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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: AMUSEMENT DEVICES AND GAMES INVOLVING HEAD TO HEAD PLAY

(57) Abstract: Various methods and apparatus related to gaming are described. Some embodiments relate to a multi-tiered game involving multiple participants. Some embodiments relate to players establishing gaming elements based on desired criteria. Other embodiments are described.

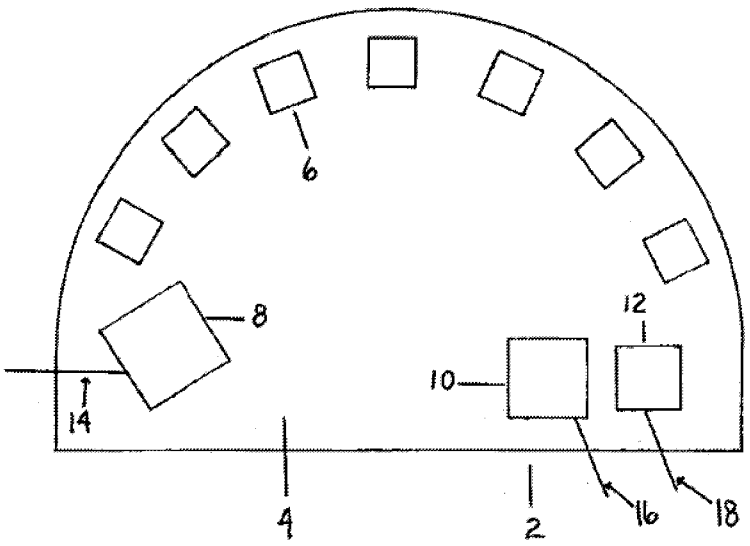

FIGURE 1

WO 2012/158999 A1

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AMUSEMENT DEVICES AND GAMES INVOLVING HEAD TO HEAD PLAY

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[001] FIG. 1 shows a block diagram of components for a hand-reading system, according to some embodiments;

[002] FIG. 2 shows an apparatus for playing a game, according to some embodiments;

[003] FIG. 3 shows an example method according to some embodiments; and

[004] FIG. 4 shows an example method according to some embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[005] Devices that are described as in communication with each other need not be in continuous communication with each other, unless expressly specified otherwise. On the contrary, such devices need only transmit to each other as necessary or desirable, and may actually refrain from exchanging data most of the time. For example, a machine in communication with another machine via the Internet may not transmit data to the other machine for long period of time (e.g. weeks at a time). In addition, devices that are in communication with each other may communicate directly or indirectly through one or more intermediaries.

[006] A description of an embodiment with several components or features does not imply that all or even any of such components / features are required. On the contrary, a variety of optional components are described to illustrate the wide variety of possible embodiments of the present invention(s). Unless otherwise specified explicitly, no component / feature is essential or required.

[007] Although process steps, algorithms or the like may be described or claimed in a particular sequential order, such processes may be configured to work in different orders. In other words, any sequence or order of steps that may be explicitly described or claimed does not necessarily indicate a requirement that the steps be performed in that order. The steps of processes described herein may be performed in any order possible. Further, some steps may be performed simultaneously despite being described or implied as occurring non-simultaneously (e.g., because one step is described after the other step). Moreover, the illustration of a process by its depiction in a drawing does not imply that the illustrated process is exclusive of other variations and modifications thereto, does not imply that the illustrated process or any of its steps are necessary to the invention(s), and does not imply that the illustrated process is preferred.

[008] Although a process may be described as including a plurality of steps, that does not imply that all or any of the steps are preferred, essential or required. Various other

embodiments within the scope of the described invention(s) include other processes that omit some or all of the described steps. Unless otherwise specified explicitly, no step is essential or required.

[009] Although a process may be described singly or without reference to other products or methods, in an embodiment the process may interact with other products or methods. For example, such interaction may include linking one business model to another business model. Such interaction may be provided to enhance the flexibility or desirability of the process.

[0010] Although a product may be described as including a plurality of components, aspects, qualities, characteristics and / or features, that does not indicate that any or all of the plurality are preferred, essential or required. Various other embodiments within the scope of the described invention(s) include other products that omit some or all of the described plurality.

[0011] An enumerated list of items (which may or may not be numbered) does not imply that any or all of the items are mutually exclusive, unless expressly specified otherwise. Likewise, an enumerated list of items (which may or may not be numbered) does not imply that any or all of the items are comprehensive of any category, unless expressly specified otherwise. For example, the enumerated list "a computer, a laptop, a PDA" does not imply that any or all of the three items of that list are mutually exclusive and does not imply that any or all of the three items of that list are comprehensive of any category.

[0012] An enumerated list of items (which may or may not be numbered) does not imply that any or all of the items are equivalent to each other or readily substituted for each other.

[0013] All embodiments are illustrative, and do not imply that the invention or any embodiments were made or performed, as the case may be.

[0014] It will be readily apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art that the various processes described herein may be implemented by, e.g., appropriately programmed general purpose computers, special purpose computers and computing devices. Typically a processor (e.g., one or more microprocessors, one or more microcontrollers, one or more digital signal processors) will receive instructions (e.g., from a memory or like device), and execute those instructions, thereby performing one or more processes defined by those instructions. Instructions may be embodied in, e.g., one or more computer programs, one or more scripts.

[0015] A "processor" means one or more microprocessors, central processing units (CPUs), computing devices, microcontrollers, digital signal processors, or like devices or any combination thereof, regardless of the architecture (e.g., chip-level multiprocessing / multi-

core, RISC, CISC, Microprocessor without Interlocked Pipeline Stages, pipelining configuration, simultaneous multithreading).

[0016] Thus a description of a process is likewise a description of an apparatus for performing the process. The apparatus that performs the process can include, e.g., a processor and those input devices and output devices that are appropriate to perform the process.

[0017] Further, programs that implement such methods (as well as other types of data) may be stored and transmitted using a variety of media (e.g., computer readable media) in a number of manners. In some embodiments, hard-wired circuitry or custom hardware may be used in place of, or in combination with, some or all of the software instructions that can implement the processes of various embodiments. Thus, various combinations of hardware and software may be used instead of software only.

[0018] The term "computer-readable medium" refers to any medium, a plurality of the same, or a combination of different media, that participate in providing data (e.g., instructions, data structures) which may be read by a computer, a processor or a like device. Such a medium may take many forms, including but not limited to, non-volatile media, volatile media, and transmission media. Non-volatile media include, for example, optical or magnetic disks and other persistent memory. Volatile media include dynamic random access memory (DRAM), which typically constitutes the main memory. Transmission media include coaxial cables, copper wire and fiber optics, including the wires that comprise a system bus coupled to the processor. Transmission media may include or convey acoustic waves, light waves and electromagnetic emissions, such as those generated during radio frequency (RF) and infrared (IR) data communications. Common forms of computer-readable media include, for example, a floppy disk, a flexible disk, hard disk, magnetic tape, any other magnetic medium, a CD-ROM, DVD, any other optical medium, punch cards, paper tape, any other physical medium with patterns of holes, a RAM, a PROM, an EPROM, a FLASH-EEPROM, any other memory chip or cartridge, a carrier wave as described hereinafter, or any other medium from which a computer can read.

