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(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING A HOST CONSOLE FOR USE WITH AN ELECTRONIC CARD GAME

(57) Abstract: A host console and method for use with an electronic card table is disclosed. The electronic card table has plurality of electronic player interaction areas located around a periphery of the table and a game computer. The game computer administers the electronic card table and is coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas. The host console is connected to the game computer. The host console includes a host display, a host interface, and a host controller. The host controller is coupled to the host display and the host interface and allows the host to display information related to the card game and to pause and/or stop the game, to reserve seats at a table and to penalize players.

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING A HOST CONSOLE FOR USE WITH AN ELECTRONIC CARD GAME

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates generally to a system and method for providing host consoles features in a host console for use with an electronic card game.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Gaming is an increasingly popular form of entertainment. Games, particularly, games of chance and skill where one or more players play and place wagers on a desired and/or predicted outcome can be played in a variety of ways and in a variety of places, including at a casino or other venue or on the Internet. Of the various forms of games that are available for play, many utilize playing cards. Of these, poker is arguably the most popular.

[0003] Traditionally, poker is played at a table with several players wagering paper or coin money on a series of playing cards dealt from a deck of fifty-two cards. This deck is comprised of four suits at thirteen cards per suit. This form of poker requires a human dealer to coordinate the game, including dealing, wagering, folding, and the like. In "social" card games, especially poker, the players take turns acting as the dealer, but in licensed commercial gaming establishments, such as casinos, the dealer is typically a non-playing employee. Unfortunately, traditional poker is potentially prone to human dealer error. Moreover, human dealers in casino type establishments must be trained and paid a salary sufficient to retain them.

[0004] One alternative form of gaming, with particular reference to poker, has flourished on the internet. Internet gaming has become quite successful in that it provides many choices for the players. In particular, internet gaming is fast and convenient, with registration, betting and payouts available from almost any computer with internet access and with payments typically arranged via a credit card. Yet further, poker or other card games may also be provided by stand-alone machines similar to slot machines.

[0005] One major drawback of internet and stand-alone type games is the lack of the human element. Many people prefer to play poker against other players face-to-face,

because of the drama associated with "live" gaming. Undoubtedly, an elevated level of competition exists when people compete directly against one another and face-to-face. In gaming establishments, experienced players are trying to hone strategy and read other players' intentions through their movements and style of play to be more competitive.

[0006] The prior art includes electronic card tables or games which utilize virtual card and/or chips. As the complexity of such systems increase, one issue raised is the ability to service the system, i.e., provide diagnostics and/or trouble shooting.

[0007] The present invention is aimed at one or more of the problems set forth above.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] In a first aspect of the present invention, a host console for use with an electronic card table is provided. The electronic card table has a playing surface, a plurality of electronic player interaction areas located around a periphery of the table, and a game computer. Each electronic player interaction area provides a player interface for interaction with one of a plurality of players. The game computer administering an electronic card game on the table and is coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas. The host console includes a host display, a host controller and a host controller. The host controller is coupled to the host display and the host user interface for interrupting the electronic card game in response to input from the host.

[0009] In a second aspect of the present invention a method for providing information to a host related to an electronic card table is provided. The electronic card table includes a plurality of electronic player interaction areas and a game computer. Each electronic player interaction area provides a player interface for interaction with one of a plurality of players. The game computer provides an electronic card game to the players. The method includes the steps of providing a host console, coupled to the electronic poker table, receiving information from the host via a user interface of the host console, and interrupting the electronic card game in response to input from the host.

[0010] In a fourth aspect of the present invention, a host console for use with an electronic card table is provided. The electronic card table has a playing surface, a plurality of electronic player interaction areas located around a periphery of the table, and a game computer. Each electronic player interaction area provides a player interface for

interaction with one of a plurality of players. The game computer administers an electronic card game on the table and is coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas. The host console includes a host display, a host user interface, and a host controller. The host display displays information to a host. The host user interface receives host input. The host controller is coupled to the host display and the host user interface for reserving an electronic player interaction area in response to input from the host.

[0011] In a fifth aspect of the present invention, a method for providing information to a host related to an electronic card table is provided. The electronic card table includes a plurality of electronic player interaction areas and a game computer. Each electronic player interaction area provides a player interface for interaction with one of a pluralities of players. The game computer provides an electronic card game to the players. The method includes the steps of providing a host console coupled to the electronic poker table, receiving information from the host via a user interface of the host console, reserving an electronic player interaction area in response to input from the host.

[0012] In a fifth aspect of the present invention a host console for use with an electronic card table is provided. The electronic card table has a playing surface, a plurality of electronic player interaction areas located around a periphery of the table, and a game computer. Each electronic player interaction area provides a player interface for interaction with one of a plurality of players. The game computer administers an electronic card game on the table and is coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas. The host console includes a host display, a host user interface, and a host controller. The host display displays information to a host. The host user interface receives host input. The host controller is coupled to the host display and the host user interface for penalizing one of the players by preventing the player from participating in the electronic card game for a specified period.

[0013] In a sixth aspect of the present invention, a method for providing information to a host related to an electronic card table is provided. The electronic card table includes a plurality of electronic player interaction areas and a game computer. Each electronic player interaction area provides a player interface for interaction with one of a pluralities of players. The game computer provides an electronic card game to the players. The method includes the steps of providing a host console coupled to the electronic poker

table, receiving information from the host via a user interface of the host console, and penalizing one of the players by preventing the player from participating in the electronic card game for a specified period.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] Other advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

[0015] Figure 1 is a diagrammatic illustration of a gaming system embodying the present invention and in a casino environment;

[0016] Figure 2 is a perspective view of an electronic poker table of the gaming system;

[0017] Figure 3 is a top view of the electronic poker table of Figure 2;

[0018] Figure 4 is a front and back view of an electronic playing card;

[0019] Figure 5 is a plan view of a player interface of an electronic player interaction area of the system with hole cards of the electronic playing cards hidden;

[0020] Figure 6 is a plan view of the player interface of Figure 5 with the hole cards revealed;

[0021] Figure 7 is a partial block diagram of the gaming system associated with one poker table;

[0022] Figure 8 is a partial block diagram of the gaming system associated with a plurality of poker tables;

[0023] Figure 9 is a perspective view of the electronic player interaction area in a module form with headphones;

[0024] Figure 10 is a perspective view of a modified electronic player interaction area embodied in a hand-held module with headphones;

[0025] Figure 11 is a block diagram of software components of the gaming system;

[0026] Figure 12 is a simplified block diagram of the gaming system;

[0027] Figure 13 is a block diagram of the gaming system with a host console;

[0028] Figure 14 is a flow diagram of a method of operating the gaming system;

[0029] Figure 15 is a first table tab image displayed on a video screen of the host console;

[0030] Figure 16 is a second table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0031] Figure 17 is a third table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0032] Figure 18 is a fourth table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0033] Figure 19 is a fifth table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0034] Figure 20 is a hand dialog displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0035] Figure 21 is a minutes dialog displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0036] Figure 22 is a sixth table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0037] Figure 23 is a seventh table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0038] Figure 24 is an eighth table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0039] Figure 25 is a ninth table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0040] Figure 26 is a tenth table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0041] Figure 27 is an eleventh table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0042] Figure 28 is a first wait list tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0043] Figure 29 is a twelfth table tab image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0044] Figure 30 is an account number dialog displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0045] Figure 31 is a time limit dialog displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0046] Figure 32 is a tournament chop page image displayed on the video screen of the host console;

[0047] Figure 33 is a menu allowing a host to make a selection of no delay, minutes, or hands, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0048] Figure 34 is a keypad allowing a host to enter a number of minutes, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0049] Figure 35 is a keypad allowing a host to enter a number of hands, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0050] Figure 36 is a dialog related to a stop function, according to an embodiment of the present invention, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0051] Figure 37 is a keypad allowing a host to enter a player card number, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0052] Figure 38 is a keypad allowing a host to enter a number of minutes, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0053] Figure 39 is a dialog related to a sitout function of the present invention;

[0054] Figure 40 is a dialog related to an unseat function of the present invention;

[0055] Figure 41 is a keypad allowing a host to enter a number of penalty minutes;

[0056] Figure 42 is a graphic related to a penalty function of the present invention; and,

[0057] Figure 43 is a keypad related to a penalty function of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF INVENTION

[0058] In the illustrated embodiment and as best shown in Figures 1-4, an electronic gaming system 10 and method of operation embodies the present invention. The system 10 utilizes electronic cards 76 or electronic chips and electronic playing cards 76 to provide an automated card game for play by one or more players. It should be noted that the description that follows is directed towards a gaming system 10 which utilizes electronic cards and chips (for wagering). However, the system 10 may also

provide a non-wagering (without electronic chips) automated card game. Preferably, a human dealer is not required, thus the system 10 handles all dealer functions. For the purposes of illustration, the system will be described as applied to an electronic poker game known as Texas Hold'em. However, the present invention is not limited to any particular card game.

I. The Game

[0059] Referring to Figures 3-6, in Texas Hold'em, each player at an electronic gaming or poker table 18 is electronically dealt a number of cards, e.g., two cards, face down. These are known as a player's "hole" cards 28 and are generally placed directly in front of the respective players. A number of cards, e.g., three or five, are dealt face-up and displayed in a common display area 26. These are known as the common cards 30. A player's hand, thus, consists of the player's hole cards 28 and the common cards 30. At the end of play of a particular hand, whichever player holds the highest poker hand is the winner of that round or hand of poker.

[0060] The electronic playing cards 76 may be used in any sort of electronic card game, and even in such games where the player chooses when to reveal their hole cards 28 to themselves or to the other players. The electronic poker tables 18 are preferably capable of playing any variety of card games. Each card game, whether poker or otherwise, will generally have its own set of rules, including the number of cards, how the cards are dealt, the number of betting rounds, the structure of permissible wagers, and the like. Thus, while the present invention may be described below in the context of an electronic poker game (and more specifically, with respect to a player's hole cards 28 in a Hold'em style poker game), the present invention is not limited to such a card game.

[0061] Furthermore, the poker or card game can be a timed game, i.e., the player's have a predetermined time period to complete each turn. For example, the player's have a set period of one minute to complete each turn, or, the period of time may vary. For instance, the first turn may have a period of completion of one minute, while the second turn may have a shorter or longer period of completion. During a given betting round, the players have a predetermined period of time to either fold, check, or make a wager. If no action is taken during the predetermined time period, a default action is taken where the player preferably must fold or check. Generally, the time period for response during a betting round will decrease as the hand of the electronic

poker game progresses. Parameters, such as the predetermined time period for each betting round may be automatically modified by the system 10.

[0062] More specific to the electronic playing cards 76, as best shown in Figure 4, each card has visual image or graphical representation of a front side 76A and a back side 76B. The back side 76B of each card 76 has an identical pattern or image such that the cards cannot be individually identified with respect to any other card when viewing the back side 76B. The electronic playing card 76 is typically one of a set or deck of standard playing cards. The deck may be a standard deck of fifty-two cards, with each card having an individual designation. The designations have a first component being assigned values of two through ACE, and the second component being four groupings or suits (hearts, diamonds, clubs, spades). The value and suit of each card is indicated on the front side 76A of each playing card 76.

[0063] In a traditional card game with physical cards, the player's hole cards are dealt "face-down" so that they are not revealed to any other player. The dealt player must then discretely view their own hole cards without revealing them to other players. To do this, the player typically lifts the hole cards close to their bodies, fanning them out, and shielding them with their hands, so only the dealt player can see the front side of their cards. Alternatively, the dealt player may leave the cards face down on the table and lift one side or corner revealing at least a portion of the front side, while shielding the cards with their hands. Similarly, and with electronic hole cards 28 of cards 76 (as best shown in Figures 5 and 6), lifting of the corners of the cards 28 can be computer simulated upon a triggering event initiated by the respective player.

[0064] The image displayed on the back side 76B of the playing cards may be a logo, a random image (chosen from a set of predetermined images), or may be advertising directed at the player. The image may include a video or a cycling through of a set of predetermined images. Alternatively, the image may be selectable by either a player or an employee of a casino 12.

II. The Casino

[0065] Referring to Figure 1, the gaming system 10 is preferably situated in a gaming environment, such as a casino 12. Typically, the casino 12 is divided into specialized or designated areas such as a poker room or poker area 14 each containing a plurality of tables 18, or five tables as illustrated. The poker area 14 is often cordoned

off by, for example, a railing 16. While the casino 12 is one example of an environment for the gaming system 10, the present invention is not limited to any such location or environment and may also include a generally virtual casino environment and the like.

III. The Table

[0066] Referring to Figures 2-3, each table 18 has a table top 20 supported by at least one base 42 at floor level, and a plurality of substantially vertical legs 44 projecting between the base 42 and the table top 20. The table top 20 includes a playing surface 22 and a plurality of electronic player interaction areas (EPIA) 24 for in-part the display of the respective hole cards 28. Each table 18 seats a plurality of players, and for example and as illustrated, is preferably capable of seating a maximum of ten players, hence, each table includes ten EPIA's 24A-24J and ten chairs 40 (see Figure 1). For the game of Texas Hold'em, the table top 20 also preferably includes one central or common display area (CDA) 26 for the display of the common cards 30.

[0067] Although the EPIA's 24 and CDA 26 are generally computer generated visual displays, thus authentic playing cards are not utilized, the electronic poker tables of the gaming system 10 are aesthetically designed to convey and retain the overall sense and ambience of a standard poker room with non-electrical poker tables. The playing surface area not taken up by the EPIA's 24 and the CDA 26 is preferably covered in a traditional material such as felt having any variety of colors. Moreover, logos, game information, or other information may be printed on the material. Alternatively, the EPIA's 24 and the CDA 26 is a single display that covers a substantial portion or all of the table top 20. The EPIA's 24 and the CDA 26 can be set apart from the rest of the table top 20 by virtual or computer generated borders. The areas of the display around the EPIA's 24 and the CDA 26 are preferably used to simulate the playing surface 22 of a standard poker table by, for example, providing an electronic image of a felt material. Furthermore, logos, game information, other information, advertisements, announcements, pictures, videos, or other information may be displayed and rotated, cycled, or shown for a limited period of time on the table top 20.

IV. Electronic Player interaction Areas

[0068] Referring to Figures 3 and 5-6, each EPIA 24 has a player interface 54 used to convey game information directly to a player assigned to the respective EPIA 24, and to effectuate interaction or input from the player to the system 10. Each EPIA 24 can be part of one large display monitor, such as a LCD or plasma monitor, that includes the CDA 26, or the EPIA's preferably have separate and distinct monitors and computers networked together as required to play the game. The player interfaces 54 can be implemented on the table top 20 or in a module 34 (see Figure 9). Alternatively, the player interface 54 may be implemented on a hand-held device 58, such as a personal data assistant (see Figure 10).

[0069] With reference to Figures 2 and 5-6, the player interface 54 of the EPIA 24 is preferably a touch-screen display. Each display 54 is preferably housed in respective modules 34. In one embodiment, each module 34 incorporates a fully-functional computer (not shown) and is thus easily removable and replaced from the poker table 18. The computer includes a processor capable of running an operating system, such as Windows XP or Windows CE, both available from Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Washington. Alternatively, the EPIA's 24 may be driven by one or more computers (not shown) located in the proximity of the table 18 with a server or server computer 50 or within the table 18.

a) Card Reader and Player Account:

[0070] Referring to Figure 9, the module 34 preferably has a card reader 36 for reading a player tracking card (not shown). A player may log into the gaming system 10 through the EPIA 24 preferably by swiping the card through the card reader 36. Additionally, the card reader 36 may be integrated into the bezel (not shown) located around the module 34. The EPIA 24 may also require entry of a personal identification number into an attached keypad or virtual keypad displayed on the player interface 54. Alternatively or in addition, the player may log-in using a biometric parameter, such as a fingerprint, sensed by a sensor and a RFID card or chip. Once a player's identity is established, the player can access a preferably required player account and purchase chips using an account balance communicated over a network. The player account may have an associated balance that contains a dollar amount based on an amount of money deposited by the player and/or any winnings that they have collected, either through poker or some other game. Additionally, information regarding the player's play at the table 18 may be tracked and recorded to the player's account.

