Referee Manual

1. General

The purpose of this document is to outline the tasks of a referee in order to make judging during a MERS tournament uniform. It is important (that) there be a better foundation in Europe for establishing a culture in which qualified referees can help run tournaments more smoothly. It is equally important that not only the rules themselves be discussed or unified, but also the role of the 'enforcer' of those rules and the penalties therein.

2. Referee's profile

There are of course different ways to act as a referee. Generally speaking, this falls into two categories:

- 1. The omnipresent: a referee who (*thinks* he) sees all and who interferes whenever he observes an irregularity even if the players do not;
- 2. The invisible: a referee that will only act when called upon except when observing severe irregularities that players may not notice.

The EMA adopts the view that referees are present to make the game run smoother and to arbitrate contestations between players. Although present, they should be invisible to the players and not normally interfere with the course of play. While obstruction or foul play (cheating) may of course not go unpunished, a referee should only act when called upon.

Furthermore, being a referee does not simply mean coldly enforcing the rules – a referee is also able to explain the motive or grounds for his ruling in a way that is accepted by the player(s) involved. This does not imply that there should be a discussion on every ruling – the point is that a referee can make and explain a ruling, without being second-guessed or questioned.

3. Self arbitration

In the Regulations an appeal is made to the players 'to foster self arbitration as much as possible'. Where there are rules, no matter how clearly written or 'unified', there will at times be discussion between players. Some tend to interpret the rules more strictly than others, even to the extent that it may become annoying. The referee should be able to handle these situations – players should understand that it is not in the 'spirit of fair play' to make a sport out of challenging every supposed infringement (referred to as 'petty mistakes' in the Regulations).

4. Referee's duties

The referee's main duty is to assure that a tournament / competition runs smoothly and that contestations are handled with as little disturbance for the other players as possible. This means that he should check and keep an eye on several things before, during and after a session.

4.1. Before a session

The referee should be at the tables in his quarter well ahead of time to check them. He should make sure that nothing is missing or broken. This includes tiles, dice and material(s) for keeping the score.

The referee should check if players are missing from any of his tables and in general encourage players to take their seats well before the round starts, so all tables can start on time.

4.2. During a session

The referee should spread his attention equally among the tables in his quarter during a session. However, if one or more tables seem to be particularly prone to arguments, he should focus more on those tables, but not to the extent that he neglects the other tables.

The referee should be careful not to signal anything about a player's hand or tactics. For instance, he should not pause behind / at any particular player because that player has a good or otherwise interesting hand.

4.2.1. When to approach a table

The referee should approach a table in any of the following situations:

- He is called by one or more players at the table;
- The players at the table are noticeably arguing;
- He feels that there is some (form of) confusion at the table and there may be a need for clarification;
- He observes foul play (cheating) or obstruction.

When there is a disagreement between players, it is the referee's duty act upon and / or resolve this, whether he is called upon or not. This may simply be achieved by clarifying and / or explaining a particular rule, but in some cases he will have to make a ruling that is not (implicitly) covered by the rules.

If the referee notices a mistake such as the scores not summing to zero, he should wait until the end of the hand and then notify the table and ask them to correct the mistake.

If the players have no argument and no one at the table seems to have any kind of problem, there is no need to approach the table. In case the referee suspects that there is some confusion at the table, but he isn't sure about it, he should simply ask the players if everything is ok. Obviously, he should be careful not to (unnecessarily) interrupt the game.

4.2.2. How to act at the table

When the referee needs to approach a table, his job is to either explain or find out what the problem is and if necessary make a ruling. He should listen to all parties involved, ask questions if necessary and then make a ruling. He should make sure that everyone at the table understands the problem and the ruling. All communication should be translated by either the referee or an interpreter when necessary.

While the referee should listen to the players, he should not let it turn into a debate or an argument. The disturbance for adjacent tables should (at all times) be minimized as much as possible.

Once a ruling has been made, a player may appeal, but the appeal will be handled after the current session has finished.

In the (rare) event that matters turn into a situation in which the referee feels that he will / may not be able to solve the problem, he should call the head-referee.

4.3. After a session

After each session the referee should check to see that the scoring at each of his tables seems in order. He does not have to check every line or figure, but scored points should add up to zero and 'uma' (Riichi) or table points (MCR) should be entered correctly. If there is a problem, he should keep all players at the table and / or if necessary return them to the table so that the problem can be solved.

If during a session the referee has made any ruling that he believes to be not covered by the written rules, he should inform the head-referee of such a ruling.

If during a session the referee has noticed certain players being troublesome or noticed other problems, he should likewise notify the head-referee.

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