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(54) **GAMING SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING ENTRY TO A CONTEST**

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(60) Provisional application No. 60/656,364, filed on Feb. 25, 2005.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A gaming system and method of providing a contest entry to a player using a gaming device are disclosed. A player of a gaming device is awarded points based on his or her game play and/or other criteria. These points are compared to pre-determined entry criteria of a plurality of contests. The player is presented with a list of eligible contests that are available for entry. The player may then select one of the eligible contests to enter, or wait to accumulate more points to enter a different contest.

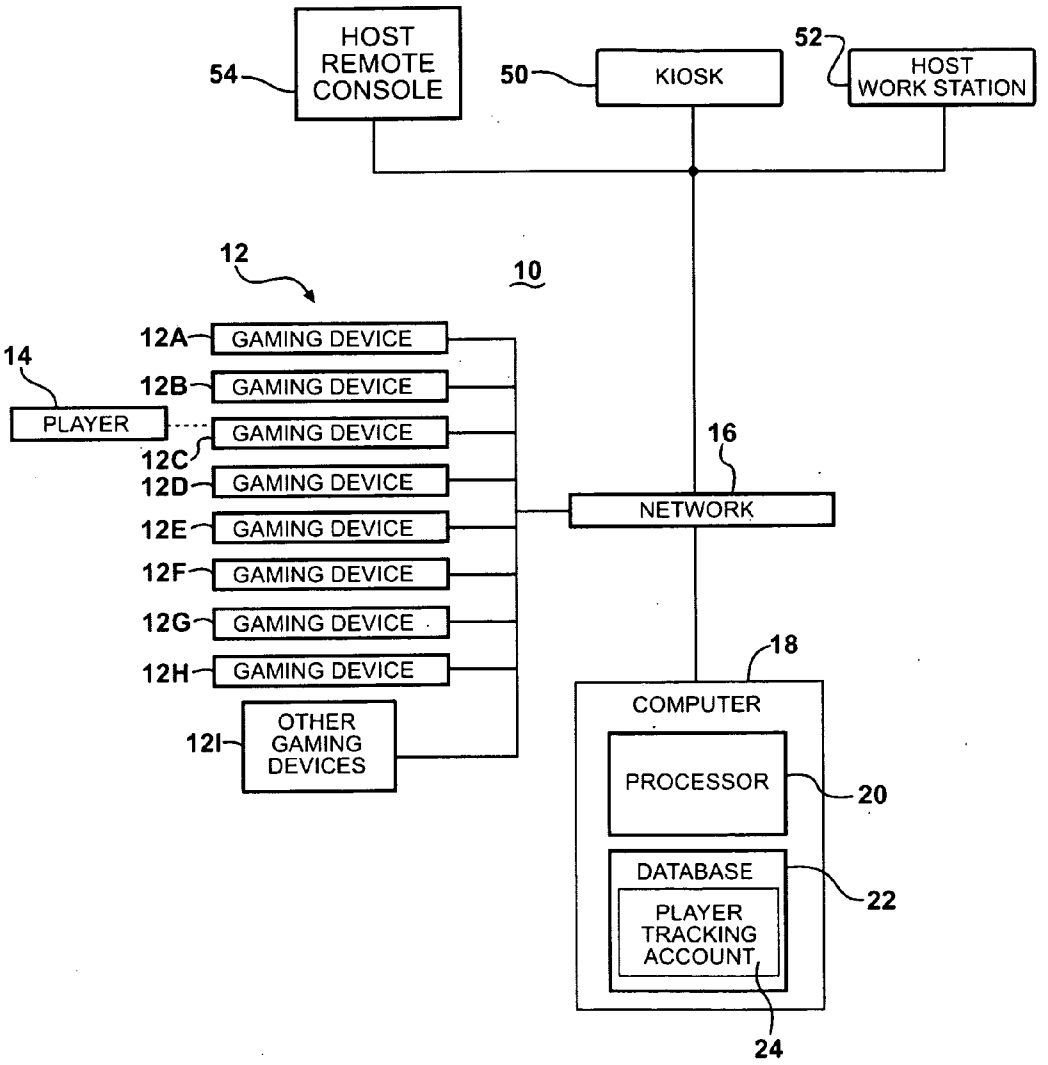
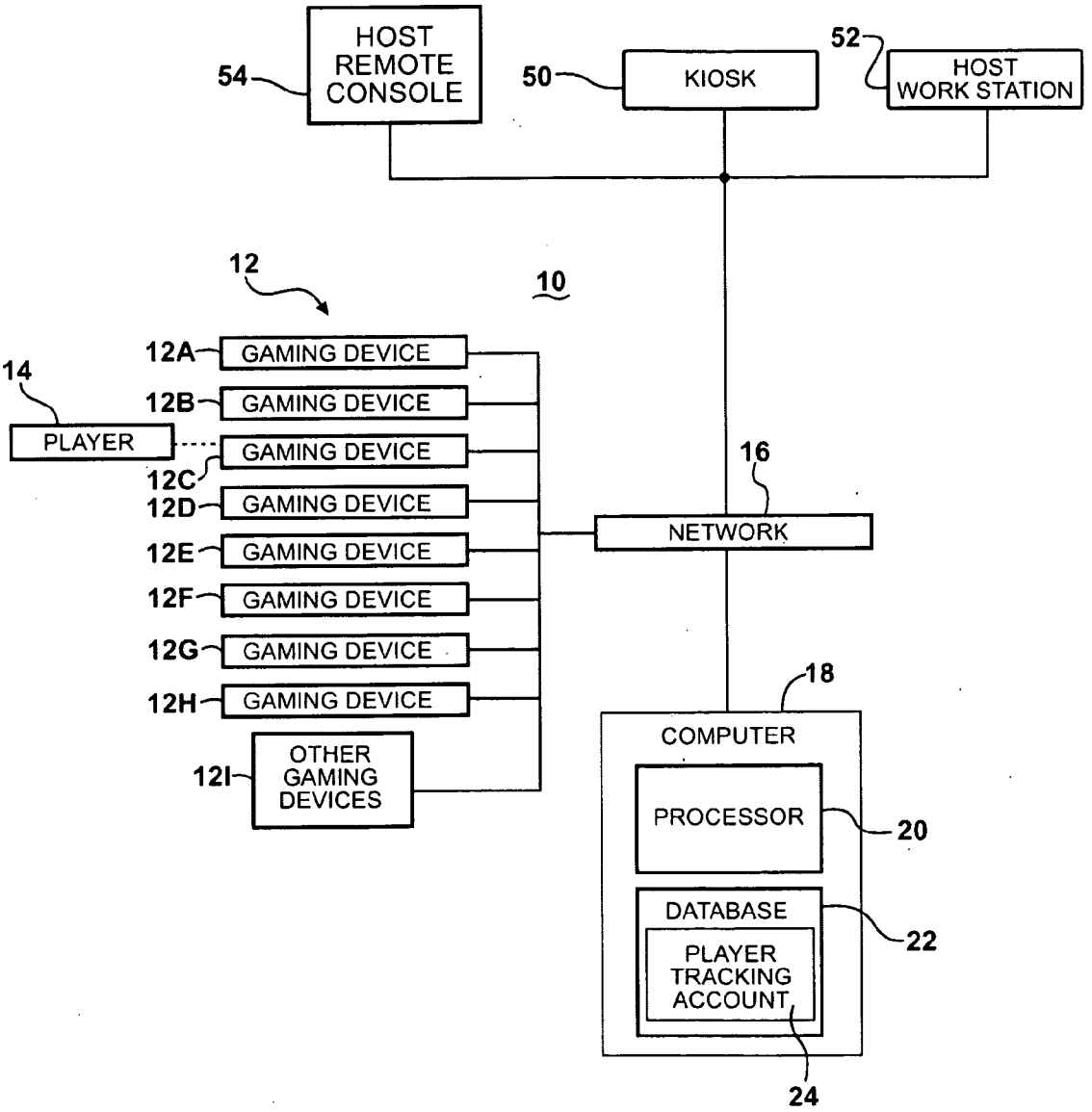


