Chicago Area Riichi Tournament (CART) 2026 Observer Report

Observer Name: Caleb Gonzalez

Observer State of Residence: Oklahoma

Event Name: 2026 CART (Chicago Area Riichi Tournament)

Event Location: Hyatt Regency O'Hare Chicago in the International Ballroom and Paris Room
9300 Bryn Mawr Avenue, Rosemont, Illinois, United States, 60018

Event Date: September 19 and 20, 2026

Number of Participants: 154

Event Schedule Summary: *(Days played, number of rounds, finalist rounds, time per round, etc.)*
2 days of playing. Full scramble the 1st hanchan then swiss pairing for the remaining hanchans.
Day 1 consisting of 5 hanchan
Day 2 consisting of 2 hanchan before a top 8 cut, then 2 more hanchan for everyone that didn't make the cut to decide 9th - 154th.

The players who made the cut would play 2 hanchan to decide who would be at the top 4 table and who would be at the 5th - 8th table then a final hanchan to decide the overall standings at those newly split tables.

Timer was 75+0 for all games including the top 8 cut which was on auto-tables

Names of Officials/Judges:
Tournament Organizer: Aldwin. G. aka Kyuu
Head judge: Takahiro S.
Judges: Steve A., Kevin D., Josh S., Nathanael K., Bret L., Jay S., Chris S., and Ray T.

Communication to Players:
Most things were done through the discord but also announcements were made using a microphone and speakers if additional clarification was needed.
Standings/pairings were in a Google Sheet in the discord.

Prizes:
1st place got a trophy and a custom made junkmat bag.
2nd - 4th got trophies
5th - 10th got plaques

Catering: Water was provided via water coolers with plenty of cups. A kettle to make hot drinks in, other small snacks/drinks, and other water soluble drink options were also provided. Plenty of restaurants close to the venue that allowed for many options without having to worry about being late coming back.

Tournament Atmosphere:
The tournament was held in a large conference room in the hotel and for the amount of people, the room still felt like we had plenty of space with no issues of tables being too close to each other. There was no interruptions/noise from anything else going on in the hotel and outside the conference room was a very wide and long hallway for the players to move to when not playing. It was a little on the cold side but given the amount of players in one room, it's better than it being too warm. Bathrooms were at the end of that hallway and were quite large that prevented them from being backed up with additional options upstairs if they did get backed up.

Complaints and Issues:
There was a presentation before the tournament on Kyuu's twitch, however it ended up causing a lot of confusion that needed more clarification at the tournament's announcements. If these are going to be used in the future they need to be more clear/concise and prevent further confusion from unclear slides. This included just the words "atamahane" and "agariyame" being on the slides but not stated whether they were on or off.

There was no clear page or list that showed the differences between standard WRC and the Saikouisen ruleset that was being used which caused a lot of confusion in general and the announcements made around this only clarified some things but not others.

There were 2 players that had issues with flights and instead of starting the hanchan on time with them receiving a penalty, they ended up waiting for a bit to give those players time to potentially make it before the start of hanchan 1. This and many other small factors led to the entirety of day 1 being behind schedule by almost an hour and caused several complaints from other players that the delays weren't being taken seriously nor were there any attempts to try and catch up. This trend of delays almost happened day 2 as well but a player spoke out and requested they shorten the lunch by a bit to get back on track since people had flights and such to catch right after the tournament. Thankfully this made the tournament for the most part end on time in day 2 but it shouldn't have taken a player to speak out for that to be the case. Lunch should not be extended if we are behind schedule already.

There were a few major issues during the whole pairings process that caused pairings to be re-made or players to be missing/listed as sub. These were fixed but not without outside help which should not be needed. They needed to be more familiar and knowledgeable on the Swiss software they were using if they are going to use it at an actual event. I was told that it's part of the agreement with ARA that when a tournament runs Swiss, the reporter who checks the final score

sheet should also be the one who inputs the score. Instead what happened is it was just Taka entering all the scores and ended up causing re-pairings to happen. There was also a lack of information on how the buckets were set up and changed throughout the tournament. That info existed somewhere because I ended up seeing/hearing about it but I don't know where the information originated from
Some people mentioned they believe having a cut with Swiss pairings defeats the purpose of swiss.