[0071] In one aspect of the present invention, the gaming system 10 may utilize a cashless system, such as Ticket-In Ticket-Out (TITO), that is constructed and arranged into each EPIA 24. Alternatively, a preferably bar-coded ticket, magnetic card, RFID card, or some other media (jointly referred to as a TICKET) may be inserted in the EPIA 24. The TICKET may have an associated value that is either printed and/or encoded thereon or that is associated with the TICKET in the gaming system 10. Additionally, once the player decides to leave the table 18, any remaining chips they have, may be instantly converted back into dollars and stored in their player account and/or a new Ticket preferably generated at the table 18.

b) Controller

[0072] A controller that is either the module 34, the personal computer (not shown), the hand-held device 58, the server 50 or a combination thereof, controls the player interface 54 (i.e. controls the information components of the player interface 54), detects touches if the player interface 54 is a touch-screen display device, and interprets the touches as trigger or touch events. The controller preferably controls the display device 54 including obscuring or hiding the player's hole cards 28 such that the player

may controllably display and view the cards, while maintaining them secret from the other players.

c) Visual Player Interface

[0073] Referring to Figures 5-6, preferably the player interface 54 includes a graphical representation 56 of a poker table. Each player in the poker game is represented by a user graphic or icon 62 that lists their names as well as their chip totals. The pot of the current hand may be represented in the center of the poker table representation 56 by stack(s) of chips 64 and/or a number 66 representing the value of the current pot. Each player's contribution to the pot may be represented by stack(s) of chips 68 and/or a number 70 adjacent their user graphic 62.

[0074] In one embodiment, not only is the EPIA 24 capable of controllably displaying and/or obscuring a player's hole cards, the EPIA 24 is also capable of providing an indication of the player's current highest hand based on the player's current hand and the community cards 30. The highest hand may be shown textually, e.g., two-pairs, and/or graphically, pictures of the five cards which make of the highest hand. The highest hand may be triggered and shown using the same trigger event associated with the hole cards 28. Alternatively, a separate trigger event, such as a touch-event on another location on the EPIA 24 may be used to show the highest hand.

[0075] The player interface 54 preferably includes a series of player buttons 72 and a series of game buttons 74. The player buttons 72 include, for example, a sit-in button 72A, a leave table button 72B, and an options button 72C. Generally, only one of the sit in button 72A and the leave table button 72B would be active at any time. The options button 72C allows the player to access an option menu or screen (not shown) that allows the player to modify certain parameters of the player interface 54, such as for example, to choose between different formats of the player interface 54 (i.e. graphical display or text display). The player buttons 72 are preferably implemented on the touch screen display 54, or alternatively, can be embodied in electro-mechanical switches or buttons (not shown).

[0076] Regarding the leave table button 72B, a player may decide to activate this feature when the player decides to change seats or move to another table altogether. For example, if another player or players have left the table 18 leaving fewer players at the

table and the player does not like to play at a table with that few of players, the player may request through the EPIA 24 another seat assignment.

[0077] The series of game buttons 74 allow the player to signal their game play decisions to the gaming system 10 during the play of the game, and thus preferably include a fold button 74A, a call button 74B and a raise button 74C. The game buttons 74 are active when it is a player's turn in the poker game and preferably inactive when it is not. Moreover, the EPIA 24 only activates those buttons 74 that are appropriate, given the rules of the game being played, during the current turn. For example, if the maximum number of raises for a particular game has already been made, then the wager or raise button would be inactive. The raise button 74C may be replaced with one or more buttons (not shown) which allow the player to make a wager of a predetermined or allowed amount, e.g., $10. In addition or alternatively, a keypad (not shown) may be provided which allows the player to key in a wager amount.

[0078] Preferably, the EPIA 24 provides a player with virtual buttons that summon or direct specific employees of the casino 12. For example the player may request a host/hostess to order a drink. Additionally, the player may anonymously request that an employee review something that occurred or is occurring at the table 18 (e.g. possible collusion).

[0079] Preferably, the player interface 54 also displays the community cards 30. Other information that can be displayed on the player interface include, but is not limited to, an indication (visual icon and/or audio) of the player whose turn it is to act, a total of chips for each player, any cards of the other players that are face-up, and/or messages to the player, such as advertising.

[0080] Moreover, in the casino 12 environment, preferably a portion of each pot goes to the house for running the poker game. This portion of the pot is known as the rake and is preferably displayed on each EPIA 24. The rake may be shown as an amount in dollars and may include a graphical representation of virtual chips. Similarly, the EPIA 24 preferably displays a graphical representation of the chips and/or a dollar amount indicative of the amount of chips each player at the table has remaining and the amount of the current pot.

[0081] In addition, or alternatively, to the common cards 30 displayed by the CDA 26, each EPIA preferably includes a graphical representation of the community

cards in the middle of the graphical representation 56 of the poker table 18. Graphical representations of the other player's card may also be shown (face-down during the current hand and face-up at the end of the hand). The common card 30 displayed in the graphical representation 56 are preferably smaller than the display of the hole cards 28 for the player of the specific EPIA 24. The display of the common cards 30 in the CDA 26 are preferably larger than the display of the common cards 30 in the EPIA representation 56.

[0082] Other attributes of the EPIA's 24 may include:

- utilization of Surface Acoustic Wave touch screen technology
- utilization of Multi Touch touch screen technology
- a secure process for returning a player to a game after missing a number of blinds by pressing the button that temporarily removes the player from the game
- method to obscure player pre-selection of one or several bet options (Poker is a sequential game. Situations exist where a player will know what action they want to take prior to it being there turn. Allowing the player to make that decision in advance of their turn in a way that allows players seating close to observe this action would provide an unfair advantage to some players and not others. This feature allows a player to make a pre-selection while observing his hole cards in such a way that other players will not be able to observe that pre-selection.),
- ability to display live and pre-recorded video, and
- ability to replay a previous hand (may be limited to showing the end result of the last hand and may only be available for a short period of time).

d) Audio Player Interface:

[0083] Preferably, the EPIA 24 includes a player sound generation device that generates sounds audible to the player assigned to the EPIA 24. The player sound generation device may be implemented as an earpiece (60) or headphones (see Figures 9 and 10) or one or more speakers. Player sounds are generally meant to be heard by a

specific player alone and may include a reminder or indication of a player's turn or if the game is timed, an indication of the time remaining or that time is running out, an audible signal indicating the player's hole cards 28 or the highest hand of the player or a winning percentage associated with the player's hand. The audio signals or sounds can be any series of beeps, chimes, a simulated voice, and the like.

e) Physical Structure of the EPIA:

[0084] As best illustrated in Figures 2 and 3, the modules 34 are removably mounted to the table top 20, and preferably such that the touch-screen display 54 is substantially parallel and relatively flush with the playing surface 22 of the table top 20. Moreover, the playing surface 22 of the table top 20 can be an overlay with selected cut-outs or openings for exposing the player interface or touch-screen display 54. The overlay preferably covers the outer edge of the display for aesthetic appearances. Moreover, the touch-screen display 54 can be mounted at an angle with respect to the table top 20 and below the playing surface 22 thus partially shielding the player's hole cards 28 from adjacent players. Similarly, the display 54 can be mounted at an angle with respect to and above the table top 20 wherein the angle can be adjustable for player viewing convenience.

V. Central Display Area and Audio

[0085] As best illustrated in Figures 3 and 5-6, the CDA 26 is used to display information such as common cards 30 for all players to see and is thus located further from the players than their respective EPIA's 24. Consequently, the display of the common cards 30 is preferably larger than the display of the hole cards 28. That is, the hole cards 28 are displayed at a first predetermined ratio from the standard size playing card, and the common cards 30 are displayed at a second predetermined ratio from the standard size playing card. Preferably, the first and second ratios may be defined such that the common cards 30 are displayed larger than the hole cards 28. Alternatively, the first and second ratios can be the same.

[0086] As previously described, the CDA 26 is preferably separate from the plurality of EPIA's 24, and is implemented preferably utilizing a LCD or plasma monitor or similar device. The CDA 26 preferably indicates which player's turn it is and which player is the designated "dealer" for the current hand. These indications are provided by

respective visual signals such as an icon, arrow or the like, and/or an audio signal such as a beep, musical tone, and/or voice message. This indication of a player's turn and dealer designation CDA 26 can also be in addition to the indication provided on the respective EPIA 24. With audio indication, the CDA 26 can utilize integrated "transducer sound emitting technology" thus eliminating the need for separate speakers.

[0087] In other card games other than Texas Hold'em, community cards 30 may not exist, hence, during play of these games, the CDA 26 can be used to display advertising messages instead. The advertising messages may be from the casino or third parties and may consist of graphics, pictures, animations, video and/or audio. The advertising may be presented at predetermined locations on the central display 38 for varied durations as the CDA cycles through a plurality of advertising messages.

[0088] In general, the CDA 26 is preferably capable of displaying and/or animating:

- blinds,
- community cards 30,
- bets placed and player chip stacks,
- an indication of players who have folded and not folded,
- winning hands,
- wining hand percentage estimates in situations where all remaining player hold cards are exposed, and
- rake in dollars or virtual chips.

[0089] Preferably, the gaming table 18 includes a table or system sound generation device (as oppose to the player sound generation device previously described) that is used to generate sounds audible to all the players. The table sound generation device may be implemented by one or more speakers mounted to the table 18. Alternatively, the table sound generation device may include one or more speakers adjacent to or integral with each EPIA 24 as previously described. For example, system sounds may include sounds imitating the shuffling of cards, the dealing of cards, chips thrown into the pot, sounds related to the winning of the jackpot. Player sounds may include a reminder or indication of a player's turn or if the game is timed, an indication

of the time remaining or that time is running out. Generally, player exclusive sounds will not be played through the system sound generation device.

VI. Server Computer

[0090] As best illustrated in Figures 7 and 8, each EPIA 24, in the illustrated embodiment, preferably includes a dedicated computer (not shown), and the CDA 26 has a dedicated computer 52. Both the EPIA computer and the CDA computer 52 for any given table 18 communicate with the server computer 50 that preferably plays/controls the card game, and preferably over an Ethernet network 48. The same server 50 communicates or is networked in a like manner to preferably all of the tables 18. One skilled in the art would now know that more than one EPIA 24 could operate off of one computer or that the computer 52 for the CDA 26 could also control the EPIA's 24 and/or replace the server 50 altogether. However, having a multitude of dedicated computers simplifies software and maintenance issues and due to the relatively inexpensive costs of computers, reduces manufacturing costs of the gaming system 10.

[0091] The server 50 is preferably used to implement and facilitate player tracking, ticket in ticket out (cashless) wagering, assigning player's to the seat 40 at a particular table 18, tournament play, table set-up (including turning the tables on and off and modifying table parameters), and progressive jackpots. In general, the server 50 runs the game wherein the server 50 electronically "shuffles" the playing cards, deals the cards, controls the players' turns, receives the player's inputs and acts accordingly; tracks, manages, and awards the pot, and tracks the rake. Game data is stored in a database preferably of the server 50 with each input, wager, play, and the like stored in the database. Other functions implemented by the server 50 are:

- electronically shuffling the playing cards 76
- dealing cards,
- controlling players' turns,
- receives the player's data input,
- player tracking,
- cashless wagering,
- defining and modifying table parameters, including, turning the tables 18 on and off, setting the poker game being played at the table 18, setting wager parameters, and the like,

- defining and managing jackpots, including the house percentage or rake,
- defining and managing progressive jackpots,
- establishing and managing a queue for players and assigning players to seats 40 and/or specific tables 18 from the queue, and
- establishing and managing tournament play, including assigning player seats, collapsing tables, and the like.

[0092] In addition, other devices may be connected to the server 50 for providing additional features and/or functions. For example, a queuing system can be provided utilizing its own dedicated computer. However, in some systems these additional features or function could be provided, at least in part, by the server(s) 50.

VII. Host Console

[0093] With particular reference to Figures 7-8 and 13, the system 10 preferably has a host console 102 in electrical communication with the server computer 50 for configuring the EPIA's 24 and/or the CDA 26 and for establishing parameters of the electronic poker game. Preferably, the host console 102 is embodied in a separate computer, such as a personal computer, connected or networked (wired or wirelessly) to the server computer 50. The host console 102 may be integrated into a console, such as a kiosk. The host console 102 may also be embodied in any type of suitable device, such as a handheld computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), notebook or laptop computer, or tablet computer. Preferably, the host console 102 provides interaction with a host or floor manager of the casino 12 via a host interface 120 of the host console 120 that is preferably a touch-screen similar to the player interface 54.

[0094] In general, the host console 102 is an administration device that can be used to create and edit game profiles including setting the game type, limits, play timing, and/or number of required players. The host console 102 allows the host or casino employee to start, pause, and stop games and to monitor table play. Additional electronic tables 18 can be activated or opened, and ring or tournament games (see below) can be easily started. Preferably, the host console 102 provides the ability to turn any one or all of the poker tables 18 on and off by communicating with the EPIA computers and CDA computer 52 via the server 50.

[0095] The host console 102 may enable a casino employee or host to:

- select or change one of the plurality of poker games to be played on one or more of the electronic poker tables 18,
- select the betting or wager structure to be used, (For example, the poker games may have one of a limit, no-limit, or pot-limit wagering structure. The host console 102 enables the employee set the wagering structure for a given electronic poker table 18.)
- select or change other parameters of the electronic poker games, including, but not limited to time parameters, wager limits, amounts associated with a big blind and a little blind,
- select whether the electronic poker game is a timed game or a non-timed game,
- modify the predetermined time period for each betting round in a timed game,
- monitor the number of drinks ordered by a player through the EPIA 24,
- add notes with information related to a specific player,
- initiate a replay of a previous hand graphically, textually or numerically,
- lock out and remove one of the players from the electronic poker table 18,
- adjust the stack of electronic chips for one or more of the players (Possibly for correcting any deficiencies and/or settle any disputes with regard to operation of the electronic poker table 18 or play of one of the other players)

[0084] Other functions may be provided by the host console 102. For example, as discussed above, players may be assigned to one of the EPIAs 24. The system 10 may require that the assigned player log-in to the assigned EPIA 24. The system 10, possibly through the host console 102 or the server computer 50 allows the host to define a trigger event based on a particular player. The host console 102 may monitor the players who log on, and produce a signal if a designated player logs on. Thus, an employee, in response to the signal is aware that the designated player is currently located and playing at the respective EPIA 24.

[0085] The host console 102 is preferably used to monitor play at any one of the electronic poker tables 18 and establishes a value associated with the rate of play of hands at the associated table 18. This may be done by establishing when a hand of the

electronic poker game is dealt and the time a winner is determined and the pot awarded to the winner. If the rate of play of hands is below a predetermined value, then the employee via the host console 102 can be signaled via a message or alert (audio and/or visual) on the host console 102. In response, the host may wish to observe play at the electronic poker table 18.

[0086] Additionally, the host console 102 allows the casino host to pause play at one of the electronic poker tables 18, for example, to allow the host to discuss any issues any of the players have with regard to the electronic poker game and/or one of the other players. The employee may re-start the electronic poker game when finished. In another aspect of the present invention, the host console 102 may allow the host to restart the electronic poker table 18 after a fault or fault condition. For example, the host console 102 may allow the host to restart the EPIA's 24 and/or the CDA 26. Additionally if the EPIA's 24 include a separate computer or a separate computer is provided to drive the central display area 36, the host console 102 may be adapted to restart or reboot these computers.

[0087] Preferably, a player may create an alert to the host console 102 through their EPIA 24. The alert may be anonymous, and is a request for the host to come and observe a table 18. The alert appears on the host console 102. If the alert is anonymous, there will be no indication of which player created the alert on the host console 102. Preferably, the host console 102 enables the host to "hibernate" a game. This may be used for example, to pause a game until the next day. A hibernated game may be re-started at the same or any other table.

[0088] Referring to Figure 15, the host console 102 is programmed with two main sections referred to on the touch screen 120 of the host console 102 as a table tab 122 and a wait list tab 124. When activating or booting-up the host console 102, or when the host selects the table tab 122 if the console is already activated, a default or home screen of the system 10 generally depicts graphically the tables 18 as table representations 180 (see Figure 18). This depiction generally marks the beginning of all the table pages 128 generally programmed under the table tab 122 option. Selection of the wait list tab 124 displays a wait list page 128 (see Figure 28). Each one of the pages 126, 128 on the touch-screen 120 provides a multitude of options for the host to select. When selected, the home pages 126, 128 will generally change the display configuration providing

additional information for the host and often additional options to choose from. For the sake of explanation, and although each page 126, 128 may have a multitude of screen displays, all the screen displays with respect to the table tab 122 will be referred to as one common table page 126. Similarly, each screen with respect to the wait list tab 124 will be referred to as one common wait list page 128.