[0019] Various forms of computer readable media may be involved in carrying data (e.g. sequences of instructions) to a processor. For example, data may be (i) delivered from RAM to a processor; (ii) carried over a wireless transmission medium; (iii) formatted and / or transmitted according to numerous formats, standards or protocols, such as Ethernet (or IEEE 802.3), SAP, ATP, Bluetooth□, and TCP/IP, TDMA, CDMA, and 3G; and / or (iv) encrypted to ensure privacy or prevent fraud in any of a variety of ways well known in the art.

[0020] Thus a description of a process is likewise a description of a computer-readable medium storing a program for performing the process. The computer-readable medium can store (in any appropriate format) those program elements which are appropriate to perform the method.

[0021] Just as the description of various steps in a process does not indicate that all the described steps are required, embodiments of an apparatus include a computer / computing device operable to perform some (but not necessarily all) of the described process.

[0022] Likewise, just as the description of various steps in a process does not indicate that all the described steps are required, embodiments of a computer-readable medium storing a program or data structure include a computer-readable medium storing a program that, when executed, can cause a processor to perform some (but not necessarily all) of the described process.

[0023] Where databases are described, it will be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art that (i) alternative database structures to those described may be readily employed, and (ii) other memory structures besides databases may be readily employed. Any illustrations or descriptions of any sample databases presented herein are illustrative arrangements for stored representations of information. Any number of other arrangements may be employed besides those suggested by, e.g., tables illustrated in drawings or elsewhere. Similarly, any illustrated entries of the databases represent exemplary information only; one of ordinary skill in the art will understand that the number and content of the entries can be different from those described herein. Further, despite any depiction of the databases as tables, other formats (including relational databases, object-based models and / or distributed databases) could be used to store and manipulate the data types described herein. Likewise, object methods or behaviors of a database can be used to implement various processes, such as the described herein. In addition, the databases may, in a known manner, be stored locally or remotely from a device which accesses data in such a database.

[0024] Various embodiments can be configured to work in a network environment including a computer that is in communication (e.g., via a communications network) with one or more devices. The computer may communicate with the devices directly or indirectly, via any wired or wireless medium (e.g. the Internet, LAN, WAN or Ethernet, Token Ring, a telephone line, a cable line, a radio channel, an optical communications line, commercial on-line service providers, bulletin board systems, a satellite communications link, a combination of any of the above). Each of the devices may themselves comprise computers or other computing devices, such as those based on the Intel® Pentium® or Centrino™ processor,

that are adapted to communicate with the computer. Any number and type of devices may be in communication with the computer.

[0025] In an embodiment, a server computer or centralized authority may not be necessary or desirable. For example, the present invention may, in an embodiment, be practiced on one or more devices without a central authority. In such an embodiment, any functions described herein as performed by the server computer or data described as stored on the server computer may instead be performed by or stored on one or more such devices.

[0026] Where a process is described, in an embodiment the process may operate without any user intervention. In another embodiment, the process includes some human intervention (e.g., a step is performed by or with the assistance of a human).

XXI. Example Embodiments

[0027] Some embodiments may include play of a game by one or more players against one or more other players and/or one or more house opponents (e.g., a computer opponent, a dealer, etc.) Such a game may be part of a competition and/or tiered game. Such a competition and/or tiered game may be continuous and/or ongoing and include players winning the competition and/or tiered game before other players even start. In some embodiments, a first player may play a card game against a second player. Such a game may include a poker game and/or any other card game and/or non-card game (e.g., a sports game, a video game, a casino game, a board game, and so on). In some embodiments that may include a poker game, play of the poker game may include play of a Texas hold 'em game, a stud game, a draw game, and/or any variation of poker desired.

[0028] In some embodiments, play of the game may include playing the game until any desired victory and/or loss condition occurs. For example, play may include play of one hand, one round, any number of hands, any number of rounds, a depletion of a player's credits, a player winning a number of times, a player losing an amount of credits, a player dropping below a threshold number of points, a player winning an amount of money, a player losing a number of times, a player winning a number of times, a player choosing to leave a game, and/or any other desired condition. In some embodiments, play may continue until one player collects all of the other player(s) account balance, chips, points, etc. (e.g., that are assigned to a table at a start of a game, that a player is willing to place in play at a table, and so on) through play of any number of rounds (e.g., by winning rounds of play of a poker game in which they are wagered). In some embodiments, players may agree to specific winning and/or losing criteria when they are paired with each other and/or otherwise choose

to play a game (e.g., one player may make a virtual table with particular winning and losing rules and another player may choose to join that table).

[0029] In some embodiments, play of a game may involve one or more computing devices. Such a computing device may include a computer, a hand held gaming device, a cellular telephone, and so on in any combination. Each player of a game may play such a game on such a device. In some embodiments, such devices may be arranged in a distributed fashion to allow play of the game without a central authority. In some embodiments, such device may act as clients of a central server that performs some and/or all gaming related functions. Such device may take input and pass input to such a server as desired, receive output from a server and display such output as desired. Some embodiments may include any desired distribution of actions between a client and a server.

[0030] Various embodiments may include formatting a presentation of information for one or more devices. For example, in some embodiments, a first player may play using a computer or other device and a presentation of information may be formatted for the computer. In some embodiments, a second player may play using a mobile telephone or other computing device and a presentation may be formatted differently for the second player than the first player based on a device being a different device and/or having different capabilities. For example, in some embodiments, a first device may have a lower screen resolution than a second device so in response to a determination as such, a server may transmit information at a lower resolution to the first device than to the second device. In some embodiments, such formatting may take place at a device rather than a central server.

[0031] In some embodiments, play of a game may include play of a competition and/or tiered game. A competition and/or tiered game may include a game in which there are multiple tiers of competition. In some embodiments, each tier may relate to a player's skill level, an amount of money, credits, etc. of a player, prior play by the player, and/or any desired characteristic. In some embodiments, players may play with and/or against players in a same tier. There may be any number of tiers as desired. Each tier may relate to a same game and/or different games as desired.

[0032] In some embodiments, players may start play in a same initial tier and may change tiers later. In some embodiments, such an initial tier may be different for different players (e.g., based on a buy in amount, prior play, other events, other actions by a player). Such an initial tier may include a lowest level tier of the set of tiers that players may play in. In some embodiments such an initial tier may not be a lowest or a highest level tier. In some embodiments, such a tier may include a highest level tier. In some embodiments, players in

an initial tier may be able to play the game using an initial number of credits (e.g., money, dollars, chips) as one another. Such a number may relate to a buy in amount (e.g., an amount a player pays to play a game). For example, the amount may be the buy in amount, the buy in amount minus a fee, the buy in a mount minus a progressive contribution, and so on. In some embodiments, players may define their own tables and/or table rules in one or more tiers. In some embodiments table and/or table rules may be imposed on players for one or more tiers. In some embodiments, different tiers may have different rules and/or allow users more control over rules.

