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(54) GAMING SYSTEM AND METHOD PROVIDING A PLURALITY OF AWARDS AND A CUMULATIVE AWARD

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Various embodiments of the gaming system of the present disclosure provide a plurality of source awards and a cumulative award maintained by the gaming system. The cumulative award increments or accumulates over multiple plays of one or more primary games based on amounts won in connection with the source awards. Each time one of the source awards is triggered, the value of the cumulative award is incremented or increased by an amount based on the triggered source award. When a designated number of source awards have been triggered, the gaming system provides the cumulative award to one or more players.

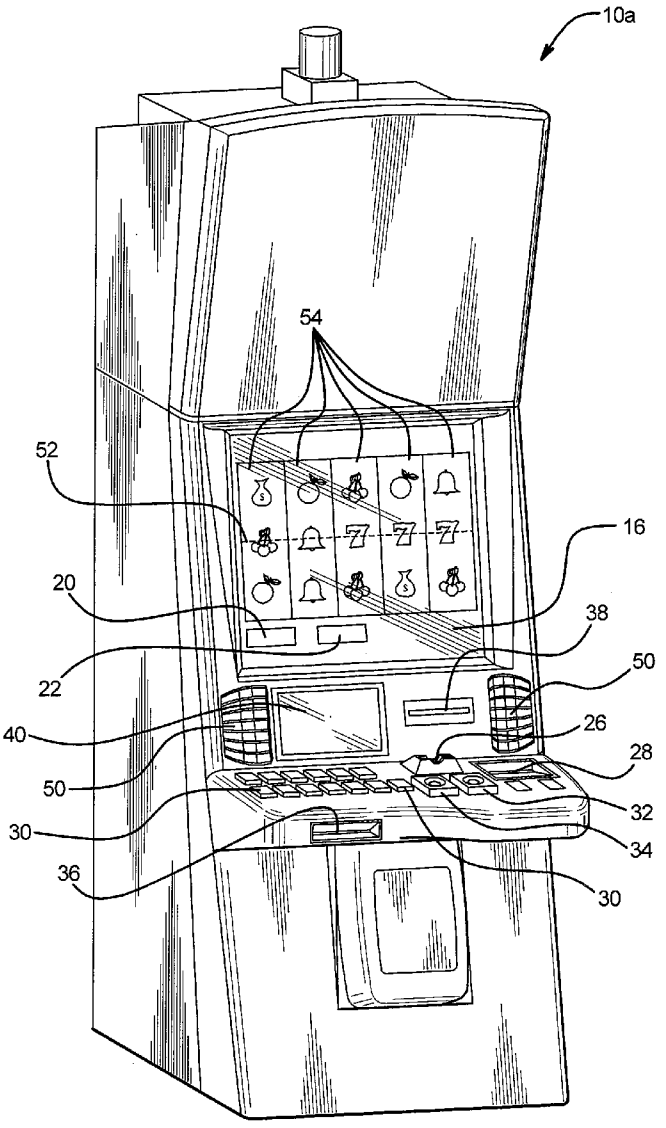


FIG. 1A

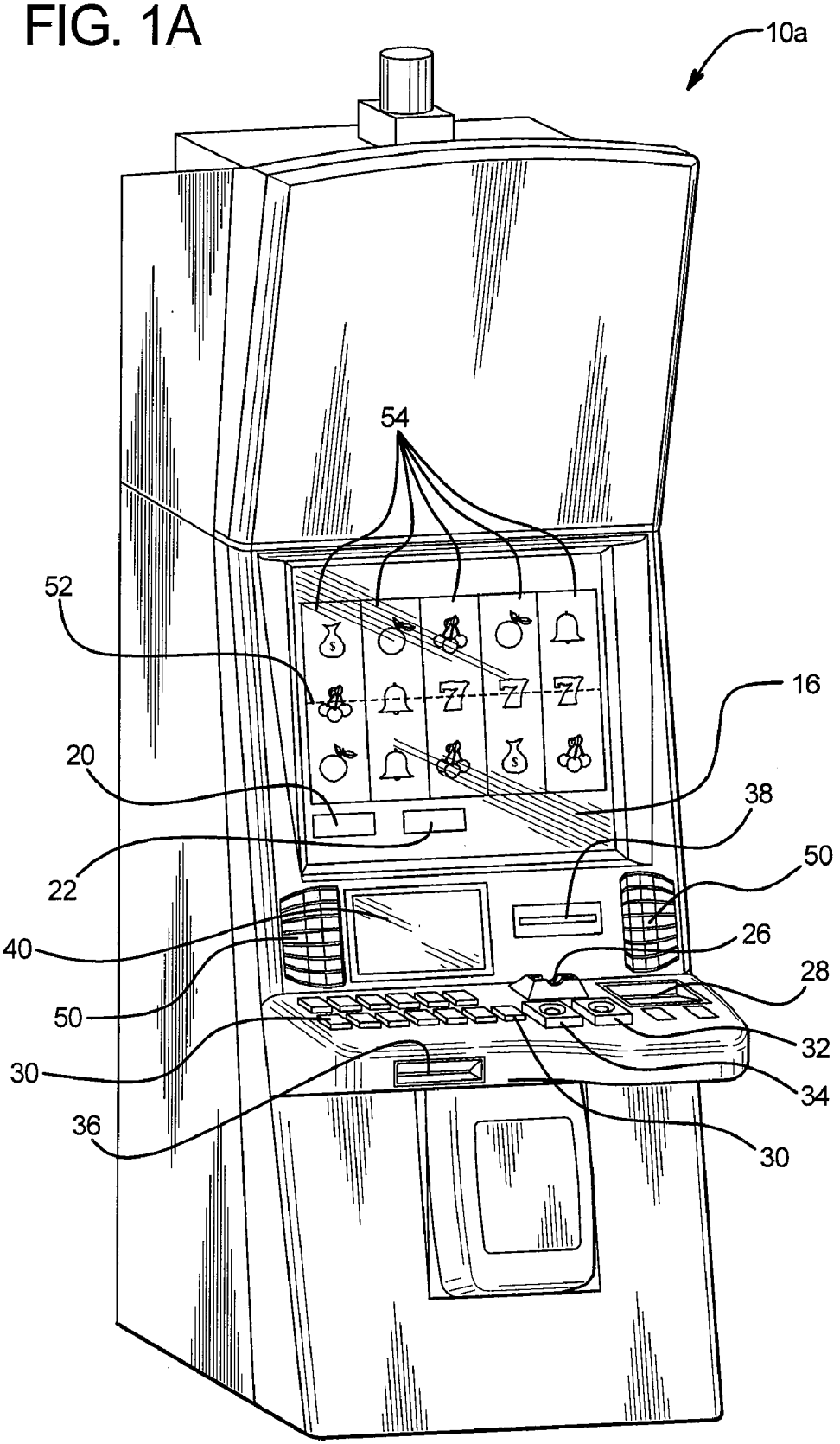


FIG. 1B

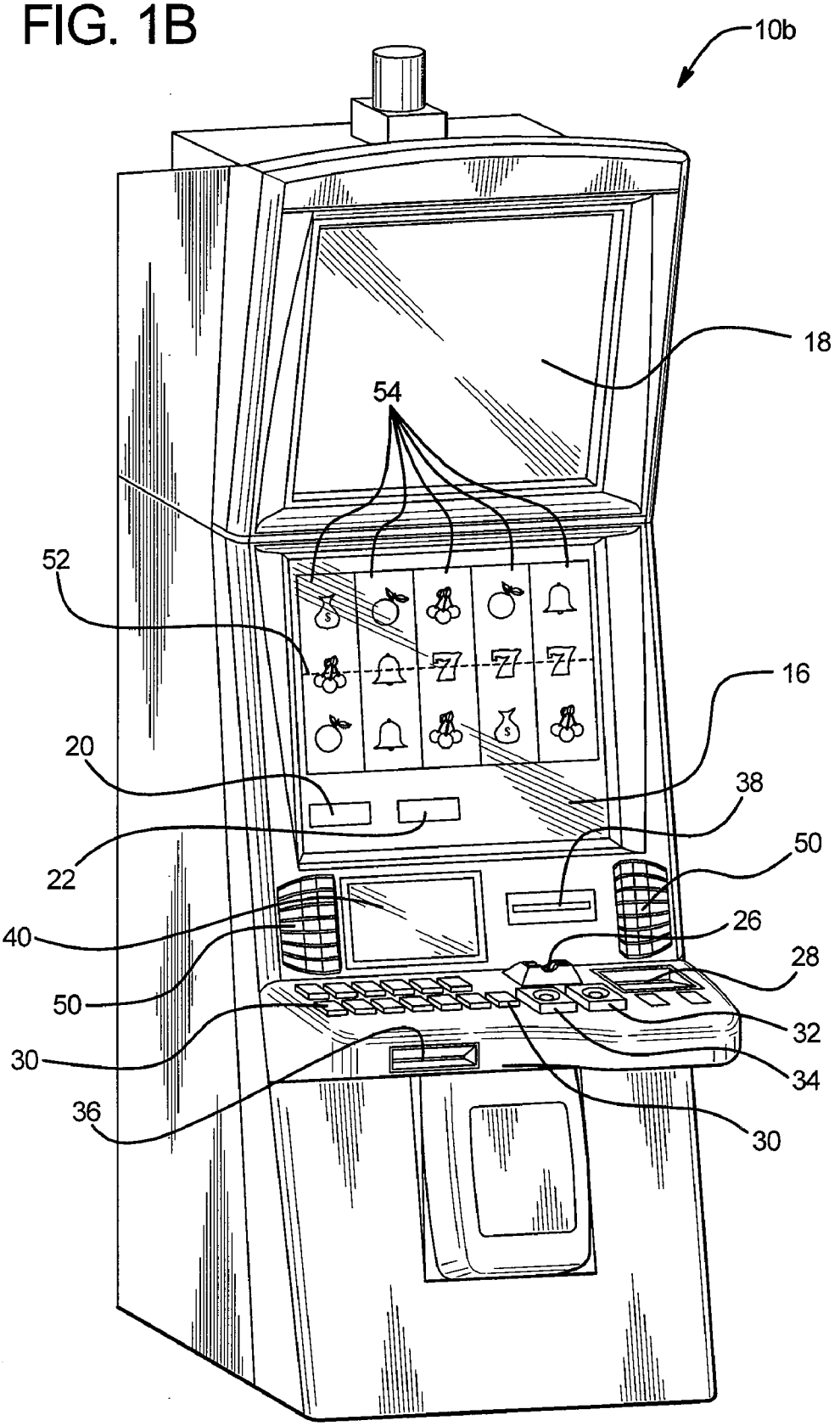


FIG. 2A

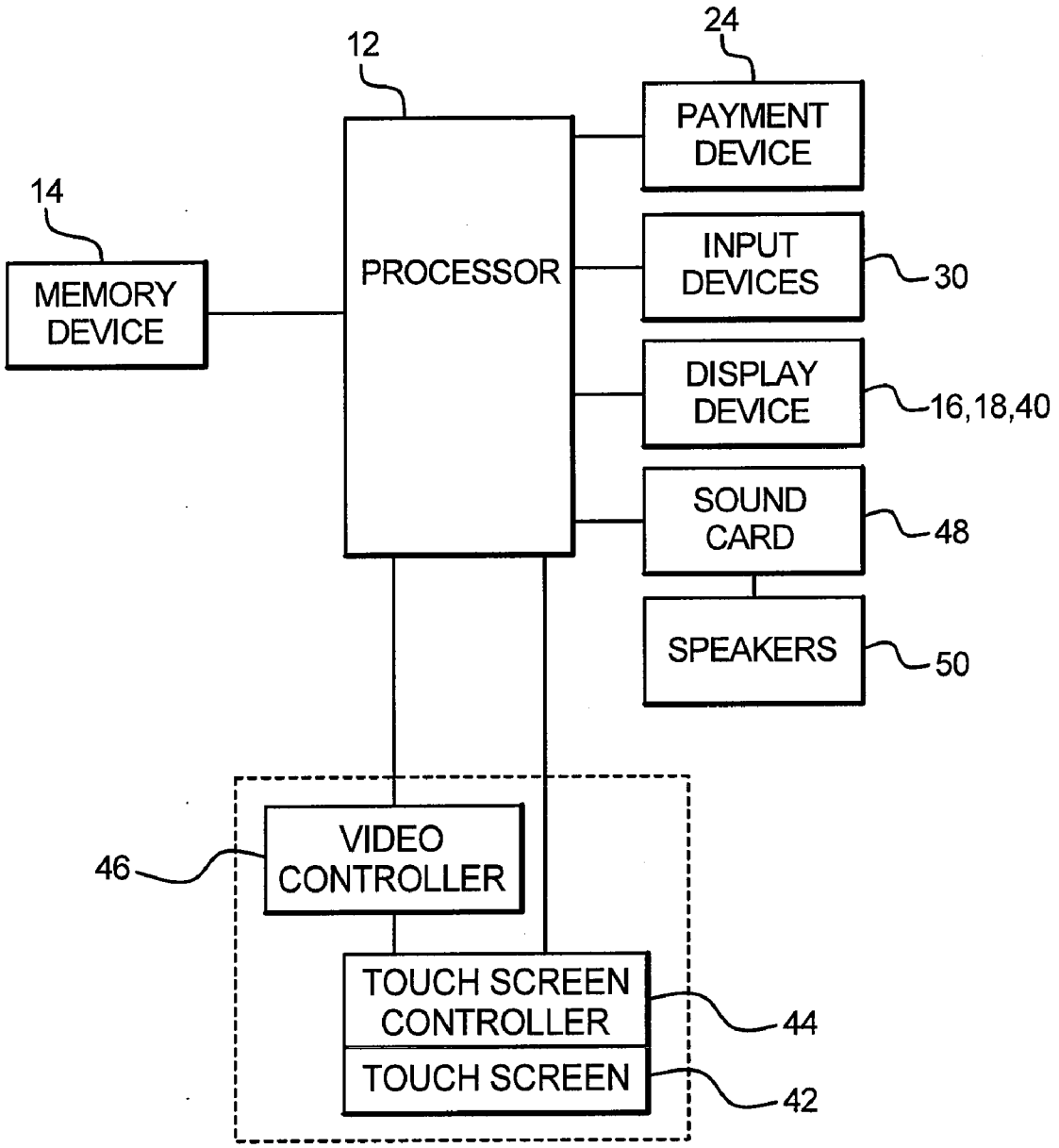

12
24
PAYMENT DEVICE
14
MEMORY DEVICE
PROCESSOR
INPUT DEVICES
30
DISPLAY DEVICE
16,18,40
SOUND CARD
48
SPEAKERS
50
46
VIDEO CONTROLLER
TOUCH SCREEN CONTROLLER
44
TOUCH SCREEN
42

FIG. 2B

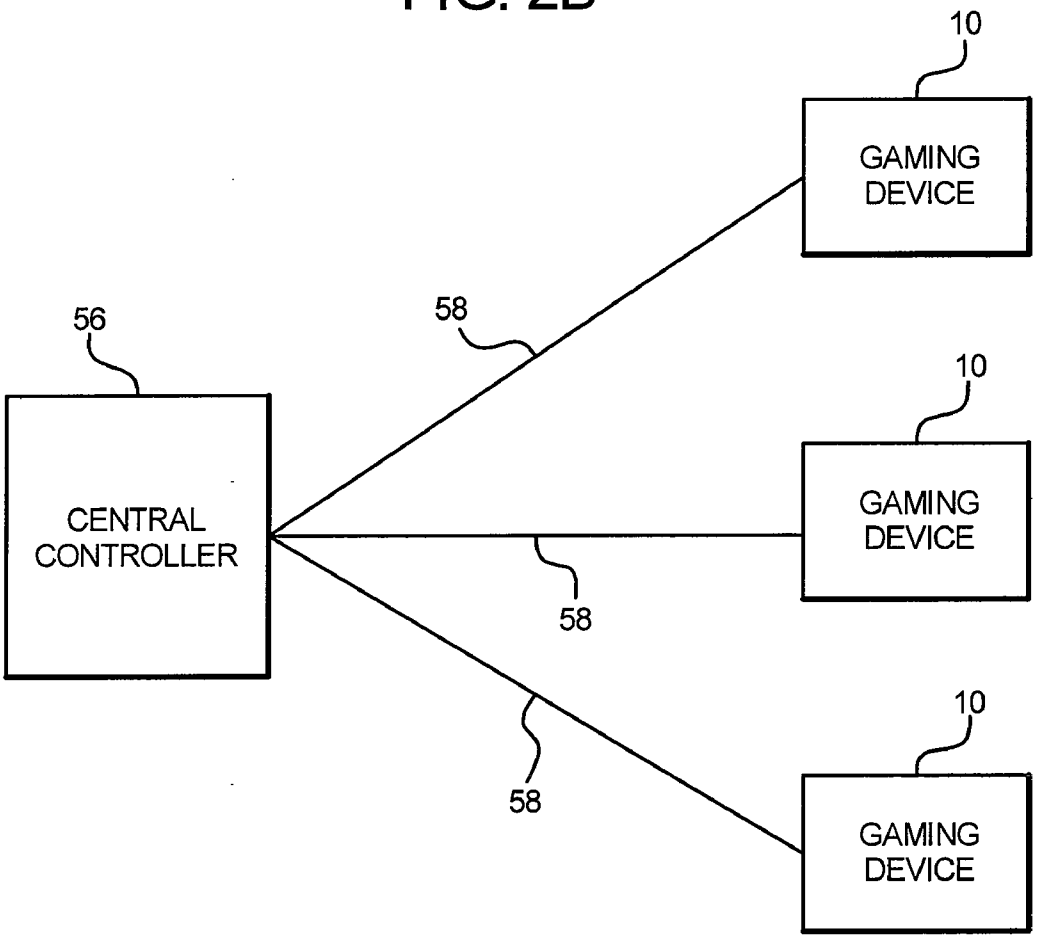

10
GAMING DEVICE
56
58
CENTRAL CONTROLLER
10
GAMING DEVICE
58
10
58
GAMING DEVICE

FIG. 3

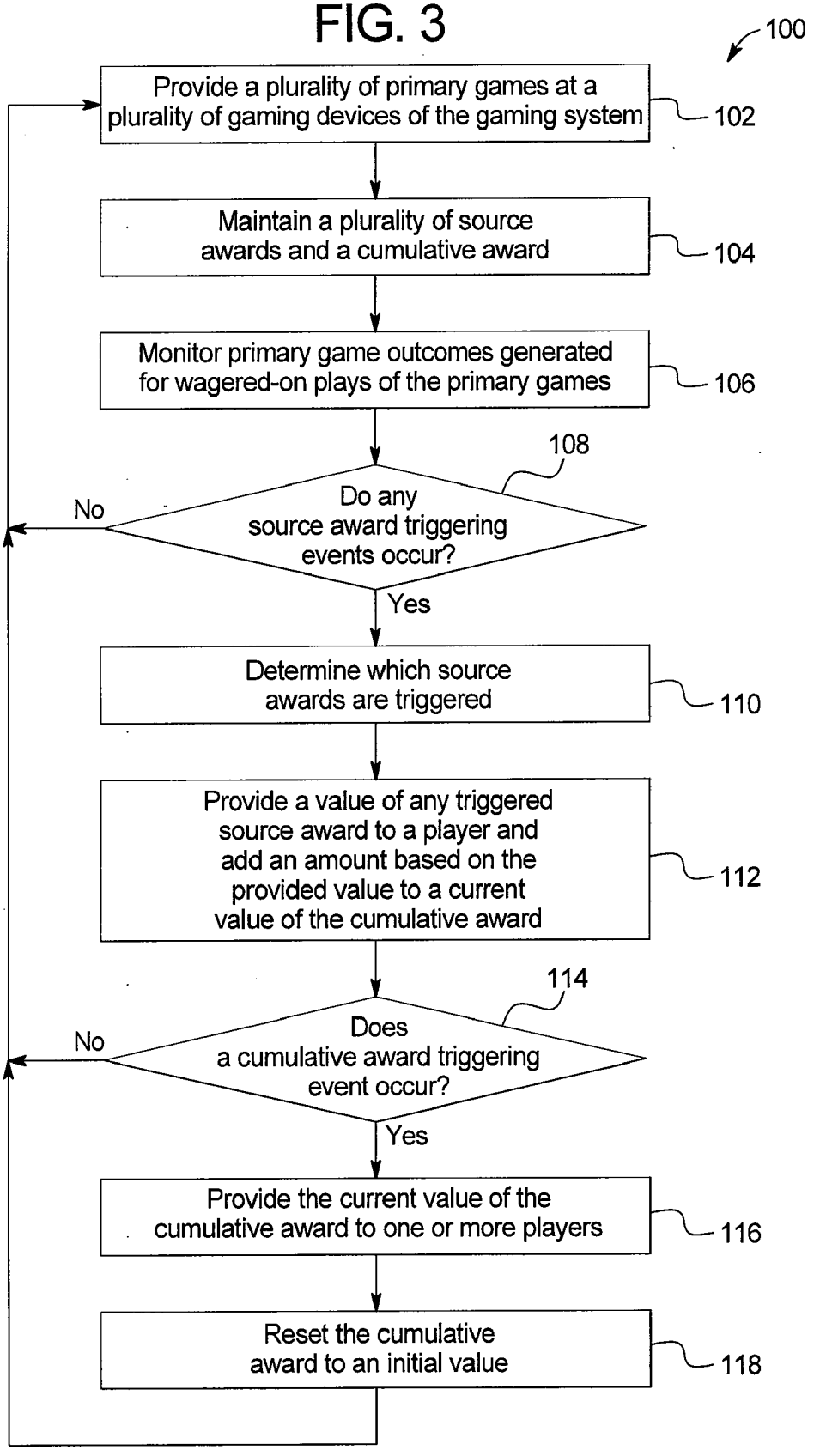

100
Provide a plurality of primary games at a plurality of gaming devices of the gaming system
102
Maintain a plurality of source awards and a cumulative award
104
Monitor primary game outcomes generated for wagered-on plays of the primary games
106
108
Do any source award triggering events occur?
No
Yes
Determine which source awards are triggered
110
Provide a value of any triggered source award to a player and add an amount based on the provided value to a current value of the cumulative award
112
114
Does a cumulative award triggering event occur?
No
Yes
Provide the current value of the cumulative award to one or more players
116
Reset the cumulative award to an initial value
118