[0089] With particular reference to Figure 15, each table 18 may be selected and diagnostic information and options are shown on the table page 126 that includes a table component list 130, a component parameter list 132, a reset button 134, a restart software button 136, a reboot button 138, a calibrate screen button 140, a back button 142, and a refresh button 144. Because the table page 126 is preferably one of many screen displays linked to that illustrated in Figure 15, the back and refresh buttons 142, 144 provide the host with the ability to generally scroll through various screen displays of the table page 126 such as that also illustrated in Figures 16 and 17.

[0090] The table component list 130 includes a list of all components of the selected table 18, each personal computer 50 (i.e., the "Table Client") and each module 34 (i.e., the individual seats). Table Client 2 is a backup to Table Client 1 and is optional. Selection of one of the components of the table 18 in the table component list 130 displays information regarding the selected component in the component parameter list 132.

[0091] The able component list parameter list 132 preferably includes a:

1. Description Field (e.g., "Table 13, Seat 4");
2. Client Type Field (e.g., Player or Table);
3. Client Status: (Active or Inactive);
4. Connection Status: (Connected or Disconnected);
5. Seat Number (where appropriate);
6. Seat Status (e.g., Open, Reserved, Active);
7. Player Name (when available); and,
8. Player Status (e.g., Active or In-Active).

[0092] The reset connection button 134 is active when the connection between the server computer 50 and the component selected in the component list 130 is disconnected. Selection of the reset connection 134 may be used to "ping" the selected component and attempt to restart the connection therebetween. The restart software

button 136 may be used to restart the software on the selected component if the component is inactive. For example, either the client software or the operating software may be restarted, i.e., a soft reboot. The reboot hardware button 138 may be used to restart the selected component, i.e., turn off the selected component and turn the selected component back on.

[0093] Because the player interface 54 of the EPIA 24 is preferably a touch-screen display, it requires running of a calibration routine for first time use and periodic calibration routine re-runs thereafter. The selection of the calibrate screen button 140 will run the calibration routine for the selected EPIA 24. Selection of the back button 142 will return the screen 120 to a previous state or view. Selection of the refresh button 144 will refresh all of the information contained on the current screen.

[0094] The table page 126 also includes a stop/pause parameter selection area 146, a move game button 148, a pause game button 150, a stop game button 152, an auto deal check button 154, a closed seating check button 156, a use wait list check button 158, an information/status area, a pair of navigation buttons, and a clear alert button 164. The stop/pause parameter selection area 146, located toward the lower left hand corner of the screen, is used with either of the pause game button 156 or the stop game button 158 if the host wants to pause a game or electronic table 18 to make a change or perform some other function. The stop/pause parameter selection area 146 includes the three options of "No Delay," "Minutes," and "Hands." The game or table will be resumed when the host is finished. A stopped game ends the play at the table typically at the end of the day.

[0095] In the lower right hand corner of the screen illustrated in Figure 15, the auto deal check button 154, the closed seating check button 156, and the use wait list check button 158 are used to turn on/off the corresponding function. The information/status area 160 provides additional information about the selected component or a just completed action. The navigation buttons 162 may be used to cross between messages in the information/status area 160. The clear alert button 164 is used to clear alerts generated by players at their respective EPIA's 24A-24J.

[0096] Referring to Figure 16, the table page 126 displays the game history of a selected table of the plurality of tables 18A-18J preferably displayed in a list 166. The

list 166 includes a line item for each action that has occurred on the selected table with a time stamp.

[0097] Referring to Figure 17, the table page 126 also displays information regarding the game being played at the selected table of the plurality of tables 18A-18J. Preferably, the tables 18A-18J are used to provide a variety of electronic card games, such as poker, and the host console 102 provides a list of the predefined or selected card games. When providing game information, the table page 126 preferably has a general section 168, a game play section 170, a rake section 172, and a live action setting section 174. The general section 168 includes the current game and a description of the current game being played on the selected table of the plurality of tables 18A-18J and any other needed information associated with the current game. In Figure 17, the selected game is "Limit Hold'em $1/$2". The general section 168 includes: type, variation, stakes, and jackpots. The game play section 170 describes parameters that affect game play. In the illustrated embodiment, the game play section 170 includes: maximum raises per hand, action time limit, minimum number of players, and maximum number of players. The rake section 172 includes information regarding the current rake. The live action section 174 includes information regarding wagering. For example, the defined game is "Limit Hold'em $1/$2" and the live action section 174 includes information related to the blinds, permissible wagers, and the minimum and maximum stakes allowed.

[0098] Referring to Figure 18, the seven table representations 180A-180G of the table page 126 is illustrated and preferably includes:

1. The name of the table shown;
2. The game being played at the table (e.g., Limit Hold'em $1/$2 or no game);
3. The number of hands being played per hour.

[0099] Each graphical table representation 180A-180G may also include the status of each EPIA 24, for example inactive (indicated by a red "X" or marked as "No Game"), active, reserved or out. A reserved EPIA 24 or seat, means that it has been assigned to a player and can only be used by that player. The player must log in to the reserved or assigned EPIA 24 to begin playing. Typically, the player has a

predetermined amount of time to log-in to the assigned EPIA 24 or the seat 40 becomes available again.

[00100] Referring to Figure 26 and more particularly to pausing and/or stopping a game via the host console 102, the stop/pause parameter selection area 146 is used to select how the game will be stopped or paused. To do so, there are three options: "no delay," "by minutes," and "by hands." If "no delay" is first selected, then if the pause button 150 or the stop game button 152 is selected, the game is immediately paused or stopped, respectively. Once a game has been paused, the pause button 150 will be replaced with a resume button 150'. Alternatively, if "by minutes" is selected, then a minute dialog 184 is displayed (see Figure 21). The minute dialog 184 allows the host to enter when the game will be paused or stopped (in minutes) after the appropriate buttons are selected. Yet again, if "by hands" is selected, then a hands dialog 186 is displayed (see Figure 20). The hands dialog 186 allows the host to enter when the game will be paused or stopped (in number of hands of play) after the appropriate buttons are selected.

[00101] Referring to Figures 19, and more particular to the present invention, the gaming system 10 via the host console 102 has the capability to move a game in mid-play from one table 18 to another previously inactive table. When an electronic game is so moved, the game in it's current state along with the players are relocated in their totality from one electronic table to another. Preferably, the seating arrangement of the players remain the same when moving games in mid-play between tables.

[00102] As best illustrated in Figures 22-25, each table representation 180A-180G of the tables 18 can generally be zoomed in upon to display additional or more particular information. The screen 120 has a zoom button 188 and a second set of navigation buttons 190. With particular reference to Figure 22, with the graphical table representations 180 being displayed, a selected table is highlighted by a colored or yellow banding 182. The navigation buttons 190 may be used to cycle or move through the table representations 180. To zoom in on a table representation 180 of a table 18, the host preferably double-clicks on the desired table representation 180 or selects the zoom button 188 to zoom in on the selected table representation 180.

[00103] Referring to Figure 23, once a table representation is zoomed in on, the table page 126 displays a larger and more detailed graphical table representation or table enlargement 192. The table enlargement 192 has a central information area 192A and a

plurality of player information areas 192B. The central information area 192A generally includes information about the actual table 18, which may include: table identifier, status, game type, pending status, average pot, hands per hour, average wait time to get a seat at the table, and a start time of the current game. The player information areas 192B generally include the seat number, the status (reserved, occupied, etc), player name (where appropriate), the player's stake, the player's wins/losses for the current game, and the time player entered the current game.

[00104] Referring to Figure 29, the table page 126 preferably includes a reserve (or reserve for player) button 194, a game info button 198, a history button 200 and a diagnostics button 202. Selection of the game info button 198, the history button 200, and the diagnostics button 202, will result in game information, history information, and diagnostics information being displayed. As shown in Figures 29-31, the table page 126 may also include a reserve empty button 204, an unseat button 206, and a penalize button 208. The reserve empty button 204 may be used to reserve a seat without designative a specific person. The unseat button 206 may be used to remove a player. The penalize button 208 may be used to adjust a player's stack or otherwise penalize a player. An adjust pot button 230 may be used to adjust the pot of the current hand.

[00105] The reserve button 194 allows the host via utilization of the host console 102 to reserve a seat 40 for a specific player. In order to use this button, the use wait list check box has to be off and the restricted seating check box has to checked. This allows the host to place the specific player ahead of those players on the wait list, while not opening the seat 40 to anyone who may attempt to log-in or use the unoccupied seat. When the reserve button 194 is selected, an account number dialog 210 is displayed (see Figure 30). The account number dialog 210 allows the host to enter the account number of the person for whom they are reserving the seat 40. After the account number has been entered, a time limit dialog 212 is shown. The time limit dialog 212 (see Figure 31) allows the host to designate how long the reservation will last before the player logs into the EPIA 24 to secure the seat 40. Once a seat has been reserved, the reservation and the player's name will be reflected at the corresponding graphical representation (see Figure 29 that shows seat 7 reserved for "Greg").

[00106] Typically, a player who has left the table to take or break or for any reason may return as long as they pay any missed blinds. However, the other players may want

another player to sit in. The unseat button 206 allows the host to remove a player from the table after the player has left their seat for an amount of time or a number of hands (without logging out).

[00107] With particular reference to Figure 27, the screen 120 includes a drop down list 214. The drop down list 214 includes a list of all games which may be played on the tables 18. Selecting "all" on the drop down list will display graphical representations of all of the tables 18. Selecting one of the games in the drop down list 214 will display graphical representations of only those tables which are playing that selected game.

[00108] With particular reference to Figure 28, the wait list page 128 includes an information section 216 for each type of game that may be played on the tables 18. Each information section 216 includes information related to the game and the wait list for that game. In the illustrated embodiment, the information section includes:

1. the number of tables playing the game;
2. the number of players sat in a given interval; and,
3. the number of players in the queue (i.e., the wait list).

[00109] The information section 216 may also include a queue active check box and an allow entry check box, which allow the employee to turn the wait list on/off for given game and to allow/disallow additional players to be added to the wait list for a given game, respectively.

[00110] With particular reference to Figure 32, a tournament chop page 218 is illustrated which is used only during tournaments and allows the host to stop tournament play prematurely, i.e., before only one player is left, and split the remaining pot or table stakes. The tournament chop page 218 includes a series of check boxes 220 that allow the host to designate how the pot or jackpot will be split. In the illustrated embodiment, there are three options: split manually, split even, or split by table stakes. If split manually is chosen, the corresponding amounts are entered in a virtual key pad 222. The tournament chop page 218 may also include a refund rake check box 224. A cancel button 224 allows the employee to cancel the current operation and return to a previous screen. A stop & chop now button 226 stops the current tournament and splits the pot as designated.

[00111] Additional features of the host console 102 are described in the following concurrently filed U.S. Patent Applications all of which are herein incorporated by reference in their entirety:

US Patent Application Serial No. N/A (Atty. Docket No. 60,667-062);

US Patent Application Serial No. N/A (Atty. Docket No. 60,667-063);

US Patent Application Serial No. N/A (Atty. Docket No. 60,667-064);

US Patent Application Serial No. N/A (Atty. Docket No. 60,667-065);

US Patent Application Serial No. N/A (Atty. Docket No. 60,667-066); and,

US Patent Application Serial No. N/A (Atty. Docket No. 60,667-067).

VIII. General Process and Software

[00112] With particular reference to Figure 14, in another aspect of the present invention, a method 110 provides an electronic poker game to a plurality of players on at the electronic poker table 18 using the host console 102 and the server computer 50. In a first step 112, the host console 102 preferably configures the EPIA's 24 and the central display area 26 and establishes parameters of the electronic poker game. In a second step 114, the electronic poker game is administered by the server computer 50 using electronic cards and chips.

[00113] In operation, the gaming system 10 will implement a player-account based cash in/cash out system. The system 10 will create a user account for each player. Once an account is established for the player, the player is issued a Player Card having an associated personal identification number or PIN. Once the player has been issued a Player Card, their account may be funded. The Player Card is used to identify the player at the tables 18. The player may fund their account by bringing cash to a cage, where the cash is accepted and credited to the player's account. Printed receipts are given to the player and maintained by the casino 12. To bring electronic chips to the table 18, the player sits down at a seat 40, swipes their Player Card and enters their PIN. The system 10 informs the player of their account balance and allows them to convert all or a portion of the account balance to electronic chips to bring to the game.

[00114] From a software perspective, the gaming system 10 may be implemented using six program groups: a table server, a game engine, a table client, a player client, a table manager, and a cage manager. The table server implements the network

communication, control and authentication as well as inter-table functions (seat reservations, multi-table tournaments). The game engine is responsible for all game functions, e.g., electronic playing card deck generation, dealing, betting, determining winners and awarding pots. The table client is the graphical control for the CDA 26. The player client implements the user interface for the EPIA 24 and the logic for capturing player input and communication the player input to the table client server. The table manager contains the host interface for setting user, network, and game parameters, for starting, pausing, and stopping games, and for monitoring game activity and responding to system or user generated alerts. The cage manager provides the ability to create and fund player accounts and to create the Player Cards.

[00115] If there are no seats 40 available, the player is placed in a queue, until a seat opens up. In one embodiment, players are taken off of the queue and assigned a seat on a first come, first served basis. However, the system 10 may allow the casino 12 to implement special rules for players to bypass the queue or list. For example, the casino may present vouchers to players under certain conditions, such as a win in a tournament, to be placed at the head of a queue.

[00116] In one aspect of the present invention and as stated above, the system 10 tracks each transaction, wager, card dealt in a database. The system 10 also tracks the players which are playing at each table 18. This information is stored in the database, summarized, and may be presented in any numerous forms of reporting formats. Any information regarding the player's, the games, and how each hand is played may be tracked. This available data may also be analyzed for purposes of determining the frequency of poker hands (per hour) for a table or all games in which a particular player or players played or detecting, e.g., collusion between players.

[00117] The system 10 allows jackpots, i.e., progressive jackpots, to be generated by and won across multiple hands and/or multiple tables. A progressive jackpot may increase based on the amounts wagered and/or won at the included tables. The progressive jackpot may continue to increase until won under a set of predetermined conditions. Alternatively, it may be active until only for a predetermined time period. The conditions for winning the jackpot that it is won by one or more players at the end of the time period.

[00118] The system 10 allows a progressive jackpot to be funded in multiple ways. The way in which a progressive jackpot is funded may be funded through a computer program application on the server 50 or other device. For example, the progressive jackpot may be funded by taking a set percentage from every jackpot, every other jackpot, or every n^{th} jackpot. The amount of the progressive jackpot may be displayed on the CDA 26 and/or a remote display.

[00119] The progressive jackpot may be initiated randomly, under certain definable conditions, and/or for a specific event, i.e., a marketing event. The progressive jackpot may be a single hand, a predetermined number of hands at one table or across multiple hands, for a predetermined time period, and the like.

[00120] Preferably, after a jackpot is won by a player, one or more government reporting forms may be presented to the player on their EPIA 24. The form may accept the player's electronic signature (if permissible) or may notify the player of the requirements and direct them to a location where they can fill out the form. The device may be a personal, notebook, or tablet computer, handheld computer, PDA, or other suitable device.

IX. Tournament Play

[00121] The system 10 facilitates tournament play. In a tournament, a predetermined number of tables 18 having a predetermined number of players are involved. A buy-in, e.g., $100 is required. Typically, after a player loses all of their money, they are eliminated from the tournament.

