants:

52

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

2 days, 8 hanchan full scramble. 75+0 time limit.

WRC 2025 Ruleset with modifications 2.1 Red Fives and 6.3 Lower Penalties. 15/5 Uma.

Freeplay available the afternoon and evening of Friday, May 29 and after the final hanchans were complete on Saturday and Sunday.

Names of Officials/Judges:

Tournament Organizer: Justin N

Head Judge: Ty B

Floor Judges: Ben H, Ethan B

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

Announcements were posted on the event Discord and made in-person before the start of Hanchan 1. When necessary, brief announcements would be made immediately prior to the start of a hanchan.

Pairings were made visible on the tournament website prior to the start of the event. Standings were updated at the end of each hanchan, with the exception of Hanchan 8, where the website was not updated until after the final placements were announced at the award ceremony.

Prizes:

Trophies for 1st - 4th place, medals for 5th - 8th place. Additionally, each table's winner of the final hanchan received that table's compass.

Catering:

Bottled water and tea and a small variety of canned soda were provided for the players. There were several restaurants within a 10-minute drive of the venue.

Tournament Atmosphere:

The tournament was held in two adjoining conference rooms in the hotel. There was adequate space between each table and the room did not feel cramped. The host organization anticipated that the room would become warm when fully occupied and did their best to mitigate the heat as much as possible by placing fans on the perimeter of the room. There was heavy rain on Saturday and Sunday morning that increased the humidity, but the tournament space never felt excessively uncomfortable. A large TV screen was set up near the entrance to the room to display pairings before each hanchan and to display the time remaining during hanchans.

Between hanchans, the hallway outside the tournament space tended to become crowded. There were two restrooms directly across the hallway from the tournament space that tended to fill up quickly, but no hanchans needed to be delayed due to players using the restroom.

Miscellaneous Observations:

Prior to hanchan 1, the question was raised whether initial seat winds for each table should be determined by traditional seat draw or direct draw. The event staff clarified that while direct draw was the preferred method, each table could use traditional draw if they so chose.

Clear expectations were set prior to hanchan 1 that use of electronics, including smartwatches, was not allowed. Players were told to summon a judge if they wanted a photo taken of a particularly high-scoring winning hand.

To encourage players to call judges in order to resolve disputes, players were informed that extra time would be given at the end of the hanchan for pauses in play. I believe this made players less reluctant to call judges over for minor disputes for fear of penalizing the entire table.

The power briefly flickered during Hanchan 1 due to an active thunderstorm.

During Hanchan 2, we began to hear people loudly shouting and playing Mario Kart from the adjacent conference room. At the end of the hanchan, the head judge informed our table that they were aware of the noise issue and would address it with the hotel staff. After the lunch break, the tournament space had been slightly rearranged; tables had been moved further away from the adjoining wall to further mitigate the noise issue.

Prior to hanchan 3, the head judge instructed the players that the dice should be placed to the current dealer's right instead of on the compass, in order to eliminate any ambiguity as to the current dealer. The players were also reminded that they should verify that all payments are correct before placing tenbou in their trays.

One player dropped from the tournament after Hanchan 4; this player was replaced in Hanchans 5-8 by one of the three substitutes.

On Sunday morning, multiple fans were running in the tournament space to mitigate the heat. My table was positioned close to one of the fans. A judge asked us between hands to ask if the noise from the fan was a distraction. The table agreed that the noise was not an issue.

The start of hanchan 7 was delayed 5 minutes to accommodate three players who were returning from lunch. This was the only hanchan that did not start exactly on schedule.