FIG. 4A

| AWARD | AWARD TRIGGERING EVENT | INITIAL VALUE OF AWARD | INCREMENT RATE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Progressive Award of Progressive Level 1 | A A A A A | 100 | .10% |
| Progressive Award of Progressive Level 2 | B B B B B | 500 | .20% |
| Progressive Award of Progressive Level 3 | C C C C C | 1000 | .40% |
| Cumulative Bonus Award | A tracked quantity of progressive awards triggered reaching a designated level | 0 | |

FIG. 4B

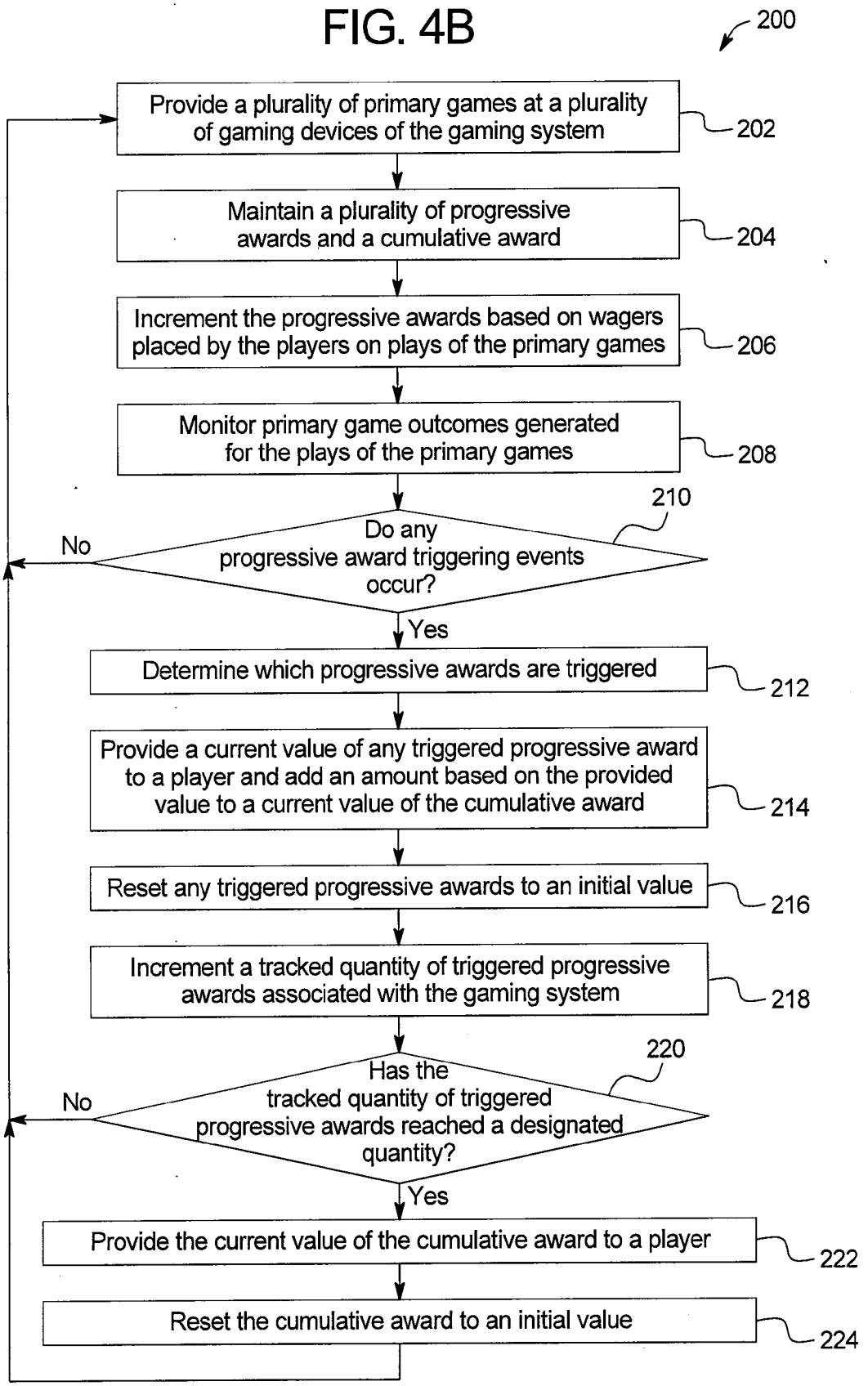

200
Provide a plurality of primary games at a plurality of gaming devices of the gaming system
202
Maintain a plurality of progressive awards and a cumulative award
204
Increment the progressive awards based on wagers placed by the players on plays of the primary games
206
Monitor primary game outcomes generated for the plays of the primary games
208
210
Do any progressive award triggering events occur?
No
Yes
Determine which progressive awards are triggered
212
Provide a current value of any triggered progressive award to a player and add an amount based on the provided value to a current value of the cumulative award
214
Reset any triggered progressive awards to an initial value
216
Increment a tracked quantity of triggered progressive awards associated with the gaming system
218
220
Has the tracked quantity of triggered progressive awards reached a designated quantity?
No
Yes
Provide the current value of the cumulative award to a player
222
Reset the cumulative award to an initial value
224

FIG. 5A

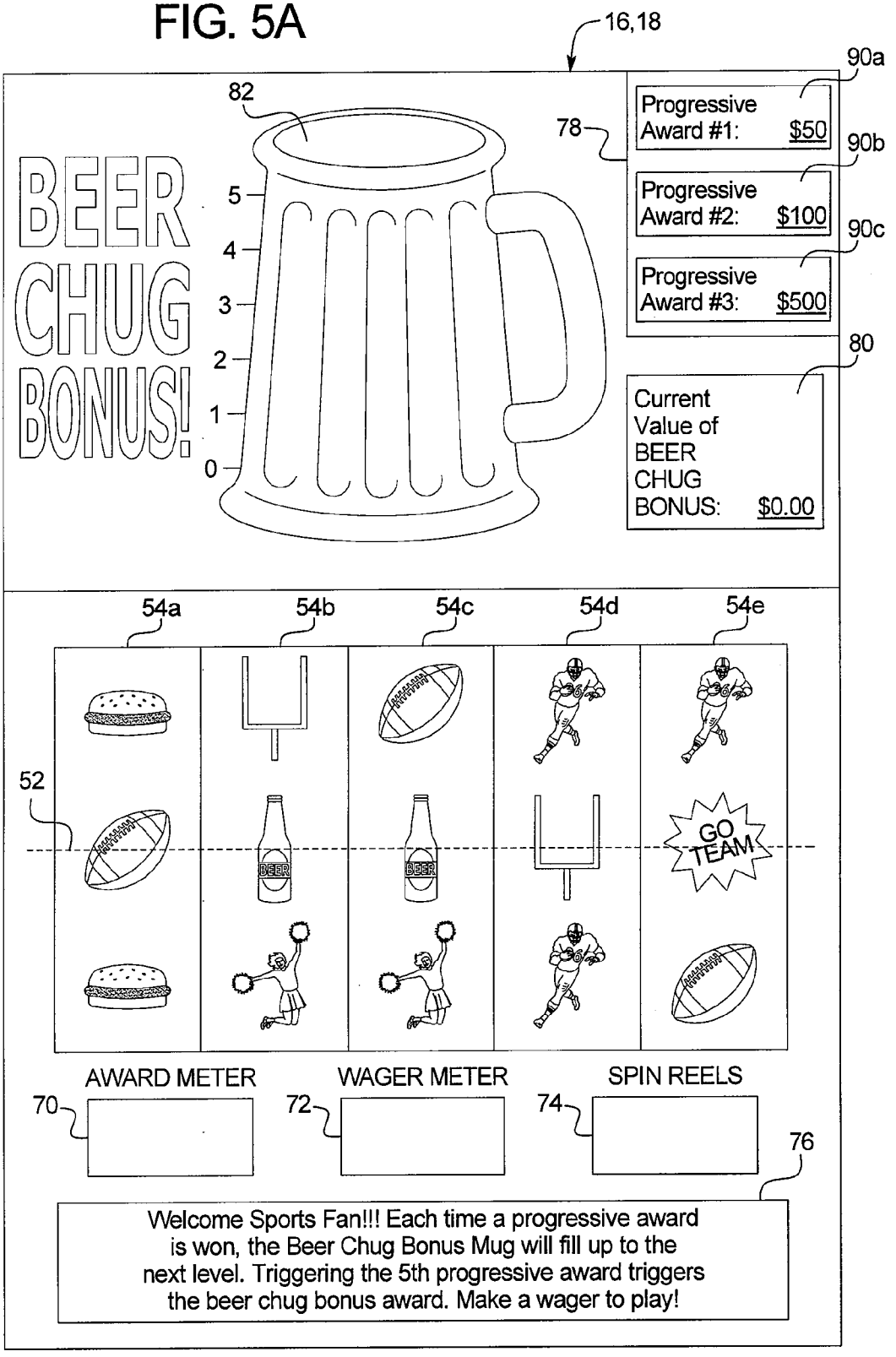

16,18
90a
82
78
Progressive Award #1: $50
90b
Progressive Award #2: $100
90c
Progressive Award #3: $500
80
Current Value of BEER CHUG BONUS: $0.00
BEER CHUG BONUS!
5
4
3
2
1
0
54a
54b
54c
54d
54e
52
BEER
BEER
GO TEAM
AWARD METER
WAGER METER
SPIN REELS
70
72
74
76
Welcome Sports Fan!!! Each time a progressive award is won, the Beer Chug Bonus Mug will fill up to the next level. Triggering the 5th progressive award triggers the beer chug bonus award. Make a wager to play!

FIG. 5B

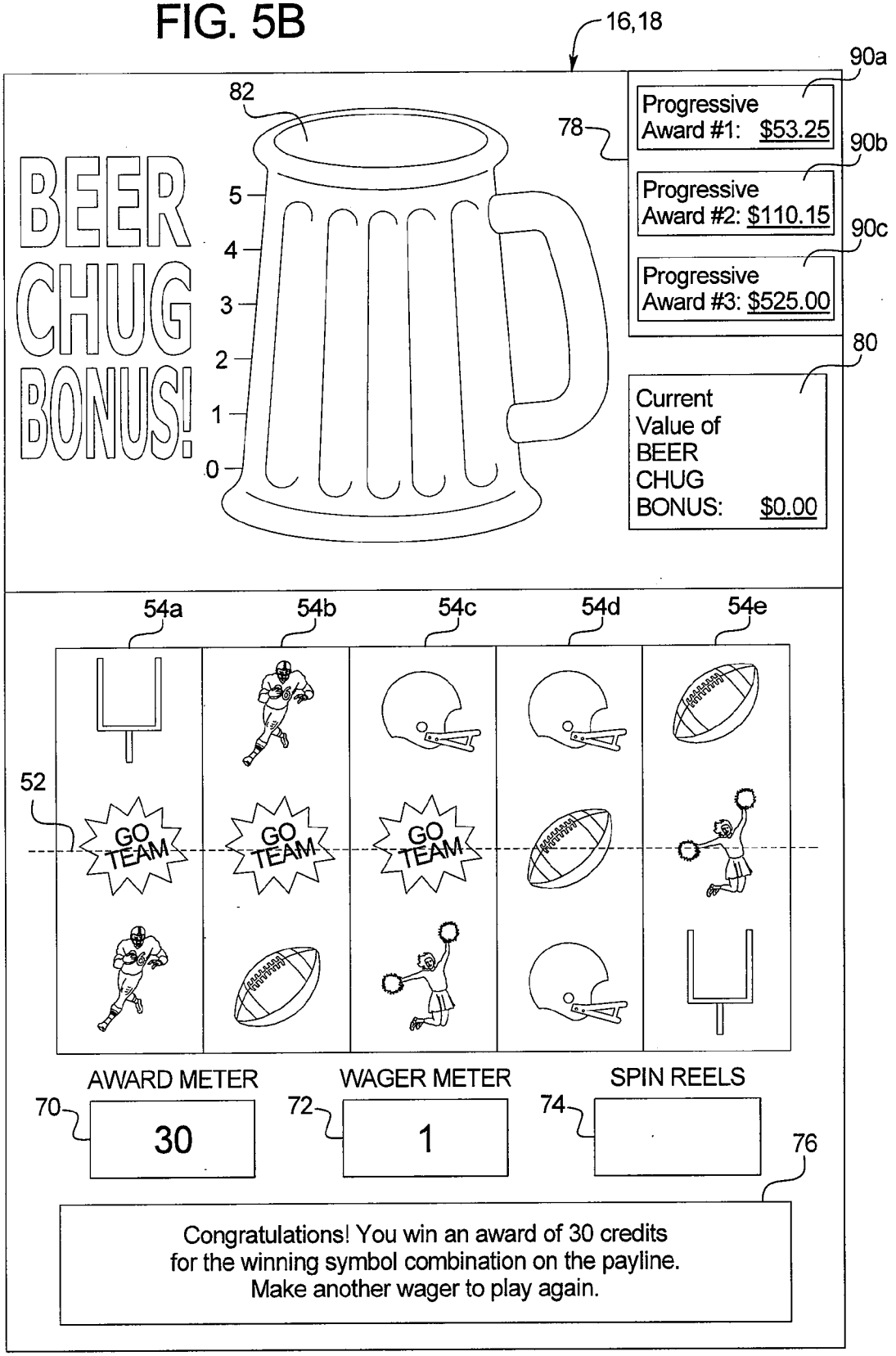

16,18
90a
82
78
Progressive Award #1: $53.25
90b
Progressive Award #2: $110.15
90c
Progressive Award #3: $525.00
BEER CHUG BONUS!
5
4
3
2
1
0
80
Current Value of BEER CHUG BONUS: $0.00
54a
54b
54c
54d
54e
52
GO TEAM
AWARD METER
WAGER METER
SPIN REELS
70
30
72
1
74
76
Congratulations! You win an award of 30 credits for the winning symbol combination on the payline. Make another wager to play again.

FIG. 5C

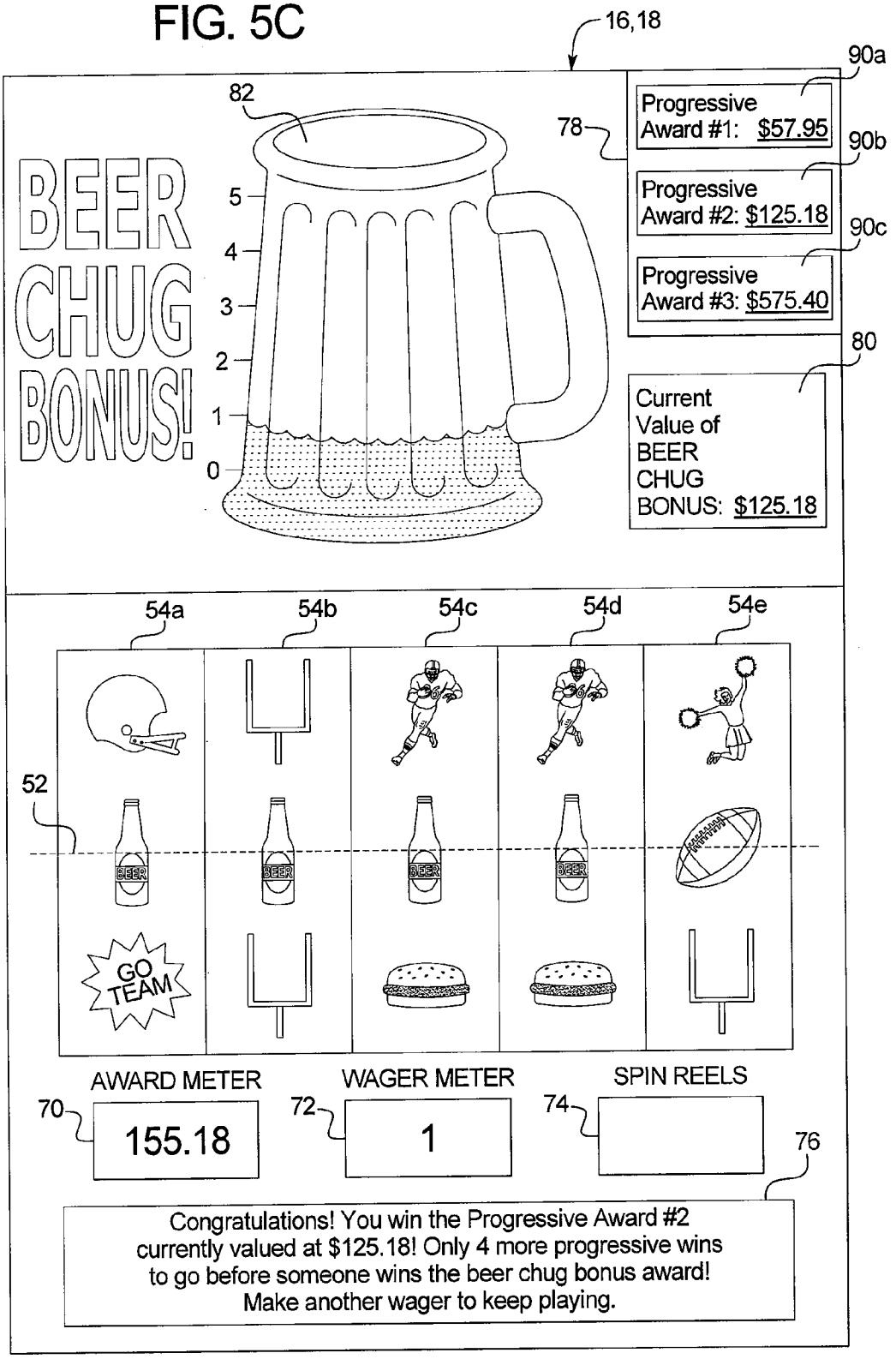

16,18
90a
82
78
Progressive Award #1: $57.95
90b
Progressive Award #2: $125.18
90c
Progressive Award #3: $575.40
BEER CHUG BONUS!
5
4
3
2
1
0
80
Current Value of BEER CHUG BONUS: $125.18
54a
54b
54c
54d
54e
52
BEER
GO TEAM
AWARD METER
WAGER METER
SPIN REELS
70
155.18
72
1
74
76
Congratulations! You win the Progressive Award #2 currently valued at $125.18! Only 4 more progressive wins to go before someone wins the beer chug bonus award! Make another wager to keep playing.

FIG. 5D

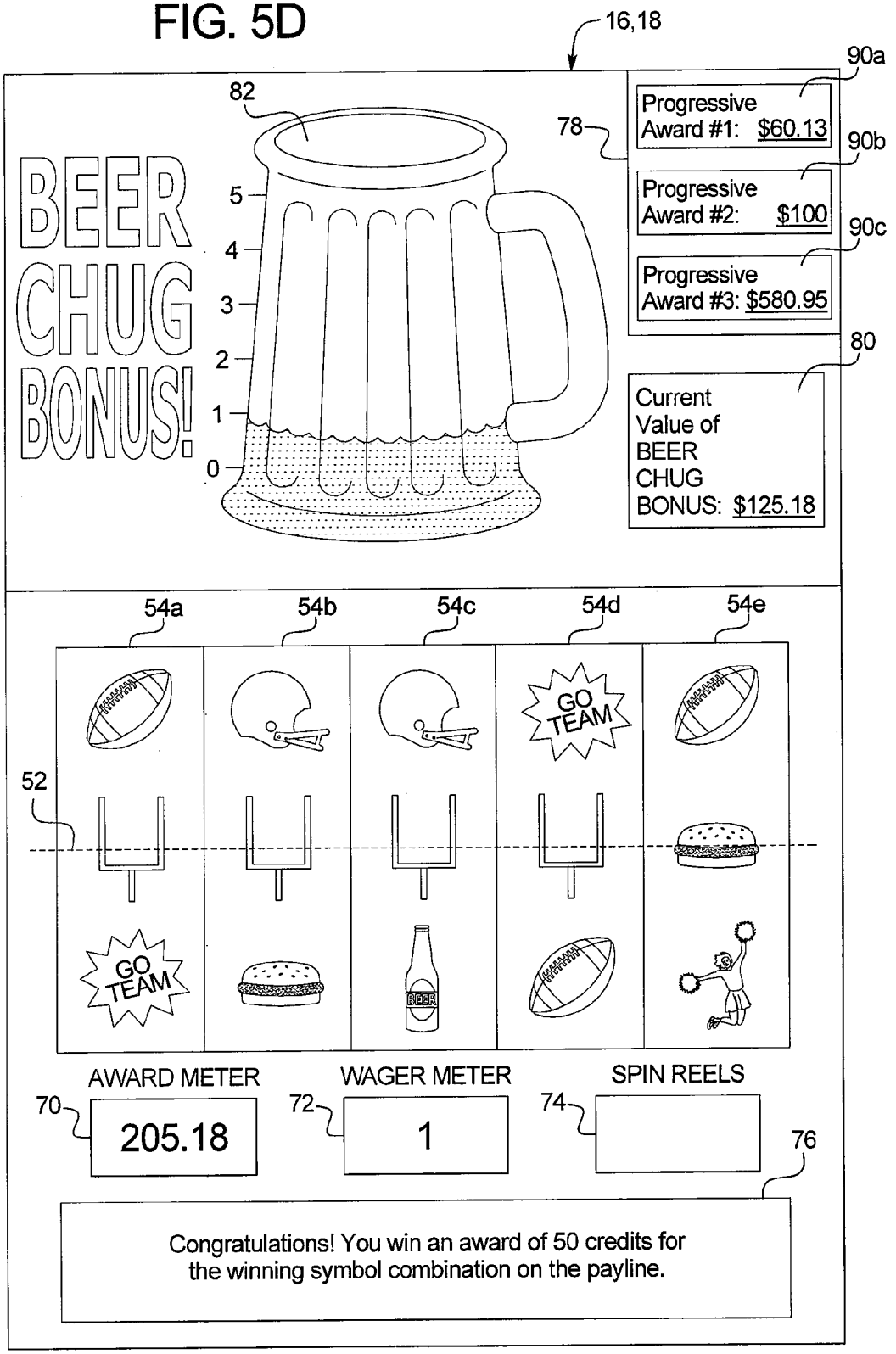

16,18
90a
82
78
Progressive Award #1: $60.13
90b
Progressive Award #2: $100
90c
Progressive Award #3: $580.95
80
Current Value of BEER CHUG BONUS: $125.18
BEER CHUG BONUS!
5
4
3
2
1
0
54a
54b
54c
54d
54e
52
GO TEAM
GO TEAM
BEER
AWARD METER
WAGER METER
SPIN REELS
70
205.18
72
1
74
76
Congratulations! You win an award of 50 credits for the winning symbol combination on the payline.