[00122] Under predetermined rules, players may register for a tournament and be assigned to seats at a table. During play, under predetermined rules, tables may be broken down and the players distributed to other tables. The system 10 facilitates the tournament by providing one or more of the following features:

a) registration
b) tracking tournament information
c) display of tournament information on central display and/or remote display
d) tournament set-up, e.g., buy-in
e) re buy-in
f) tournament jackpot, cash or entry voucher for entry another tournament

(specific tournament or expiration date)

g) Process for breaking tables:
   (1) message that table is breaking
   (2) convey new seat assignment
   (3) determination of breaking order
   (4) display of breaking order

h) display information on status of other tables and players at other tables

i) System to monitor and adjust hands per hour of an individual table during a tournament: During a poker tournament it is important that each table play roughly the same number of hands per hour as all other tables. This can be accomplished by pausing a game and/or slowing a game down with out pausing.

j) multi-site tournaments

k) system for automatically paying players tournament winnings based on tournament pay tables and their final position in the tournament

l) automatic posting of blinds and method to turn on and off of automatic posting of blinds/missed blinds

m) method for automatically calculating allowed bet amounts in pot-limit and no-limit betting structures

n) automatic varying of rake based upon number of players, time of day, type of game and/or other criteria

o) ability to offer rake discounts to individual players

p) transferring a player from one seat to another at the same table, or to another: Situations exist where are forced to ("must move") or desire to move seats. This feature provides automatic notification and movement of player information from one seat to another.

q) database and network architecture allowing single and multi-site networking and management of a plurality of automated poker

r) tracking and reporting of player statistics: Data and method of display over the internet and/or other methods for player to analyze their previous play statistics. In another embodiment date and method of display is utilized to determine player rankings for a given game and/or over a

given time period

s) ability to view available tables and register for live tables and/or tournaments via a remote connection such as the internet or an automated voice response unit

t) options adjust speed of play(speed of card shuffling, dealing, discarding, betting, etc.)

u) electronically transfer money from an account to the table

v) electronically transfer money to another

w) use of "cash card" to bring money to the table

x) ability for operator to view details of any and all tables

y) ability for operator to view details of any and all players

X. Virtual Gaming

[00123] In one aspect of the present invention, remote or virtual games may be provided by the system 10. The remote or virtual games may be provided on wireless devices and may be played at predetermined locations.

[00124] Virtual games may also be provided through the EPIAs 24. For example, the virtual or remote games may be played by the poker players when it is not their turn. The virtual or remote games may be another poker hand, played against other players, at the table or at other tables, or played against virtual players. Alternatively, the remote or virtual games may be other types of games, including, but not limited to blackjack, keno, slot machines, and the like.

[00125] In addition to running other casino games on EPIA 24 or other terminals, system can be run on other gaming devices throughout the casino. For example, a virtual poker game can be run on an existing electronic bingo terminal or an electronic race book terminal.

XI. Pausing or Stopping a Game

[00126] In one aspect of the present invention, the host console 102 allows a user of the host console 102 (or host) to interrupt the electronic card game. In one embodiment of the present invention, interrupting the electronic card means either pausing or stopping the card game. Pausing the electronic card game is temporary, i.e., the game can be resumed. A stopped game cannot resumed.

[00127] The host may indicate that the game is to be stopped or paused through input on the host console 102. In one embodiment, pausing of the game may be initiated through actuation of the pause game button 150. After a game has been paused, it may be resumed through actuation of the resume button 150'.

[00128] In one embodiment, after the pause or stop game buttons 150, 152 are actuated the game may be automatically paused or stopped. Alternatively, the game may be pause or stopped after a predetermined number of minutes or hands of the game.

[00129] In another embodiment, the host may choose whether to immediately interrupt the game or to interrupt the game after a predetermined or specified number of minutes or hands.

[00130] With specific reference to Figure 33, in the illustrated embodiment upon actuation of the pause or stop game buttons 150, 152, a menu 300 is displayed. The menu 300 includes a no delay item 302, a minutes item 304, and a hands item 306. If the host selects no delay 302, the game is immediately interrupted (paused or stopped). If the host selects minutes 304, then a keypad 308 is displayed which allows the host to enter a number of minutes after which the game will be interrupted. Appropriate alerts messages may be sent to the electronic player interaction areas 24 and/or central display area 26. If the host selects hands 306, then a keypad 310 is displayed which allows the host to enter a number of hands of the game after which the game will be interrupted.

[00131] With specific reference to Figure 36, since a stopped game cannot be resumed, the host is asked to confirm that the current game is to be stopped via a dialog 312. The dialog 312 include a no button 314 and a yes button 316. Actuation of the no button 314 dismisses the action and actuation of the yes button 316 will stop the game.

[00132] In tournaments, in one embodiment, games can be only be interrupted with no delay.

[00133] One a game has been set up to be paused or stopped in a number of minutes or number of hands, the action cannot be cancelled. However, the number of minutes or hands may be increased or decreased. In the case the game has been scheduled to be paused, the game may be manually resumed.

[00134] Reserving a Seat

[00135] In another aspect of the present invention, the host may reserve a seat, i.e., an electronic player interaction area 24 for a player. The seat may be reserved either with a name (for a specific player) or without a name.

[00136] If the seat has been reserved for a specific player, the host may enter the player identification or card number via a key pad 318.

[00137] Once a seat or electronic player interaction area 24 has been reserved, its status is changed from open to reserved. Generally, a player must logon to the reserved electronic player interaction area prior to playing the game. In one embodiment, the player must logon to the reserved electronic player interaction area within a specified time period or the status changes back to open.

[00138] In one embodiment, the specified time period is set or predetermined. In another embodiment, the host may enter the time period on a keypad 320.

XII. Sitting Out, Unseating, or Penalizing a Player

[00139] In one embodiment, the host may need to "sit out" a player using the host console if the player leaves the table, but does not sit out themselves. To sit out a player, the host may select a fold or sit out button (not shown) on the host console 102. With specific reference to Figure 39, the host is asked to confirm that they want to sit out the player via a dialog 322. The dialog 322 includes a no button 324 and a yes button 326. Actuation of the no button 324 dismisses the dialog 324 and the action and actuation of the yes button 326 sit outs the player (and fold if currently in a hand). This changes the step of the electronic player interaction area 24 from occupied to sitting out.

[00140] In another embodiment, the host may need to "unseat" a player using the host console if the player leaves the table without quitting (and logging out). This may usually be done at the request of the other players and/or after a predetermined or sufficient time period passes. To unseat a player, the host may select an unseat or logoff button (not shown) on the host console 102. With specific reference to Figure 40, the host is asked to confirm that they want to unseat the player via a dialog 328. The dialog 328 includes a no button 330 and a yes button 332. Actuation of the no button 328 dismisses the dialog 328 and the action and actuation of the yes button 332 unseats the player (and logs them off the electronic player interaction area 24).

[00141] In another aspect of the present invention, the host console 102 allows the host to penalize a player, typically, for bad behavior. In one embodiment, the host may

penalize the player by preventing the player from participating in the electronic card game for a specified period which may be defined as a period of time or a number of hands.

[00142] In one embodiment, the specified period may be predetermined or may be determined by the host.

[00143] In one embodiment, the host may initiate the penalty by actuation the penalize button 208. In the illustrated embodiment, the host may enter a number of minutes that the player must sit out in a key pad 334. With specific reference to Figure 42, once a player has been penalized the status of their electronic player interaction area 24 is changed from occupied to penalty as reflected in the graphic 336. The time period specified by the penalty may be modified by the host in another keypad 338.

We Claim:

1. A host console, for use with an electronic card table, the electronic card table having a playing surface, a plurality of electronic player interaction areas located around a periphery of the table, and a game computer, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of a plurality of players, the game computer for administering an electronic card game on the table, coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas, comprising:

a host display for displaying information to a host;

a host user interface for receiving host input; and,

a host controller coupled to the host display and the host user interface for interrupting the electronic card game in response to input from the host.

2. A host console, as set forth in claim 1, wherein the host controller in interrupting the electronic card game stops the electronic card game.

3. A host console, as set forth in claim 1, wherein the host controller in interrupting the electronic card game pauses a hand of the electronic card game.

4. A host console, as se forth in claim 1, wherein the host controller resumes the hand of the electronic card game in response to host input.

5. A host console, as set forth in claim 1, the host controlling allowing the user to specify that the game will be interrupted with no delay or in a specified time period or in a specified number of hands.

6. A host console, as set forth in claim 5, wherein the host may enter the specified time period.

7. A host console, as set forth in claim 5, wherein the host may enter the specified number of hands.

8. A method for providing information to a host related to an electronic card table, the electronic card table a plurality of electronic player interaction areas and a game computer, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of a plurality of players, the game computer for providing an electronic card game to the players, including the steps of:

providing a host console, the host console being coupled to the electronic poker table;

receiving information from the host via a user interface of the host console; and,

interrupting the electronic card game in response to input from the host.

9. A method, as set forth in claim 8, wherein the step of interrupting the electronic card game includes the step of stopping the electronic card game.

10. A method, as set forth in claim 8, wherein the step of interrupting the electronic card game includes the step of pausing a hand of the electronic card game.

11. A method, as se forth in claim 10, including the step of resuming the hand of the electronic card game in response to host input.

12. A method, as set forth in claim 8, including the step of allowing the host to specify that the game will be interrupted with no delay or in a specified time period or in a specified number of hands.

13. A method, as set forth in claim 5, wherein the host may enter the specified time period.

14. A method, as set forth in claim 5, wherein the host may enter the specified number of hands.

15. A host console, for use with an electronic card table, the electronic card table having a playing surface, a plurality of electronic player interaction areas located around a periphery of the table, and a game computer, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of a plurality of players, the game computer for administering an electronic card game on the table, coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas, comprising:

a host display for displaying information to a host;

a host user interface for receiving host input; and,

a host controller coupled to the host display and the host user interface for reserving an electronic player interaction area in response to input from the host.

16. A host console, as set forth in claim 15, wherein the host may reserve an electronic player interaction area for a specific player.

17. A host console, as set forth in claim 16, wherein each player has an associated identification number, the electronic player interaction area being reserved via the specific player's identification number.

18. A host console, as set forth in claim 15, the host controller changing a status of the electronic player interaction area from open to reserved.

19. A host console, as set forth in claim 18, wherein the player is required to logon to the reserved electronic player interaction area within a specified time period.

20. A host console, as set forth in claim 19, wherein the specified time period is predetermined.

21. A host console, as set forth in claim 19, wherein the specified time period may be entered by the host.

22. A method for providing information to a host related to an electronic card table, the electronic card table a plurality of electronic player interaction areas and a game computer, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of a pluralities of players, the game computer for providing an electronic card game to the players, including the steps of:

providing a host console, the host console being coupled to the electronic poker table;

receiving information from the host via a user interface of the host console; and,

reserving an electronic player interaction area in response to input from the host.

23. A method, as set forth in claim 22, wherein the host may reserve an electronic player interaction area for a specific player.

24. A method, as set forth in claim 23, wherein each player has an associated identification number, the method including the step of reserving the electronic player interaction area via the specific player's identification number.

25. A method, as set forth in claim 22, including the step of changing a status of the electronic player interaction area from open to reserved.

26. A method, as set forth in claim 22, wherein the player is required to logon to the reserved electronic player interaction area within a specified time period.

27. A method, as set forth in claim 26, wherein the specified time period is predetermined.

28. A method, as set forth in claim 26, wherein the specified time period may be entered by the host.

29. A host console, for use with an electronic card table, the electronic card table having a playing surface, a plurality of electronic player interaction areas located around a periphery of the table, and a game computer, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with

the players, the game computer for administering an electronic card game on the table, coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas, comprising:

a host display for displaying information to a host;

a host user interface for receiving host input; and,

a host controller coupled to the host display and the host user interface for penalizing one of the players by preventing the player from participating in the electronic card game for a specified period.

30. A host console, as set forth in claim 29, wherein the specified period is a period of time.

31. A host console, as set forth in claim 30, wherein the host controller allows the host to enter the period of time.

32. A host console, as set forth in claim 29, wherein the specified period is defined by a number of hands.

33. A host console, as set forth in claim 32, wherein the host controller allows the host to enter the number of hands.

34. A host console, as set forth in claim 29, the host controller changing a status of the electronic player interaction area from occupied to penalty.

35. A method for providing information to a host related to an electronic card table, the electronic card table a plurality of electronic player interaction areas and a game computer, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of a pluralities of players, the

game computer for providing an electronic card game to the players, including the steps of:

providing a host console, the host console being coupled to the electronic poker table;

receiving information from the host via a user interface of the host console; and,

penalizing one of the players by preventing the player from participating in the electronic card game for a specified period.

36. A method, as set forth in claim 35, wherein the specified period is a period of time.

37. A method, as set forth in claim 36, including the step of allowing the host to enter the period of time.

38. A method, as set forth in claim 35, wherein the specified period is defined by a number of hands.

39. A method, as set forth in claim 38, including the step of allowing to enter the number of hands.

40. A method, as set forth in claim 35, including the step of changing a status of the electronic player interaction area from occupied to penalty.