[0033] Some embodiments may include assigning a player to a tier of game play out of a plurality of tiers of game play. Such assigning may include assigning at a beginning of play in a competition and/or tiered game (e.g., to an initial tier). Such assigning may include assigning in response to a win and/or loss (e.g., changing from one tier to another). Such assigning may be in response to a player buying a change in tier, accepting an offer, and/or performing any desired actions. Such assigning may take place after other players have won a top tier and ended play in the competition and/or tiered game by winning. Accordingly, such winning of the competition and/or tiered game does not end the competition and/or tiered game, but new players may even join after others have won. Some embodiments may enable players to play against other players in a same tier (e.g., in response to a determination that players are in a same tier, allow players to play against one another, match players against one another, enter players into a gaming lobby, start a game, and so on). Some embodiments may prevent players from playing against players in different tiers (e.g., not allow players to select each other, prevent players from joining a same table, preventing players from communicating, and so on).

[0034] In some embodiments, players may change tiers based on play of games. For example, a player may move up a tier after winning a game, winning some number of games, winning more than losing by some amount in a current tier, winning all of another player's credits, amassing a number of credits, and so on. For example, in some embodiments, a player may play a one on one poker game and the winner of the poker game may include the player that obtains all of the other player's credits by winning hands of the game. That player in the example may move to a next tier of play. In some embodiments, such as in the example, players may start an initial tier with a same number of credits and therefore and/or may move on to a next tier with a same number of credits. Some embodiments may include determining that a player has performed an action that allows them to move to a next tier (e.g., won a game, amassed a number of credits, purchased a change). In response to such a

determination, a player may be moved to a new tier and/or notified that the player may be qualified to move to a new tier.

[0035] In some embodiments, a player may move down a tier based on play. For example, a player may move down a tier after a loss, may move down a tier after losing some number of credits, may move down a tier after some number of losses, may move down a tier if losses outnumber wins by some amount in a current tier, losing all of the players credits, and so on. In some embodiments a player moving down a tier may start at the tier with any desired number of credits, such as a standard starting amount for that tier. In some embodiments, a loss (e.g., a loss of credits) may cause a player to lose a tiered competition (e.g., be removed from all tiers of play). Such a player may play another game by buying in to the competition again and starting at an initial tier. In some embodiments, a loser may buy back into a same or different tier. In some embodiments, there may be a maximum number of buy backs. In some embodiments, buying back in may cost a same amount or more than an amount associated with a tier to be bought into and/or than an initial buy in amount. In some embodiments, a fee may increase to buy back in more than once. In some embodiments a loss may send a user down some number of tiers in addition to and/or as an alternative to a required buy in and/or kicking out of a tournament. In some embodiments, a loss may have no effect on a user other than to not advance a user a tier based on the lost game. In some embodiments, in response to an action occurring, a determination may be made that a player should move down a tier.

[0036] In some embodiments, a player may pay to move from one tier to another tier. For example, a player may pay a fee to move a tier higher and/or lower. Such a fee may or may not relate to a credit amount associated with the higher and/or lower tier (e.g., the number of credits other players have when beginning to play in the higher and/or lower tier). For example, in some embodiments, such a fee may include a difference between a current credits of the player and the amount associated with the higher and/or lower tier. Such a fee may in part and/or in whole be added and/or subtracted to and/or from credits of the player (e.g., to bring the players credits in line with the amount associated with the higher and/or lower tier). Such a fee may not be added and/or subtracted to and/or from credits of the player (i.e., the player may be at a disadvantage in the higher tier and/or an advantage in the lower tier). In some embodiments a payment may be taken by a house from the fee as desired. In some embodiments, in addition to and/or as an alternative to a fee, a player may play another game, view advertising, perform actions, move to a location, sign up for a program, and/or any other desired action to move to a tier. In some embodiments the tier may be a lower tier and/or

higher tier. In some embodiments, the tier may be more than one tier away from a current tier. In some embodiments, there may be no current tier, but rather the player may pay or perform some action to start at a different tier than the initial tier.

[0037] Some embodiments may include a top tier. In some embodiments, winning a top tier may include winning against another player in the top tier. In some embodiments, winning at the top tier may result in winning an amount of money that the player has in credits, winning an award, winning a jackpot, winning a progressive award, and so on, For example, in some embodiments, a player that wins in a top tier may win an amount related to the buy in associated with a pyramid of players that were beat or in order for that play to win at the top tier (e.g., each player that that player played against, each player that any of those players played against, and so on and so on). An amount won may equal such an amount, be less than that amount (e.g., that amount minus a house take, and so on as desired. Some embodiments may not include a top tier and/or any tiers at all.

[0038] Some embodiments may include a lowest tier. In some embodiments, the lowest tier may include an initial tier. In some embodiments, losing at the lowest tier may cause a player to be removed from a competition. In some embodiments losing at any tier may cause the player to be removed from a competition. Some embodiments may not include a lowest tier and/or any tiers at all. In some embodiments, a player may begin at a tier higher than a lowest tier.

[0039] In some embodiments, a house and/or other gaming provider may take some cut of each game, each buy in, each wager, each win, a fee to play, and so on. Such a cut may be placed to make the game operate and/or as revenue for the house. Such a cut may relate to a grand prize amount and/or other winnings amount and a setup of the game so that the house may still make a desired amount of money despite players winning money for play.

[0040] In some embodiments, before play of a game, a player may enter a virtual lobby and/or queue to identify that the player wants want to play a game. In some embodiments, in the lobby or queue players may chat with one another. A lobby and/or queue may be specific for a particular tier of play. In some embodiments, a player in a lobby and/or queue may choose another player to play against. In some embodiments, a player in a lobby and/or queue may be randomly and/or otherwise paired against another player to play against. In some embodiments after win of a game and/or loss of a game a player may be placed in a queue and/or lobby for a different tier. In some embodiments, players in a lobby and/or queue may browse available tables and/or games to select one to join. In some embodiments, players in a lobby and/or queue may wait until automatically placed in a new game. In some

embodiments, players in a lobby and/or queue may form their own tables for play of a game according to rules that they establish.

[0041] Some embodiments may include receiving an indication that a player desires to play a game. Such an indication may include a player entering a virtual lobby, a player selecting a control, a player forming a new table, a player selecting a table, and so on.