One table at the tournament (table 13) was set up to stream matches on KCRM's YouTube channel. An elaborate nine-camera setup was used, allowing those running the stream to focus on each player's hand, each player's face, and see the table from above. The stream overlay listed each player's name and club affiliation, their current score, the current round, the total number of riichi sticks and honba count, the dora tile, and each player's wait when they reached tenpai. The tournament organizers made it clear before the tournament that the streaming table would not be treated any differently from the non-streaming tables; players would still need to summon a judge to resolve disputes, and those running the stream would not intervene to prevent errors. The result was a very professional-looking stream that allowed friends and family members of the players to watch their matches. If the ARA has not already published guidelines for streaming tables at tournaments, I would recommend they do so, using the HART stream as a model.

Three KCRM members provided their autotables for use during freeplay. The organizers communicated that the autotables would *only* be used during freeplay and not during official tournament matches.

Complaints and Issues:

During hanchan 2, the player seated across from me appeared to be frustrated with how long the player to my right was taking to flip over tiles at the end of each hand and build their wall at the start of each hand. There were also two instances during the hanchan where the player to my right needed to be reminded to take their turn. While each delay was noticeable, I do not believe they added up to a significant amount of time over the course of the hanchan. With 6 minutes remaining before South 1, the player to my right asked if we should fill out the all-last sheet, but the player across from me insisted on starting the hand, saying we could fill it out if time expired before the end of the hand. There was a floor judge nearby who instructed us to proceed with the hand without filling the all-last sheet. We were able to finish the hand shortly before time expired and played one more hand with the all-last sheet filled out. After the hanchan, I raised the concern with the head judge who let me know that he was aware of the issue and would discuss it with the two floor judges to ensure consistency going forward.

On Sunday morning, the venue was scheduled to open at 8:30 AM, with announcements scheduled at 9:00 AM and the start of hanchan 5 at 9:30 AM. Initially, players were instructed to check in prior to going to their assigned table, but the message was updated at 7:37 AM with instructions for

players to proceed to their assigned table to be checked in. At 8:38 AM, another message was posted asking for players to be at their assigned tables by 9:00 AM and apologizing for any confusion. The group of players I was staying with felt a bit rushed to get out the door after the final message.

There was a waitlisted player who had traveled with the rest of their club members to the tournament, hoping to fill a spot if another player had dropped. This was communicated to the event organizers, who instructed the waitlisted player to be at the venue on Saturday morning, but cautioned that there was no guarantee they would be able to play. One player had not arrived by 9:14 and was pinged in the Discord by one of the judges. The waitlisted player was informed they could play the first hanchan if the missing player did not show up by 9:20, but the missing player showed up by 9:21 and was allowed to play as normal. The waitlisted player told me that they felt a little strung along by the communication from the organizers, although they fully understood that they were not guaranteed to play any games at the tournament. *(I don't fault the organizers for this one. As communicated, players late to a hanchan receive a 1P penalty for each minute they are late, and players who are 15 minutes late to a hanchan receive a 30P penalty and are replaced by a substitute. The player who arrived at 9:21 was still on time for the first hanchan; allowing them to be replaced would have raised more issues than allowing them to play as normal.)*

At one table in hanchan 6, the South player declared riichi, chased shortly after by the dealer. According to one player at this table, the two players not in riichi appeared to be folding. As they approached the end of the North player's wall, the North player shifted their wall so the remaining tiles were closer to the middle of their pond. The Dealer went to draw a tile, and at this point, the South player pointed out that the dealer had drawn from the West player's wall while there were still three tiles remaining in the North player's wall. The tile the dealer drew was the bottom tile of the stack, indicating that it is the second tile that had been drawn from that wall. The dealer had seen the tile but had not yet discarded. A judge was called and the situation explained. Before the judge could give a ruling, the head judge came to the table and the situation was explained again. The table was unsure who drew the first incorrect tile, but the North player was willing to take responsibility for the first tile being drawn out of order. The head judge ruled that the North player would receive a dead hand for drawing the incorrect tile, but the dealer was allowed to return the second incorrect tile to the wall and continue playing without penalty.