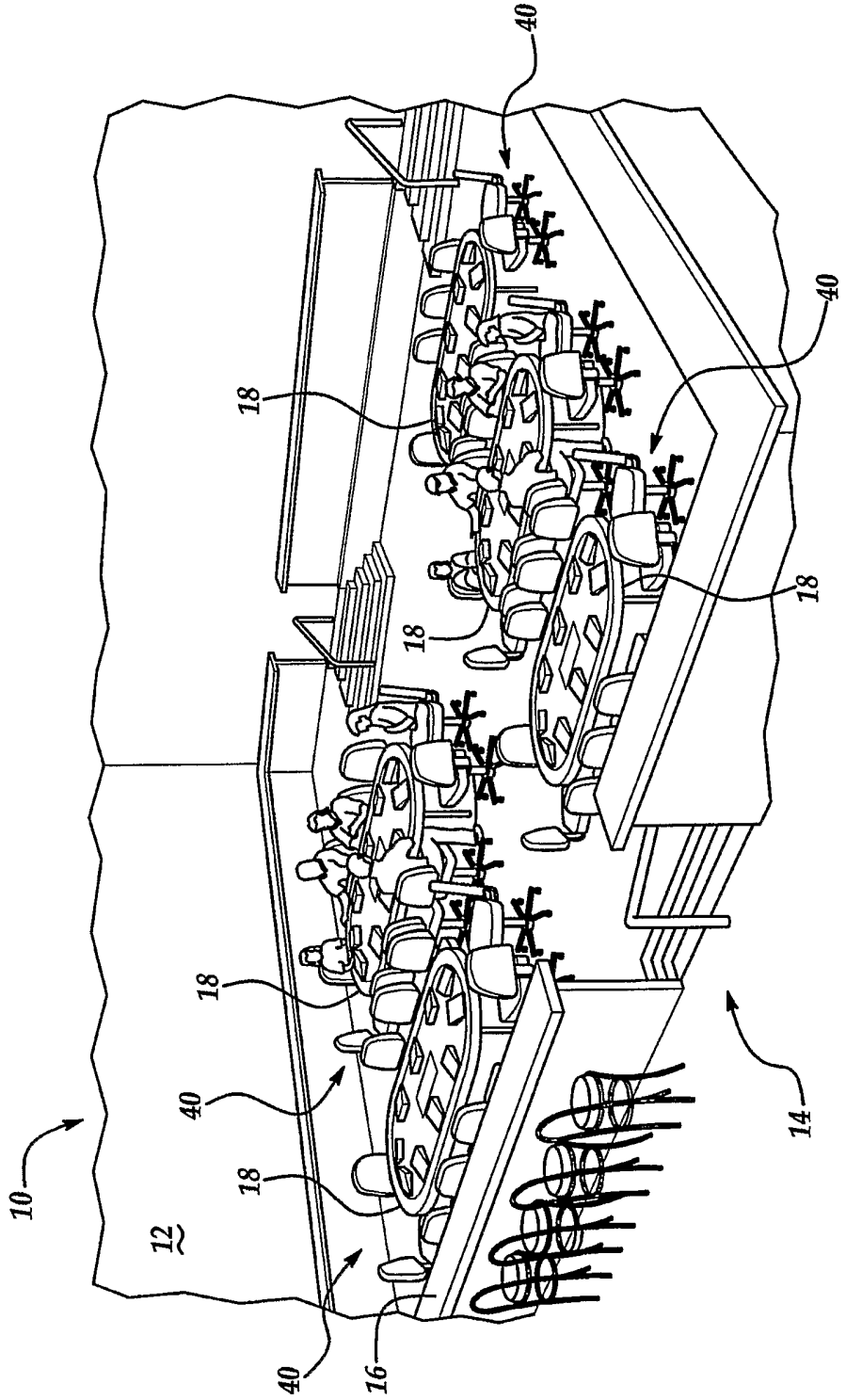


Figure 1

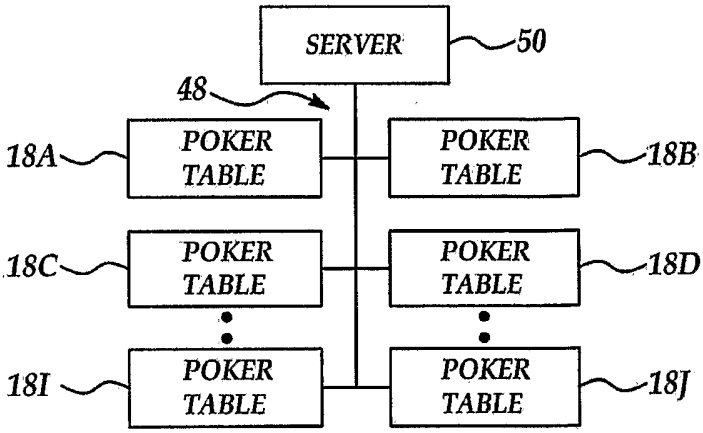


Figure 8

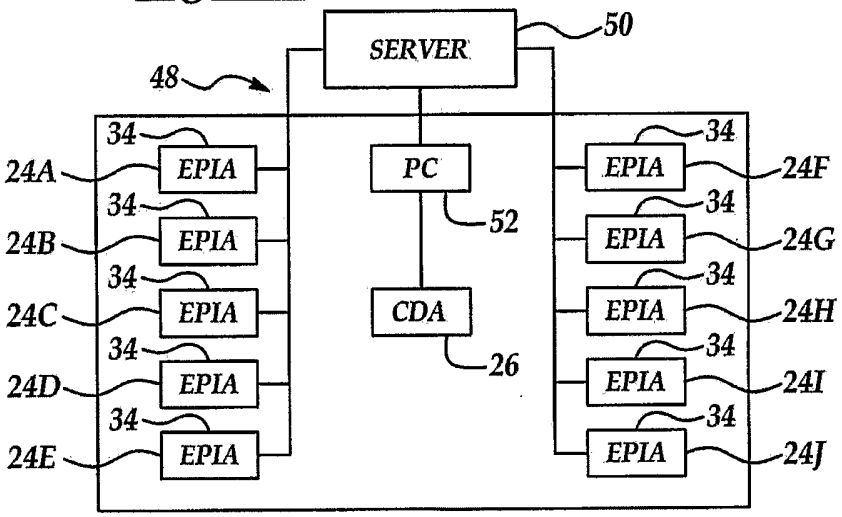


Figure 7

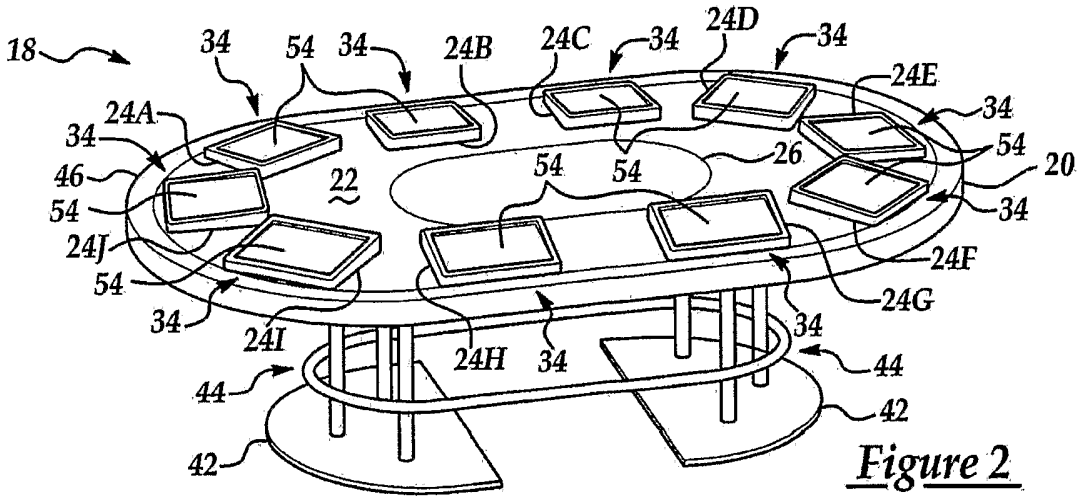


Figure 2

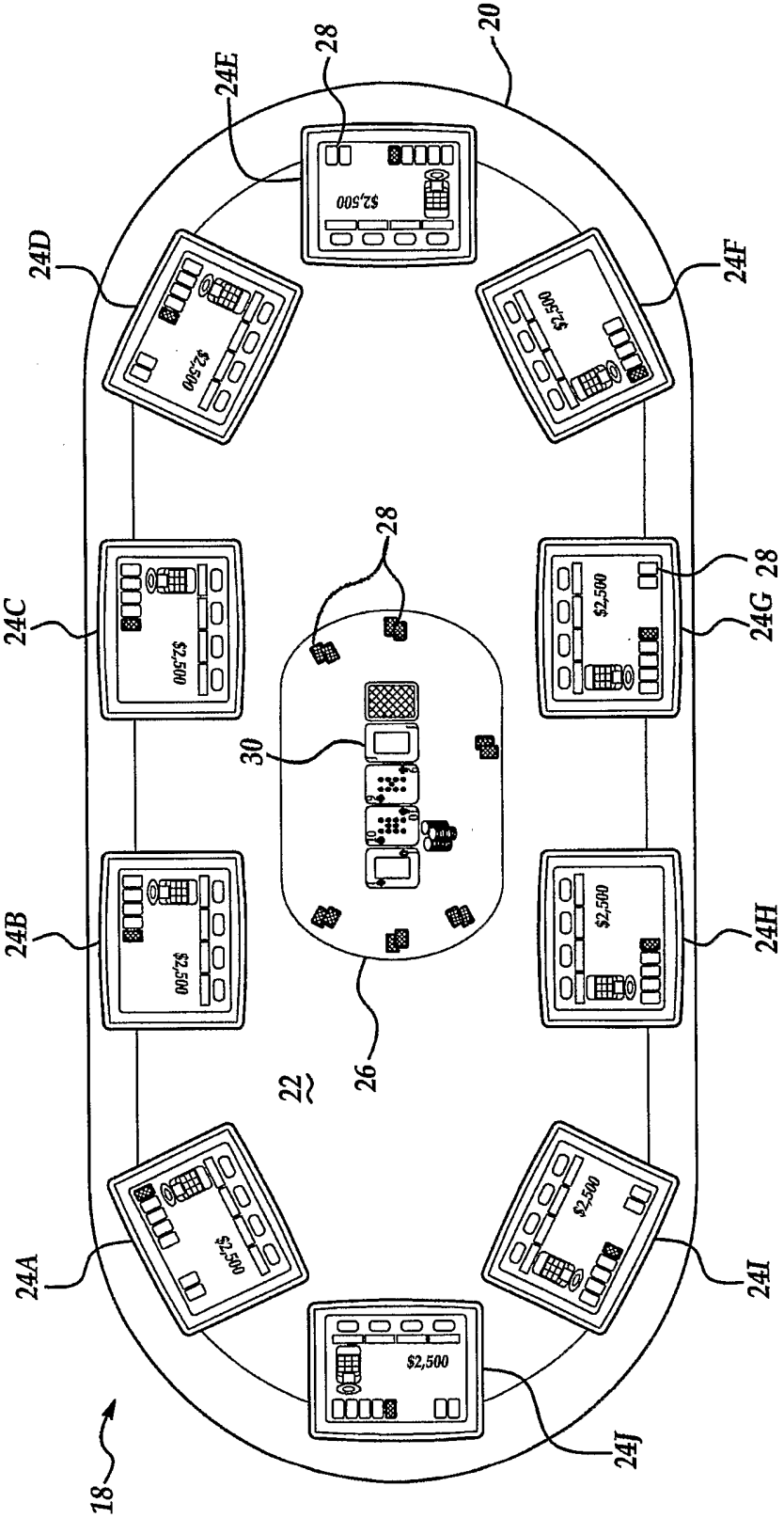


Figure 3

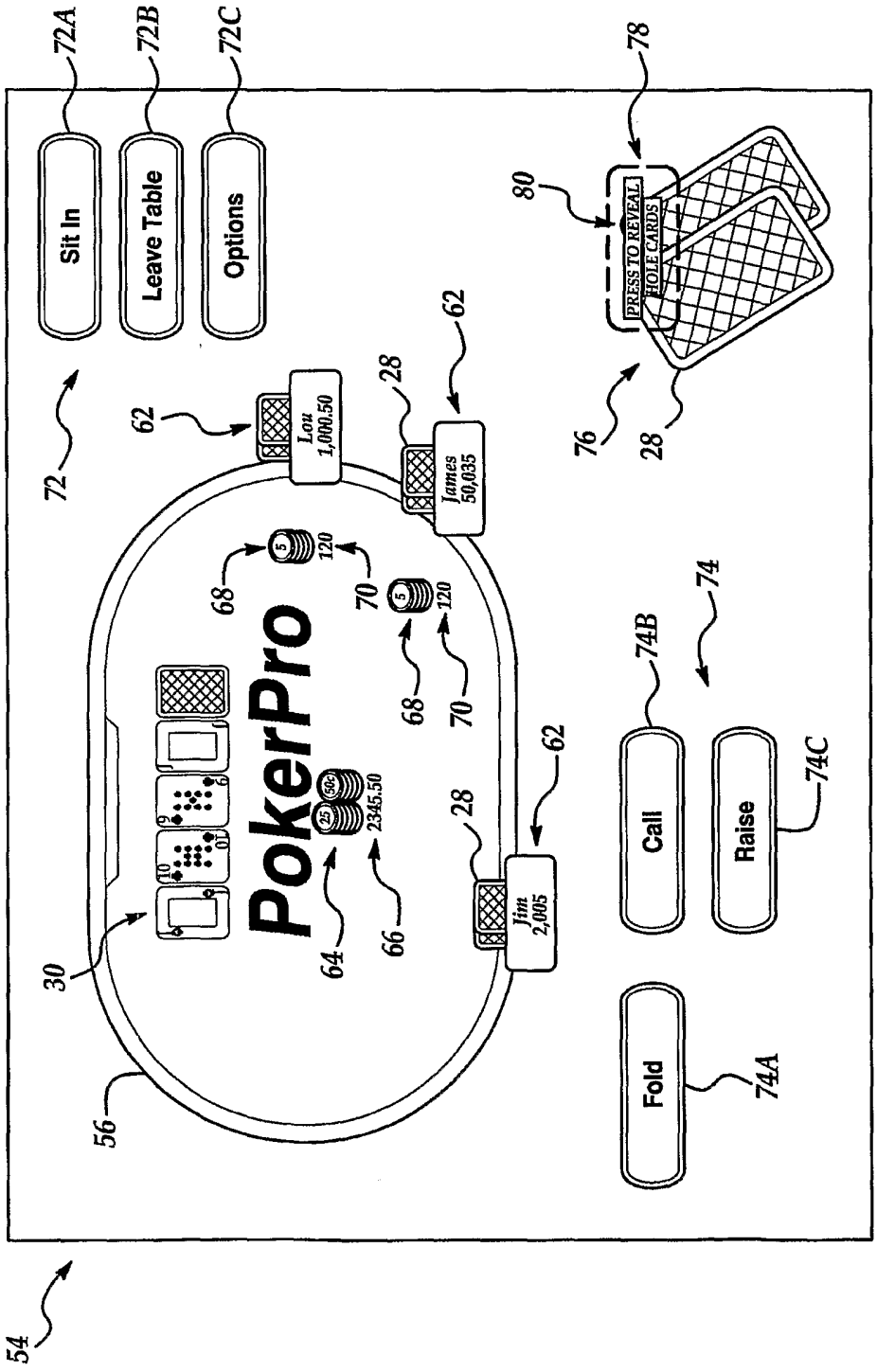

72A
72B
72C
Sit In
Leave Table
Options
72
62
Low
1,000.50
28
62
James
50,035
78
80
PRESS TO REVEAL
HOLE CARDS
76
28
68
120
70
68
120
70
PokerPro
64
2345.50
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Jim
2,005
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74B
74
Call
Raise
74C
Fold
74A
54

Figure 5

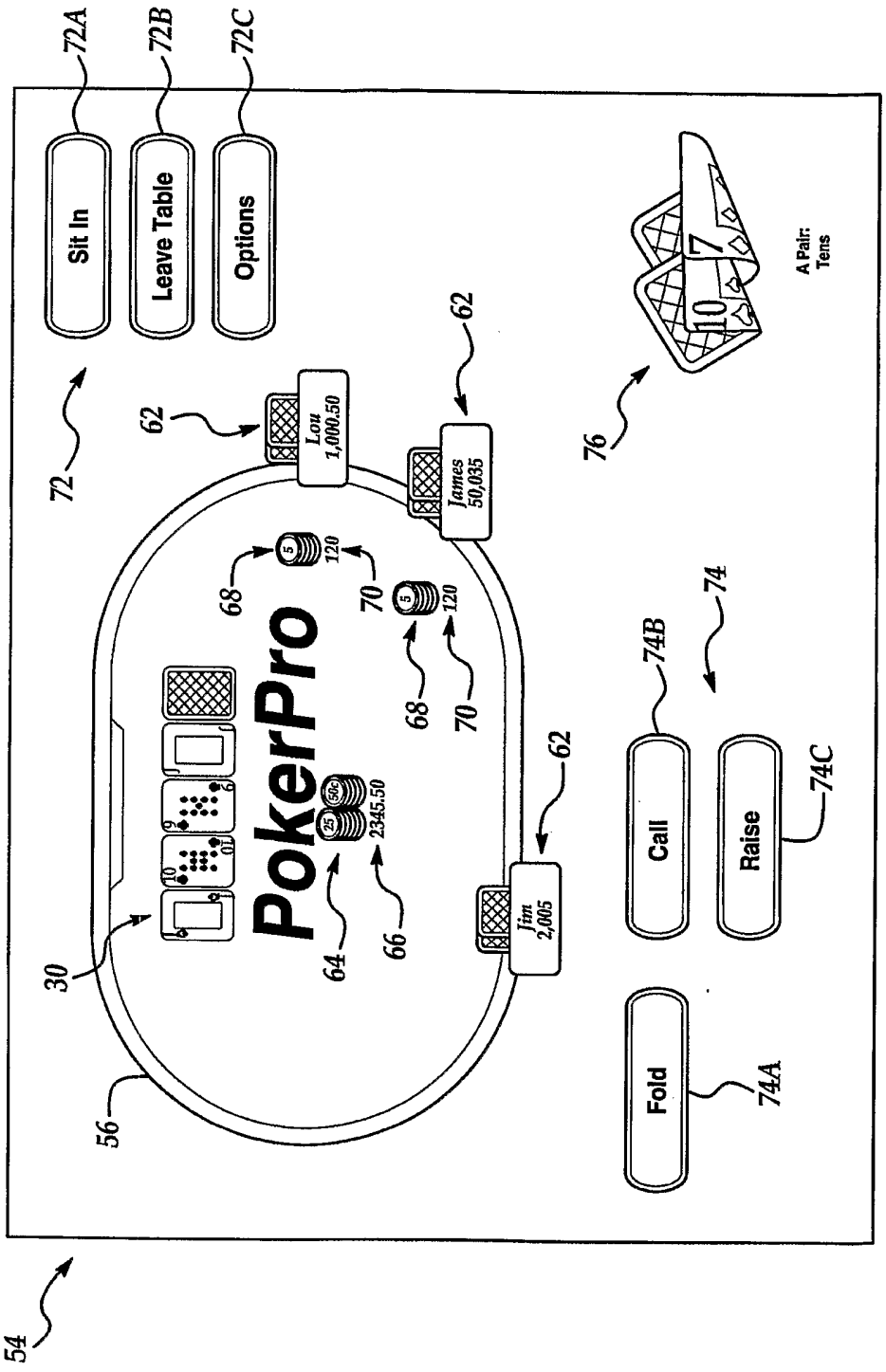

54
72A
72B
72C
Sit In
Leave Table
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62
Lou
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James
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Jim
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62
68
70
120
5
68
70
120
5
64
66
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76
A Pair:
Tens
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74C
Call
Raise
Fold
74A