FIG. 5E

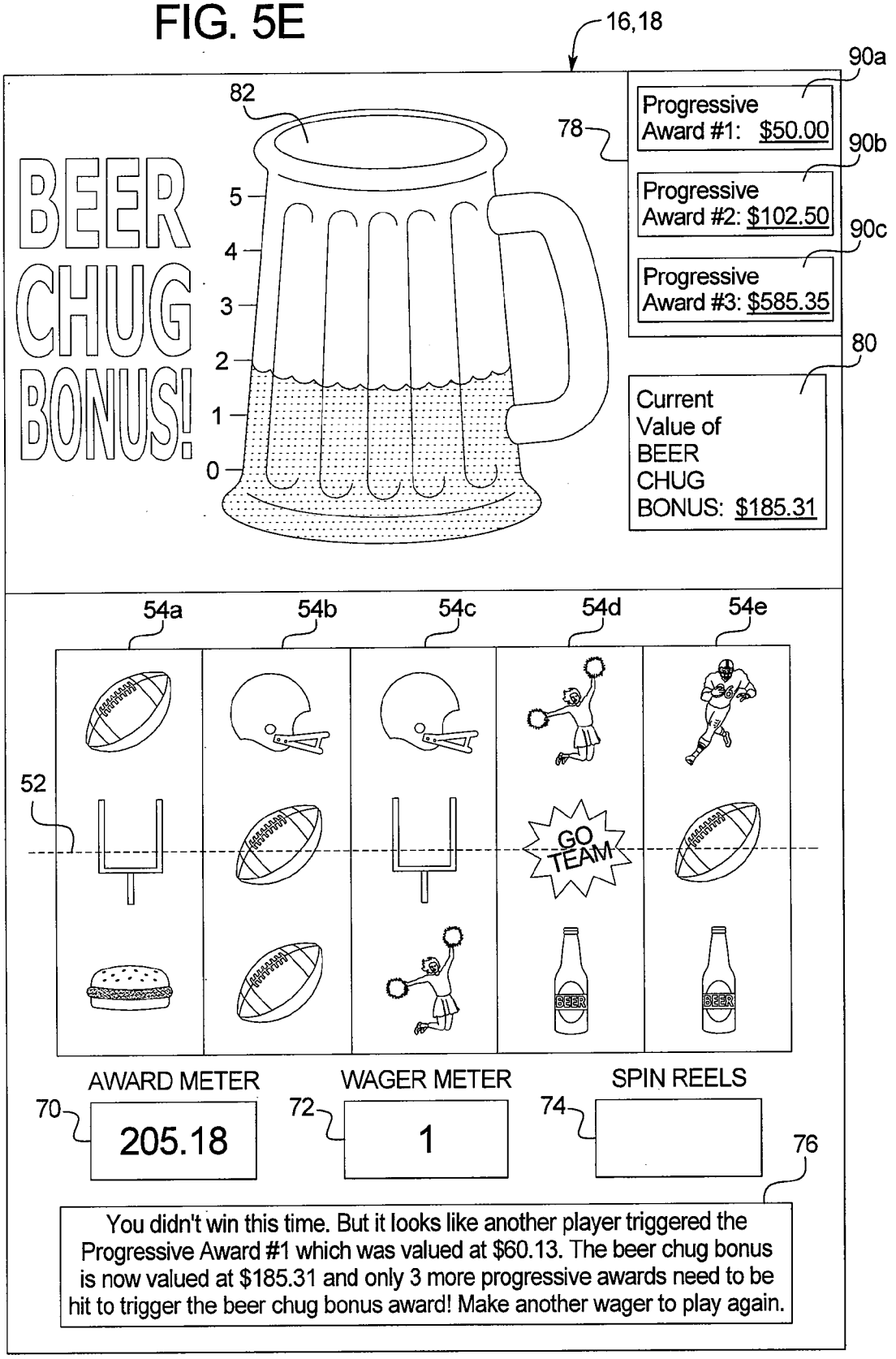

16,18
90a
82
78
Progressive Award #1: $50.00
90b
Progressive Award #2: $102.50
90c
Progressive Award #3: $585.35
80
Current Value of BEER CHUG BONUS: $185.31
BEER CHUG BONUS!
5
4
3
2
1
0
54a
54b
54c
54d
54e
52
GO TEAM
BEER
BEER
AWARD METER
70
205.18
WAGER METER
72
1
SPIN REELS
74
76
You didn't win this time. But it looks like another player triggered the Progressive Award #1 which was valued at $60.13. The beer chug bonus is now valued at $185.31 and only 3 more progressive awards need to be hit to trigger the beer chug bonus award! Make another wager to play again.

FIG. 5F

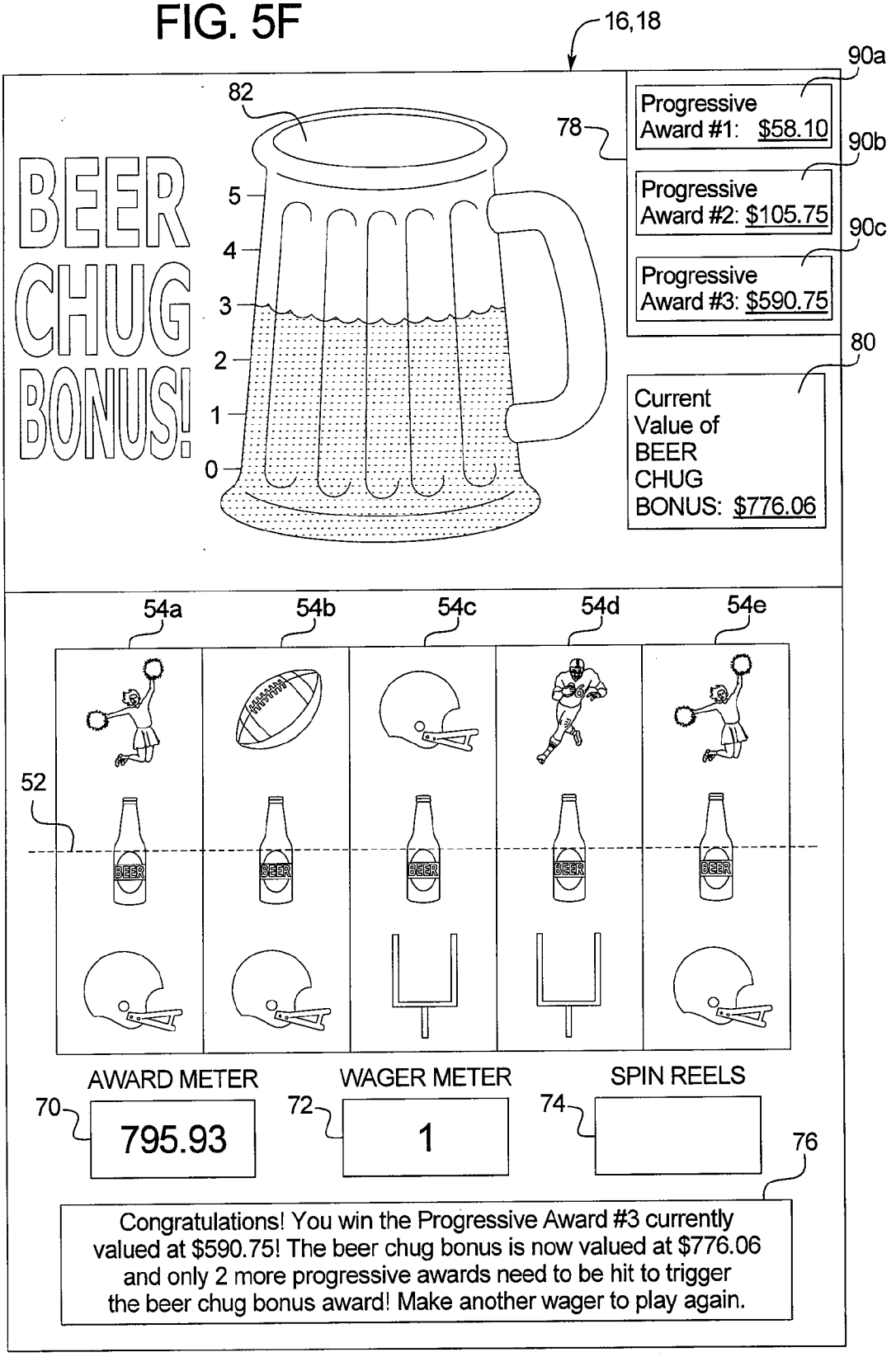

16,18
90a
82
78
Progressive Award #1: $58.10
90b
Progressive Award #2: $105.75
90c
Progressive Award #3: $590.75
80
Current Value of BEER CHUG BONUS: $776.06
BEER CHUG BONUS!
5
4
3
2
1
0
54a
54b
54c
54d
54e
52
AWARD METER
WAGER METER
SPIN REELS
70
795.93
72
1
74
76
Congratulations! You win the Progressive Award #3 currently valued at $590.75! The beer chug bonus is now valued at $776.06 and only 2 more progressive awards need to be hit to trigger the beer chug bonus award! Make another wager to play again.

FIG. 5G

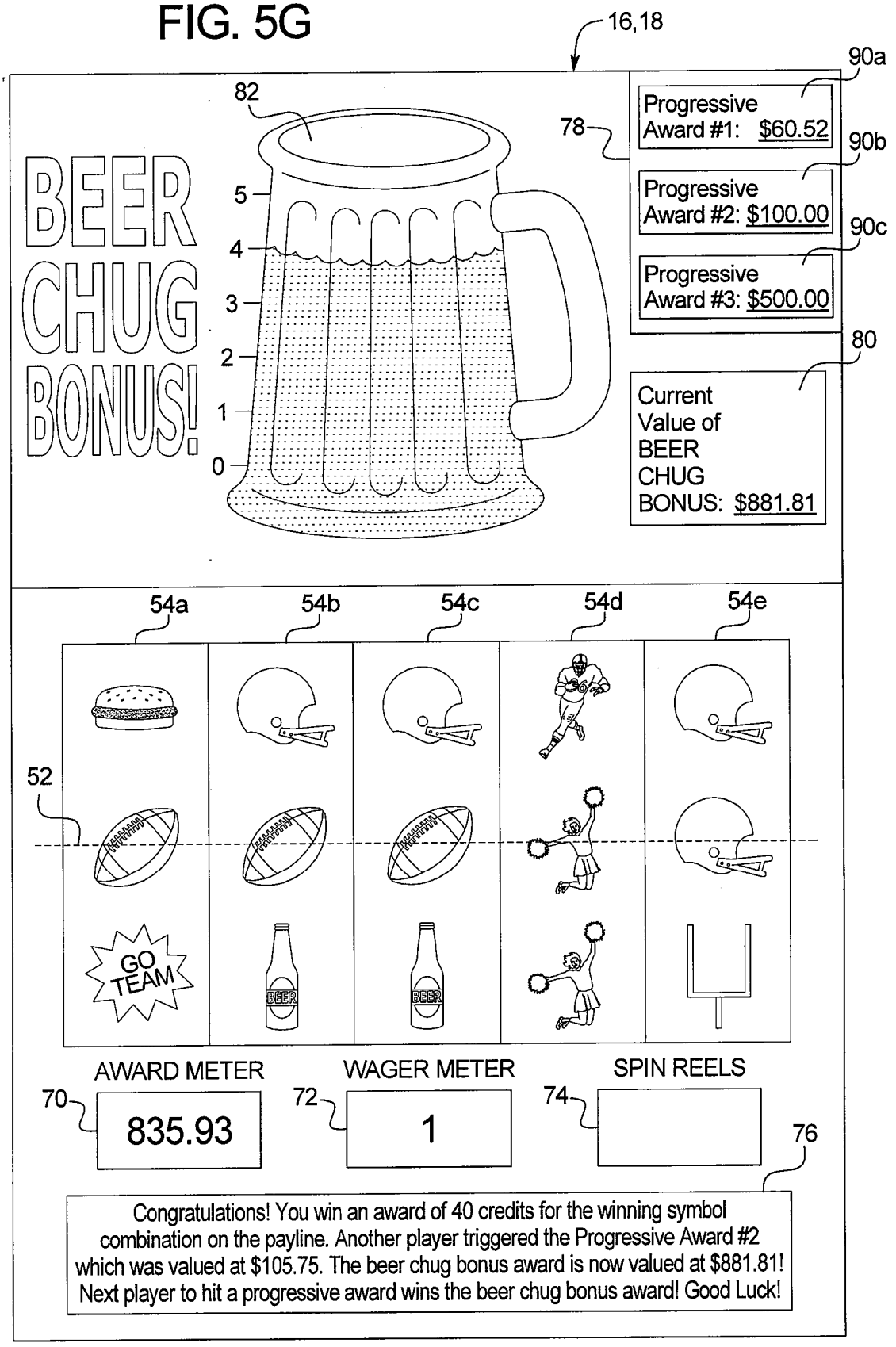

16,18
90a
90b
90c
80
82
78
BEER CHUG BONUS!
5
4
3
2
1
0
Progressive Award #1: $60.52
Progressive Award #2: $100.00
Progressive Award #3: $500.00
Current Value of BEER CHUG BONUS: $881.81
54a
54b
54c
54d
54e
52
GO TEAM
BEER
BEER
AWARD METER
WAGER METER
SPIN REELS
70
72
74
76
835.93
1
Congratulations! You win an award of 40 credits for the winning symbol combination on the payline. Another player triggered the Progressive Award #2 which was valued at $105.75. The beer chug bonus award is now valued at $881.81! Next player to hit a progressive award wins the beer chug bonus award! Good Luck!

FIG. 5H

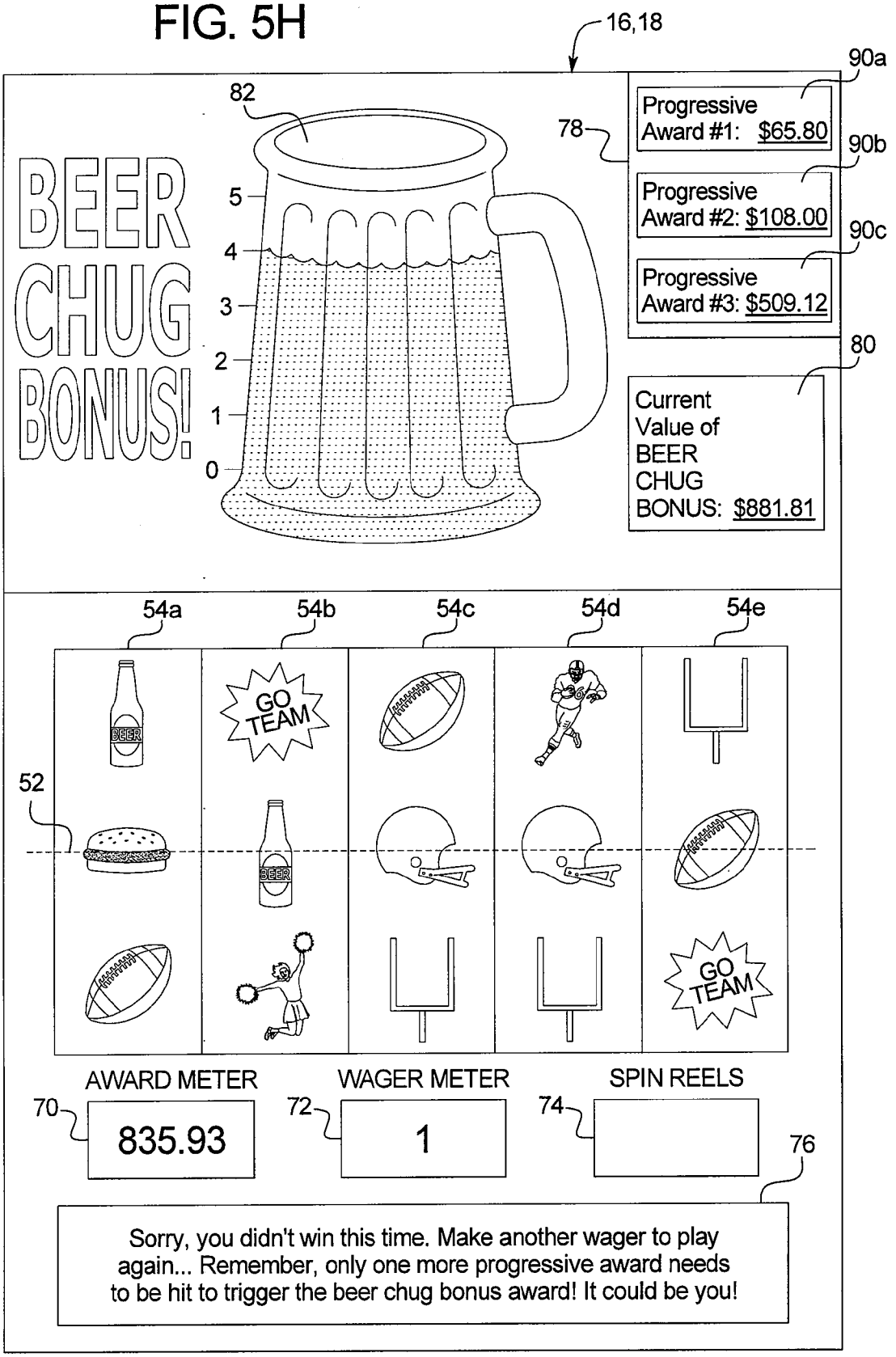

16,18
90a
82
78
Progressive Award #1: $65.80
90b
Progressive Award #2: $108.00
90c
Progressive Award #3: $509.12
80
Current Value of BEER CHUG BONUS: $881.81
BEER CHUG BONUS!
5
4
3
2
1
0
54a
54b
54c
54d
54e
52
GO TEAM
BEER
AWARD METER
WAGER METER
SPIN REELS
70
835.93
72
1
74
76
Sorry, you didn't win this time. Make another wager to play again... Remember, only one more progressive award needs to be hit to trigger the beer chug bonus award! It could be you!