[0042] Some embodiments may include facilitating play of a game. Such play may include play among and/or between any number of players. In some embodiments, such facilitating may include executing any desired program, accepting input, causing output, determining opponents, and so on. For example, in some embodiments, two opponents may be paired to play a game against one another. An interface may be provided to each player through a computing device to allow the player to view events in the game and/or input actions to be performed in the game. Input may be accepted and/or output may be provided to cause a game to progress through any number of states from start to finish based on player input, random events, game rules, and/or any other desired elements. Such facilitating may take place in response to receiving an indication that one or more of the players in the game desire to play the game. In some embodiments, such facilitating may take place in response to determining that there are a sufficient number of players desiring to play the game in a particular tier of game play. In some embodiments, matching players to play a game may include matching players in a particular tier of game play together. In some embodiments, matching players may include matching players in accordance with a selection and/or formation of a table by one or more of the players.

[0043] In some embodiments, a tier may allow substantially continuous play of games as players are available in the tier. For example, when enough players are ready to play in a tier, a game may be played with those players. Accordingly, a player may not be required to wait for all or most players in prior tiers to complete a next tier or even to win a top tier. Rather such a competition may be continuous and/or unending in itself but may allow players to finish while others continue and/or start to play and/or even start to play later. A win of a top tier by one player may have no effect on another players play of the game if that player is not an opponent of the winning player. It should be recognized that any action may take place in any order so that for example some players may end play by winning a tiered game and/or competition before others even begin and/or while others are in the middle of play in the tiered game and/or competition.

[0044] Some embodiments may include determining a winner of a game. Such determination may include determining the winner based on events in the game, rules of the

game, random events, and so on. For example, in a poker embodiments, a winner may include a player who wins all of the credits in play, wins a hand, and so on.

[0045] In some embodiments, any method of collusion detection and/or prevention may be used. In some embodiments, proximity of players and/or devices may be determined and used to prevent pairing and/or play by certain players and/or devices that are too close. For example, in some embodiments, a game may be ended and/or paused in response to a determination that two players participating in the game are within a threshold distance of one another (e.g., 10 feet, 1 foot, 100 feet, 1 inch, etc.).In some embodiments, players may be notified that they are too close and a direction of movement may be identified to rectify the proximity problem. In some embodiments, players may be warned as they approach a threshold (e.g., a light, sound, or other indicator may notify them that they are heading too close to another player and should change course or stop). In some embodiments, players may be prevented from joining a tournament and/or tier if they are too close to other players in the tournament and/or tier.

[0046] In some embodiments, elements of a game may be disguised. For example, suits may be changed on cards, player icons and/or names may be changed, and so on. Cards or hands that would lose or win may be altered to other cards and/or hands that would also win. Such disguising may prevent players from knowing they are in the same game. Some embodiments may limit a number of times one player may be paired with another player.

[0047] In some embodiments, a player may stop play during and/or after a game. For example, a pair of players may stop play mid game and return to the game later, a player may stop play before playing a game in a new tier, after playing a game in an old tier, and so on. A players position may be remembered (e.g., by a server), and a player may be allowed to return to a same tier and/or game at a later time. In some embodiments, a player's position may decay over time thereby encouraging a player to return sooner rather than later. For example, a number of credits may decrease every hour, a level of tier may decrease every day, and so on. It should be recognized that credits and tiers are given as examples only and that any element of decay may be used. It should be recognized that hours and days are given as examples only and that any term may be used such as seconds years, months, and so on. In some embodiments, a player's credits at a time of stopping play may remain relatively similar upon return.

[0048] Some embodiments may include awards provided for moving from one tier to another, winning one or more games, and so on. Such awards may be smaller than an award for winning a top tier game and/or otherwise winning a competition. In some embodiments, a

play may be offered an award to drop out of a game rather than continue to play for a higher tier. Some embodiments may include offering an award to change to a lower and/or higher tier. Such a move may include providing an advantage or disadvantage in the new tier (e.g., move to a higher tier with fewer credits than normal for that tier).

[0049] Some embodiments may allow a player to establish a virtual table, game, and/or tournament. Establishing such a virtual game related element may include setting rules and/or other characteristics for the element (e.g., rules for a game, rules for a tournament). For example, a player may set a minimum wager, a maximum wager, a minimum balance, a rule regarding rebuying in, victory conditions, a rule regarding elimination from a tournament, a rule regarding a jackpot, a rule regarding advancement from tier to tier, a rule regarding lowering tiers, a rule regarding speed of game play (e.g., how long a player has to make an action), a rule regarding a number of rounds (e.g., a number of rounds required for a player to win), a rule regarding an amount of money (e.g., n amount of money that a player may be required to accumulate to win a game), and so on. One or more other players may join such a game, table, tournament, and so on to play one or more games according to such one or more characteristics.

[0050] Some embodiments may include providing an interface through which a user may establish such characteristics. For example, a player may enter information into such an interface by selecting buttons, entering numbers, and so on. A user may actuate a control (e.g. press a button) to submit information about such characteristics to a central authority (e.g., server, cloud computing system). In response to receiving such information, a central authority may generate such a virtual element (e.g., make database entries, advertise the element, allow others to join the element, perform one or more verifications, and so on).

[0051] Existence of a virtual element with one or more characteristics may be presented to one or more players (e.g., through a computing device, through a network, through a kiosk, through a mobile device display, and so on). For example, a listing of existing elements may be presented through an interface to one or more players. Such an interface may allow such players to select an element to join. In some embodiments, a player may be presented with a number of players at the table waiting to play and/or in a queue to a player.

[0052] Some embodiments may allow searching for such elements. For example, other players may be allowed to search for existing elements based on characteristics of the elements. For example, a player may search for a table with a particular minimum wager by entering such a search criteria into a search interface. If such a virtual table has been created that meets the criteria, the searching player may be presented with such a matching table or

tables (e.g., an indication of such tables). If not, the player may be presented with an indication that no such table exists. A player may generate a new table with such characteristics in some embodiments.

[0053] In some embodiments, a player may choose to join an element with desired characteristics. Such an element may include an element created by another player and/or an element created by a gaming operator (e.g., a default table, a casino wide tournament, etc.). A player may enter information through an interface that displays one or more available elements to the player to submit such a choice to a gaming operator (e.g., transmit form a computing device to a central service). In response to choosing to join an element, a player may be matched with another player that created the element and/or also chose to join the element, placed in a queue for the table, placed in a seat at a table to await an opponent and so on.

[0054] In some embodiments, players may make, choose, and/or search for an element within a tournament. For example, a player in a particular tier of a tournament may search for and/or make a table in a particular tier that has desired characteristics. In some embodiments, there may be no tiers and players may make, search for and/or join tables at large.