Figure 6

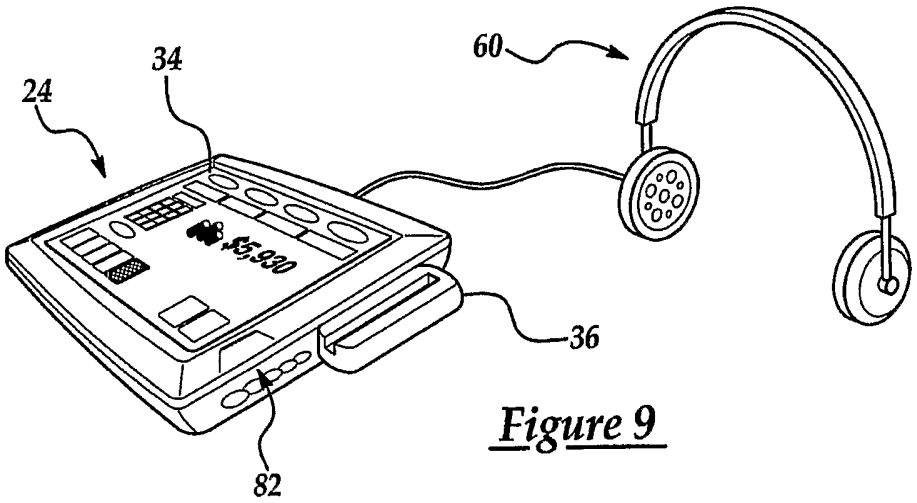


Figure 9

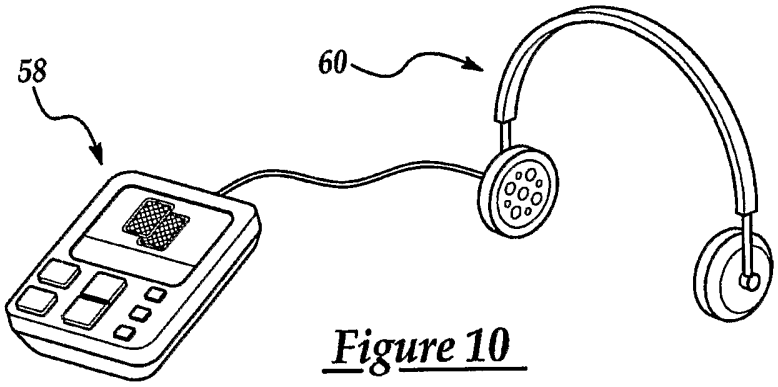


Figure 10

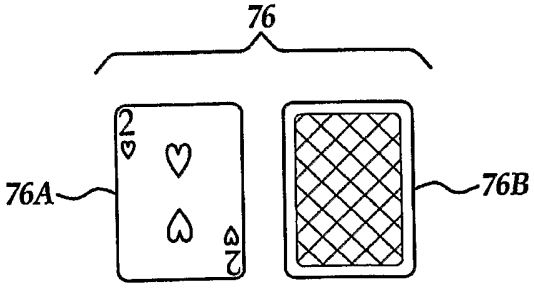


Figure 4

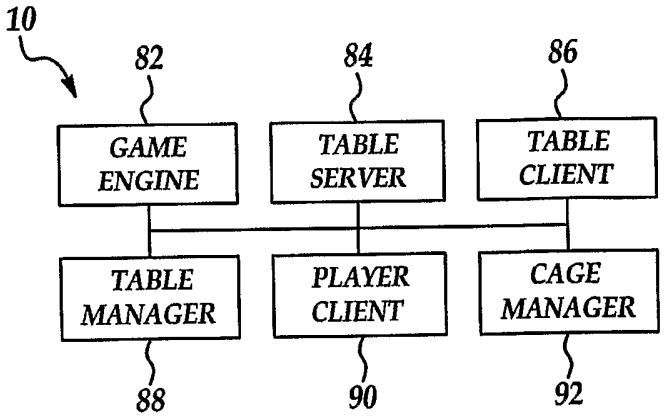


Figure 11

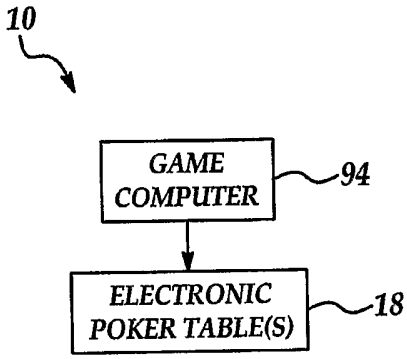


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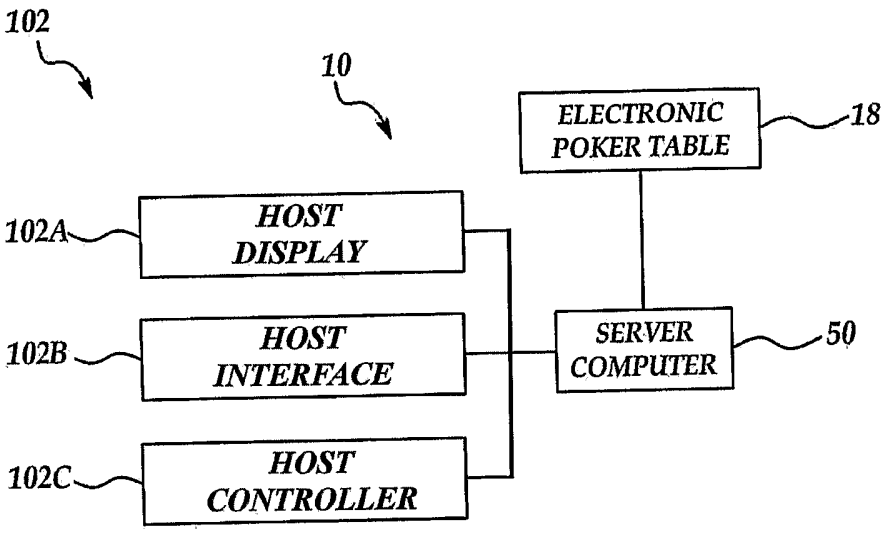