FIG. 5I

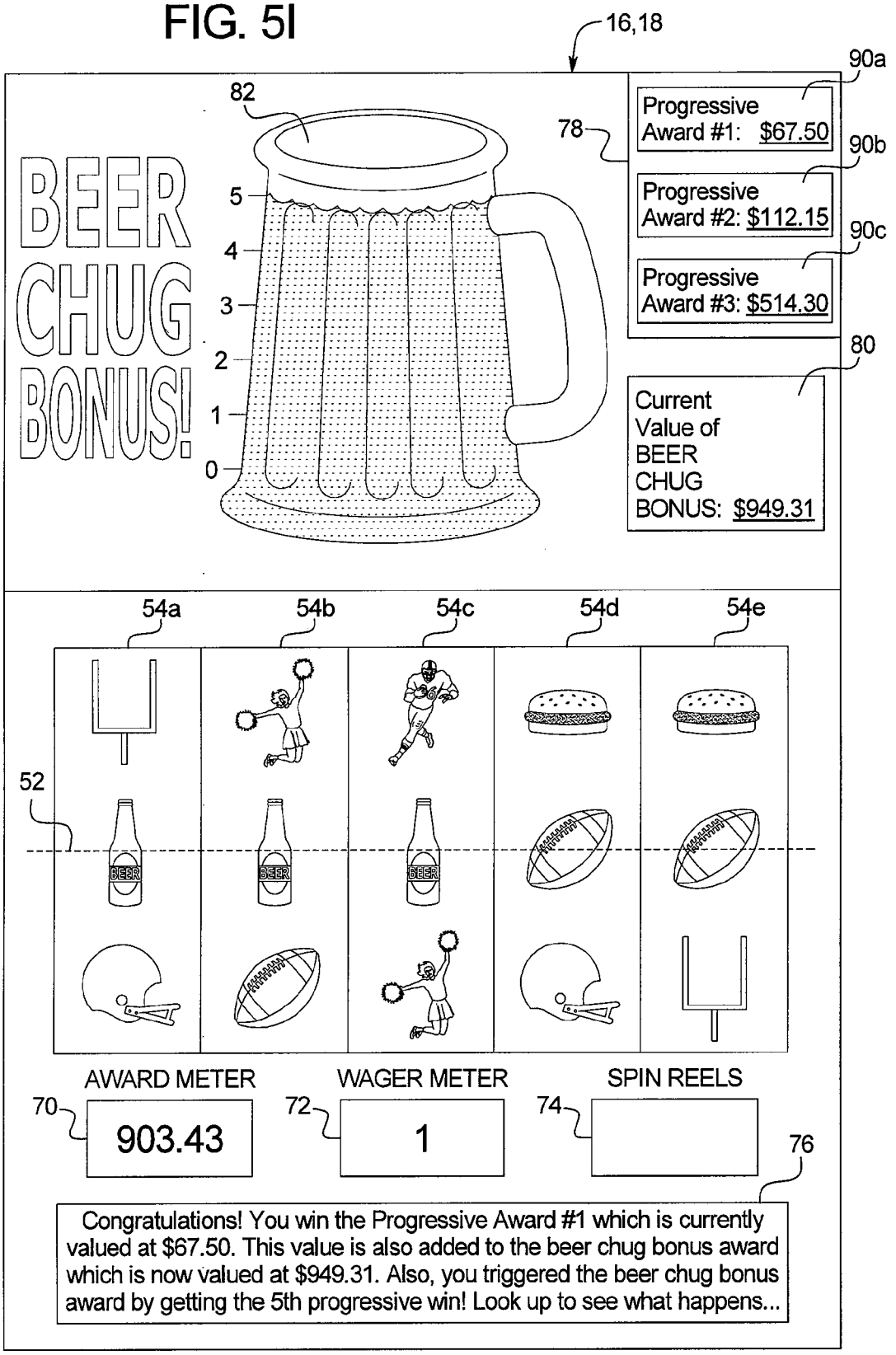
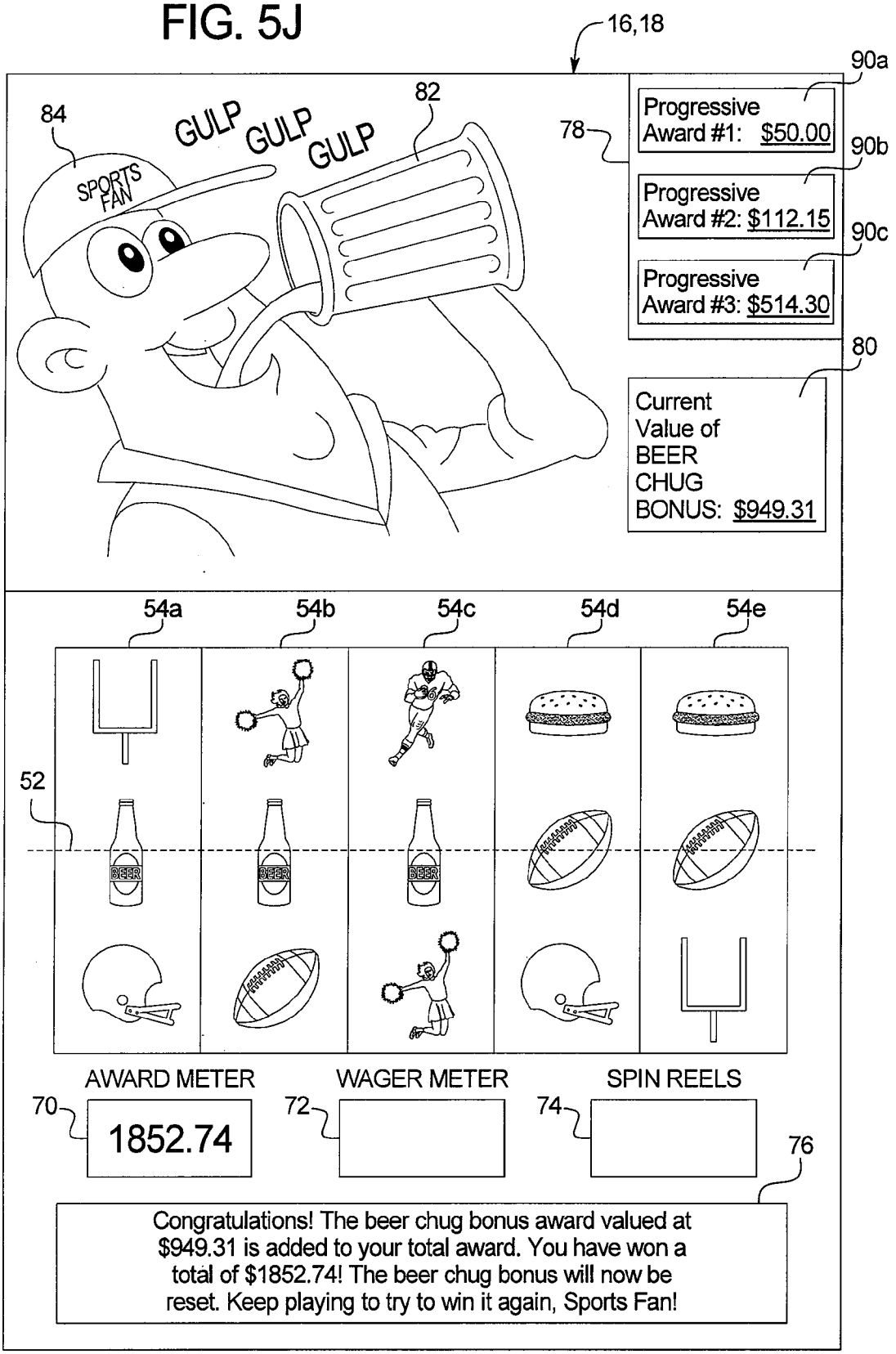
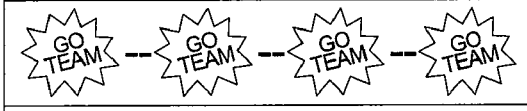
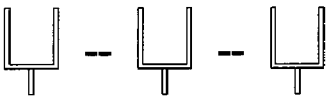
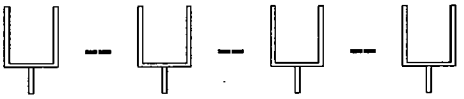
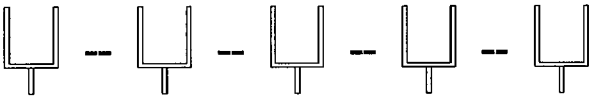
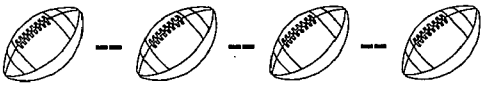
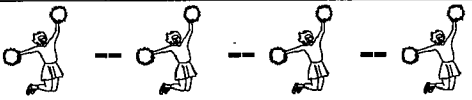

16,18
90a
82
78
Progressive Award #1: $67.50
90b
Progressive Award #2: $112.15
90c
Progressive Award #3: $514.30
80
BEER CHUG BONUS!
5
4
3
2
1
0
Current Value of BEER CHUG BONUS: $949.31
54a
54b
54c
54d
54e
52
BEER
AWARD METER
WAGER METER
SPIN REELS
70
903.43
72
1
74
76
Congratulations! You win the Progressive Award #1 which is currently valued at $67.50. This value is also added to the beer chug bonus award which is now valued at $949.31. Also, you triggered the beer chug bonus award by getting the 5th progressive win! Look up to see what happens...

FIG. 5J


16,18
90a
90b
90c
84
82
78
GULP GULP GULP
SPORTS FAN
Progressive Award #1: $50.00
Progressive Award #2: $112.15
Progressive Award #3: $514.30
80
Current Value of BEER CHUG BONUS: $949.31
54a
54b
54c
54d
54e
52
BEER
AWARD METER
WAGER METER
SPIN REELS
70
1852.74
72
74
76
Congratulations! The beer chug bonus award valued at $949.31 is added to your total award. You have won a total of $1852.74! The beer chug bonus will now be reset. Keep playing to try to win it again, Sports Fan!

# FIG. 6

| SYMBOL COMBINATION | AWARD |
|---|---|
|  | 30 |
|  | 35 |
|  | 50 |
|  | 40 |
|  | 50 |
|  | 60 |
|  | 40 |
|  | 75 |
|  | 100 |
|  | 50 |
|  | 75 |
|  | 150 |
|  | Progressive Award #1 |
|  | Progressive Award #2 |
|  | Progressive Award #3 |

# GAMING SYSTEM AND METHOD PROVIDING A PLURALITY OF AWARDS AND A CUMULATIVE AWARD

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## BACKGROUND

[0002] Gaming machines which provide players awards in primary or base games are well known. Gaming machines generally require the player to place or make a wager to activate the primary or base game. In many of these gaming machines, the award is based on the player obtaining a winning symbol or symbol combination and on the amount of the wager (e.g., the higher the wager, the higher the award). Symbols or symbol combinations which are less likely to occur usually provide higher awards.

[0003] In such known gaming machines, the amount of the wager made on the base game by the player may vary. For instance, the gaming machine may enable the player to wager a minimum number of credits, such as one credit (e.g., one cent, nickel, dime, quarter or dollar) up to a maximum number of credits, such as five credits. This wager may be made by the player a single time or multiple times in a single play of the primary game. For instance, a slot game may have one or more paylines and the slot game may enable the player to make a wager on each payline in a single play of the primary game. Thus, it is known that a gaming machine, such as a slot game, may enable players to make wagers of substantially different amounts on each play of the primary or base game ranging, for example, from one credit up to 125 credits (e.g., five credits on each of 25 separate paylines). This is also true for other wagering games, such as video draw poker, where players can wager one or more credits on each hand and where multiple hands can be played simultaneously. Accordingly, it should be appreciated that different players play at substantially different wagering amounts or levels and at substantially different rates of play.

[0004] Secondary or bonus games are also known in gaming machines. The secondary or bonus games usually provide an additional award to the player. Secondary or bonus games usually do not require an additional wager by the player to be activated. Secondary or bonus games are generally activated or triggered upon an occurrence of a designated triggering symbol or triggering symbol combination in the primary or base game. For instance, a bonus symbol occurring on the payline on the third reel of a three reel slot machine may trigger the secondary bonus game. When a secondary or bonus game is triggered, the gaming machines generally indicates this to the player through one or more visual and/or audio output devices, such as the reels, lights, speakers, video screens, etc. Part of the enjoyment and excitement of playing certain gaming machines is the occurrence or triggering of the secondary or bonus game (even before the player knows how much the bonus award will be).

[0005] Progressive awards associated with gaming machines are also known. In one form, a progressive award is an award amount which includes an initial amount and an additional amount funded through a portion of each wager made on the progressive gaming machine. For example, 0.1% of each wager placed on the primary game of a gaming machine may be allocated to the progressive award or progressive award fund. The progressive award grows in value as more players play the gaming machine and more portions of the players' wagers are allocated to the progressive award. When a player obtains a winning symbol or symbol combination which results in the progressive award, the accumulated progressive award is provided to the player. After the progressive award is provided to the player, the amount of the next progressive award is reset to the initial value and a portion of each subsequent wager is allocated to the next progressive award.

[0006] A progressive award may be associated with a single gaming machine or multiple gaming machines which each contribute portions of the progressive award. The multiple gaming machines may be in the same bank of machines, in the same casino or gaming establishment (usually through a local area network ("LAN")) or in two or more different casinos or gaming establishments (usually through a wide area network ("WAN")). Such progressive awards are sometimes called local area progressives ("LAP") and wide area progressives ("WAP"), respectively.

[0007] Moreover, a gaming machine or bank of gaming machines may be simultaneously associated with a plurality of progressive awards. In these multi-level progressive ("MLP") configurations, a plurality of progressive awards start at different award or value levels, such as $10, $100, $1000 and $10,000 and each individually increment or increase until provided to a player. Upon a suitable triggering event at one of more of the gaming devices associated with the MLP, one or more of the progressive awards which form the MLP are provided to one or more of the players at such gaming devices.

[0008] There is a continuing need to provide new and different gaming machines and gaming systems which offer players the opportunity to play for various awards including progressive awards.

## SUMMARY

[0009] In various embodiments, the gaming system disclosed herein includes a plurality of gaming devices in communication with or linked to a central server, central controller or remote host. Each of the gaming devices includes at least one primary game operable upon a wager by a player. In one embodiment, a gaming system maintains a plurality of awards. The gaming system enables one or more players to play for or try to win one or more of the plurality of gaming system awards over multiple plays of the primary games displayable by the gaming devices of the gaming system.

[0010] In one embodiment, the plurality of awards maintained by the gaming system includes a plurality of source awards and a cumulative award. In one such embodiment, each of the source awards has a source award value and is associated with a source award triggering event. In one embodiment, each of the source awards maintained by the gaming system has a different source award value. In operation, the gaming system monitors game play at the gaming devices. Each time one of the source award triggering events occurs, the gaming system determines which of the source awards has been triggered. After determining which of the source awards has been triggered, the gaming system pro-

vides the source award value of that source award to a player. Additionally, an amount based on the provided source award value is added to the cumulative award, thus increasing a value of the cumulative award. The source award that was triggered and provided to a player is then reset, such that, as game play continues, that source award may be triggered again and provided to the same or a different player during subsequent game play.

**[0011]** As source awards are triggered and provided to players during game play, the gaming system continues to increment or increase value of the cumulative award based on the values of the provided source awards until a cumulative award triggering event occurs. Upon an occurrence of the cumulative award triggering event, the gaming system provides the cumulative award to one or more of the players playing at the gaming devices of the gaming system. After the cumulative award is awarded, the cumulative award is reset to an initial value, such as zero or any other suitable start-up value, as desired by the operator.

**[0012]** In one embodiment, the cumulative award triggering event occurs (and, thus, causes the cumulative award to be awarded) when a designated quantity of source awards have been triggered since the last time the cumulative award was reset. In one such embodiment, the cumulative award triggering event occurs when any combination of the source awards have been triggered a designated number of times. In other words, the cumulative award is awarded on the $x^{th}$ source award win. In such embodiments, when the cumulative award is provided to a player, the cumulative award has a value that is based, at least in part, on the sum of the last ten source awards triggered. In other embodiments, the cumulative award triggering event occurs when one or more of the source awards have each been hit a designated number of times. In such embodiments, the number of times that each source award must be hit for the cumulative award to be triggered may be any suitable number of times, such as three times for each source award. In various different embodiments, the number of times that each source award must be hit is randomly determined, scaled based on the respective values of the source awards, or based on any other predefined criteria. It should be appreciated that the cumulative award may be triggered upon any suitable cumulative award triggering event or condition.

**[0013]** In this manner, various embodiments of the gaming system of the present disclosure provide a cumulative award in addition to a plurality of source awards maintained by the gaming system. The cumulative award increments or accumulates over multiple plays of one or more primary games based on amounts won in connection with source awards previously triggered.

**[0014]** In one embodiment, the source awards include one or more progressive awards. In one such embodiment, the gaming system maintains a plurality of progressive awards in a multiple-level progressive ("MLP") configuration. The gaming system also maintains a separate cumulative award in addition to the plurality of progressive awards of the MLP configuration. In one embodiment, each of the progressive awards of the MLP configuration starts at a different initial or reset value level, such as $100, $500, and $1000, and each individually increments based on different incrementing events until provided to a player. In one embodiment, each of the progressive awards increments based on a portion of one or more wagers placed on plays of the primary games until that progressive award is provided to a player.

**[0015]** In one embodiment, each time one of the progressive awards of the MLP is hit, such as upon a suitable progressive award triggering event, the then current value of that progressive award is provided to a player. Additionally, an amount based on the provided value of that progressive award is added to the cumulative award, which increases the value of the cumulative award. The triggered progressive award (i.e., the progressive award that is provided to the player) is then reset to its initial or reset value level and is again increased by one or more wagers placed during subsequent plays of the primary games. It should be appreciated that, when one of the progressive awards is provided to a player, the remaining progressive awards of the gaming system can continue to increment based on subsequent game play until subsequently hit. The cumulative award also continues to increment or increase based on any progressive awards that are hit, until the cumulative award is triggered. After the cumulative award is triggered and, as a result, awarded to one or more players, the cumulative award is reset to an initial value, such as zero or any other suitable start-up value.

**[0016]** In one embodiment, each of the progressive awards of the MLP is associated with a designated progressive award triggering event which causes that progressive award to be provided to a player. In one such embodiment, each of the progressive awards is associated with a different progressive award triggering event. In one embodiment, the progressive award triggering event can occur in the primary games. One example of such a triggering event includes an occurrence of a designated symbol or symbol combination in a primary game.

**[0017]** In one embodiment, each time one of the progressive awards is hit, an amount equal to the then current value of that progressive award is added to the cumulative award. Thus, when the cumulative award is subsequently awarded to a player, it is a sum of the progressive awards that were previously hit after the cumulative award was most recently reset. In other embodiments, each time one of the progressive awards is triggered, the amount added to the cumulative award may be any suitable amount based on the value of the progressive award value that is provided to the player, such as half of that progressive award value or two times that progressive award value. It should be appreciated that, in these embodiments, when the cumulative award is triggered, the value of the cumulative award is dependent upon the values of the past progressive awards won.

**[0018]** In one embodiment, the cumulative award triggering event occurs when a designated quantity of progressive award hits have occurred. In one such embodiment, the cumulative award triggering event occurs when any combination of the progressive awards have been hit or won a designated number of times. In other words, the cumulative award is awarded on the $x^{th}$ progressive award win. For example, the gaming system maintains three progressive awards in an MLP configuration having initial values of $50, $150, and $500, respectively. In this example, the cumulative award triggering event occurs when any combination of the progressive awards have been hit ten times. That is, every $10^{th}$ progressive award win causes the cumulative award to be awarded. In other embodiments, the cumulative award is provided to a player when one or more of the progressive awards have each been hit a designated number of times. In such embodiments, the number of times that each progressive award must be hit for the cumulative award to be awarded to a player may be any suitable number of times, such as three

times for each progressive award. In various embodiments, the number of times that each progressive award must be hit is randomly determined, scaled based on the respective values of the progressive awards, or based on any predefined criteria.

**[0019]** In one embodiment, the cumulative award is provided to a player that causes the cumulative award triggering event to occur. In one example embodiment where the cumulative award is awarded on the $x^{th}$ progressive award win, the cumulative award is provided to a player playing at the gaming device at which the $x^{th}$ progressive win occurs. In other embodiments, when the cumulative award triggering event occurs, which player or players of the gaming system are awarded the cumulative award is determined in any suitable manner.

**[0020]** In this manner, the present disclosure provides a cumulative award which is provided in addition to a plurality of progressive awards of an MLP configuration. The cumulative award increments or accumulates over multiple plays of one or more primary games based on amounts won in connection with progressive awards previously hit.

**[0021]** It should be appreciated that the cumulative award of the present disclosure can be added to any gaming system that includes an MLP configuration to add another feature that enhances the enjoyment of the players and increases camaraderie.

**[0022]** In various embodiments, the cumulative award is associated with a plurality of gaming devices in a bank of gaming devices. The cumulative award increments or accumulates over multiple plays of one or more primary games of the gaming devices based on progressive awards won. In other embodiments, each, one, or a plurality of the gaming devices of a bank of gaming devices is individually associated with a cumulative award. In such embodiments, each time a progressive win occurs on one of the gaming devices, an amount based on the progressive award won is added to the cumulative award for that gaming device.

**[0023]** Accordingly, one feature of the gaming system and method disclosed herein is to provide a multi-level award structure in association with a plurality of primary games, wherein the primary games can be the same primary game or different primary games.

**[0024]** Another feature of the gaming system and method disclosed herein is to provide a plurality of progressive awards in an MLP configuration and a separate cumulative award, which grows based on the values of previously hit progressive awards.

**[0025]** Additional features and advantages are described in, and will be apparent from, the following Detailed Description and the figures.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

**[0026]** FIG. **1**A is a front-side perspective view of one embodiment of the gaming device disclosed herein.

**[0027]** FIG. **1**B is a front-side perspective view of another embodiment of the gaming device disclosed herein.

**[0028]** FIG. **2**A is a schematic block diagram of the electronic configuration of one embodiment of the gaming device disclosed herein.

**[0029]** FIG. **2**B is a schematic block diagram illustrating a plurality of gaming devices in communication with a central controller.

**[0030]** FIG. **3** is a flowchart of one example process for one embodiment of the gaming system disclosed herein, which enables a plurality of players to each play for a plurality of source awards and a cumulative award in plays of primary games.

**[0031]** FIG. **4**A is a table illustrating an association between a plurality of progressive awards, a plurality of progressive award triggering events, a cumulative award, and a cumulative award triggering event.

**[0032]** FIG. **4**B is a flowchart of one example process for one embodiment of the gaming system disclosed herein, which enables a plurality of players to each play for a plurality of progressive awards and a cumulative award in plays of primary games.

**[0033]** FIGS. **5**A, **5**B, **5**C, **5**D, **5**E, **5**F, **5**G, **5**H, **5**I, and **5**J are front views of a display device of one of the gaming devices of one embodiment of the gaming system disclosed herein, illustrating an example game play session for one player of a primary game at that gaming device.

**[0034]** FIG. **6** is an example paytable which is employed in the example game play session illustrated in FIGS. **5**A to **5**J.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

**[0035]** The present disclosure may be implemented in various configurations for gaming machines, gaming devices or gaming systems, including but not limited to: (1) a dedicated gaming machine, gaming device or gaming system wherein the computerized instructions for controlling any games (which are provided by the gaming machine or gaming device) are provided with the gaming machine or gaming device prior to delivery to a gaming establishment; and (2) a changeable gaming machine, gaming device or gaming system where the computerized instructions for controlling any games (which are provided by the gaming machine or gaming device) are downloadable to the gaming machine or gaming device through a data network when the gaming machine or gaming device is in a gaming establishment. In one embodiment, the computerized instructions for controlling any games are executed by at least one central server, central controller or remote host. In such a "thin client" embodiment, the central server remotely controls any games (or other suitable interfaces) and the gaming device is utilized to display such games (or suitable interfaces) and receive one or more inputs or commands from a player. In another embodiment, the computerized instructions for controlling any games are communicated from the central server, central controller or remote host to a gaming device local processor and memory devices. In such a "thick client" embodiment, the gaming device local processor executes the communicated computerized instructions to control any games (or other suitable interfaces) provided to a player.