FIG - 1


HOST REMOTE CONSOLE
54
KIOSK
50
52
HOST WORK STATION
12
10
12A
GAMING DEVICE
14
12B
GAMING DEVICE
PLAYER
GAMING DEVICE
16
12C
12D
GAMING DEVICE
12E
GAMING DEVICE
NETWORK
12F
GAMING DEVICE
12G
GAMING DEVICE
18
12H
GAMING DEVICE
COMPUTER
OTHER GAMING DEVICES
12I
PROCESSOR
20
DATABASE
22
PLAYER TRACKING ACCOUNT
24

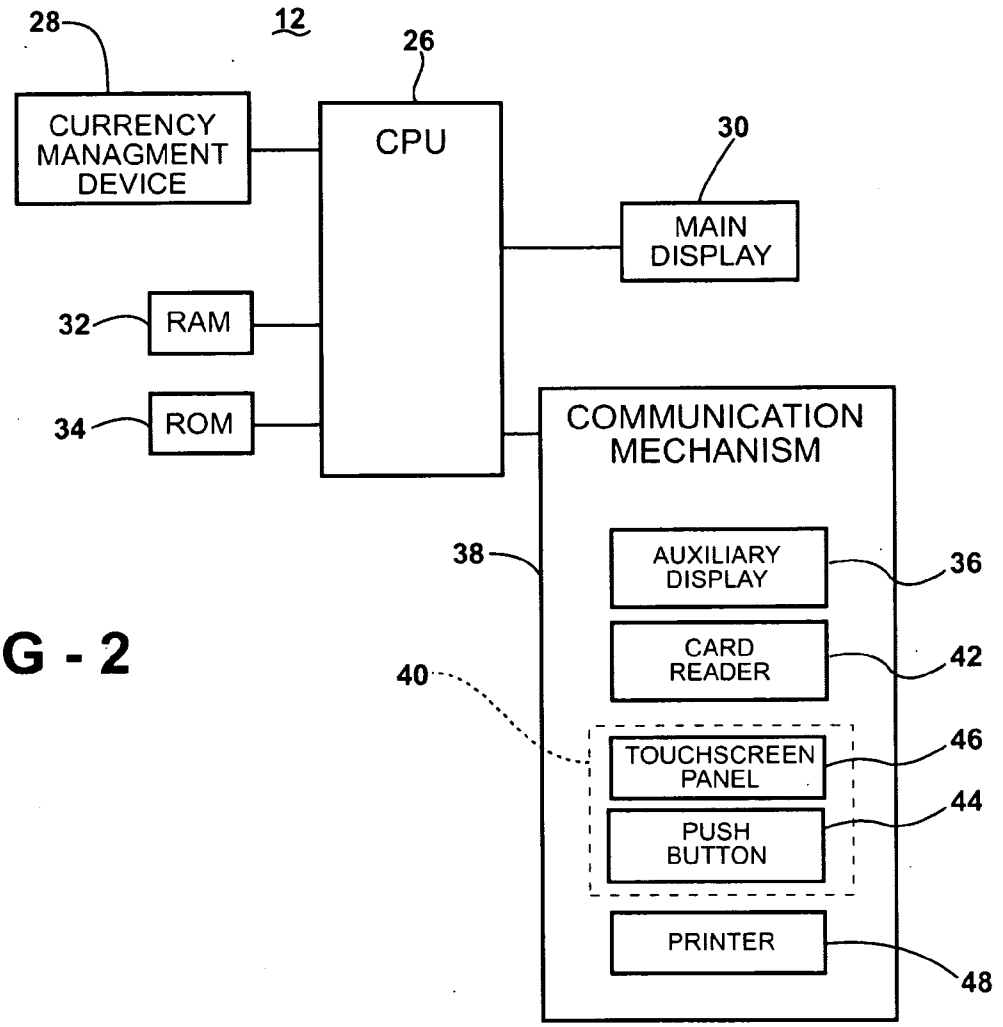

28
12
26
CURRENCY MANAGMENT DEVICE
CPU
30
MAIN DISPLAY
32
RAM
34
ROM
COMMUNICATION MECHANISM
38
AUXILIARY DISPLAY
36
CARD READER
42
40
TOUCHSCREEN PANEL
46
PUSH BUTTON
44
PRINTER
48