General issues with timers not being visible from every point in the room or sometimes only visible very far away from the back of the room.

There were also many complaints about calling a judge over for misehai. When it was called it was done in a timely manner however over the course of a game it added up and ended discouraging several tables/players from calling a judge at all. Instead most tables just showed the tile to the table before continuing play without calling a judge as you are not awarded any time back for misehai calls. The entire misehai reporting part of the rules is based on the assumption you have a judge already at the table. Since that's not possible here, it should be considered to not be something a judge is needed for in the future. It also caused people to player slower and more careful after getting a misehai to prevent further judge calls which slowed down the overall game pace.

There was also discrepancies on time being given back at all for judge calls. When judges were called over for Chombos that sometimes took a minute or 2 to resolve, that time was not given back while other times it was.

Players were also not originally instructed to write their player number on their badge which caused a lot of players to not know their player number at all. This was later announced for us to do so and to fill out the reporting sheet before the start of the hanchan with our names/numbers but still issues had already been caused because of it.

A player who ended up feeling light headed and sick due to food poisoning was instructed that if they got up from the table at all that it was a 30k point penalty even after they had gotten a sho-chombo due to their sickness. Later on the player was informed that they would allow for a 5 min break with just a warning but by then the player had already thrown the game to be able to leave sooner due to feeling ill so the damage was already done.

There was a set of tiles at table 1 that while it was the same size as all the other tables, ended up being a different set that was slippery and hard to play with which caused several complaints. I brought this up day 1 but it was left at the time and eventually swapped out later on the start of day 2. This set ended up getting more misehai calls on it because of the slippery tile nature. There was also at least 1 set that a player mentioned the hatsu being noticeably bigger than the other tiles in which the rest of the table also acknowledged after noticing it. Also tiles were played on during free play after day 1 and did not appear to be wiped down/cleaned for day 2. Could have been avoided if they had sets specifically for freeplay either separate to the tournament sets or dedicate a few sets

to be used during freeplay so it's easier to clean a few sets rather than all of them.

Some players reported being unable to access the pairings due to poor cell signal and issues with the WIFI. The staffing table did allow for players to look it up through them though to help. In the future, they probably need to have pairings up in some way on the tv screens to try and prevent issues with this.

In terms of the top 8 cut, it was odd to keep the same 75+0 timer even when playing on auto tables instead. We also played an additional game that no one outside of the top 8 played which caused some people to be confused on when the award ceremony would happen or what they were waiting for. There were spectators allowed for the final game of top 8 but some players did not know that was an option or where it was being held.

There were some noise complaints from other tables on day 2 but no judge was ever called to deal with the issue nor did they step in.

There were complaints about the level of play of some substitutes as well. One situation ended up causing 2 other players to lose out on their conditions to gyakuten due to a sub calling a furiten ron while in 1st place.

There was also a group of kids that were not associated with the tournament that came into free play on day 2 that ended up causing some people to be uncomfortable. I'm unaware of if the tournament staff knew about it but another player and I ended up getting them to leave after hearing said complaints.

General complaints about announcements being hard to hear or them not using a microphone properly.

Some praises include the judge calling system with the colored flags allowing a judge to easily glance at a call for them to know if they are needed for a report, ruling/penalty issue, or for a busting stick. The venue itself was very spacious with very well sized bathrooms. Many players also loved the environment after hanchans finished which included karaoke. The drink options offered by the venue were also highly praised including Korean coffee mix.

Observer Personal Summary:

Overall, while there were a lot of complaints I think most of these can be easily fixed for next year. I'm sure a large part of them were from just not being used to dealing with this large of an event after scaling up this much. Most people did end up enjoying a tournament this large, especially with swiss pairings. I am looking forward to the tournament staff ironing out the kinks and having an amazing event next year!