Figure 13

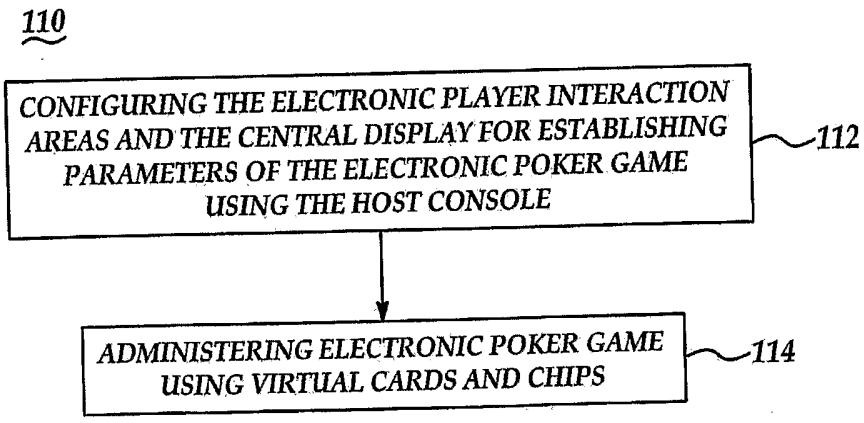


Figure 14

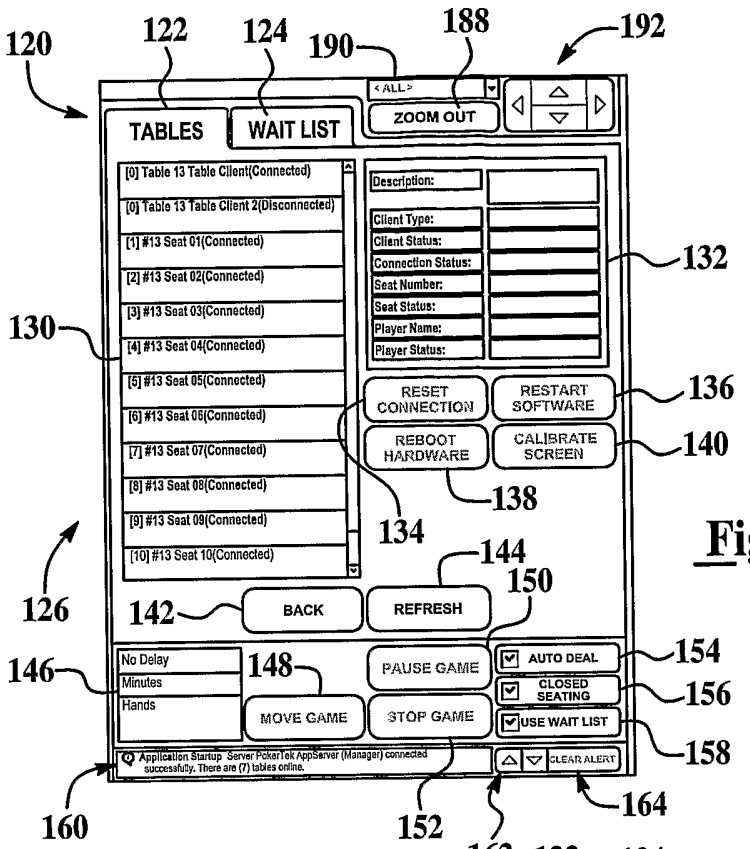


Figure 15

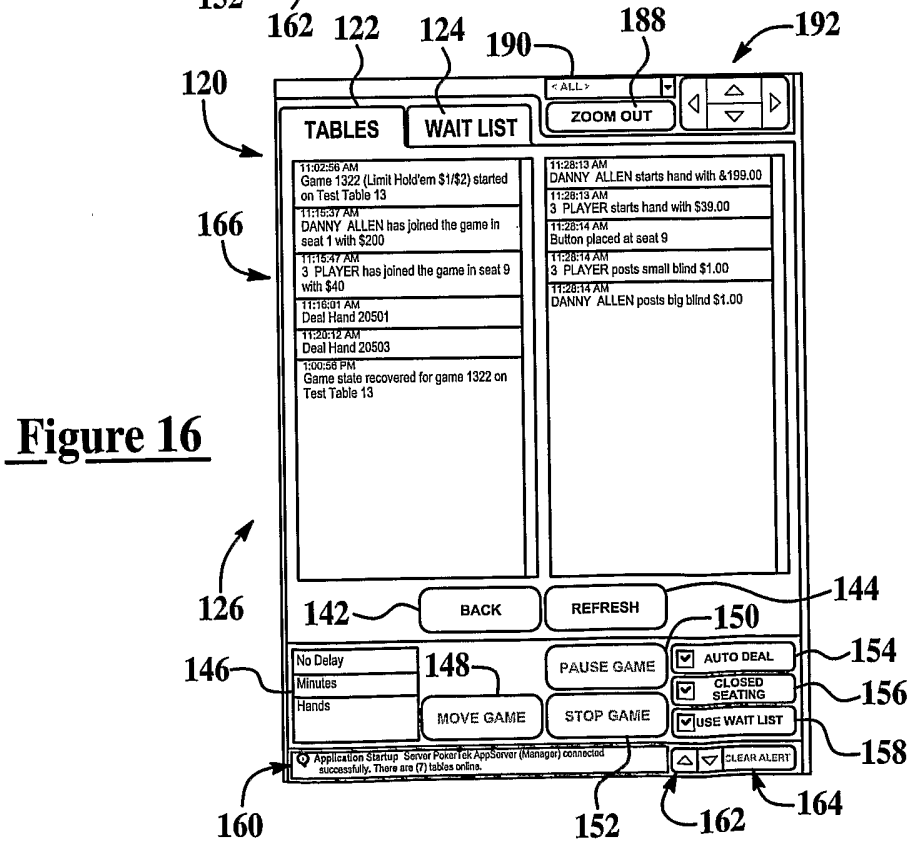


Figure 16

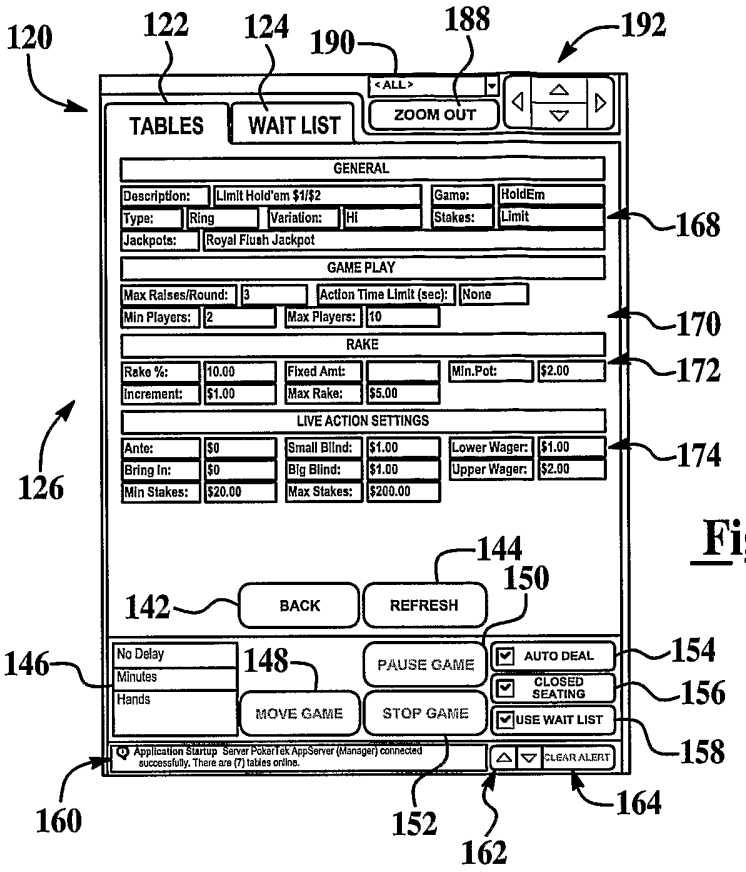


Figure 17

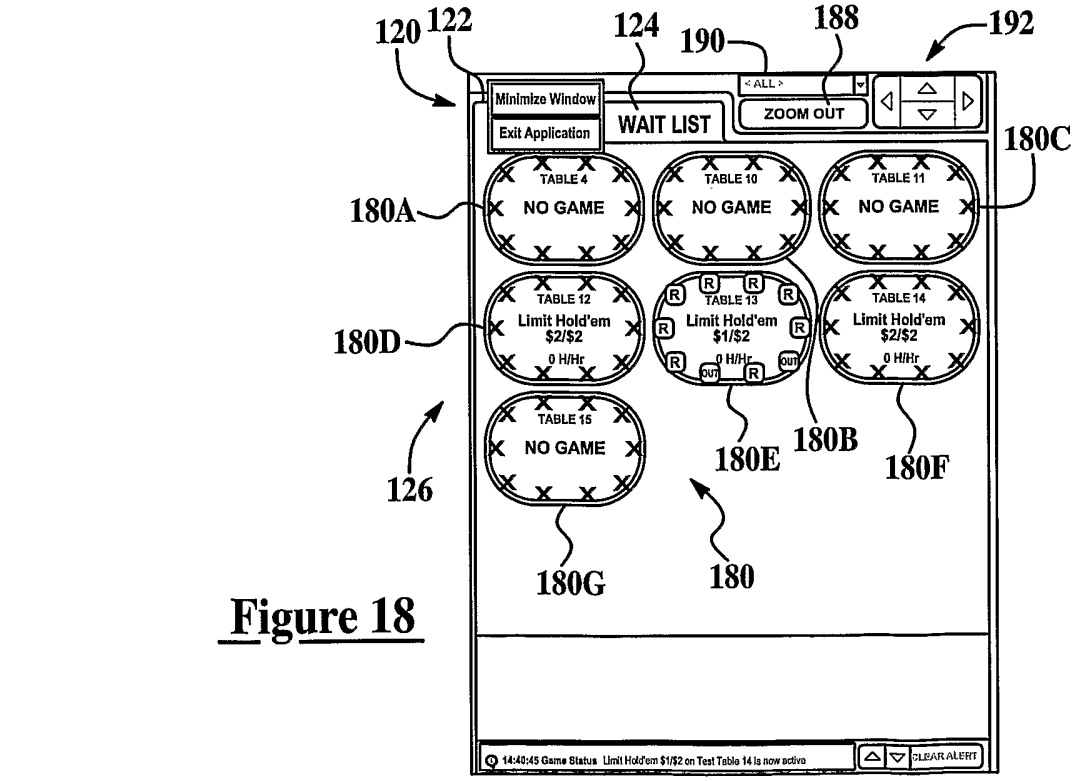


Figure 18

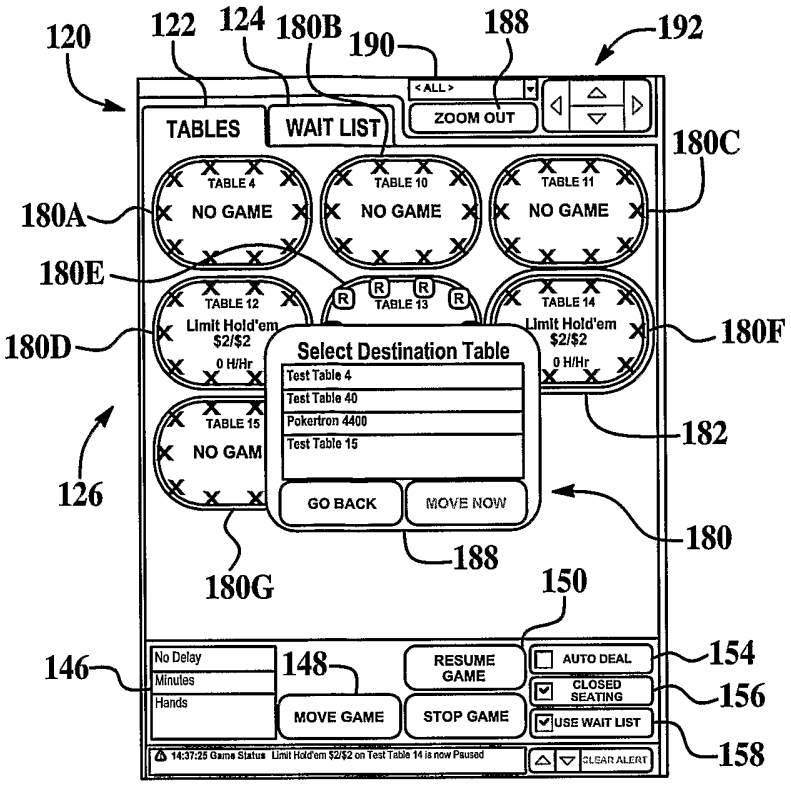


Figure 19

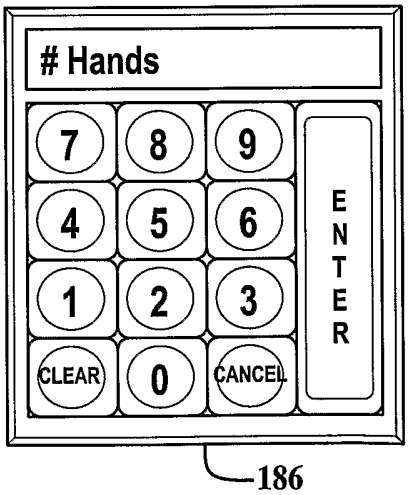


Figure 20

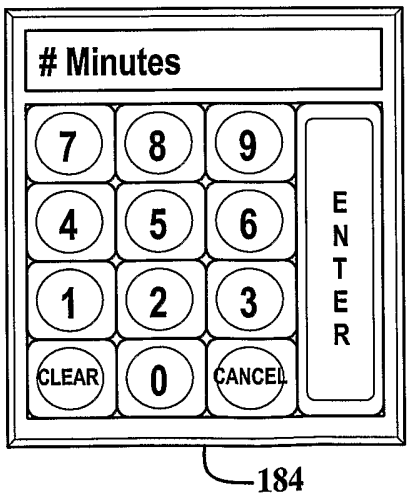


Figure 21

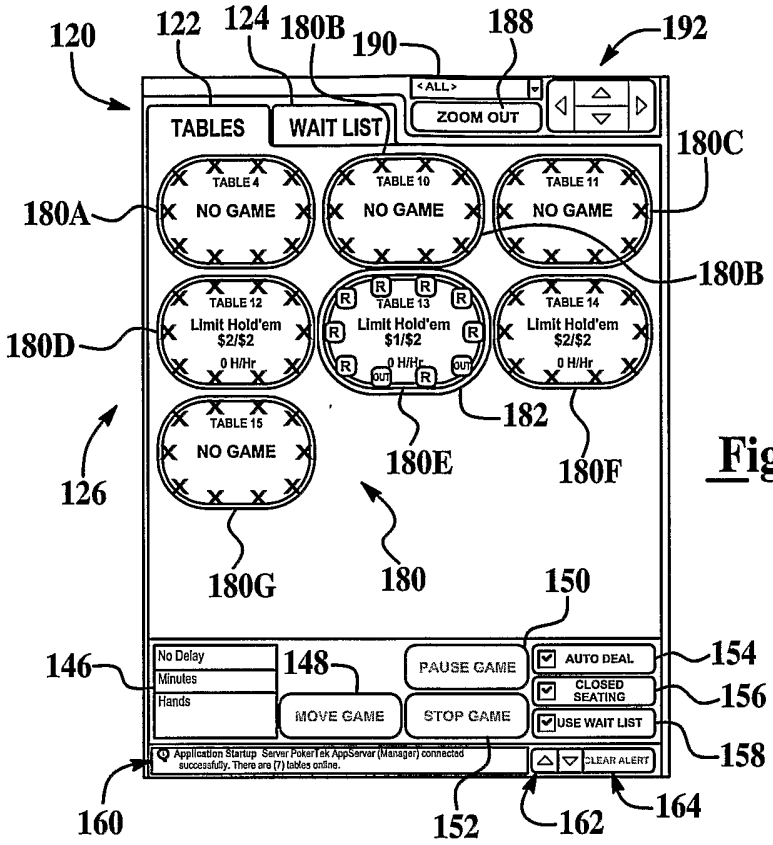


Figure 22

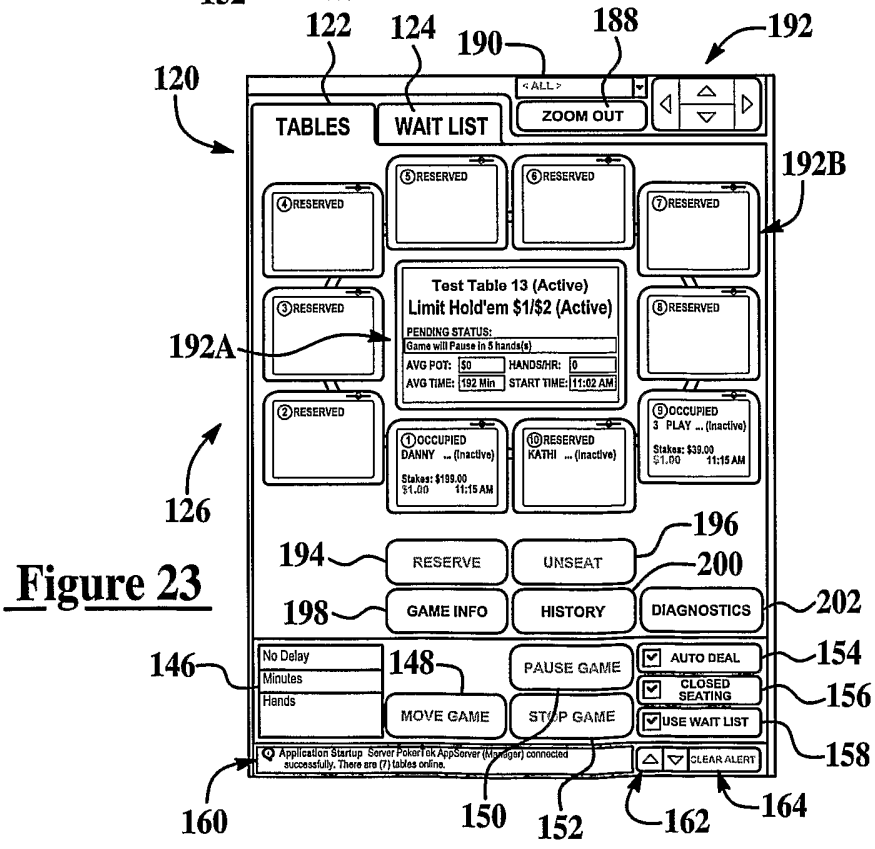


Figure 23

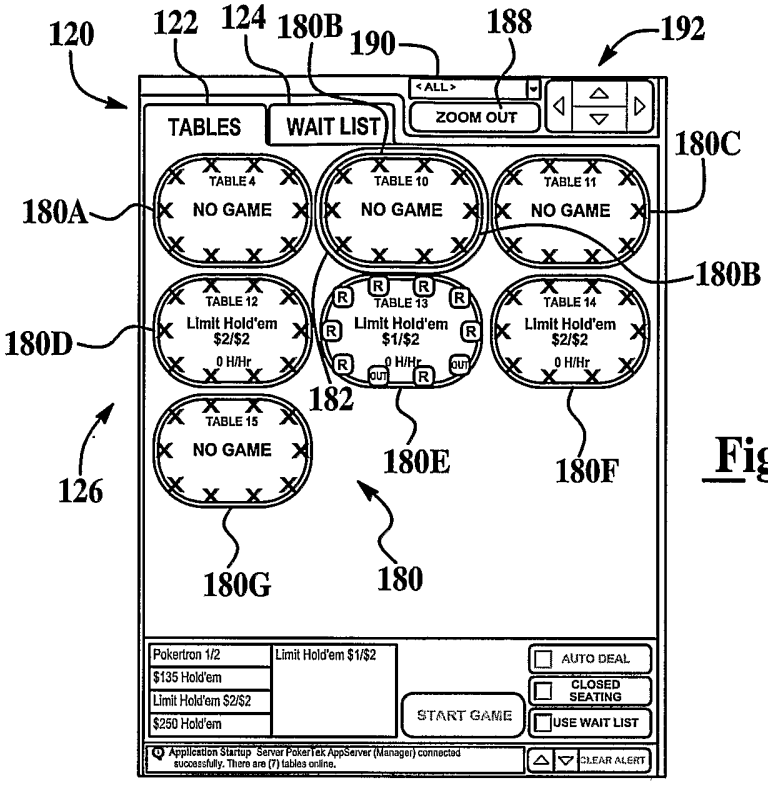


Figure 24

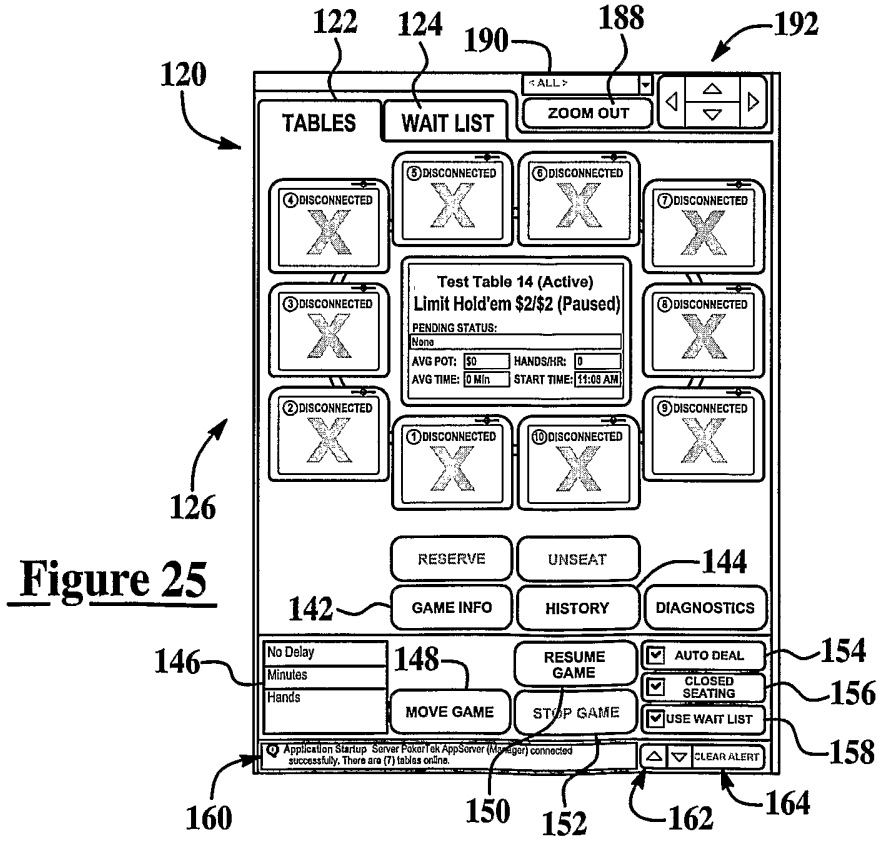


Figure 25

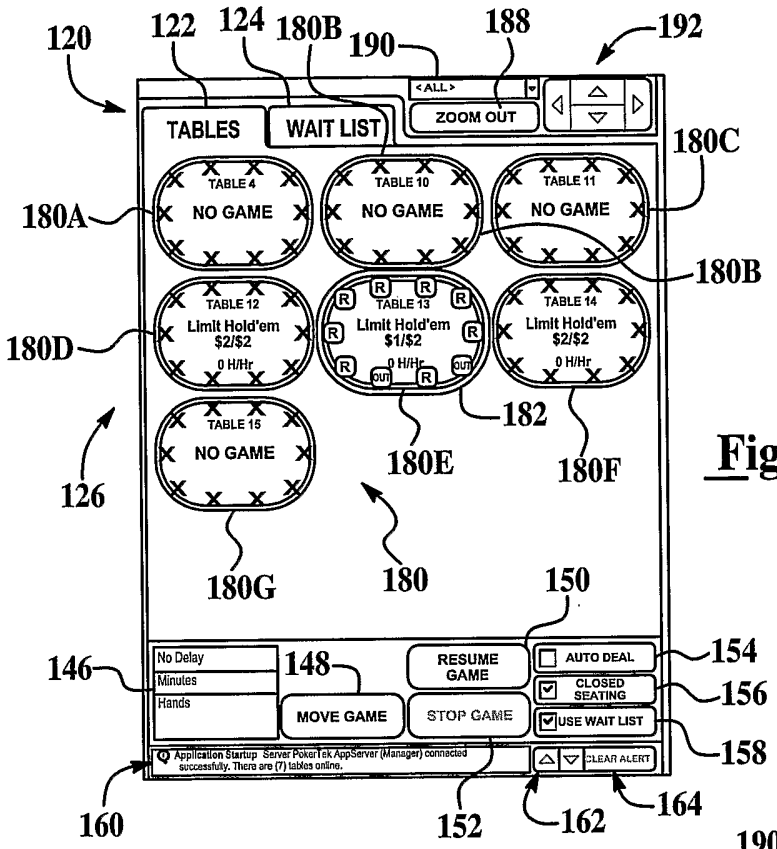


Figure 26

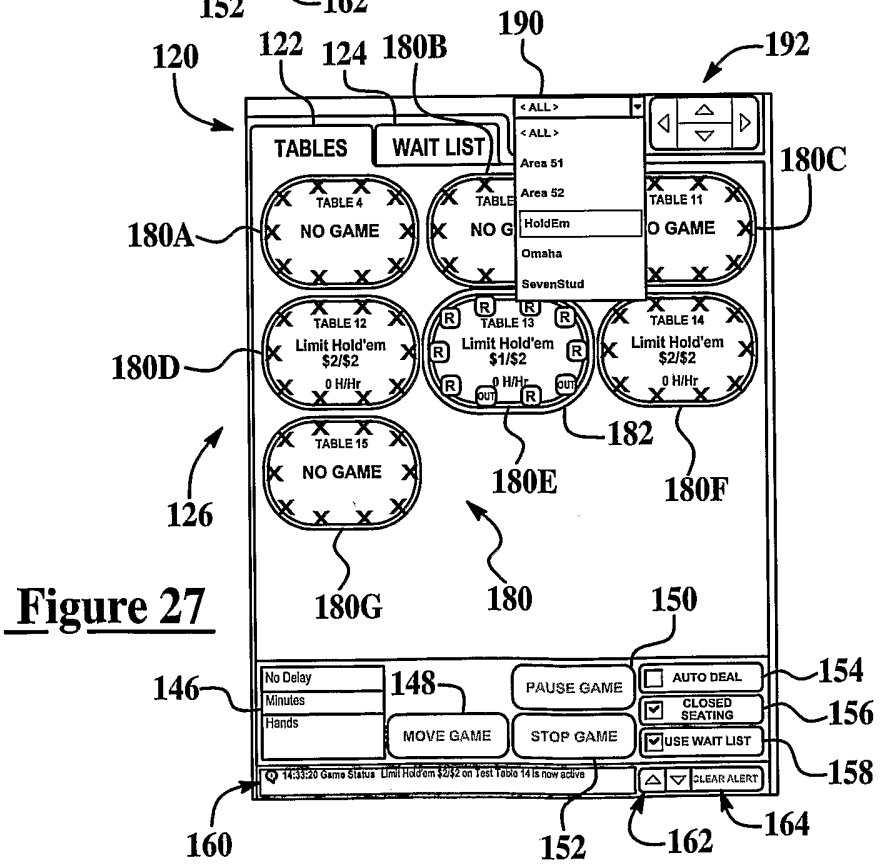


Figure 27

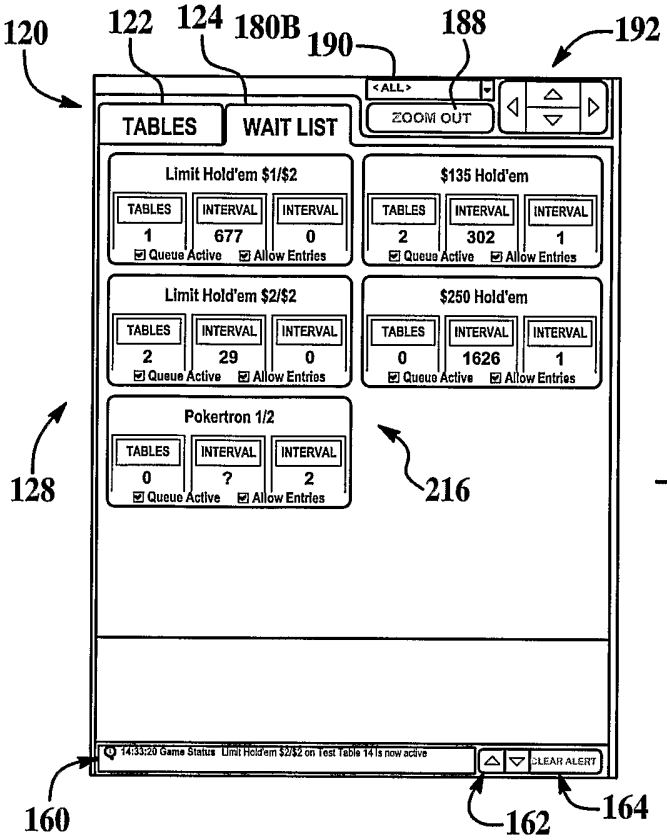


Figure 28