[0055] In response to a second player choosing an element, a first and second player may be matched against one another for game play. Such game play may be carried out in accordance with one or more criteria established for the element. Some embodiments may include facilitating game play between two players. In some embodiments, a game may include a two player poker game. In some embodiments, game play may include making wagers by one or more players in a game, taking actions in one or more games by one or more players, and so on. In some embodiments, a determination may be made that a wager and/or action is in accordance with requirements of a criteria established for an element. An action and/or wager may be allowed in response to such a determination and/or prevented in response to an action and/or wager not being in accordance with such requirements.

[0056] In some embodiments, one or more players may disconnect from a gaming service (e.g., a battery may die, a connection issue, and so on) while engaged in play of a game. In response to such a disconnect a gaming operating may take any desired actions. For example, a gaming operator may end a game, may pause a game, may take actions on behalf of one or more disconnected players in a game, and so on. For example, in some embodiments, a gaming operator may check and/or fold at each opportunity in a game when a player may be required to take an action in a poker game if the player required to take an action has been disconnected. Such an action may be taken after some waiting period whenever such an

action is required (e.g., at each round, when a player is required to make a bet or fold, a gaming operator may make a player match a prior player's bet and/or fold after waiting a minute for the player to reconnect). Actions may be taken in accordance with a strategy, such as a basic strategy in a blackjack game. For example, a gaming operator may hit and/or stand in a blackjack game according to the basic strategy, and so on. In some embodiments, if rules for a game allow a player to leave a game and/or table a gaming operator may cause a player to do so. For example, a player may be caused to walk away from a table at the end of a hand. In some embodiments, such leaving a game, table, and/or tournament may thereby cause a transferring of remaining credits out of a table, game, tournament, etc. account and into a general and/or wagering account. In some embodiments, such leaving may thereby cause a forfeit of a game, tournament, etc. and/or a loss of credits associated with such a game, tournament, and so on.

[0057] In some embodiments, when a player joins a element and/or is matched against another player, money and/or credits may be transferred from one account (e.g., a wagering account, a bank account, a credit card) to a game account (e.g., a set of money available to pay the game). The money and/or credits may be the whole amount in the account, a smaller amount than is in the account, an amount set by rules of an element, and so on. In some embodiments, at the end of a game or tournament, winnings may be transferred back to the account from the game account. In some embodiments, remaining amount in a game account may be transferred to the account. In some embodiments, a user may be allowed to buy back into a game table by transferring more money into the game account if a user runs out of money in a game account. Such ability may be governed by rules governing a virtual table.

[0058] It should be understood that various examples are non-limiting, and that various embodiments may include some, none, more, different, and so on elements as described herein. Figure 3 illustrates an example method 300 that may be performed in some embodiments. Figure 4 illustrates an example method 400 that may be performed in some embodiments. It should be recognized that the processes may be performed by any desired entity, in any desired order, in any desired combination, with same, different, additional, alternative, and so on elements. It should be recognized that some embodiments may include different, fewer, more, alternative, no, the same, and so on actions as desired.

XXII. Embodiments

[0059] The following should be understood to be embodiments and not claims.

[0060] A. An apparatus comprising a non-transitory medium having stored thereon a plurality of instructions that when executed by a processor causes the processor to perform a method comprising: assigning a first player to a first tier of game play of a plurality of tiers of game play; receiving an indication that a first player desires to play a first game; determining that the first player is a winner of the first game, in which the game is against a second player assigned to the first tier of game play; in response to determining that the first player is the winner of the first game, assigning the first player to a second tier of game play of the plurality of tiers of game play, in which the second tier includes a highest tier of the plurality of tiers; receiving an indication that the first player desires to play a second game; determining that there are sufficient players in the second tier ready to play the second game; in response to determining that there are sufficient players and in response to receiving the indication that the first player desires to play the second game, facilitating play of the second game between the first player and a third player assigned to the second tier of game play; determining that the first player is a winner of the second game; in response to determining that the player is the winner of the second game, providing the player with an award; assigning a fourth player to the first tier of game play, in which the fourth player is assigned to the first tier after the first player is determined to be the winner; determining that the fourth player has paid a fee to move from the first tier of game play to the second tier of game play; and in response to determining that the fourth player has paid the fee, assigning the player to the second tier of game play.

[0061] B. A. An apparatus comprising a non-transitory medium having stored thereon a plurality of instructions that when executed by a processor causes the processor to perform a method comprising: receiving one or more criteria defining a game from a first user; storing information about the game, the information including the one or more criteria; receiving a search request for games that include the one or more criteria from a second user; in response to receiving the search request, determining that the game should be presented to the second user in response to the search request; in response to the determination that the game should be presented to the second user, transmitting an indication of the game to the second user; receiving a selection of the game by the second user; in response to receiving the selection of the game, matching the first use against the second user in the game; receiving at least one first wager and at least one first action for the game from the first player; receiving at least one second wager and at least one second wager for the game from the second player; determining a winner of the game based at least on the at least one first action and the at least

one second action; and in response to determining the winner, awarding an amount of money to the winner based on the at least one first wager and the at least one second wager.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus comprising a machine readable medium having stored thereon a plurality of instructions that when executed by a computing device causes the computing device to perform a method comprising:

assigning a first player to a first tier of game play of a plurality of tiers of game play;

receiving an indication that a first player desires to play a first game;

determining that the first player is a winner of the first game, in which the game is against a second player assigned to the first tier of game play;

in response to determining that the first player is the winner of the first game, assigning the first player to a second tier of game play of the plurality of tiers of game play, in which the second tier includes a highest tier of the plurality of tiers;

receiving an indication that the first player desires to play a second game;

determining that there are sufficient players in the second tier ready to play the second game;

in response to determining that there are sufficient players and in response to receiving the indication that the first player desires to play the second game, facilitating play of the second game between the first player and a third player assigned to the second tier of game play;

determining that the first player is a winner of the second game;

in response to determining that the player is the winner of the second game, providing the player with an award;

assigning a fourth player to the first tier of game play, in which the fourth player is assigned to the first tier after the first player is determined to be the winner;

determining that the fourth player has paid a fee to move from the first tier of game play to the second tier of game play; and

in response to determining that the fourth player has paid the fee, assigning the player to the second tier of game play.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising the computing device.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the plurality of tiers includes tiers of a tournament.

4. The apparatus of claim 3, in which the award includes a jackpot of the tournament.

5. The apparatus of claim 3, in which the method further comprises: awarding the jackpot to additional winners of the tournament after the first player in response to said additional winners winning the second tier of game play.

6. The apparatus of claim 3, in which the fourth player joins the tournament after the first player wins the tournament.

7. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the method comprises:

after receiving the indication that the first player desires to play the second game, determining that there are insufficient players in the second tier ready to play the second game against the first player; and

in response to determining that there are insufficient players, notifying at least one player in the second tier that the first player is ready to play in the second tier.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, in which the method comprises:

receiving a response to the notifying from the second player indicating that the second player desires to play the second game, and in which determining that there are sufficient players in the second tier includes determining that there are sufficient players in the second tier based on the response.

9. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the method comprises:

assigning at least a part of the fee to an available credits for game play by the fourth player in the second tier of game play.

10. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the method comprises:

receiving respective entry fees for each of the first, second, and fourth players;

assigning at least a part of respective entry fees to an available credits for game play in the first tier of game play; and

in which the at least the part of the entry fee of the fourth player is available for game play by the fourth player in the second tier, the fee is not available, and both the at least part

of the entry fee of the first player and the at least part of the entry fee of the second player are available for game play by the first player in the second tier.

11. The apparatus of claim 1, in which game play includes a two player poker game.

12. The apparatus of claim 11, in which play of the poker game includes play until an amount of money of one of the two players has been won by the other of the two players.

13. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the method comprises:

determining that the fourth player loses in the second tier, and in response assigning the fourth player to the first tier of game play.

14. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the method comprises:

determining that the second player losses the first game, and in response eliminating the second player from a tournament.

15. A. An apparatus comprising a non-transitory medium having stored thereon a plurality of instructions that when executed by a processor causes the processor to perform a method comprising:

receiving one or more criteria defining a game from a first user;

storing information about the game, the information including the one or more criteria;

receiving a search request for games that include the one or more criteria from a second user;

in response to receiving the search request, determining that the game should be presented to the second user in response to the search request;

in response to the determination that the game should be presented to the second user, transmitting an indication of the game to the second user;

receiving a selection of the game by the second user;

in response to receiving the selection of the game, matching the first user against the second user in the game;

receiving at least one first wager and at least one first action for the game from the first player;

receiving at least one second wager and at least one second wager for the game from the second player;

determining a winner of the game based at least on the at least one first action and the at least one second action; and

in response to determining the winner, awarding an amount of money to the winner based on the at least one first wager and the at least one second wager.

16. The apparatus of claim 1, including the computing device.

17. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the game includes a game of a tier of a tournament, and the method comprises determining that each of the first and second users are qualified to play in the tier of the tournament.

18. The apparatus of claim 17, in which the method comprises determining that the winner is allowed to play in a higher level of the tournament.

19. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the one or more criteria include at least one of a minimum wager, a maximum wager, a rule for determining when the game ends, a rule controlling buy in to the game, a rule controlling speed of game play of the game, a rule controlling a number of rounds of play of the game, and a rule of the game.

20. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the one or more criteria includes a rule governing when a player wins the game.

21. The apparatus of claim 20, in which the rule includes at least one of a rule identifying at least one of a number of rounds and an amount of money.

22. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the method comprises determining that the first wager, first action, second wager, and second action meet the requirements of the one or more criteria, and allowing the first wager, second wager, first action, and second action in response to the determination that the first wager, second wager, first action, and second action meet the requirements.

23. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the game includes a game of poker between two players.

24. The apparatus of claim 1, in which presenting includes transmitting information for display on a gaming device used by the second user.