**[0036]** In one embodiment, one or more gaming devices in a gaming system may be thin client gaming devices and one or more gaming devices in the gaming system may be thick client gaming devices. In another embodiment, certain functions of the gaming device are implemented in a thin client environment and certain other functions of the gaming device are implemented in a thick client environment. In one such embodiment, computerized instructions for controlling any primary games are communicated from the central server to the gaming device in a thick client configuration and computerized instructions for controlling any secondary games or bonus functions are executed by a central server in a thin client configuration.

**[0037]** Referring now to the drawings, two example alternative embodiments of the gaming device disclosed herein

are illustrated in FIGS. **1**A and **1**B as gaming device **10***a* and gaming device **10***b*, respectively. Gaming device **10***a* and/or gaming device **10***b* are generally referred to herein as gaming device **10**.

**[0038]** In the embodiments illustrated in FIGS. **1**A and **1**B, gaming device **10** has a support structure, housing or cabinet which provides support for a plurality of displays, inputs, controls and other features of a conventional gaming machine. It is configured so that a player can operate it while standing or sitting. The gaming device may be positioned on a base or stand or can be configured as a pub-style table-top game (not shown) which a player can operate preferably while sitting. As illustrated by the different configurations shown in FIGS. **1**A and **1**B, the gaming device may have varying cabinet and display configurations.

**[0039]** In one embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. **2**A, the gaming device preferably includes at least one processor **12**, such as a microprocessor, a microcontroller-based platform, a suitable integrated circuit or one or more application-specific integrated circuits (ASIC's). The processor is in communication with or operable to access or to exchange signals with at least one data storage or memory device **14**. In one embodiment, the processor and the memory device reside within the cabinet of the gaming device. The memory device stores program code and instructions, executable by the processor, to control the gaming device. The memory device also stores other data such as image data, event data, player input data, random or pseudo-random number generators, pay-table data or information and applicable game rules that relate to the play of the gaming device. In one embodiment, the memory device includes random access memory (RAM), which can include non-volatile RAM (NVRAM), magnetic RAM (MRAM), ferroelectric RAM (FeRAM) and other forms as commonly understood in the gaming industry. In one embodiment, the memory device includes read only memory (ROM). In one embodiment, the memory device includes flash memory and/or EEPROM (electrically erasable programmable read only memory). Any other suitable magnetic, optical and/or semiconductor memory may operate in conjunction with the gaming device disclosed herein.

**[0040]** In one embodiment, part or all of the program code and/or operating data described above can be stored in a detachable or removable memory device, including, but not limited to, a suitable cartridge, disk, CD ROM, DVD or USB memory device. In other embodiments, part or all of the program code and/or operating data described above can be downloaded to the memory device through a suitable network.

**[0041]** In one embodiment, an operator or a player can use such a removable memory device in a desktop computer, a laptop personal computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), portable computing device, or other computerized platform to implement the present disclosure. In one embodiment, the gaming device or gaming machine disclosed herein is operable over a wireless network, such as part of a wireless gaming system. In this embodiment, the gaming machine may be a hand held device, a mobile device or any other suitable wireless device that enables a player to play any suitable game at a variety of different locations. It should be appreciated that a gaming device or gaming machine as disclosed herein may be a device that has obtained approval from a regulatory gaming commission or a device that has not obtained approval from a regulatory gaming commission. It should be appreciated that the processor and memory device may be collectively referred to herein as a "computer" or "controller."

**[0042]** In one embodiment, as discussed in more detail below, the gaming device randomly generates awards and/or other game outcomes based on probability data. In one such embodiment, this random determination is provided through utilization of a random number generator (RNG), such as a true random number generator, a pseudo random number generator or other suitable randomization process. In one embodiment, each award or other game outcome is associated with a probability and the gaming device generates the award or other game outcome to be provided to the player based on the associated probabilities. In this embodiment, since the gaming device generates outcomes randomly or based upon one or more probability calculations, there is no certainty that the gaming device will ever provide the player with any specific award or other game outcome.

**[0043]** In another embodiment, as discussed in more detail below, the gaming device employs a predetermined or finite set or pool of awards or other game outcomes. In this embodiment, as each award or other game outcome is provided to the player, the gaming device flags or removes the provided award or other game outcome from the predetermined set or pool. Once flagged or removed from the set or pool, the specific provided award or other game outcome from that specific pool cannot be provided to the player again. This type of gaming device provides players with all of the available awards or other game outcomes over the course of the play cycle and guarantees the amount of actual wins and losses.

**[0044]** In another embodiment, as discussed below, upon a player initiating game play at the gaming device, the gaming device enrolls in a bingo game. In this embodiment, a bingo server calls the bingo balls that result in a specific bingo game outcome. The resultant game outcome is communicated to the individual gaming device to be provided to a player. In one embodiment, this bingo outcome is displayed to the player as a bingo game and/or in any form in accordance with the present disclosure.

**[0045]** In one embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. **2**A, the gaming device includes one or more display devices controlled by the processor. The display devices are preferably connected to or mounted to the cabinet of the gaming device. The embodiment shown in FIG. **1**A includes a central display device **16** which displays a primary game. This display device may also display any suitable secondary game associated with the primary game as well as information relating to the primary or secondary game. The alternative embodiment shown in FIG. **1**B includes a central display device **16** and an upper display device **18**. The upper display device may display the primary game, any suitable secondary game associated or not associated with the primary game and/or information relating to the primary or secondary game. These display devices may also serve as digital glass operable to advertise games or other aspects of the gaming establishment. As seen in FIGS. **1**A and **1**B, in one embodiment, the gaming device includes a credit display **20** which displays a player's current number of credits, cash, account balance or the equivalent. In one embodiment, the gaming device includes a bet display **22** which displays a player's amount wagered. In one embodiment, as described in more detail below, the gaming device includes a player tracking display **40** which displays information regarding a player's playing tracking status.

**[0046]** In another embodiment, at least one display device may be a mobile display device, such as a PDA or tablet PC,

that enables play of at least a portion of the primary or secondary game at a location remote from the gaming device.

**[0047]** The display devices may include, without limitation, a monitor, a television display, a plasma display, a liquid crystal display (LCD) a display based on light emitting diodes (LED), a display based on a plurality of organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs), a display based on polymer light-emitting diodes (PLEDs), a display based on a plurality of surface-conduction electron-emitters (SEDs), a display including a projected and/or reflected image or any other suitable electronic device or display mechanism. In one embodiment, as described in more detail below, the display device includes a touch-screen with an associated touch-screen controller. The display devices may be of any suitable size and configuration, such as a square, a rectangle or an elongated rectangle.

**[0048]** The display devices of the gaming device are configured to display at least one and preferably a plurality of game or other suitable images, symbols and indicia such as any visual representation or exhibition of the movement of objects such as mechanical, virtual or video reels and wheels, dynamic lighting, video images, images of people, characters, places, things and faces of cards, and the like.

**[0049]** In one alternative embodiment, the symbols, images and indicia displayed on or of the display device may be in mechanical form. That is, the display device may include any electromechanical device, such as one or more mechanical objects, such as one or more rotatable wheels, reels or dice, configured to display at least one or a plurality of game or other suitable images, symbols or indicia.

**[0050]** As illustrated in FIG. **2**A, in one embodiment, the gaming device includes at least one payment device **24** in communication with the processor. As seen in FIGS. **1**A and **1**B, a payment device such as a payment acceptor includes a note, ticket or bill acceptor **28** wherein the player inserts paper money, a ticket or voucher and a coin slot **26** where the player inserts money, coins, or tokens. In other embodiments, payment devices such as readers or validators for credit cards, debit cards or credit slips may accept payment. In one embodiment, a player may insert an identification card into a card reader of the gaming device. In one embodiment, the identification card is a smart card having a programmed microchip or a magnetic strip coded with a player's identification, credit totals (or related data) and other relevant information. In another embodiment, a player may carry a portable device, such as a cell phone, a radio frequency identification tag or any other suitable wireless device, which communicates a player's identification, credit totals (or related data) and other relevant information to the gaming device. In one embodiment, money may be transferred to a gaming device through electronic funds transfer. When a player funds the gaming device, the processor determines the amount of funds entered and displays the corresponding amount on the credit or other suitable display as described above.

**[0051]** As seen in FIGS. **1**A, **1**B and **2**A, in one embodiment the gaming device includes at least one and preferably a plurality of input devices **30** in communication with the processor. The input devices can include any suitable device which enables the player to produce an input signal which is received by the processor. In one embodiment, after appropriate funding of the gaming device, the input device is a game activation device, such as a play button **32** or a pull arm (not shown) which is used by the player to start any primary game or sequence of events in the gaming device. The play button can be any suitable play activator such as a bet one button, a max bet button or a repeat the bet button. In one embodiment, upon appropriate funding, the gaming device begins the game play automatically. In another embodiment, upon the player engaging one of the play buttons, the gaming device automatically activates game play.

**[0052]** In one embodiment, one input device is a bet one button. The player places a bet by pushing the bet one button. The player can increase the bet by one credit each time the player pushes the bet one button. When the player pushes the bet one button, the number of credits shown in the credit display preferably decreases by one, and the number of credits shown in the bet display preferably increases by one. In another embodiment, one input device is a bet max button (not shown) which enables the player to bet the maximum wager permitted for a game of the gaming device.

**[0053]** In one embodiment, one input device is a cash out button **34**. The player may push the cash out button and cash out to receive a cash payment or other suitable form of payment corresponding to the number of remaining credits. In one embodiment, when the player cashes out, a payment device, such as a ticket, payment or note generator **36** prints or otherwise generates a ticket or credit slip to provide to the player. The player receives the ticket or credit slip and may redeem the value associated with the ticket or credit slip via a cashier (or other suitable redemption system). In another embodiment, when the player cashes out, the player receives the coins or tokens in a coin payout tray. It should be appreciated that any suitable payout mechanisms, such as funding to the player's electronically recordable identification card may be implemented in accordance with the gaming device disclosed herein.

**[0054]** In one embodiment, as mentioned above and seen in FIG. **2**A, one input device is a touch-screen **42** coupled with a touch-screen controller **44**, or some other touch-sensitive display overlay to allow for player interaction with the images on the display. The touch-screen and the touch-screen controller are connected to a video controller **46**. A player can make decisions and input signals into the gaming device by touching the touch-screen at the appropriate places. One such input device is a conventional touch-screen button panel.

**[0055]** The gaming device may further include a plurality of communication ports for enabling communication of the processor with external peripherals, such as external video sources, expansion buses, game or other displays, an SCSI port or a key pad.

**[0056]** In one embodiment, as seen in FIG. **2**A, the gaming device includes a sound generating device controlled by one or more sounds cards **48** which function in conjunction with the processor. In one embodiment, the sound generating device includes at least one and preferably a plurality of speakers **50** or other sound generating hardware and/or software for generating sounds, such as playing music for the primary and/or secondary game or for other modes of the gaming device, such as an attract mode. In one embodiment, the gaming device provides dynamic sounds coupled with attractive multimedia images displayed on one or more of the display devices to provide an audio-visual representation or to otherwise display full-motion video with sound to attract players to the gaming device. During idle periods, the gaming device may display a sequence of audio and/or visual attraction messages to attract potential players to the gaming device. The videos may also be customized for or to provide any appropriate information.

**[0057]** In one embodiment, the gaming machine may include a sensor, such as a camera in communication with the processor (and possibly controlled by the processor) that is selectively positioned to acquire an image of a player actively using the gaming device and/or the surrounding area of the gaming device. In one embodiment, the camera may be configured to selectively acquire still or moving (e.g., video) images and may be configured to acquire the images in either an analog, digital or other suitable format. The display devices may be configured to display the image acquired by the camera as well as display the visible manifestation of the game in split screen or picture-in-picture fashion. For example, the camera may acquire an image of the player and the processor may incorporate that image into the primary and/or secondary game as a game image, symbol or indicia.

**[0058]** Gaming device **10** can incorporate any suitable wagering primary or base game. The gaming machine or device may include some or all of the features of conventional gaming machines or devices. The primary or base game may comprise any suitable reel-type game, card game, cascading or falling symbol game, number game or other game of chance susceptible to representation in an electronic or electromechanical form, which in one embodiment produces a random outcome based on probability data at the time of or after placement of a wager. That is, different primary wagering games, such as video poker games, video blackjack games, video keno, video bingo or any other suitable primary or base game may be implemented.

**[0059]** In one embodiment, as illustrated in FIGS. **1**A and **1**B, a base or primary game may be a slot game with one or more paylines **52**. The paylines may be horizontal, vertical, circular, diagonal, angled or any combination thereof. In this embodiment, the gaming device includes at least one and preferably a plurality of reels **54**, such as three to five reels **54**, in either electromechanical form with mechanical rotating reels or video form with simulated reels and movement thereof. In one embodiment, an electromechanical slot machine includes a plurality of adjacent, rotatable reels which may be combined and operably coupled with an electronic display of any suitable type. In another embodiment, if the reels **54** are in video form, one or more of the display devices, as described above, display the plurality of simulated video reels **54**. Each reel **54** displays a plurality of indicia or symbols, such as bells, hearts, fruits, numbers, letters, bars or other images which preferably correspond to a theme associated with the gaming device. In another embodiment, one or more of the reels are independent reels or unisymbol reels. In this embodiment, each independent or unisymbol reel generates and displays one symbol to the player. In one embodiment, the gaming device awards prizes after the reels of the primary game stop spinning if specified types and/or configurations of indicia or symbols occur on an active payline or otherwise occur in a winning pattern, occur on the requisite number of adjacent reels and/or occur in a scatter pay arrangement.

**[0060]** In an alternative embodiment, rather than determining any outcome to provide to the player by analyzing the symbols generated on any wagered upon paylines as described above, the gaming device determines any outcome to provide to the player based on the number of associated symbols which are generated in active symbol positions on the requisite number of adjacent reels (i.e., not on paylines passing through any displayed winning symbol combinations). In this embodiment, if a winning symbol combination is generated on the reels, the gaming device provides the player one award for that occurrence of the generated winning symbol combination. For example, if one winning symbol combination is generated on the reels, the gaming device will provide a single award to the player for that winning symbol combination (i.e., not based on the number of paylines that would have passed through that winning symbol combination). It should be appreciated that because a gaming device with wagering on ways to win provides the player one award for a single occurrence of a winning symbol combination and a gaming device with paylines may provide the player more than one award for the same occurrence of a single winning symbol combination (i.e., if a plurality of paylines each pass through the same winning symbol combination), it is possible to provide a player at a ways to win gaming device with more ways to win for an equivalent bet or wager on a traditional slot gaming device with paylines.

**[0061]** In one embodiment, the total number of ways to win is determined by multiplying the number of symbols generated in active symbol positions on a first reel by the number of symbols generated in active symbol positions on a second reel by the number of symbols generated in active symbol positions on a third reel and so on for each reel of the gaming device with at least one symbol generated in an active symbol position. For example, a three reel gaming device with three symbols generated in active symbol positions on each reel includes 27 ways to win (i.e., 3 symbols on the first reel×3 symbols on the second reel×3 symbols on the third reel). A four reel gaming device with three symbols generated in active symbol positions on each reel includes 81 ways to win (i.e., 3 symbols on the first reel×3 symbols on the second reel×3 symbols on the third reel×3 symbols on the fourth reel). A five reel gaming device with three symbols generated in active symbol positions on each reel includes 243 ways to win (i.e., 3 symbols on the first reel×3 symbols on the second reel×3 symbols on the third reel×3 symbols on the fourth reel×3 symbols on the fifth reel). It should be appreciated that modifying the number of generated symbols by either modifying the number of reels or modifying the number of symbols generated in active symbol positions by one or more of the reels, modifies the number of ways to win.

**[0062]** In another embodiment, the gaming device enables a player to wager on and thus activate symbol positions. In one such embodiment, the symbol positions are on the reels. In this embodiment, if based on the player's wager, a reel is activated, then each of the symbol positions of that reel will be activated and each of the active symbol positions will be part of one or more of the ways to win. In one embodiment, if based on the player's wager, a reel is not activated, then a designated number of default symbol positions, such as a single symbol position of the middle row of the reel, will be activated and the default symbol position(s) will be part of one or more of the ways to win. This type of gaming machine enables a player to wager on one, more or each of the reels and the processor of the gaming device uses the number of wagered on reels to determine the active symbol positions and the number of possible ways to win. In alternative embodiments, (1) no symbols are displayed as generated at any of the inactive symbol positions, or (2) any symbols generated at any inactive symbol positions may be displayed to the player but suitably shaded or otherwise designated as inactive.

**[0063]** In one embodiment wherein a player wagers on one or more reels, a player's wager of one credit may activate each of the three symbol positions on a first reel, wherein one

default symbol position is activated on each of the remaining four reels. In this example, as described above, the gaming device provides the player three ways to win (i.e., 3 symbols on the first reel×1 symbol on the second reel×1 symbol on the third reel×1 symbol on the fourth reel×1 symbol on the fifth reel). In another example, a player's wager of nine credits may activate each of the three symbol positions on a first reel, each of the three symbol positions on a second reel and each of the three symbol positions on a third reel wherein one default symbol position is activated on each of the remaining two reels. In this example, as described above, the gaming device provides the player twenty-seven ways to win (i.e., 3 symbols on the first reel×3 symbols on the second reel×3 symbols on the third reel×1 symbol on the fourth reel×1 symbol on the fifth reel).

**[0064]** In one embodiment, to determine any award(s) to provide to the player based on the generated symbols, the gaming device individually determines if a symbol generated in an active symbol position on a first reel forms part of a winning symbol combination with or is otherwise suitably related to a symbol generated in an active symbol position on a second reel. In this embodiment, the gaming device classifies each pair of symbols which form part of a winning symbol combination (i.e., each pair of related symbols) as a string of related symbols. For example, if active symbol positions include a first cherry symbol generated in the top row of a first reel and a second cherry symbol generated in the bottom row of a second reel, the gaming device classifies the two cherry symbols as a string of related symbols because the two cherry symbols form part of a winning symbol combination.

**[0065]** After determining if any strings of related symbols are formed between the symbols on the first reel and the symbols on the second reel, the gaming device determines if any of the symbols from the next adjacent reel should be added to any of the formed strings of related symbols. In this embodiment, for a first of the classified strings of related symbols, the gaming device determines if any of the symbols generated by the next adjacent reel form part of a winning symbol combination or are otherwise related to the symbols of the first string of related symbols. If the gaming device determines that a symbol generated on the next adjacent reel is related to the symbols of the first string of related symbols, that symbol is subsequently added to the first string of related symbols. For example, if the first string of related symbols is the string of related cherry symbols and a related cherry symbol is generated in the middle row of the third reel, the gaming device adds the related cherry symbol generated on the third reel to the previously classified string of cherry symbols.

**[0066]** On the other hand, if the gaming device determines that no symbols generated on the next adjacent reel are related to the symbols of the first string of related symbols, the gaming device marks or flags such string of related symbols as complete. For example, if the first string of related symbols is the string of related cherry symbols and none of the symbols of the third reel are related to the cherry symbols of the previously classified string of cherry symbols, the gaming device marks or flags the string of cherry symbols as complete.

**[0067]** After either adding a related symbol to the first string of related symbols or marking the first string of related symbols as complete, the gaming device proceeds as described above for each of the remaining classified strings of related symbols which were previously classified or formed from related symbols on the first and second reels.

**[0068]** After analyzing each of the remaining strings of related symbols, the gaming device determines, for each remaining pending or incomplete string of related symbols, if any of the symbols from the next adjacent reel, if any, should be added to any of the previously classified strings of related symbols. This process continues until either each string of related symbols is complete or there are no more adjacent reels of symbols to analyze. In this embodiment, where there are no more adjacent reels of symbols to analyze, the gaming device marks each of the remaining pending strings of related symbols as complete.

**[0069]** When each of the strings of related symbols is marked complete, the gaming device compares each of the strings of related symbols to an appropriate paytable and provides the player any award associated with each of the completed strings of symbols. It should be appreciated that the player is provided one award, if any, for each string of related symbols generated in active symbol positions (i.e., as opposed to being based on how many paylines that would have passed through each of the strings of related symbols in active symbol positions).

**[0070]** In one embodiment, a base or primary game may be a poker game wherein the gaming device enables the player to play a conventional game of video draw poker and initially deals five cards all face up from a virtual deck of fifty-two card deck. Cards may be dealt as in a traditional game of cards or in the case of the gaming device, may also include that the cards are randomly selected from a predetermined number of cards. If the player wishes to draw, the player selects the cards to hold via one or more input device, such as pressing related hold buttons or via the touch screen. The player then presses the deal button and the unwanted or discarded cards are removed from the display and the gaming machine deals the replacement cards from the remaining cards in the deck. This results in a final five-card hand. The gaming device compares the final five-card hand to a payout table which utilizes conventional poker hand rankings to determine the winning hands. The gaming device provides the player with an award based on a winning hand and the credits the player wagered.

**[0071]** In another embodiment, the base or primary game may be a multi-hand version of video poker. In this embodiment, the gaming device deals the player at least two hands of cards. In one such embodiment, the cards are the same cards. In one embodiment each hand of cards is associated with its own deck of cards. The player chooses the cards to hold in a primary hand. The held cards in the primary hand are also held in the other hands of cards. The remaining non-held cards are removed from each hand displayed and for each hand replacement cards are randomly dealt into that hand. Since the replacement cards are randomly dealt independently for each hand, the replacement cards for each hand will usually be different. The poker hand rankings are then determined hand by hand and awards are provided to the player.

**[0072]** In one embodiment, a base or primary game may be a keno game wherein the gaming device displays a plurality of selectable indicia or numbers on at least one of the display devices. In this embodiment, the player selects at least one or a plurality of the selectable indicia or numbers via an input device such as the touch screen. The gaming device then displays a series of drawn numbers to determine an amount of matches, if any, between the player's selected numbers and the gaming device's drawn numbers. The player is provided

an award based on the amount of matches, if any, based on the amount of determined matches and the number of numbers drawn.