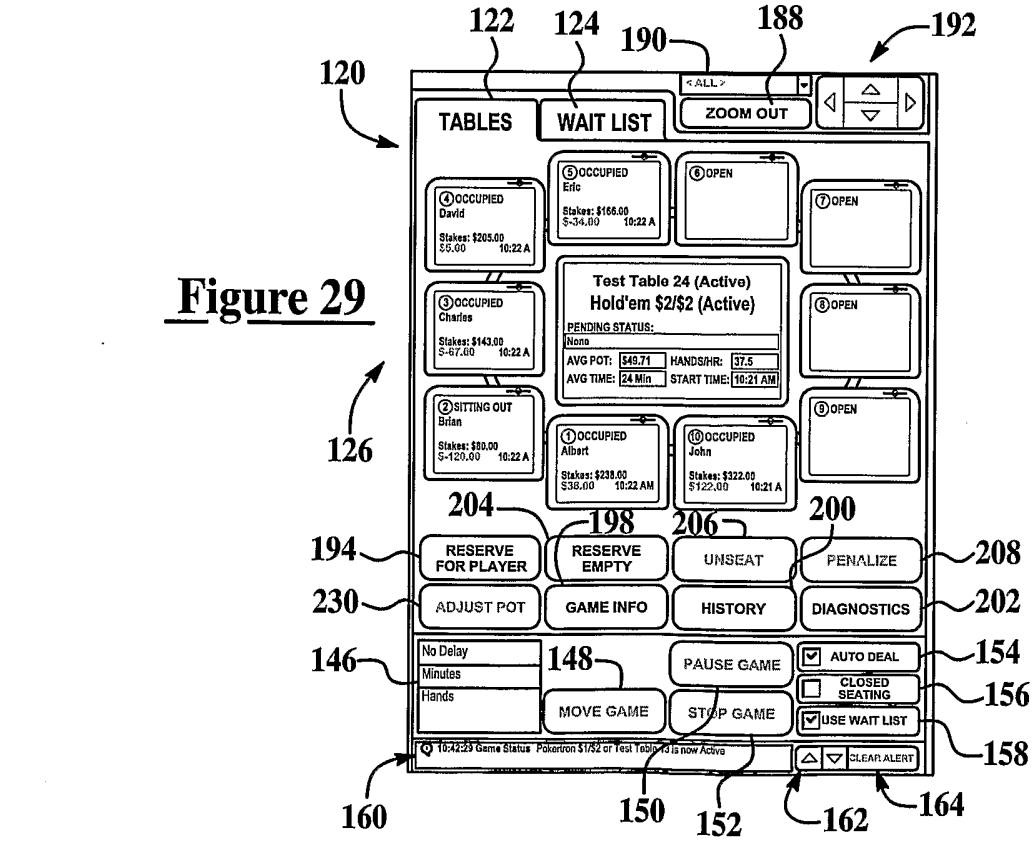


Figure 29

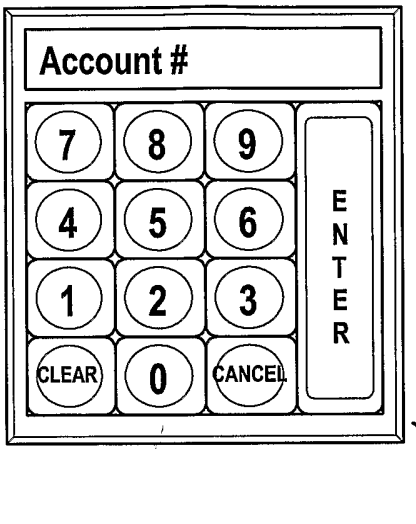


Figure 30

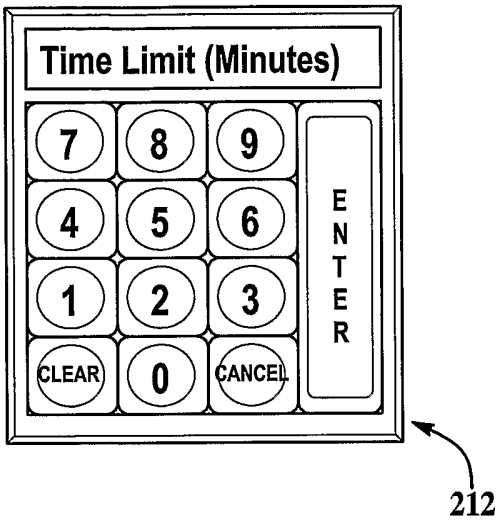


Figure 31

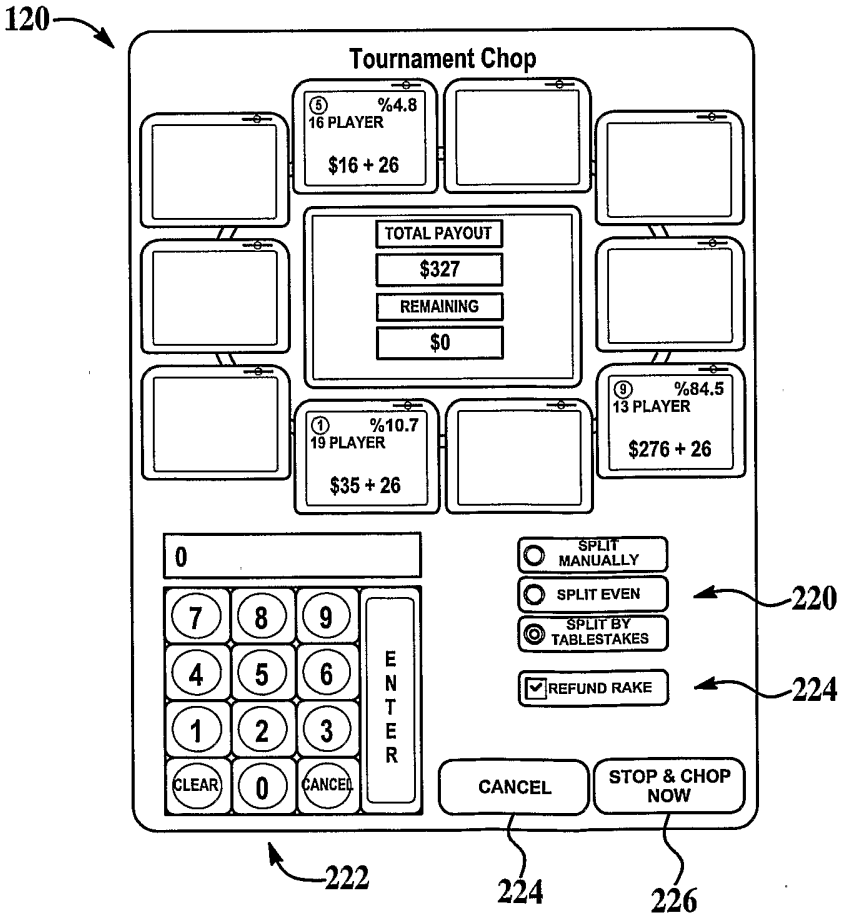


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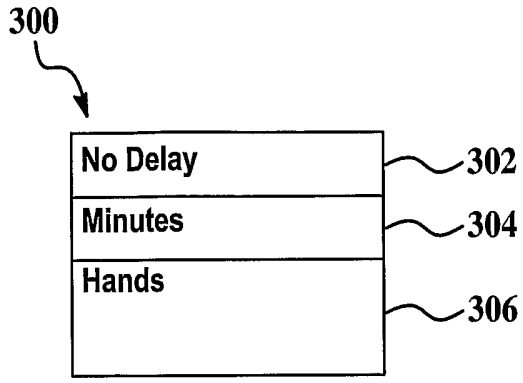


Figure 33

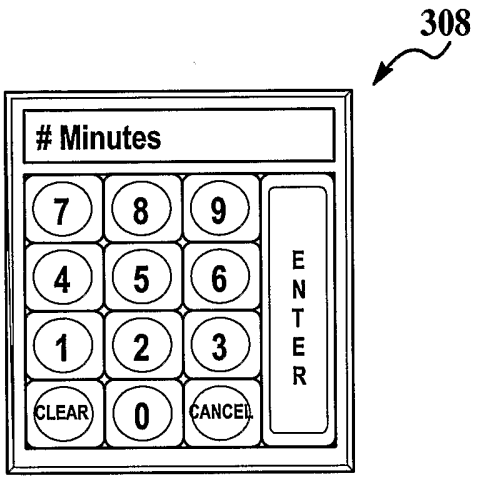


Figure 34

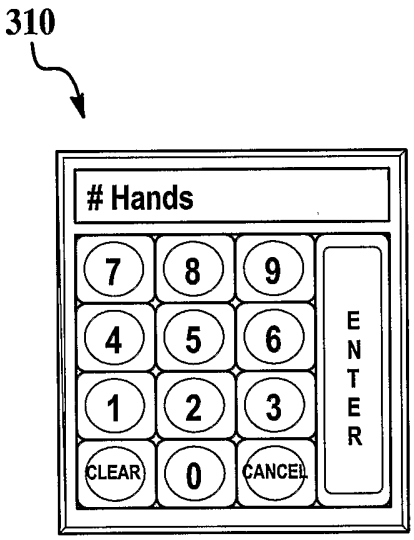


Figure 35

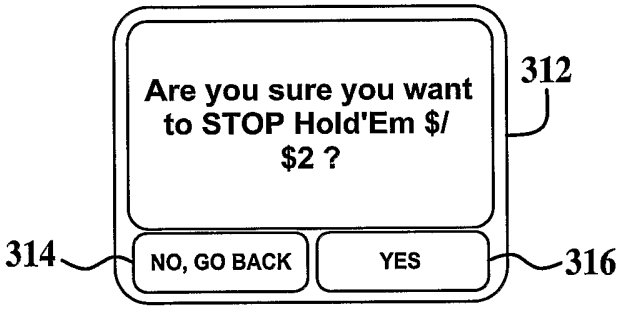


Figure 36

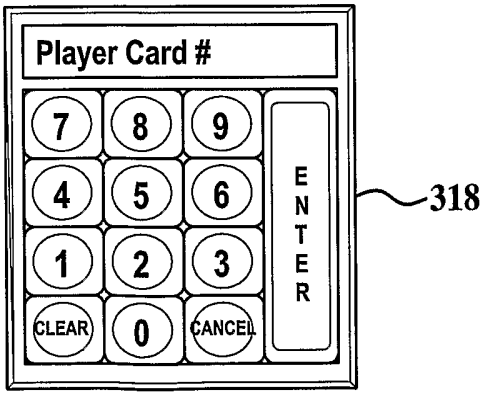


Figure 37

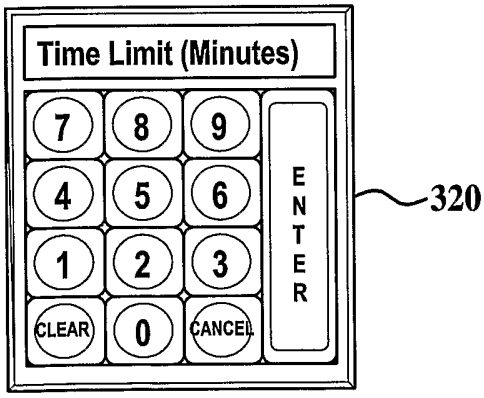


Figure 38

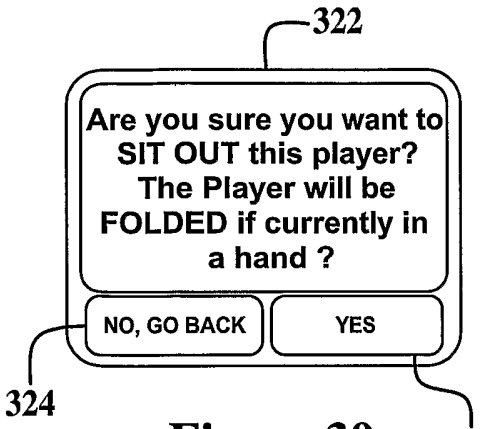


Figure 39

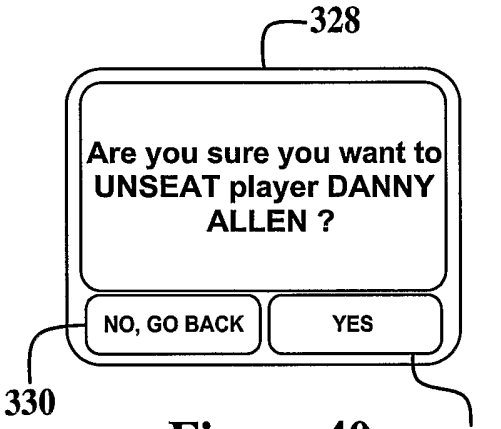


Figure 40

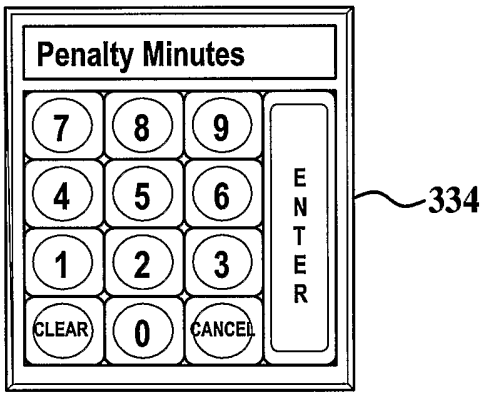


Figure 41

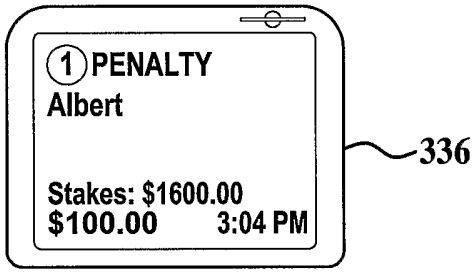


Figure 42

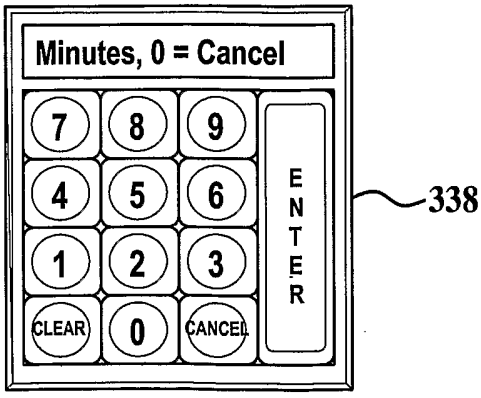


Figure 43