FIG - 2

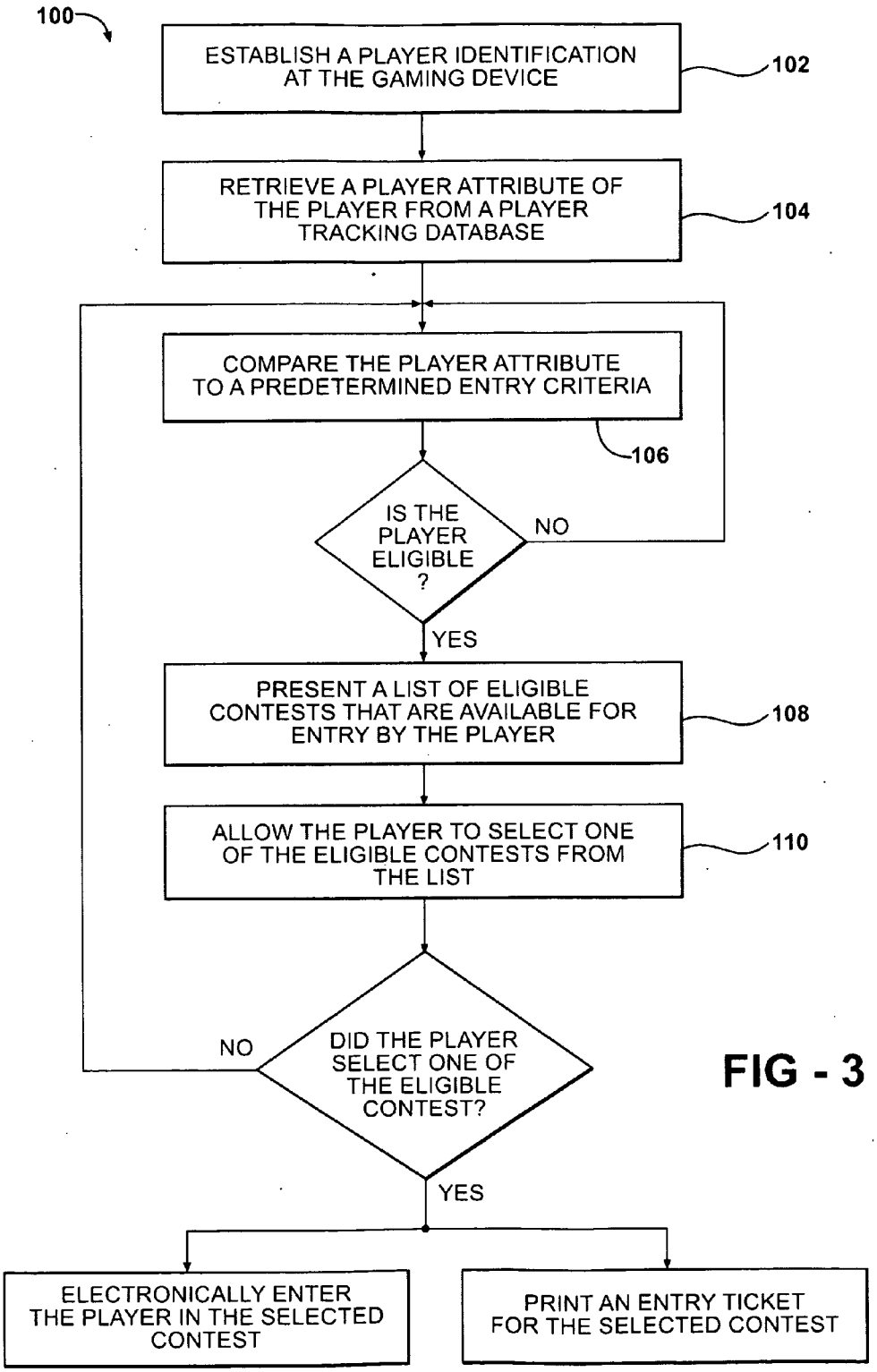

100
ESTABLISH A PLAYER IDENTIFICATION AT THE GAMING DEVICE
102
RETRIEVE A PLAYER ATTRIBUTE OF THE PLAYER FROM A PLAYER TRACKING DATABASE
104
COMPARE THE PLAYER ATTRIBUTE TO A PREDETERMINED ENTRY CRITERIA
106
IS THE PLAYER ELIGIBLE ?
NO
YES
PRESENT A LIST OF ELIGIBLE CONTESTS THAT ARE AVAILABLE FOR ENTRY BY THE PLAYER
108
ALLOW THE PLAYER TO SELECT ONE OF THE ELIGIBLE CONTESTS FROM THE LIST