The player who brought this to my attention did not begrudge the judge for ruling against the North player since they were willing to take the penalty, and recognized that, under time pressure and using reduced penalties, the judge is incentivized to be more lenient. On reflection, however, the player felt that a chonbo would have been more appropriate, as this was the second tile that was drawn out of order and no one knew what had happened to the first; the question would still remain which player would be penalized. The player felt it was a bit weird that the dealer had not received a penalty for also drawing out of order, and felt that the dead hand penalty for North was a bit soft for a player who was already ostensibly folding the hand. *(I agree that a dead hand penalty doesn't really penalize a player who is already folding their hand; however, the decision to impose a dead hand is in line with the established WRC guidelines for reduced penalties.)*

Conversely, another player felt that the dead hand penalty should not have been assessed for drawing the wrong tile in all cases. Per the WRC optional rules with optional lower penalties, wrongly drawing tiles is penalized with a dead hand. However, the main rules under “Wrongly drawing tiles” state: *In case a player draws from the wrong place in the wall, or out of turn, they must place it back without penalty. If the player has already included the tile into their hand, so that they can’t prove which tile it was, they will receive a chonbo.* This player feels like the WRC Optional Rules document could be clarified: “Wrongly drawing tiles” would be updated to read “Wrongly drawn tile that is not identifiable.”

Recommendations:

A few players felt that the food options close to the venue were a bit limited. It was difficult for some players to find restaurants that were close enough to the venue, quick enough, and could accommodate their dietary restrictions. Several players opted to have food delivered to the venue, as any nearby restaurants were only reachable by car. If KCRM chooses to use the same venue in the future, perhaps they could look at either partnering with a food truck or having a low-cost food option (sandwiches, chips, etc.) catered at the venue.

One player felt that it would have been a small quality-of-life improvement to have a second screen displaying the time remaining at the opposite side of the room so players would not have to turn their heads to see it. This player noted that the single screen was nonetheless readable from across the room and appropriate for the room’s size. I would recommend KCRM consider adding a second screen, especially if future tournaments end up being larger than this year’s.

A score chart was provided to each table, along with a yaku list. The score chart was printed on a full letter-size sheet of paper; the size of the score chart made it so some players felt discouraged to use it, as it did not fit well on the tables underneath the junk mat and pulling it out of the folder mid-game was too much of a hassle. It should be noted that several players provided their own pocket-sized score charts, and the head judge had communicated that these would be acceptable as long as he had a chance to review them to make sure they matched the official WRC 2025 chart. With HART advertised as a beginner-friendly tournament, they may consider that newer players may feel more comfortable using the provided score charts if they are small enough to fit on the table.

Observer Personal Summary:

Despite the minor issues listed above, this tournament was an *incredibly* well-run event. I received messages from several players detailing what they enjoyed about the tournament:

KCRM did an amazing job as first time hosts! ... It was the first tournament for both me and my fellow club member and we both loved it. We are running our first (one day) tournament this year and learned a lot from how well KC ran.

My feedback for HART is overwhelmingly positive, of course. I loved the friendly yet professional atmosphere. I could feel that the organizers and staff were prioritizing the

players. Any issues (heat, noise) were acknowledged [and] addressed as promptly as possible to the best of the organizers' ability and announced clearly to the room.

I thought [the tournament] went really well. It was my first time doing a tournament. I felt that it all went really smoothly. My disability was accommodated perfectly. I was always assured by staff that they would make sure it was handled. I couldn't shuffle because my shoulder could not handle the motion. They offered to explain to the table so I wouldn't have to. [They] made sure to check in with me the next day. I felt very comfortable and confident in this new playing environment.

Echoing the above sentiment, I think that the tournament was very well thought-out. The organizers were incredibly proactive at identifying issues and addressing them as soon as they came up. The players at the event were generally polite and courteous. I had the opportunity to play against skilled players from across the country. This was my first tournament, and it has set a very high standard that future tournaments will be compared to. I look forward to attending events hosted by KCRM in the future!