25. The apparatus of claim 1, in which matching includes facilitating play of the game by the first and second users.

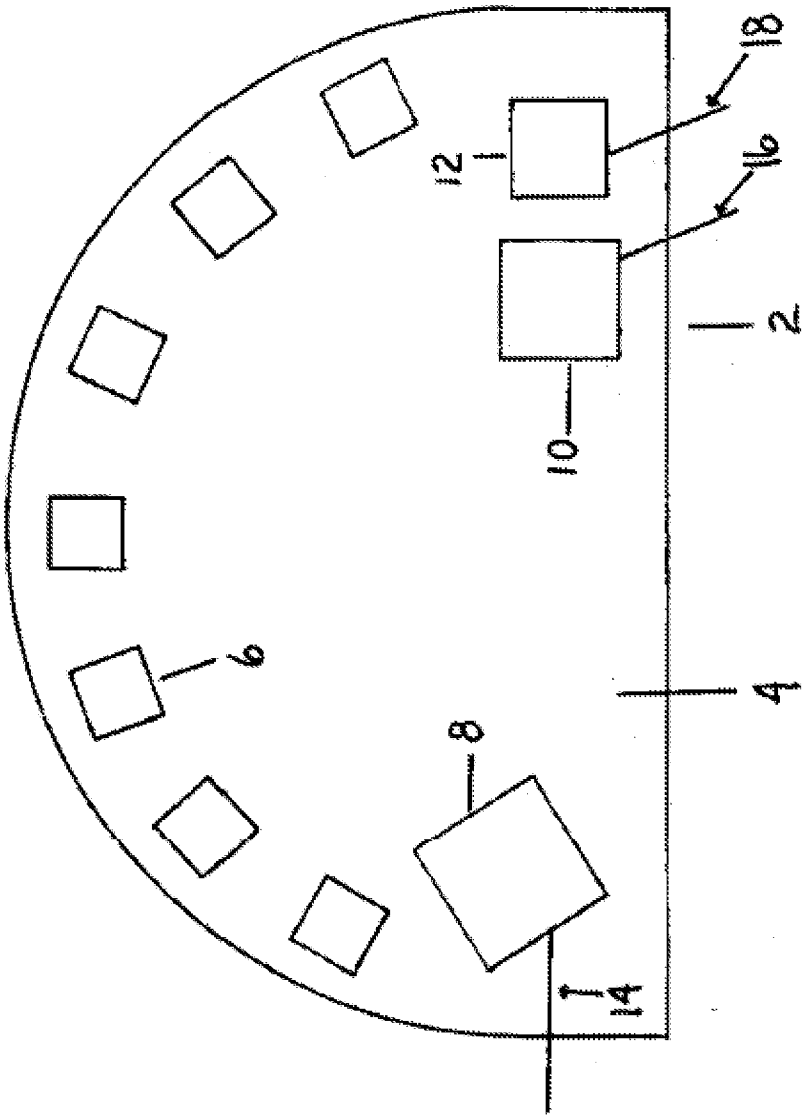

FIGURE 1

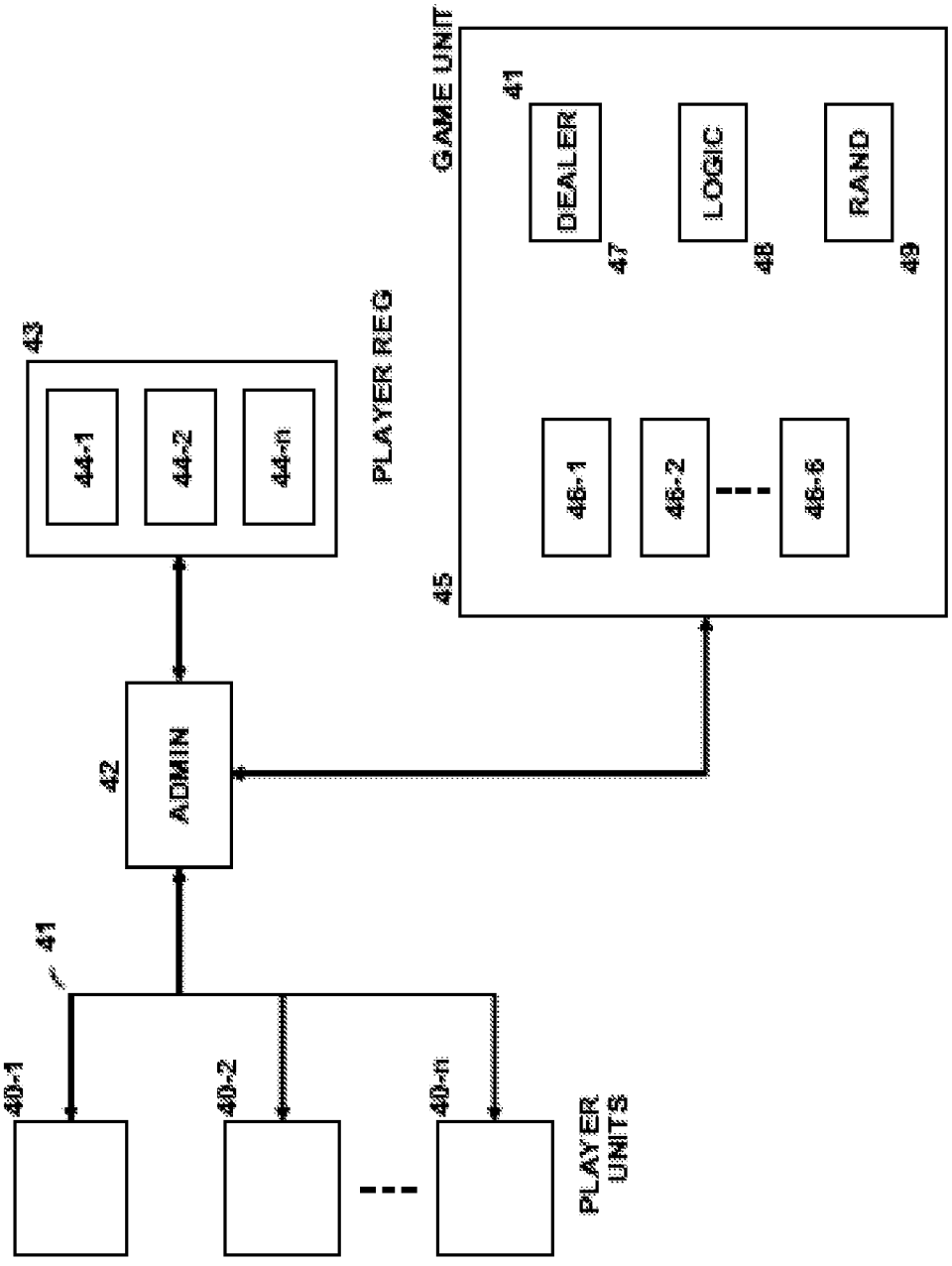
GAME UNIT
41
DEALER
47
LOGIC
48
RAND
49
45
46-1
46-2
46-6
PLAYER REG
43
44-1
44-2
44-n
42
ADMIN
41
40-1
40-2
40-n
PLAYER UNITS

FIGURE 2


300
BEGIN
ASSIGNING A FIRST PLAYER TO A FIRST TIER OF GAME PLAY OF A PLURALITY OF TIERS OF GAME PLAY
RECEIVING AN INDICATION THAT A FIRST PLAYER DESIRES TO PLAY A FIRST GAME
DETERMINING THAT THE FIRST PLAYER IS A WINNER OF THE FIRST GAME, IN WHICH THE GAME IS AGAINST A SECOND PLAYER ASSIGNED TO THE FIRST TIER OF GAME PLAY
IN RESPONSE TO DETERMINING THAT THE FIRST PLAYER IS THE WINNER OF THE FIRST GAME, ASSIGNING THE FIRST PLAYER TO A SECOND TIER OF GAME PLAY OF THE PLURALITY OF TIERS OF GAME PLAY, IN WHICH THE SECOND TIER INCLUDES A HIGHEST TIER OF THE PLURALITY OF TIERS
RECEIVING AN INDICATION THAT THE FIRST PLAYER DESIRES TO PLAY A SECOND GAME
DETERMINING THAT THERE ARE SUFFICIENT PLAYERS IN THE SECOND TIER READY TO PLAY THE SECOND GAME
IN RESPONSE TO DETERMINING THAT THERE ARE SUFFICIENT PLAYERS AND IN RESPONSE TO RECEIVING THE INDICATION THAT THE FIRST PLAYER DESIRES TO PLAY THE SECOND GAME, FACILITATING PLAY OF THE SECOND GAME BETWEEN THE FIRST PLAYER AND A THIRD PLAYER ASSIGNED TO THE SECOND TIER OF GAME PLAY
DETERMINING THAT THE FIRST PLAYER IS A WINNER OF THE SECOND GAME
IN RESPONSE TO DETERMINING THAT THE PLAYER IS THE WINNER OF THE SECOND GAME, PROVIDING THE PLAYER WITH AN AWARD
ASSIGNING A FOURTH PLAYER TO THE FIRST TIER OF GAME PLAY, IN WHICH THE FOURTH PLAYER IS ASSIGNED TO THE FIRST TIER AFTER THE FIRST PLAYER IS DETERMINED TO BE THE WINNER
DETERMINING THAT THE FOURTH PLAYER HAS PAID A FEE TO MOVE FROM THE FIRST TIER OF GAME PLAY TO THE SECOND TIER OF GAME PLAY
IN RESPONSE TO DETERMINING THAT THE FOURTH PLAYER HAS PAID THE FEE, ASSIGNING THE PLAYER TO THE SECOND TIER OF GAME PLAY
END

