

Warsaw 11.12.2018

Warsaw Mahjong Taikai 2018 – Dead Hand Incident Committee report

Members:

Szymon Lasota – Tournament Head Referee

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Situation:

During Warsaw Mahjong Taikai 2018, in hanchan 6, at table 4, with players: Yuliya L., Justyna K., Artur L., Dan S. during hand 東2-2 following occurred.

Players' winds during 東2-2:

東 - Justyna

南 - Artur

西 - Dan

北 - Yuliya

Dan melded 3 green dragons, having on his hand pair of white and pair of red dragons. Later he upgraded those 3 green dragons to kan. With rinshan tile he drew red dragon, which also made him tenpai. In that situation, he declared riichi with the following actions: saying “riichi”, putting riichi stick on the table and discarding a tile (whether it was rotated or not, players at the table could not make clear conclusion – when later asked by referee).

Immediately, next player (Yuliya) said that Dan couldn't make riichi as he had open hand. At this moment Artur said that Dan had a dead hand.

It is important to mention that at this moment, it was very loud in the room: at one table there was a discussion about the hand, at the other table one of the players got excited and was talking with a very loud voice and there where tiles being shuffled at another table. In that moment it was very difficult to hear it clearly. Yuliya when interviewed by referee later, stated that she did not hear this dead hand declaration and treated Dan as playing normally. Justyna confirmed hearing that “dead hand” was said by Artur and treated Dan as a player who couldn't win.

Artur stated to referee (during the interview later) that Dan confirmed “Ok, ok, dead hand”.

Dan stated to the head referee that he made a quick correction and he understood that he didn't have a dead hand, and that he would have had it only if the next player had drawn his tile before he fixed it.

The game went on and Justyna discarded white dragon. Dan declared Ron with yakuman (Dai San Gen). Artur said that this is a chombo because Dan had the dead hand. Referee was called at this moment (Head Referee – Szymon).

Warsaw 11.12.2018

Referee asked all the players to explain situation in detail and could not make decision straight away because of two factors: "quick fix" done by Dan and the fact that half of the players didn't consider the dead hand was announced.

Szymon stopped the game at this table and went to consult other referees. Most of them suggested (after a brief explanation of situation) that this should be a chombo.

As all this discussion took a lot of time, to not postpone the game at table 4 any further, and without clear, consistent view of the situation and big pressure of Dan who was very upset about the situation and wanted to leave the table, Head Referee made his call to call yakuman valid, thinking that it could be fixed later somehow (which of course weren't possible to be fixed easily later due to the enormous impact on the game). Yakuman was inserted to the scoring application and the game went on.

Additional time was added for the table (20 minutes) as well as for the tables where other referees played.

Head Referee perspective:

- Referee was called to the table to address the issue with declaring winning hand: Dai San Gen (ron).
- Situation at the table looked correct: winning hand had proper structure for Dai San Gen, number of the tiles was correct, there was no furiten, no clear indication of a dead hand, no riichi stick on the table and no rotated tile.
- 2 of 4 players claimed that winning player had a dead hand and could not win. Other two (including winning player) claimed that dead hand was not announced.
- Referee began investigation by asking players for details about the situation and briefly discussed it with other referees
- Decision was made (by Head Referee) to claim the yakuman valid (because of not being able to clarify the situation, lack of evidence on the table and different versions of events from each player) - although, all players agreed (including Dan) that Dan attempted to declare riichi on open hand.

Additional information:

It is important to note, that at the beginning of the tournament, Head Referee and Organizer, Szymon was talking about rules, focusing on two things:

- remembering about fair play
- **declaration of dead hand on the table needs to be stated clearly so no player will have doubt about that (!)**

(after this incident, the second point was reminded once again to all players)

Head Referee's mistakes:

- Falling to pressure of players (which is highlighted in Referees Seminar Guidelines at page 59 "Do not let yourself be bullied by one player's opinion")
- Not being sure about what is stated in the rules (this is first and always most important thing, but during stressful situation simple matter become complex...)
- Thinking that such situation could be fixed later and let players continue the game without being sure what's the right decision
- Not gathering all referees for immediate discussion
- Not asking other players to help in translation (it is in Referees Seminar Guidelines)

Ad-hoc committee discussion:

First of all, after consultation with Gemma from EMA Board, during the 7th hanchan, need for committee was raised with some suggestions about resolving situation. During lunch break all referees met in a committee for discussion on how to address the mistakes described above.

EMA Riichi Rules 2016 are clear about attempting to declare riichi on an open hand: "5.3. (...) Attempting to declare riichi on an open hand results in a dead hand", and even not hearing announcing it this doesn't give the right to ignore the rule. Player himself should know it, due to the law *ignorantia legis non excusat* that means "ignorance of law excuses no one". This causes a conflict between "clearly stated dead hand" and "lack of knowledge doesn't give you the right to ignore the law", but we should have in mind that it can happen under different circumstances and sometimes we're not able to prove it after the win, especially when the decision must be only based on the players' statements. In this case they all were sure about 1 thing – he had attempted to declare riichi on the open hand, what is every time considered as a dead hand.

Committee considered 4 options:

1. Do nothing - keep wrong referee's decision, yakuman and points just as there were
2. Keep points as they were and add chombo for Dan
3. Remove yakuman (-32k for Dan, +32k for Justyna) after UMA (as players while playing were aligned on points with yakuman being in play)
4. Combine point 2 and 3

Committee agreed that Head Referee did make a big mistake. Head Referee admitted it himself after studying all paragraphs in the rules and Referees Seminar Guidelines. All the referees agreed that something needs to be done (so option 1 was removed from discussion). In the end, committee decided to apply idea from point 3.

Warsaw 11.12.2018

Later, Yuliya suggested to play that hanchan once again. However, due to the late hour during the last day of tournament, it was not possible. Committee agreed that this could be added to possible solutions, if the issue occurred during the first day of the tournament.

Proposition for improvement:

- Always assemble all referees in such difficult situation (which would lead to holding games on 4 tables – but additional time can be added for those)
- Remind players to call referee (especially when non-playing referee is available) for a dead hand appointment decision
- Use this case scenario during Referee Seminars to avoid such situations in the future
- Mahjong Tracker's team received suggestion to implement a new feature in the app (option to highlight player who got dead hand, in order to not leave any doubt in such situation) and they have agreed and added this idea to their roadmap
- Ask (if available/possible) other player to help in translation (in this case it would be some Russian speaking person also fluent in Polish/English - to talk immediately at the table with Yuliya, and Japanese to Polish translator – on that tournament there were players that could take this role to help communication, but causing to disrupt play on their tables)
- A short presentation about the rules which are unclear or not stated in EMA RR 2016 will be presented before the tournaments until we make sure every player knows the key points of the most difficult rules, some important points which are known only by referees will be included. We are working on the list of circumstances not included in EMA RR 2016 as to improve the next edition or to make the update of the old one.

Report assembled by Szymon Lasota

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If anyone have any comments or suggestions, please contact us at: zarzad@mahjong.waw.pl