110
DID THE PLAYER SELECT ONE OF THE ELIGIBLE CONTEST?
NO
YES
ELECTRONICALLY ENTER THE PLAYER IN THE SELECTED CONTEST
PRINT AN ENTRY TICKET FOR THE SELECTED CONTEST

FIG - 3

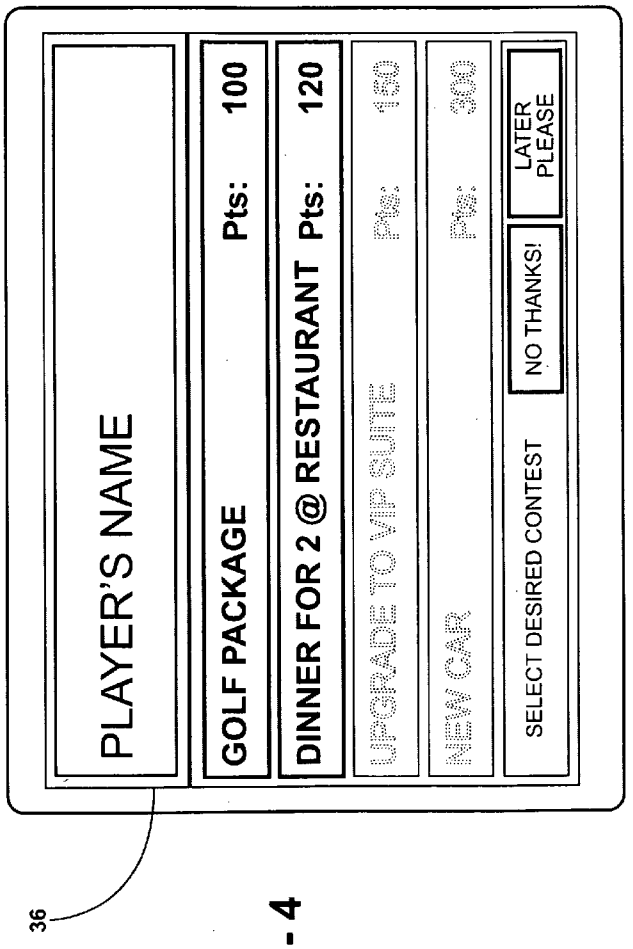

PLAYER'S NAME
GOLF PACKAGE Pts: 100
DINNER FOR 2 @ RESTAURANT Pts: 120
UPGRADE TO VIP SUITE Pts: 150
NEW CAR Pts: 300
SELECT DESIRED CONTEST
NO THANKS!
LATER PLEASE
36