**[0073]** In one embodiment, in addition to winning credits or other awards in a base or primary game, the gaming device may also give players the opportunity to win credits in a bonus or secondary game or bonus or secondary round. The bonus or secondary game enables the player to obtain a prize or payout in addition to the prize or payout, if any, obtained from the base or primary game. In general, a bonus or secondary game produces a significantly higher level of player excitement than the base or primary game because it provides a greater expectation of winning than the base or primary game and is accompanied with more attractive or unusual features than the base or primary game. In one embodiment, the bonus or secondary game may be any type of suitable game, either similar to or completely different from the base or primary game.

**[0074]** In one embodiment, the triggering event or qualifying condition may be a selected outcome in the primary game or a particular arrangement of one or more indicia on a display device in the primary game, such as the number seven appearing on three adjacent reels along a payline in the primary slot game embodiment seen in FIGS. **1**A and **1**B. In other embodiments, the triggering event or qualifying condition may be by exceeding a certain amount of game play (such as number of games, number of credits, amount of time), or reaching a specified number of points earned during game play.

**[0075]** In another embodiment, the gaming device processor **12** or central server **56** randomly provides the player one or more plays of one or more secondary games. In one such embodiment, the gaming device does not provide any apparent reasons to the player for qualifying to play a secondary or bonus game. In this embodiment, qualifying for a bonus game is not triggered by an event in or based specifically on any of the plays of any primary game. That is, the gaming device may simply qualify a player to play a secondary game without any explanation or alternatively with simple explanations. In another embodiment, the gaming device (or central server) qualifies a player for a secondary game at least partially based on a game triggered or symbol triggered event, such as at least partially based on the play of a primary game.

**[0076]** In one embodiment, the gaming device includes a program which will automatically begin a bonus round after the player has achieved a triggering event or qualifying condition in the base or primary game. In another embodiment, after a player has qualified for a bonus game, the player may subsequently enhance his/her bonus game participation through continued play on the base or primary game. Thus, for each bonus qualifying event, such as a bonus symbol, that the player obtains, a given number of bonus game wagering points or credits may be accumulated in a "bonus meter" programmed to accrue the bonus wagering credits or entries toward eventual participation in a bonus game. The occurrence of multiple such bonus qualifying events in the primary game may result in an arithmetic or exponential increase in the number of bonus wagering credits awarded. In one embodiment, the player may redeem extra bonus wagering credits during the bonus game to extend play of the bonus game.

**[0077]** In one embodiment, no separate entry fee or buy in for a bonus game need be employed. That is, a player may not purchase an entry into a bonus game, rather they must win or earn entry through play of the primary game thus, encouraging play of the primary game. In another embodiment, qualification of the bonus or secondary game is accomplished through a simple "buy in" by the player, for example, if the player has been unsuccessful at qualifying through other specified activities. In another embodiment, the player must make a separate side-wager on the bonus game or wager a designated amount in the primary game to qualify for the secondary game. In this embodiment, the secondary game triggering event must occur and the side-wager (or designated primary game wager amount) must have been placed to trigger the secondary game.

**[0078]** In one embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. **2**B, one or more of the gaming devices **10** are in communication with each other and/or at least one central server, central controller or remote host **56** through a data network or remote communication link **58**. In this embodiment, the central server, central controller or remote host is any suitable server or computing device which includes at least one processor and at least one memory or storage device. In different such embodiments, the central server is a progressive controller or a processor of one of the gaming devices in the gaming system. In these embodiments, the processor of each gaming device is designed to transmit and receive events, messages, commands or any other suitable data or signal between the individual gaming device and the central server. The gaming device processor is operable to execute such communicated events, messages or commands in conjunction with the operation of the gaming device. Moreover, the processor of the central server is designed to transmit and receive events, messages, commands or any other suitable data or signal between the central server and each of the individual gaming devices. The central server processor is operable to execute such communicated events, messages or commands in conjunction with the operation of the central server. It should be appreciated that one, more or each of the functions of the central controller as disclosed herein may be performed by one or more gaming device processors. It should be further appreciated that one, more or each of the functions of one or more gaming device processors as disclosed herein may be performed by the central controller.

**[0079]** In one embodiment, the game outcome provided to the player is determined by a central server or controller and provided to the player at the gaming device. In this embodiment, each of a plurality of such gaming devices are in communication with the central server or controller. Upon a player initiating game play at one of the gaming devices, the initiated gaming device communicates a game outcome request to the central server or controller.

**[0080]** In one embodiment, the central server or controller receives the game outcome request and randomly generates a game outcome for the primary game based on probability data. In another embodiment, the central server or controller randomly generates a game outcome for the secondary game based on probability data. In another embodiment, the central server or controller randomly generates a game outcome for both the primary game and the secondary game based on probability data. In this embodiment, the central server or controller is capable of storing and utilizing program code or other data similar to the processor and memory device of the gaming device.

**[0081]** In an alternative embodiment, the central server or controller maintains one or more predetermined pools or sets of predetermined game outcomes. In this embodiment, the central server or controller receives the game outcome

request and independently selects a predetermined game outcome from a set or pool of game outcomes. The central server or controller flags or marks the selected game outcome as used. Once a game outcome is flagged as used, it is prevented from further selection from the set or pool and cannot be selected by the central controller or server upon another wager. The provided game outcome can include a primary game outcome, a secondary game outcome, primary and secondary game outcomes, or a series of game outcomes such as free games.

**[0082]** The central server or controller communicates the generated or selected game outcome to the initiated gaming device. The gaming device receives the generated or selected game outcome and provides the game outcome to the player. In an alternative embodiment, how the generated or selected game outcome is to be presented or displayed to the player, such as a reel symbol combination of a slot machine or a hand of cards dealt in a card game, is also determined by the central server or controller and communicated to the initiated gaming device to be presented or displayed to the player. Central production or control can assist a gaming establishment or other entity in maintaining appropriate records, controlling gaming, reducing and preventing cheating or electronic or other errors, reducing or eliminating win-loss volatility and the like.

**[0083]** In another embodiment, a predetermined game outcome value is determined for each of a plurality of linked or networked gaming devices based on the results of a bingo, keno or lottery game. In this embodiment, each individual gaming device utilizes one or more bingo, keno or lottery games to determine the predetermined game outcome value provided to the player for the interactive game played at that gaming device. In one embodiment, the bingo, keno or lottery game is displayed to the player. In another embodiment, the bingo, keno or lottery game is not displayed to the player, but the results of the bingo, keno or lottery game determine the predetermined game outcome value for the primary or secondary game.

**[0084]** In the various bingo embodiments, as each gaming device is enrolled in the bingo game, such as upon an appropriate wager or engaging an input device, the enrolled gaming device is provided or associated with a different bingo card. Each bingo card consists of a matrix or array of elements, wherein each element is designated with a separate indicia, such as a number. It should be appreciated that each different bingo card includes a different combination of elements. For example, if four bingo cards are provided to four enrolled gaming devices, the same element may be present on all four of the bingo cards while another element may solely be present on one of the bingo cards.

**[0085]** In operation of these embodiments, upon providing or associating a different bingo card to each of a plurality of enrolled gaming devices, the central controller randomly selects or draws, one at a time, a plurality of the elements. As each element is selected, a determination is made for each gaming device as to whether the selected element is present on the bingo card provided to that enrolled gaming device. This determination can be made by the central controller, the gaming device, a combination of the two, or in any other suitable manner. If the selected element is present on the bingo card provided to that enrolled gaming device, that selected element on the provided bingo card is marked or flagged. This process of selecting elements and marking any selected elements on the provided bingo cards continues until one or more predetermined patterns are marked on one or more of the provided bingo cards. It should be appreciated that in one embodiment, the gaming device requires the player to engage a daub button (not shown) to initiate the process of the gaming device marking or flagging any selected elements.

**[0086]** After one or more predetermined patterns are marked on one or more of the provided bingo cards, a game outcome is determined for each of the enrolled gaming devices based, at least in part, on the selected elements on the provided bingo cards. As described above, the game outcome determined for each gaming device enrolled in the bingo game is utilized by that gaming device to determine the predetermined game outcome provided to the player. For example, a first gaming device to have selected elements marked in a predetermined pattern is provided a first outcome of win $10 which will be provided to a first player regardless of how the first player plays in a first game and a second gaming device to have selected elements marked in a different predetermined pattern is provided a second outcome of win $2 which will be provided to a second player regardless of how the second player plays a second game. It should be appreciated that as the process of marking selected elements continues until one or more predetermined patterns are marked, this embodiment ensures that at least one bingo card will win the bingo game and thus at least one enrolled gaming device will provide a predetermined winning game outcome to a player. It should be appreciated that other suitable methods for selecting or determining one or more predetermined game outcomes may be employed.

**[0087]** In one example of the above-described embodiment, the predetermined game outcome may be based on a supplemental award in addition to any award provided for winning the bingo game as described above. In this embodiment, if one or more elements are marked in supplemental patterns within a designated number of drawn elements, a supplemental or intermittent award or value associated with the marked supplemental pattern is provided to the player as part of the predetermined game outcome. For example, if the four corners of a bingo card are marked within the first twenty selected elements, a supplemental award of $10 is provided to the player as part of the predetermined game outcome. It should be appreciated that in this embodiment, the player of a gaming device may be provided a supplemental or intermittent award regardless of if the enrolled gaming device's provided bingo card wins or does not win the bingo game as described above.

**[0088]** In another embodiment, one or more of the gaming devices are in communication with a central server or controller for monitoring purposes only. That is, each individual gaming device randomly generates the game outcomes to be provided to the player and the central server or controller monitors the activities and events occurring on the plurality of gaming devices. In one embodiment, the gaming network includes a real-time or on-line accounting and gaming information system operably coupled to the central server or controller. The accounting and gaming information system of this embodiment includes a player database for storing player profiles, a player tracking module for tracking players and a credit system for providing automated casino transactions.

**[0089]** In one embodiment, the gaming device disclosed herein is associated with or otherwise integrated with one or more player tracking systems. Player tracking systems enable gaming establishments to recognize the value of customer

loyalty through identifying frequent customers and rewarding them for their patronage. In one embodiment, the gaming device and/or player tracking system tracks any players gaming activity at the gaming device. In one such embodiment, the gaming device includes at least one card reader **38** in communication with the processor. In this embodiment, a player is issued a player identification card which has an encoded player identification number that uniquely identifies the player. When a player inserts their playing tracking card into the card reader to begin a gaming session, the card reader reads the player identification number off the player tracking card to identify the player. The gaming device and/or associated player tracking system timely tracks any suitable information or data relating to the identified player's gaming session. Directly or via the central controller, the gaming device processor communicates such information to the player tracking system. The gaming device and/or associated player tracking system also timely tracks when a player removes their player tracking card when concluding play for that gaming session. In another embodiment, rather than requiring a player to insert a player tracking card, the gaming device utilizes one or more portable devices carried by a player, such as a cell phone, a radio frequency identification tag or any other suitable wireless device to track when a player begins and ends a gaming session. In another embodiment, the gaming device utilizes any suitable biometric technology or ticket technology to track when a player begins and ends a gaming session.

**[0090]** During one or more gaming sessions, the gaming device and/or player tracking system tracks any suitable information or data, such as any amounts wagered, average wager amounts and/or the time these wagers are placed. In different embodiments, for one or more players, the player tracking system includes the player's account number, the player's card number, the player's first name, the player's surname, the player's preferred name, the player's player tracking ranking, any promotion status associated with the player's player tracking card, the player's address, the player's birthday, the player's anniversary, the player's recent gaming sessions, or any other suitable data. In one embodiment, such tracked information and/or any suitable feature associated with the player tracking system is displayed on a player tracking display **40**. In another embodiment, such tracked information and/or any suitable feature associated with the player tracking system is displayed via one or more service windows (not shown) which are displayed on the central display device and/or the upper display device.

**[0091]** In one embodiment, a plurality of the gaming devices are capable of being connected together through a data network. In one embodiment, the data network is a local area network (LAN), in which one or more of the gaming devices are substantially proximate to each other and an on-site central server or controller as in, for example, a gaming establishment or a portion of a gaming establishment. In another embodiment, the data network is a wide area network (WAN) in which one or more of the gaming devices are in communication with at least one off-site central server or controller. In this embodiment, the plurality of gaming devices may be located in a different part of the gaming establishment or within a different gaming establishment than the off-site central server or controller. Thus, the WAN may include an off-site central server or controller and an off-site gaming device located within gaming establishments in the same geographic area, such as a city or state. The WAN gaming system may be substantially identical to the LAN gaming system described above, although the number of gaming devices in each system may vary relative to each other.

**[0092]** In another embodiment, the gaming system disclosed herein is implemented via a data network, such as an internet or intranet. In one such embodiment, the operation of a gaming device can be viewed at the gaming device with at least one internet browser. In another such embodiment, the operation of a gaming device can be viewed at a location remote from the gaming device or gaming establishment utilizing at least one internet browser. In these embodiments, operation of the gaming device may be accomplished with only a connection to the central server or controller (i.e., an internet/intranet server) through a conventional phone or other data transmission line, digital subscriber line (DSL), T-1 line, coaxial cable, fiber optic cable, or other suitable connection. Accordingly, players may access an internet game page from any location where an internet connection and computer, or other internet facilitator is available. It should be appreciated that the expansion in the number of computers and number and speed of internet connections in recent years increases opportunities for players to play from an ever-increasing number of remote sites. It should be further appreciated that enhanced bandwidth of digital wireless communications may render such technology suitable for some or all communications, particularly if such communications are encrypted. Higher data transmission speeds may be useful for enhancing the sophistication and response of the display and interaction with the player.

**[0093]** In one embodiment, the central server (i.e., an internet/intranet server) maintains at least one dedicated gaming site which is associated with one or more progressive awards and one or more supplemental funds as disclosed herein. In operation, a player logs onto the dedicated gaming site and the central server enables the player to wager on and participate in one or more online games at this gaming site. In this embodiment, upon the occurrence of any progressive award increase event, the central server adds a value or amount (from the maintained supplemental fund) to one or more of the progressive awards associated with the dedicated gaming site.

**[0094]** In one embodiment, to regulate and monitor the play of games over the internet, player's identifications are verified through credit card authentication. Through this authentication, the gaming system verifies the player, the player's age, the player's location and any other suitable information associated with the player. In one such embodiment, the gaming system utilizes the verified location information to monitor and ensure that the player in a certain location follows any applicable gaming regulations associated with that location. In another such embodiment, the gaming system utilizes the verified location information to set up different progressive awards for different regions. In this embodiment, different progressive awards are allotted per region.

**[0095]** In another embodiment including game play over the internet, the gaming system stores information about one or more players. In this embodiment, after a player has enrolled or identified themselves with the gaming system (via the dedicated gaming site), the gaming system stores their information, such as credit card information, preferred options, player number, name, or any other information in a database. In one such embodiment, the gaming system enables the player to set and store one or more gaming

options, such as jackpot betting, side wagering, and preferred games, associated with the dedicated gaming site.

**[0096]** As mentioned above, in one embodiment, the present disclosure may be employed in a server based gaming system. In one such embodiment, as described above, one or more gaming devices are in communication with a central server or controller. The central server or controller may be any suitable server or computing device which includes at least one processor and a memory or storage device. In alternative embodiments, the central server is a progressive controller or another gaming machine in the gaming system. In one embodiment, the memory device of the central server stores different game programs and instructions, executable by a gaming device processor, to control the gaming device. Each executable game program represents a different game or type of game which may be played on one or more of the gaming devices in the gaming system. Such different games may include the same or substantially the same game play with different pay tables. In different embodiments, the executable game program is for a primary game, a secondary game or both. In another embodiment, the game program may be executable as a secondary game to be played simultaneous with the play of a primary game (which may be downloaded to or fixed on the gaming device) or vice versa.

**[0097]** In this embodiment, each gaming device at least includes one or more display devices and/or one or more input devices for interaction with a player. A local processor, such as the above-described gaming device processor or a processor of a local server, is operable with the display device(s) and/or the input device(s) of one or more of the gaming devices.

**[0098]** In operation, the central controller is operable to communicate one or more of the stored game programs to at least one local processor. In different embodiments, the stored game programs are communicated or delivered by embedding the communicated game program in a device or a component (e.g., a microchip to be inserted in a gaming device), writing the game program on a disc or other media, downloading or streaming the game program over a dedicated data network, internet or a telephone line. After the stored game programs are communicated from the central server, the local processor executes the communicated program to facilitate play of the communicated program by a player through the display device(s) and/or input device(s) of the gaming device. That is, when a game program is communicated to a local processor, the local processor changes the game or type of game played at the gaming device.

**[0099]** In another embodiment, a plurality of players at a plurality of linked gaming devices in a gaming system participate in a group gaming environment. In one embodiment, a plurality of players at a plurality of linked gaming devices work in conjunction with one another, such as playing together as a team or group, to win one or more awards. In one such embodiment, any award won by the group is shared, either equally or based on any suitable criteria, amongst the different players of the group. In another embodiment, a plurality of players at a plurality of linked gaming devices compete against one another for one or more awards. In one such embodiment, a plurality of players at a plurality of linked gaming devices participate in a gaming tournament for one or more awards. In another embodiment, a plurality of players at a plurality of linked gaming devices play for one or more awards wherein an outcome generated by one gaming device affects the outcomes generated by one or more linked gaming devices.

Cumulative Award

**[0100]** Referring now to FIG. **3**, one embodiment of the gaming system of the present disclosure operates according to sequence **100**. In one embodiment, the process **100** is embodied in one or more software programs stored in one or more memories executable by one or more processors, such as the controller of the gaming system.

**[0101]** As indicated by block **102**, the processor of each of a plurality of gaming devices of the gaming system provides a primary game after a player places a wager. The controller maintains a plurality source awards and a cumulative award, as indicated by block **104**. The controller monitors the primary game outcomes generated for the plays of the primary games, as indicated by block **106**.

**[0102]** As seen in diamond **108**, the controller determines whether any source award triggering events occur. In one embodiment, the source award triggering events are based on symbol-driven events, as such one or more generations of a designated symbol or symbol combination in the primary games of the gaming devices of the gaming system.

**[0103]** If, at diamond **108**, the controller determines that no source award triggering events have occurred, the controller continues causing the gaming devices of the gaming system to display plays of the primary games, as indicated by block **102**. If the controller determines that a source award triggering event has occurred, the controller determines which of the plurality of source awards is triggered, as indicated by block **110**. As seen in block **112**, the controller provides a value of the triggered source award to a player. Additionally, the controller adds an amount based on the provided source award value to the cumulative award, thereby increasing the value of the cumulative award.

**[0104]** At diamond **114**, the controller determines whether a cumulative award triggering event occurs. If the cumulative award triggering event has not occurred, the controller continues causing the gaming devices of the gaming system to display plays of the primary games, as indicated by block **102**. If the cumulative award triggering event occurs, the controller provides the cumulative award to one or more players, as indicated by block **118**. After the cumulative award is provided to one or more players, the cumulative award is reset to an initial value, as indicated by block **120**. The process **100** repeats itself, with the cumulative award incrementing based on source award values provided to the players over multiple plays of the primary games.

**[0105]** Thus, in one embodiment, the present disclosure provides a gaming system having a multiple bonus award structure, which enables players to play for a plurality of awards in addition to any awards resulting from the primary or secondary game play. The plurality of awards of the gaming system includes a plurality of source awards and a cumulative award which grows based on the source awards that have been triggered since the cumulative award was most recently reset to its initial or reset value. The cumulative award grows over multiple plays of the primary games until a triggering event occurs which causes the cumulative award to be provided to one or more of the players.

**[0106]** In one embodiment, the cumulative award triggering event occurs (and, thus, causes the cumulative award to be provided to a player) when a designated quantity of source

awards have been triggered since the cumulative award was most recently reset. In one such embodiment, the cumulative award triggering event occurs when any combination of the source awards have been triggered a designated number of times. In other words, the cumulative award is awarded on the $x^{th}$ source award win. In other embodiments, the cumulative award triggering event occurs when one or more of the source awards have each been hit a designated number of times. In such embodiments, the number of times that each source award must be hit for the cumulative award to be awarded may be any suitable number of times, such as three times for each source award. In various embodiments, the number of times that each source award must be hit is randomly determined, scaled based on the respective values of the source awards, or based on any other predefined criteria. In another embodiment, the cumulative award triggering event occurs when the cumulative award reaches a threshold value.

Progressive Awards

**[0107]** Referring now to FIGS. **4**A and **4**B, in one embodiment, the gaming system maintains a plurality of progressive awards in a multiple-level progressive award ("MLP") configuration and a separate cumulative award. The gaming system enables one or more players to try to win one or more of the progressive awards and the cumulative award over multiple plays of the primary games displayable by the gaming devices of the gaming system.

**[0108]** In one embodiment, the gaming system includes a central controller, central server or remote host, wherein a plurality of gaming devices are in communication with or linked to the central server through a data network or a remote communication link. The linked gaming devices may have the same primary game or two or more different primary games. The central controller may be any suitable server or computing device which includes a processor and a memory or storage device. In alternative embodiments, the central server is another gaming device in the gaming system.

**[0109]** In one embodiment, one, more or each of the plurality of progressive awards and the cumulative award are maintained by the central controller of the gaming system. In another embodiment, one, more or each of the plurality of progressive awards and the cumulative award are maintained by the individual gaming devices. In some embodiments, each individual gaming machine maintains one or more progressive awards of the MLP configuration and the central server simultaneously or substantially simultaneously maintains one or more progressive awards of the MLP configuration. In one such embodiment, the lower valued, more frequently triggered progressive awards of the MLP are maintained by the individual gaming machines and the higher valued, less frequently triggered progressive awards of the MLP are maintained by the central server. It should be appreciated that any suitable configuration of maintaining one, more or each of the plurality of progressive awards and the cumulative award may be implemented in accordance with the gaming system disclosed herein.