Figure 3

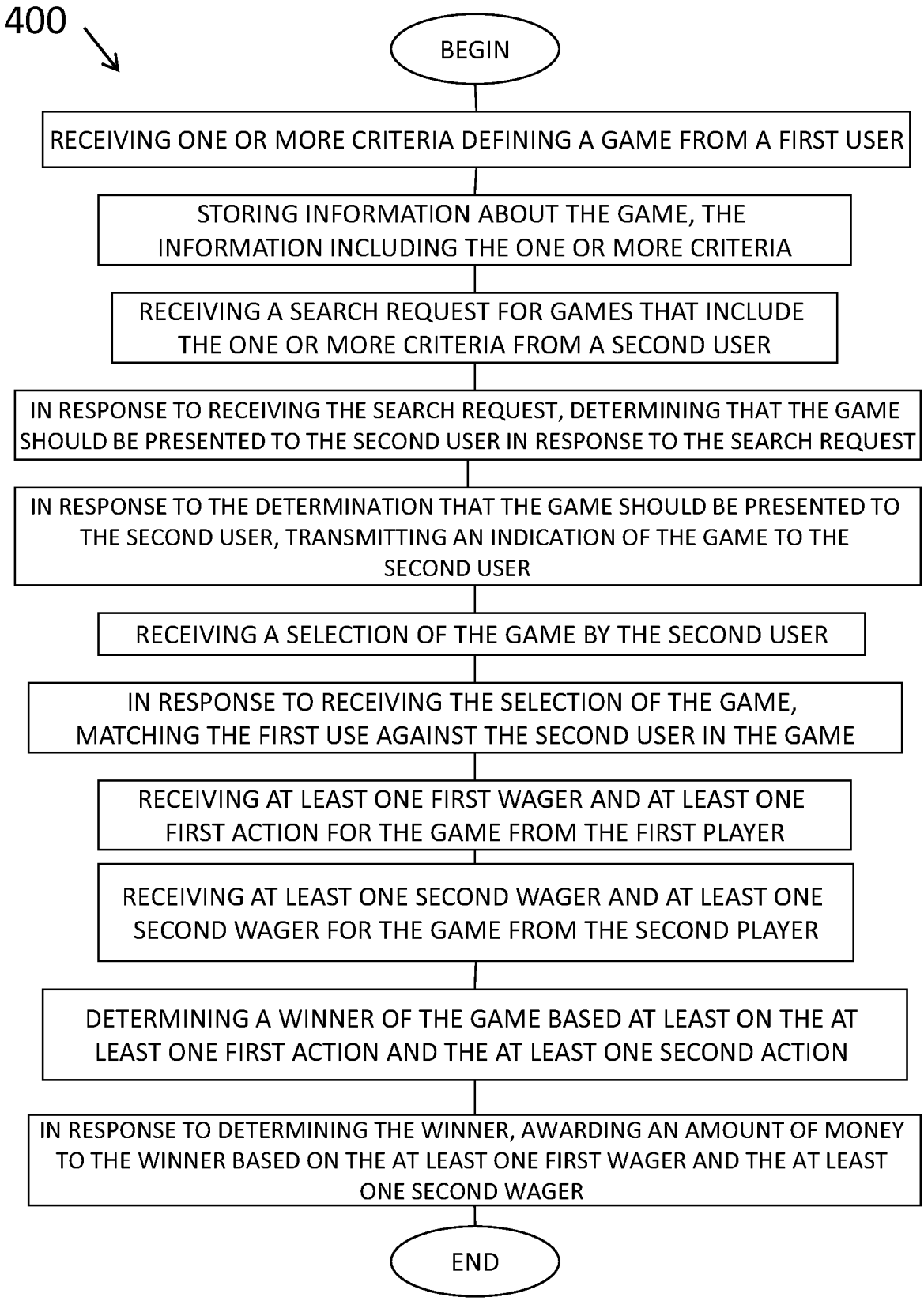
400
BEGIN
RECEIVING ONE OR MORE CRITERIA DEFINING A GAME FROM A FIRST USER
STORING INFORMATION ABOUT THE GAME, THE INFORMATION INCLUDING THE ONE OR MORE CRITERIA
RECEIVING A SEARCH REQUEST FOR GAMES THAT INCLUDE THE ONE OR MORE CRITERIA FROM A SECOND USER
IN RESPONSE TO RECEIVING THE SEARCH REQUEST, DETERMINING THAT THE GAME SHOULD BE PRESENTED TO THE SECOND USER IN RESPONSE TO THE SEARCH REQUEST
IN RESPONSE TO THE DETERMINATION THAT THE GAME SHOULD BE PRESENTED TO THE SECOND USER, TRANSMITTING AN INDICATION OF THE GAME TO THE SECOND USER
RECEIVING A SELECTION OF THE GAME BY THE SECOND USER
IN RESPONSE TO RECEIVING THE SELECTION OF THE GAME, MATCHING THE FIRST USE AGAINST THE SECOND USER IN THE GAME
RECEIVING AT LEAST ONE FIRST WAGER AND AT LEAST ONE FIRST ACTION FOR THE GAME FROM THE FIRST PLAYER
RECEIVING AT LEAST ONE SECOND WAGER AND AT LEAST ONE SECOND WAGER FOR THE GAME FROM THE SECOND PLAYER
DETERMINING A WINNER OF THE GAME BASED AT LEAST ON THE AT LEAST ONE FIRST ACTION AND THE AT LEAST ONE SECOND ACTION
IN RESPONSE TO DETERMINING THE WINNER, AWARDING AN AMOUNT OF MONEY TO THE WINNER BASED ON THE AT LEAST ONE FIRST WAGER AND THE AT LEAST ONE SECOND WAGER
END

Figure 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US 12/38500

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC(8) - A63F 9/24 (2012.01)
USPC - 463/42
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
USPC: 463/42
IPC(8): A63F 9/24 (2012.01)

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched
USPC: 463/25; 463/13; 463/1; 463/42 (Keyword limited; terms below)
IPC(8): A63F 9/24 (2012.01) (Keyword limited; terms below)

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
PubWEST (PGPB, USPT, EPAB, JPAB); Google (Scholar, Patents, Web)
Terms used: assign first player first tier second third fourth receive request facilitate play game determine winner assign top award jackpot pay fee move eliminate tournament computer

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X --- Y	US 2008/0191418 A1 (LUTNICK et al.), 14 August 2008 (14.08.2008), entire document, especially Abstract, para [0052], [0057], [0065]-[0068], [0108], [0130], [0163]-[0166], [0180]-[0181], [0188], [0197], [0205], [0207], [0210]-[0211], [0218], [0248]-[0250], [0264], [0277], [0335], [0348],[0357], [0365], [0374], [0431], [0454], [0456], [0501], [0607], [0619]-[0633]	15-16 --- 1-14, 17-25
Y	US 2006/0093142 A1 (SCHNEIER et al.), 04 May 2006 (04.05.2006), entire document, especially Abstract, para [0006], [0170], [0175], [0182], [0191], [0193]-[0196], [0549]	1-14, 17-25
A	US 5,755,621 A (MARKS et al.), 26 May 1998 (26.05.1998), entire document	1-25
A	US 6,093,100 A (SINGER et al.), 25 July 2000 (25.07.2000), entire document	1-25
A	US 2005/0003878 A1 (UPDIKE), 06 January 2005 (06.01.2005), entire document	1-25
A	US 2009/0221342 A1 (KATZ et al.), 03 September 2009 (03.09.2009), entire document	1-25
T	US 2012/0034962 A1 (AMAITIS), 09 February 2012 (09.02.2012), entire document	1-25

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☐

* Special categories of cited documents:
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed
"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
18 July 2012 (18.07.2012)	03 AUG 2012
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US, Commissioner for Patents P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450 Facsimile No. 571-273-3201	Authorized officer: Lee W. Young PCT Helpdesk: 571-272-4300 PCT OSP: 571-272-7774

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (July 2009)