**[0110]** In one embodiment, a master host site computer is in communication with or coupled to a plurality of the central servers at a variety of mutually remote gaming sites for providing a multi-site linked progressive automated gaming system. In one embodiment, a master host site computer may serve gaming devices distributed throughout a number of properties at different geographical locations including, for example, different locations within a city or different cities within a state. In one embodiment, the master host site computer is maintained for the overall operation and control of the system. In this embodiment, a master host site computer oversees all or part of the progressive gaming system and is the master for computing all or part of the progressive jackpots. All participating gaming sites report to, and receive information from, the master host site computer. Each central server computer is responsible for all data communication between the gaming device hardware and software and the master host site computer.

**[0111]** Referring now to FIG. **4**A, in one example embodiment, the gaming system maintains a plurality of progressive awards and a separate cumulative award. Each of the progressive awards is associated with a different progressive award level. The progressive awards and the cumulative award of the gaming system are each associated with an initial or start-up value. In FIG. **4**A, at a certain point in time, a first progressive award associated with a first progressive award level **60***a* of the MLP has an initial value of one hundred credits; a second progressive award associated with a second progressive award level **60***b* of the MLP has an initial value of five hundred credits; and a third progressive award associated with a third progressive award level **60***c* of the MLP has an initial value of one thousand credits. At this point in time, the cumulative award **62** has a value of zero. The progressive awards individually increment or accumulate during game play based on different incrementing events until provided to one or more players upon a suitable triggering event.

**[0112]** In one embodiment, the progressive awards of the MLP accumulate based on a small percentage (such as 0.1%) of coin-in or wagered amounts. In one such embodiment, different progressive awards associated with different levels of the MLP increment at different rates. In one embodiment, different percentages of coin-in or wagered amounts fund different progressive awards of the MLP. For example, as illustrated in FIG. **4**A, the first progressive award associated with the first progressive award level **60***a* of the MLP has an increment rate of 0.10%; the second progressive award associated with the second progressive award level **60***b* of the MLP has an increment rate of 0.20%; and the third progressive award associated with the third progressive award level **60***c* of the MLP an increment rate of 0.40%. Thus, in this example, the progressive award associated with the highest progressive award level of the MLP increments at the highest rate and the progressive award associated with the lowest progressive award level of the MLP increments at the lowest rate. Such different starting values coupled with different increment rates provides that, even if a progressive award triggering event occurs infrequently, the gaming system disclosed herein maintains the hierarchy of the plurality of progressive awards of the MLP. In other embodiments, the percentage that goes to each progressive award is equal (such as 0.1% to each of the three progressive award levels of the MLP).

**[0113]** In one embodiment, the percentage of each wagered amount that funds one or more progressive awards is equal for each wagered amount. In another embodiment, the percentages of wagered amounts that fund one or more progressive awards are different for different wager amounts. For example, a wager of one to twenty-five credits may increment a progressive award 0.1% of the wager, a wager of twenty-six to fifty credits may increment a progressive award 0.08% of the wager and a wager of fifty-one to seventy-five credits may increment a progressive award 0.07% of the wager. In another

embodiment, as described in more detail below, at least a fraction of one or more of the progressive awards of the MLP are funded by the gaming establishment, such as a casino, by using a starting value higher than zero to make the progressive awards attractive even after they are reset.

**[0114]** In one embodiment, two or more of the progressive awards of the MLP are funded at different temporal rates. In this embodiment, the different progressive awards are incremented or funded in different increments of time wherein, until the progressive award hits, a set amount is added to the progressive award at each determined time increment. In another embodiment, two or more of the progressive awards may each be incremented or funded based on different incrementing factors or incriminators. In this embodiment, a first progressive award may increment each time a first incrementing factor occurs and a second progressive award may increment each time a second incrementing factor occurs, wherein the first incrementing factor and the second incrementing factor are different. Examples of incrementing factors could be a symbol-driven trigger in the base game, the occurrence of one or more events in a bonus game, the player betting a maximum amount, a percentage of possible gaming devices being actively played or in active status, or any other suitable method for defining an incriminator.

**[0115]** In one embodiment, different gaming devices in the gaming system have different progressive awards of the MLP available to the player. In one such embodiment, different types of gaming devices are associated with different types of progressive awards of the MLP based on the current configuration of the gaming system. In one embodiment, zero, one or more progressive awards of the MLP may be associated with each of the gaming devices in the gaming system while zero, one or more different progressive awards of the MLP may be associated with a plurality of, but not all of the gaming devices in the gaming system.

**[0116]** In one embodiment, one or more of the progressive awards of the MLP are each funded via a side bet or side wager. In this embodiment, a player must place or wager a side bet to be eligible to win the progressive award associated with the side bet. In one embodiment, the player must place the maximum bet and the side bet to be eligible to win one of the progressive awards of the MLP. In another embodiment, if the player places or wagers the required side bet, the player may wager at any credit amount on any payline (i.e., the player need not place the maximum bet and the side bet to be eligible to win one of the progressive awards). In one such embodiment, the greater the player's wager (in addition to the placed side bet), the greater the odds or probability that the player will win one of the progressive awards of the MLP. It should be appreciated that one or more of the progressive awards of the MLP may each be funded, at least in part, based on the wagers placed on the primary games of the gaming devices in the gaming system, via a gaming establishment or via any suitable manner. In one such embodiment, one or more progressive awards of the MLP are funded, at least partially, via an amount provided by one or more marketing and/or advertising departments, such as a casino's marketing department.

**[0117]** In another embodiment, one or more of the progressive awards of the MLP are partially funded via a side-bet or side-wager which the player may make (and which may be tracked via a side-bet meter). In one embodiment, one or more of the progressive awards of the MLP are funded based on player's wagers as described above as well as any side-bets or side-wagers placed.

**[0118]** In one alternative embodiment, a minimum wager level is required for a gaming device to qualify to be selected to obtain one of the progressive awards of the MLP. In one embodiment, this minimum wager level is the maximum wager level for the primary game in the gaming device. In another embodiment, this minimum wager level is placing a wager on all available paylines in a slot primary game or alternatively placing a wager on all available poker hands in a multi-hand poker primary game. In another embodiment, no minimum wager level is required for a gaming device to qualify to be selected to obtain one of the progressive awards of the MLP.

**[0119]** Referring back to FIG. **4**A, the progressive awards **60***a*, **60***b*, and **60***c* are each associated with a progressive award triggering event. In this example embodiment, the progressive award triggering events include one or more game play events. (i.e., based on a displayed event in a play of a primary game of one of the gaming devices in the gaming system). More specifically, the determination of when to provide one or more progressive awards is based on the generation of one or more designated symbols or symbol combinations in plays of the primary games. For example, as seen in FIG. **4**A, the first progressive award **60***a* of the MLP is provided when a designated symbol combination including A-A-A-A-A occurs in a play of the primary game; the second progressive award **60***b* of the MLP is provided when a designated symbol combination including B-B-B-B-B occurs in a play of the primary game; and the third progressive award **60***c* of the MLP is provided when a designated symbol combination including C-C-C-C-C occurs in a play of the primary game.

**[0120]** In one embodiment, an individual gaming device may trigger one or more progressive wins, for example through a game play event or game specific function, such as a symbol-driven trigger. In such an embodiment, the progressive award provided is a direct result of a game outcome generated on one of the gaming devices. That is, providing the progressive award is triggered by an event in or based specifically on one or more plays of any primary game or on one or more of the plays of any secondary game of one or more of the gaming devices in the gaming system. In one embodiment, the central sever determines the symbol combination which will trigger a progressive award for the specific game played. In one embodiment, an individual gaming device determines the symbol combination which will trigger a progressive award for the specific game played and the gaming device communicates such determined symbol combination to the central server. In this embodiment, the gaming device determines the symbol combination based on the central server determined parameters set forth for the specific game played. In these embodiments, the central server displays the determined symbol combination on one or more signs associated with that progressive award.

**[0121]** In one embodiment, the gaming device does not provide any apparent reasons to the player for providing a progressive award, wherein triggering event is not based on any event in any of the plays of any primary games or on any of the plays of any secondary game of the gaming devices in the gaming system. That is, a progressive award is provided to a player without any explanation or alternatively with simple explanations.

**[0122]** In another embodiment, the triggering of one or more of the progressive awards is at least partially based on a game event, such as a symbol-driven trigger, and at least partially based on a non-game play, random event.

**[0123]** In other embodiments, the triggering of one or more of the progressive awards is based on exceeding a certain amount of game play (such as number of games, number of credits, or amount of time), or reaching a specified number of points earned during game play.

**[0124]** In one embodiment, the triggering of one or more of the progressive awards of the MLP is randomly determined, wherein different players are assigned different chances of being awarded a progressive award based on their respective wager levels. For example, if a first player wagered 500 coins and a second player wagered 225 coins and the chance of winning a progressive award was 1/20,000, the first player would have a 2.5% (500/20,000) chance of winning a progressive award while the second player would have a 1.125% (225/20,000) chance of winning a progressive award.

**[0125]** In one embodiment, the triggering of one or more of the progressive awards occurs based on at least one progressive award incrementing to a progressive award hit value. In this embodiment, the gaming system includes one or more progressive awards driven by an amount of wagers placed or a suitable coin-in amount. In one such embodiment, each progressive award is associated with a range of values, wherein a progressive award is triggered when that progressive award increments to a progressive award hit value within the range of values associated with that progressive award. That is, when a progressive award increases to a determined progressive award hit value, a triggering of the progressive award will occur. In different embodiments, the progressive award hit value is predetermined, randomly determined, determined based on the wagers placed in the gaming system, determined based on the status of one or more players (such as determined through a player tracking system), determined based on time, or determined based on any other suitable method. In this embodiment, after the progressive award is provided to a player, the progressive award is reset to an initial or start-up value and starts incrementing from the initial or start-up level.

**[0126]** In one embodiment, one or more progressive awards maintained by the gaming system are each associated with a separate range of values. In this embodiment, a triggering event will occur and one of the progressive awards will be provided to a player of a gaming device in the gaming system when that progressive award increments or increases to a value (i.e., the progressive hit value) within the range of values associated with that progressive award. For example, a first progressive award is associated with a value range of $10 to $100 and a second progressive award is associated with a value range of $100 to $1,000. In this example, a triggering event will occur and the first progressive award will be provided to a player when the value of the first progressive award increments to a first progressive hit value of $54.65. In this example, another triggering event will occur and the second progressive award will be provided to a player when the value of the second progressive award increments to a second progressive hit value of $765.71. It should be appreciated that, in this embodiment, the amount which each progressive award may be incremented to is capped or limited by the highest value in the value range associated with such progressive award. In an alternative embodiment, the controller utilizes an associated coin-in value to determine when the progressive has reached the set value. Such a coin-in value is determined by using the hit value, the percentage applied to the progressive and the wager value.

**[0127]** In operation of one such embodiment, the central server which hosts one of these progressive awards: (1) determines a minimum amount and a maximum amount for the progressive award, (2) provides that the progressive award starts at the minimum, (3) determines an progressive award hit value between the minimum amount and the maximum amount, (4) increments the progressive award with a configured percent of coin-in, and (5) causes a triggering of the bonus event to occur when the progressive award equals the determined progressive award hit value. In this embodiment, the progressive award hit value is determined at random to maintain fairness for the players at the gaming devices in the gaming system, wherein the players are not aware of any determined progressive award hit value.

**[0128]** In different embodiments, the range of values associated with a progressive award is predetermined, randomly determined, determined based on the wagers placed in the gaming system, determined based on the status of one or more players (such as determined through a player tracking system), determined based on time, or determined based on any other suitable method. In one embodiment, a plurality of progressive awards are associated with different value ranges. In another embodiment, each of a plurality of progressive awards are associated with a different value range. In another embodiment, a plurality of progressive awards are associated with the same value range. In another embodiment, the value range associated with a progressive award is based on a player's status (via a player tracking system).

**[0129]** In another embodiment, the triggering of one or more of the progressive awards is based on time. In this embodiment, a time is set for when a progressive award will be awarded. In one embodiment, such a set time is based on historic data. For example, if previous progressive award triggers have occurred after approximately sixty-seven hours, a progressive award may be set to trigger sixty-seven hours from the time at which the previous progressive award was awarded to a player.

**[0130]** In another embodiment, the triggering of one or more of the progressive awards is based on a predefined variable reaching a defined parameter threshold. For example, a progressive award is triggered when the 500th different player has played a gaming device associated with one of the progressive awards (ascertained from a player tracking system). In different embodiments, the predefined parameter thresholds include a length of time, a length of time after a certain dollar amount is hit, a wager level threshold for a specific device (which gaming device is the first to contribute $250,000), a number of gaming devices active, or any other parameter that would define a threshold for triggering a progressive award.

**[0131]** In another embodiment, the triggering of one or more of the progressive awards occurs after a random number of plays in which a progressive award has not been triggered. In another embodiment, the triggering of a progressive award is based upon gaming system operator defined player eligibility parameters stored on a player tracking system (such as via a player tracking card or other suitable manner). In another embodiment, the triggering of a progressive award is based upon gaming system operator defined player eligibility parameters stored on a player tracking system (such as via a player tracking card or other suitable manner).

**[0132]** In another embodiment, the triggering of one or more of the progressive awards includes a system determination which is based on a random selection by the central controller. In one embodiment, the central controller tracks all active gaming devices and the wagers they placed. Each gaming device has its own entry defining its state as either active or inactive and also defining the values of the wagers from that gaming device. In one embodiment, active status means that the gaming device is being actively played by a player and enrolled/inactive status means that the gaming device is not being actively played by a player. The active status requirements can be based on any suitable number of satisfied criteria or defined in any suitable manner by the implementer of the gaming system. For instance, a play of or wager on the primary game of the gaming device within a predetermined period of time may be part of the determination of whether that gaming device is in the active status. Other factors such as: (a) the amount of time between each play of or wager on the primary game of the gaming device; (b) the amount being wagered on the primary game(s); and (c) the number of plays within a period of time, may also or alternatively be part of the determination of whether a gaming device is in the active status; (d) the existence of credits on the gaming device may also or alternatively be part of the determination of whether a gaming device is in the active status. On the other hand, inactive status means that the gaming device is one of the gaming devices in the gaming system, but is not in the active status (i.e., not being actively played by a player according to one or more of the predetermined criteria).

**[0133]** In one embodiment, a central controller and an individual gaming device work in conjunction with each other to determine when to trigger each progressive award. In one embodiment, an individual gaming device may determine when to trigger one or more progressive awards. In another embodiment, an individual gaming device may determine when to trigger at least one progressive award and the central controller determines when to trigger at least one progressive award.

**[0134]** In another embodiment, the central controller determines, in cooperation with the gaming device, when to trigger a progressive award by utilizing one or more random number generators. In this embodiment, the central controller determines when to trigger a progressive award by determining if any numbers allotted to a gaming device match a randomly selected number. In one such embodiment, upon or prior to each play of each gaming device, a random number is selected from a range of numbers and during each primary game, the gaming device allocates the first N numbers in the range, where N is the number of credits bet by the player in that primary game. At the end of the primary game, the randomly selected number is compared with the numbers allocated to the player and if a match occurs, that particular gaming device triggers a progressive award.

**[0135]** It should be appreciated that any suitable manner of triggering one or more of the progressive awards may be implemented with the gaming system disclosed herein.

**[0136]** Referring now to FIG. **4**B, another embodiment of the gaming system of the present disclosure operates according to process **200**. In one embodiment, the process **200** is embodied in one or more software programs stored in one or more memories executable by one or more processors such as the controller of the gaming system.

**[0137]** As indicated by block **202**, the controller of the gaming system causes each of a plurality of gaming devices of the gaming system to display a primary game after a player places a wager. The controller maintains a plurality of progressive awards and a cumulative award, as indicated by block **204**. Each of the progressive awards has an initial or start-up value and is associated with a designated triggering event, such as in FIG. **4**A.

**[0138]** As indicated by block **206**, as the players play the primary games of the gaming devices, the central controller increments the progressive awards based on wagers placed on plays of the primary games of the gaming devices.

**[0139]** The controller monitors the primary game outcomes generated for the plays of the primary games, as indicated by block **208**. As indicated by diamond **210**, the controller determines whether any progressive award triggering events occur.

**[0140]** If no progressive award triggering event occurs, the controller continues causing the gaming devices of the gaming system to display primary game plays, and the progressive awards continue to increment based on wagers placed on primary game plays.

**[0141]** If, at diamond **210**, the controller determines that a progressive award triggering event occurs, the controller determines which of the progressive awards is triggered, as indicated by block **212**. In one embodiment, each of the progressive awards is associated with a separate triggering event. In various different embodiments, a plurality or each of the progressive awards may be triggered by the same or different types of triggering events.

**[0142]** As indicated by block **214**, the controller causes a value of the triggered progressive award to be provided to a player. Additionally, an amount based on the value of the provided progressive award is added to the cumulative award, thus increasing the cumulative award. It should be appreciated that, when one of the progressive awards is provided to a player, the remaining progressive awards of the gaming system continue to increment based on subsequent game play until subsequently triggered.

**[0143]** In one embodiment, each time one of the progressive awards of the MLP configuration is triggered, the amount added to the cumulative award is equal to the current value of the triggered progressive award (i.e., the value of the progressive at the point in time at which it is triggered). Thus, in such an embodiment, the cumulative award is a sum of any progressives awards which were previously triggered after the cumulative award was most recently reset. In other embodiments, each time one of the progressive awards of the MLP configuration is triggered, the amount added to the cumulative award may be any suitable amount based on the value of the triggered progressive award, such as a percentage of that progressive award value. In various embodiments, the percentage added to the cumulative award is tiered based on the value and/or level of the progressive award.

**[0144]** Referring back to FIG. **4**B, as indicated by block **216**, after the triggered progressive award is provided to the player, that progressive award is reset to its initial or start-up value and is again increased by one or more wagers in subsequent game play.

**[0145]** As indicated by block **218**, the controller increments a tracked quantity of triggered progressive awards. More particularly, the controller keeps track of how many progressive wins have occurred since the last time the cumulative award was reset to its initial value.

**[0146]** Referring back to FIG. **4**A, the cumulative award in this example is associated with a triggering event which includes a tracked quantity of triggered progressive awards reaching a designated level. In other words, the event that causes the cumulative award to be provided to one or more players (i.e., the cumulative award triggering event) occurs when a designated quantity of the progressive awards have been hit since the last time the cumulative award was reset to its initial value.

**[0147]** Accordingly, at diamond **220**, the controller determines whether the tracked quantity of triggered progressive awards reaches the designated level. If the tracked quantity of triggered progressive awards does not reach the designated level, the controller continues causing the gaming devices of the gaming system to display plays of the primary games, as indicated by block **102**.

**[0148]** If the tracked quantity of triggered progressive awards reaches the designated level, the cumulative award triggering event occurs. Thus, the controller causes the cumulative award to be provided to one or more players, as indicated by block **222**.

**[0149]** In one embodiment, the cumulative award triggering event occurs when any combination of the progressive awards have been hit a designated number of times, such as ten times. In another embodiment, the triggering event or condition occurs when one or more of the progressive awards have each been hit a designated number of times. In one embodiment, the number of times is set by the game designer. In various embodiments, the number of times a progressive award must be hit could be X times total, the number of times that each progressive award must be hit is scaled, or the number of times is based on any predefined criteria.

**[0150]** In one embodiment, the cumulative award triggering event occurs when any combination of the progressive awards have been hit x times. That is, the cumulative award is awarded on the $x^{th}$ progressive hit. In one example embodiment, an MLP includes a first progressive award, a second progressive award and a third progressive award, having values of $50, $150, and $500, respectively, at a first point in time. In this example embodiment, any combination of multi-level progressives must be hit ten times before the cumulative award is awarded. In other words, every $10^{th}$ progressive win causes the cumulative award to be awarded, which is the value of the sum of the last ten progressives won.

**[0151]** In one embodiment, when the cumulative award is hit, the cumulative award is provided to the player that caused the designated number of progressive award wins to be reached. In another embodiment, when the cumulative award is triggered, the cumulative award is split among two or more players. In various embodiments, which player or players of the gaming system are awarded the cumulative award is determined in any suitable manner. In different embodiments, this split is done evenly, is weighted based on play, is based on favoring player's with higher player tracking status, randomly determined, determined based on a player's primary game wager, determined based on a level of a progressive award, determined based on time (such as the time of day) or determined based on any other suitable method or criteria. In other embodiments, the split is controlled such that it only occurs if the value of the cumulative award is at or above a certain value when it is triggered (i.e., to prevent awarding players an insignificant amount, such as $0.90 each.

**[0152]** In one embodiment, to receive the cumulative award, a player must be eligible. In one embodiment, eligibility is determined based on the player wagering within a designated timeframe requirement. In one embodiment, this timeframe is established depending on the type of game played (i.e. different timeframes for poker players and slot players). In one embodiment, when a player is eligible, an indicator or other suitable display communicates this information to the player. Additionally, if a player is ineligible for the cumulative award, the indicator or display communicates this information to the player and displays to the player how they may become eligible for the cumulative award. In different embodiments, eligibility to receive at least part of the cumulative award is based on a generated symbol or symbol combination, based on a random determination by the central controller, based on a random determination at a gaming device, based on one or more side wagers placed, predetermined, randomly determined, determined based on the player's status (such as determined through a player tracking system), determined based on time (such as the time of day) or determined based on any other suitable method or criteria.

**[0153]** In one embodiment, the gaming system maintains a reserve cumulative award pool for funding the cumulative award. In this embodiment, the gaming system designates a portion of each wager placed at each gaming device in the gaming system for incrementing the displayed values of the progressive awards and the reserve cumulative award pool. In one such embodiment, the gaming system allocates a first percentage of the designated portion to incrementing the displayed values of the progressive awards. The gaming system allocates a second percentage of the designated portion to incrementing the reserve cumulative award pool. The amounts being allocated to the reserve cumulative award pool are not displayed to the player, such that the reserve cumulative award pool accumulates or increments "behind the scenes." Thus, in this embodiment, the displayed values of the progressive awards reflect only a fraction of the actual value being accrued to fund the bonus awards of the gaming system. When the cumulative award is triggered, the cumulative award value is funded, at least in part, by the reserve cumulative award pool. For example, for every $1.00 that the gaming system designates for incrementing the progressive awards of the gaming system, the gaming system allocates $0.40 to incrementing one or more of the displayed values of the progressive awards. That is, in this example, the gaming system increments the currently displayed values of the progressive awards by 40% of the amount allocated from each placed wager. The remaining 60% is added to the reserve cumulative award pool. In other embodiments, each time a progressive award is won, the gaming system allocates a first portion of the progressive award to the cumulative award and a second portion of the progressive award to the reserve cumulative award pool. For example, 10% of the progressive award amount is allocated to the cumulative award, and 1% of the progressive award is allocated to the reserve cumulative award pool.

**[0154]** It should be appreciated that the cumulative award of the present disclosure can be added to any gaming system that includes an MLP configuration to add another feature that enhances the enjoyment of the players and increases camaraderie. Players become encouraged and excited when another player triggers one of the progressive awards because the gaming system adds the value of that triggered progressive award to the cumulative award which may subsequently be provided to one or more of the players playing at one or more of the gaming devices in the gaming system.

**[0155]** In one embodiment, the gaming system and method disclosed herein employs one or more displays to provide the players of the gaming devices information about the progressive awards and the cumulative award. This displayed information increases player's awareness of these progressive awards and increases interaction between players of the gaming devices. The display(s) provide any suitable information about the gaming system, gaming devices, and progressive awards, such as which gaming devices are winning or have recently won progressive awards, the current values of the progressive awards, the current value of the cumulative award, when a progressive award is about to be hit, how many progressive awards have been hit since the last time the cumulative award was awarded, etc. For example, the number of times a progressive award must be triggered before awarding the cumulative award is displayed to the players of the gaming devices. This encourages the players to continue playing when the cumulative award gets close to being awarded. That is, if a player knows that the $x^{th}$ progressive win is getting close, the player may be encouraged to continue to play because they player can see that the cumulative award will soon be awarded.

**[0156]** In one embodiment, the central server communicates information to the players via one or more progressive tracking meters on each separate device, on an overhead sign that is common to all gaming devices in the bank and/or on one or more signs which are not associated with any gaming devices in the gaming system (such as signs placed anywhere in the casino). It should be appreciated that such information can be provided to the players through any suitable audio, audio-visual or visual devices.

**[0157]** Referring now to FIGS. **5**A, **5**B, **5**C, **5**D, **5**E, **5**F, **5**G, **5**H, **5**I, and **5**J, one example embodiment of the gaming system of the present disclosure is shown. In the illustrated embodiment, the gaming system maintains a plurality progressive awards in an MLP configuration and a separate cumulative award in addition to the plurality of progressive awards. The players playing at the gaming devices of the gaming system have the opportunity to play for or try to win one or more of the progressive awards and the cumulative award over multiple plays of the primary games of the gaming devices.

**[0158]** The example of FIGS. **5**A to **5**J is described in relation to one gaming device in the gaming system. That is, a display device **16** or **18** of one of the gaming devices in the gaming system is shown. In the example embodiment of FIGS. **5**A to **5**J, a football tailgate theme is employed. The primary game includes a plurality of reels **54**, one or more paylines **52** associated with the reels **54**. The reels **52** include a plurality of symbols, which relate to the football tailgate theme, such as football player symbols, cheerleader symbols, football symbols, goal post symbols, beer symbols, etc. It should be appreciated that any suitable theme can be employed and the symbols can include any suitable character, numeral, indicia or image.

**[0159]** The display device **16** displays a wager meter **72** to indicate a number of monetary units wagered on a play of the primary game at the gaming device. The display device **16** also displays an award meter **70** which indicates any awards provided to the player. The display device **16** further includes a spin reels button **74**, which can be activated by the player to cause the reels to spin for a play of the primary game. The display device **16** also includes a message display **76** for displaying messages regarding game play to the player.

**[0160]** The display device **16** also displays information relating to the progressive awards and the cumulative award maintained by the gaming system. The display device **16** includes a progressive award value meter **78**, which displays the current values of the progressive awards maintained by the gaming system at any given point in time. More specifically, the progressive award value meter **78** displays the current values of a first level progressive award **90***a*, a second level progressive award **90***b*, and a third level progressive award **90***c*. The display device **16** further includes a cumulative award value meter **80**, which shows the player the value of the cumulative award at any given point in time. The display device **16** also includes a progressive award hit meter **82**, which tracks the number of progressive awards that are hit. In keeping with the football tailgate theme of this example embodiment, the cumulative award is called the "Beer Chug Bonus Award," and the a progressive award hit meter **82** is in the form of a beer mug that fills with beer each time a progressive award is triggered. Once the progressive award hit meter **82** reaches a designated level, the gaming system causes the Beer Chug Bonus Award (i.e., the cumulative award) to be awarded to a player playing at one of the gaming devices of the gaming system.

**[0161]** Referring now to FIG. **5**A, the player has just sat down at the gaming device. At this point in time, progressive award value meter **78** shows that the first progressive award **90***a* is currently valued at its initial or start-up value of $50.00; the second progressive award **90***b* is currently valued at its initial or start-up value of one $100.00; and the third progressive award **90***c* is currently valued at its initial or start-up value of $500.00. The cumulative award value meter **80** shows that the value of the Beer Chug Bonus Award is zero. No progressive awards have been hit since the last time the Beer Chug Bonus Award was reset. Accordingly, the progressive award hit meter **82** is at zero. That is, the beer mug representing the progressive award hit meter **82** is empty.

**[0162]** The gaming device displays a message to the player in the message display **76** informing that player that each time one of the progressive awards **90***a*, **90***b*, **90***c* is triggered, the progressive award hit meter **82** will increment. The message displayed in the message display area **76** further indicates that, once five progressive wins have occurred, the value of the Beer Chug Bonus Award will be awarded to a player. The gaming device prompts the player to make a wager to play a first play of the primary game, as indicated by the message in the message display area **76**.

**[0163]** As seen in FIG. **5**B, the player placed a wager of one credit, as indicated by the wager meter **72**. The reels **54** have spun and a plurality of symbols are generated on the reels **54**. A winning symbol combination including three "GO TEAM" symbols is displayed on the payline **52**. The example paytable **300** of FIG. **6** is employed for determining awards in this example. According to paytable **300**, this winning symbol combination is associated with an award of thirty credits. Accordingly, as indicated by the award meter **70**, the gaming device provides the player with thirty credits for the first play of the primary game. It should be appreciated that, in the illustrated example, a credit has a value of one dollar and, thus, the terms are used interchangeably.

**[0164]** In FIG. **5**B, the progressive awards have incremented based on wagers placed by the players of the gaming system. As indicated by the progressive award value meter **78**, the first progressive award **90***a* is currently valued at $53.25; the second progressive award **90***b* is currently valued at $110.

15; and the third progressive award **90***c* is currently valued at $525.00. At this point in time, none of the progressive awards have been triggered. Accordingly, the progressive award hit meter **82** is still at zero (i.e., the beer mug is empty).

**[0165]** As seen in FIG. **5**C, the player has made another wager to play the primary game for a second time. At this point in time, the progressive awards have continued to increment based on wagers placed by the players of the gaming system. As indicated by the progressive award value meter **78**, the first progressive award **90***a* is currently valued at $57.95; the second progressive award **90***b* is currently valued at $125.18; and the third progressive award **90***c* is currently valued at $575.40. The second play of the game results in a symbol combination including four beer symbols displayed on the payline **52**. According to the paytable **300**, this symbol combination is the trigger for the second progressive award **90***b*. The gaming device therefore informs the player that the second progressive award **90***b*, currently valued at $125.18, has been triggered, as indicated by the message display area **76**.

**[0166]** Since the second progressive award **90***b* has been triggered, the current value of the second progressive award **90***b* (i.e., $125.18) is provided to the player. As indicated by the award meter **70**, the player now has a total award in the game of $155.18. Also, an amount equal to the provided progressive award value (i.e., $125.18) is added to the value of the Beer Chug Bonus Award. As indicated by the cumulative award value meter **80**, the Beer Chug Bonus Award is now valued at $125.18. Also, since one of the progressive awards has been triggered, the progressive award hit meter **82** increments by one. That is, the beer mug representing the progressive award hit meter **82** is filled such that it is now one-fifth full. As indicated by the message displayed to the player in the message display area **76**, only four more progressive award wins must occur to trigger the Beer Chug Bonus Award.

**[0167]** Referring now to FIG. **5**D, the player has made another wager to play the primary game for a third time. At this point in time, the first progressive award **90***a* is currently valued at $60.13 and the third progressive award **90***c* is currently valued at $580.95. The second progressive award **90***b* has been reset to its initial value of $100.00.

**[0168]** As seen in FIG. **5**D, the third play of the game results in a symbol combination including four goal post symbols displayed on the payline **52**. According to the paytable of FIG. **6**, this symbol combination is associated with an award of fifty credits. Accordingly, the gaming device provides the player with an award of fifty credits for the third play of the primary game. As indicated by the award meter **70**, the player has a total award in the game of $205.18.

**[0169]** As illustrated in FIG. **5**E, the player has made another wager to play the primary game for a fourth time. At this point in time, the first progressive award **90***a* is currently valued at $50.00; the second progressive award **90***b* is currently valued at $102.50; and the third progressive award **90***c* is currently valued at $585.35. Therefore, it can be inferred that the first progressive award was triggered by another player and subsequently reset to its initial value of $50.00. As indicated by the message displayed in the message display area **76**, the first progressive award **90***a* was triggered by another player when it was valued at $60.13. Accordingly, an amount equal to $60.13 has been added to the value of the Beer Chug Bonus Award. As indicated by the cumulative award value meter **80**, the Beer Chug Bonus Award is now valued at $185.31 (i.e., $125.18 plus $60.13).

**[0170]** Since another progressive award was triggered by another player playing at one of the gaming devices of the gaming system, the progressive award hit meter **82** increments by one. In other words, the beer mug representing the progressive award hit meter **82** fills up by another one-fifth, to reflect that two progressive awards have been hit since the last time the cumulative award was reset to its initial value. As a result of the fourth play of the primary game, the player did not win any primary game award. The gaming device prompts the player to make another wager to play a next play of the primary game.

**[0171]** As illustrated in FIG. **5**F, the player has made another wager to play the primary game for a fifth time. The progressive awards have continued to increment based on wagers placed by the players of the gaming system. As indicated by the progressive award value meter **78**, the first progressive award **90***a* is currently valued at $58.10; the second progressive award **90***b* is currently valued at $105.75; and the third progressive award **90***c* is currently valued at $590.75. The fifth play of the game results in a symbol combination including five beer symbols displayed on the payline **52**. According to the paytable **300**, this symbol combination is the trigger for the third progressive award **90***c*. The gaming device therefore informs the player that the third progressive award **90***c*, currently valued at $590.75, has been triggered, as indicated by the message in the message display area **76**.

**[0172]** Since the third progressive award **90***c* has been triggered by the player, the current value of the third progressive award **90***c* (i.e., $590.75) is provided to the player. As indicated by the award meter **70**, the player now has a total award in the game of $795.93. Also, an amount equal to the provided progressive award value (i.e., $590.75) is added to the value of the Beer Chug Bonus Award. As indicated by the cumulative award value meter **80**, the Beer Chug Bonus Award is now valued at $776.06. Also, since one of the progressive awards has been triggered, the progressive award hit meter **82** increments by one. That is, the beer mug representing the progressive award hit meter **82** is filled such that it is now three-fifths full. As indicated by the message in the message display area **76**, only two more progressive award wins must occur to trigger the Beer Chug Bonus Award. The gaming device prompts the player to make another wager to play the primary game.

**[0173]** It should be appreciated that, since the Beer Chug Bonus Award is only two progressive wins away from being awarded to a player, this encourages the players of the gaming system to continue playing the primary games of their gaming devices.

**[0174]** As seen in FIG. **5**G, the player has placed another wager to play another play of the primary game. At this point in time, the first progressive award **90***a* is currently valued at $60.52; the second progressive award **90***b* is currently valued at $100.00; and the third progressive award **90***c* is currently valued at $500.00. The third progressive award **90***c* has been reset to its initial value because the player of this gaming device won the third progressive award in the last play of the game. The second progressive award **90***b* also appears to have been reset to its initial value, which indicates that another player playing at one of the gaming devices of the gaming system triggered the second progressive award **90***b*. As indicated by the message displayed in the message display area **76**, the second progressive award **90***a* was triggered when it was valued at $105.75. Accordingly, an amount equal to $105.75 has been added to the value of the Beer Chug Bonus

Award. As indicated by the cumulative award value meter **80**, the Beer Chug Bonus Award is now valued at $881.81 (i.e., $776.06 plus $105.75). Also, since another progressive award has been triggered, the progressive award hit meter **82** increments by one. That is, the beer mug representing the progressive award hit meter **82** is filled such that it is now four-fifths full. The message displayed in the message display area **76** informs the player that only one more progressive award needs to be hit to trigger the Beer Chug Bonus Award.

**[0175]** As seen in FIG. **5**G, as a result of this play of the primary game, a symbol combination including three football symbols is displayed on the payline **52**. According to the paytable **300**, this symbol combination is associated with an award of forty credits. The award of forty credits is added to the player's total award and, therefore, the award meter **70** shows the number $835.93.

**[0176]** In FIG. **5**H, the player plays another play of the primary game. At this point in time, the first progressive award **90***a* is currently valued at $65.80; the second progressive award **90***b* is currently valued at $108.00; and the third progressive award **90***c* is currently valued at $509.12. The player did not obtain any winning symbol combinations as a result of this play of the game. The message displayed in the message display area **76** reminds the player that only one more progressive award needs to be hit to trigger the Beer Chug Bonus Award.

**[0177]** As seen in FIG. **5**I, the player makes a wager to play another play of the primary game. At this point, the first progressive award **90***a* is currently valued at $67.50; the second progressive award **90***b* is currently valued at $112.15; and the third progressive award **90***c* is currently valued at $514.30. This play of the game results in a symbol combination including three beer symbols displayed on the payline **52**. According to the paytable **300**, this symbol combination is the trigger for the first progressive award **90***a*. The gaming device therefore informs the player that the first progressive award **90***a*, currently valued at $67.50, has been triggered, as indicated by the message in the message display area **76**.

**[0178]** Since the first progressive award **90***a* has been triggered by the player, the current value of the first progressive award **90***a* (i.e., $67.50) is provided to the player. As indicated by the award meter **70**, the player now has a total award in the game of $903.43. Also, an amount equal to the provided value of the first progressive award **90***a* (i.e., $67.50) is added to the value of the Beer Chug Bonus Award. As indicated by the cumulative award value meter **80**, the Beer Chug Bonus Award is now valued at $949.31. Also, since another one of the progressive awards has been triggered, the progressive award hit meter **82** increments by one. That is, the beer mug representing the progressive award hit meter **82** is filled such that it is now completely full. As indicated by the message displayed to the player in the message display area **76**, the Beer Chug Bonus Award has been triggered because five progressive wins have occurred. The gaming device instructs the player to look up to see what happens.

**[0179]** As seen in FIG. **5**J, the gaming device displays an animation **84** of a sports fan image drinking or chugging the contents of the beer mug. In various embodiments, the gaming device provides suitable sounds, such as "GULP" or "AHHH!", coupled with the animation of the sports fan chugging the beer. As the sports fan chugs the beer, the value of the Beer Chug Bonus Award is added to the player's total award for the gaming session. As indicated by the award meter **70**, the player has a total award of $1852.74 after the player is provided with the value of the Beer Chug Bonus Award.

**[0180]** It should be understood that various changes and modifications to the presently preferred embodiments described herein will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Such changes and modifications can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention and without diminishing its intended advantages. It is therefore intended that such changes and modifications be covered by the appended claims.

The invention is claimed as follows:

**1**. A gaming system comprising:
a controller; and
a plurality of gaming devices configured to communicate with the controller, each of the gaming devices including at least one display device operable to display a primary game, the primary game configured to operate upon a wager by a player;
wherein the controller is programmed to operate with the plurality of gaming devices to:
(a) maintain a plurality of source awards, each of said source awards having a different value;
(b) maintain a cumulative award;
(c) for a plurality of plays of the primary games, for each occurrence of at least one designated outcome:
(i) cause one of the gaming devices to provide at least a portion of one of said source awards to the player of said gaming device,
(ii) increment the cumulative award by an amount based on the provided source award, and
(iii) increment a tracked quantity of provided source awards; and
(d) when the tracked quantity of provided source awards reaches a designated quantity, cause at least one gaming device to provide the cumulative award to the player of said at least one gaming device.

**2**. The gaming system of claim **1**, wherein the source awards are progressive awards.

**3**. The gaming system of claim **2**, wherein the progressive awards are funded based, at least in part, on wagers placed on the primary games of the gaming devices.

**4**. The gaming system of claim **1**, wherein said at least one designated outcome occurs in the plays of the primary games.

**5**. The gaming system of claim **1**, wherein which of the source awards is provided to the player of said gaming device is based on which of said at least one designated outcome occurs.

**6**. The gaming system of claim **1**, wherein each of the source awards is associated with a different designated outcome.

**7**. The gaming system of claim **1**, wherein, each time the cumulative award is incremented, the cumulative award is incremented by an amount which is equal to a value of the provided source award.

**8**. A gaming system comprising:
a controller; and
a plurality of gaming devices configured to communicate with the controller, each of the gaming devices including at least one display device operable to display a primary game, the primary game configured to operate upon a wager by a player;
wherein the controller is programmed to operate with the plurality of gaming devices to:

(a) maintain a plurality of source awards, each of said source awards having a different value;

(b) maintain a cumulative award, wherein at a first point in time said cumulative award has an initial reset value;

(c) for a plurality of plays of the primary games, for each occurrence of at least one designated outcome;

(i) cause one of the gaming devices to provide at least a portion of one of the source awards to the player of said at least one gaming device, and

(ii) increment the cumulative award by an amount based on the provided source award; and

(d) upon a cumulative award triggering event, cause at least one gaming device to provide the cumulative award to the player of said at least one gaming device, wherein a value of the provided cumulative award is based, at least in part, on each of the provided source awards.

**9**. The gaming system of claim **8**, wherein the source awards are progressive awards.

**10**. The gaming system of claim **9**, wherein the progressive awards are funded based, at least in part, on wagers placed on the primary games of the gaming devices.

**11**. The gaming system of claim **8**, wherein said at least one designated outcome occurs in the plays of the primary games.

**12**. The gaming system of claim **8**, wherein which of the source awards is provided to the player of said gaming device is based on which of said at least one designated outcome occurs.

**13**. The gaming system of claim **8**, wherein each of the source awards is associated with a different designated outcome.

**14**. The gaming system of claim **8**, wherein, each time the cumulative award is incremented, the cumulative award is incremented by an amount which is equal to a value of the provided source award.

**15**. The gaming system of claim **8**, wherein the controller is configured, for each of the source awards, to track a quantity of times said source award is provided.

**16**. The gaming system of claim **15**, wherein the cumulative award triggering event occurs when any combination of the source awards have been provided a designated quantity of times.

**17**. The gaming system of claim **15**, wherein the cumulative award triggering event occurs when each of said source awards has been provided a designated number of times.

**18**. The gaming system of claim **8**, wherein, after said cumulative award is provided to the player of said at least one gaming device, the cumulative award is reset to the default value.

**19**. A gaming system comprising:

a controller; and

a plurality of gaming devices configured to communicate with the controller, each of the gaming devices including at least one display device operable to display a primary game, the primary game configured to operate upon a wager by a player;

wherein the controller is programmed to operate with the plurality of gaming devices to:

(a) maintain a plurality of source awards, each of said source awards having a different value;

(b) maintain a cumulative award;

(c) provide one or more of the plurality of source awards a plurality of times over a plurality of plays of the primary games;

(d) each time a source award is provided, increment the cumulative award by an amount based on the provided source award; and

(e) when a designated number of source awards have been provided, cause at least one gaming device to provide the cumulative award to the player of said at least one gaming device.

**20**. The gaming system of claim **19**, wherein the source awards are progressive awards.

**21**. The gaming system of claim **20**, wherein the progressive awards are funded based, at least in part, on wagers placed on the primary games of the gaming devices.

**22**. A gaming system comprising:

a controller; and

a plurality of gaming devices configured to communicate with the controller, each of the gaming devices including at least one display device operable to display a primary game, the primary game configured to operate upon a wager by a player;

wherein the controller is programmed to operate with the plurality of gaming devices for a plurality of plays of the primary games to:

(a) maintain a plurality of progressive awards levels, each of said progressive award levels associated with a progressive award value;

(b) maintain a cumulative award;

(c) for each of said plurality of plays of the primary games:

(i) generate an outcome for said play of the primary game, and

(ii) if the generated outcome includes at least one designated outcome,

(A) increment an accumulated quantity of said designated outcomes,

(B) provide at least a portion of one of the progressive award values associated with one of the progressive award levels to the player of said gaming device, and

(C) add an amount based on the provided progressive award value to the cumulative award; and

(d) when the accumulated quantity of said designated outcomes reaches a designated quantity, provide the cumulative award to at least one of the players of said gaming devices.

**23**. The gaming system of claim **22**, wherein the progressive award values are funded based, at least in part, on wagers placed on the primary games of the gaming devices.

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