FIG - 4

GAMING SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING ENTRY TO A CONTEST

CROSS REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application claims priority to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/276,312 filed Feb. 23, 2006 (pending) which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/656,364, filed Feb. 25, 2005 (expired) and is a continuation-in-part of prior application Ser. No. 10/938,677, filed Sep. 10, 2004 (pending), which are hereby incorporated by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to a gaming system and method of providing a contest entry to a player using a gaming device.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Connecting a plurality of gaming devices over a network to a host computer is known within the art. Also known within the art is the use of a database maintained within the host computer for tracking a player's play within a casino. The player is issued an identification card by the casino which is inserted into a reader located on the gaming device. These readers may also be installed on kiosks or host workstations located throughout the casino or on handheld remote consoles and carried by casino employees.

[0004] The database provides casinos with the ability to monitor a player's play and to compensate the players based on any predetermined event or criteria as established by the casino. This compensation extends to awarding a contest entry to a player. One such example is disclosed in United States Patent Application Publication No. 2005/0059480 (the '480 publication). The '480 publication describes a gaming system and method for entering a contest. The player may be automatically submitted into the contest or a ticket may be printed at the gaming device and manually entered into the contest. However, the system and method of the '480 publication does not account for multiple contests in the casino.

[0005] The present invention is aimed at one or more of the problems as set forth above.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION AND ADVANTAGES

[0006] The subject invention provides a method of providing a contest entry to a player using a gaming device. The method includes the step of establishing a player identification of the player at the gaming device. A player attribute of the player is retrieved from a player tracking database in response to establishing the player identification. The player attribute is compared to a predetermined entry criteria of a plurality of contests. The method continues with the step of presenting a list of eligible contests that are available for entry by the player based on the comparison of the player attribute to the predetermined entry criteria.

[0007] The subject invention also provides a gaming system. The system includes a player tracking database for storing player attributes of a player. A gaming device establishes a player identification of the player. A processor is operatively coupled to the database and the gaming device for comparing the player attributes to predetermined entry criteria of a plurality of contests. A communication mechanism, operatively coupled to the processor, presents a list of eligible contests that are available for entry by the player.

[0008] By presenting a list of a plurality of contests available to the player, the player is given the option to choose one (or more) of the contests that appeal specifically to him or her. This will result in a higher level of customer satisfaction and will give the casino distinct promotional advantages over other casinos.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] Other advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciated, as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

[0010] FIG. **1** is a block diagram of a gaming system;

[0011] FIG. **2** is a block diagram of a gaming device of the gaming system including a communication mechanism;

[0012] FIG. **3** is a flow diagram of a method of providing entry in a contest to a player; and

[0013] FIG. **4** is a diagram of an auxiliary display showing a list of contests to the player.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0014] Referring to the Figures, wherein like numerals indicate corresponding parts throughout the several views, the present invention provides a gaming system **10** and a method **100** for providing entry in a contest to a player **14**. The contest is typically a drawing where at least one entry is chosen from a plurality of entries to be awarded a prize. The contest, as is common practice, may also be described as a drawing, a raffle, a lottery, a sweepstakes, or a pool. In a first embodiment, the at least one entry, i.e., the winning entry is chosen at random where each entry has an equal chance. However, in other embodiments, some entries may have a higher chance of winning than other entries.

[0015] Referring to FIG. **1**, in the first embodiment, the gaming system **10** includes a plurality of gaming devices **12**. The gaming devices **12** may include, but are not limited to, mechanical reel slot machines, video slot machines, video poker machines, video arcade games, an electronically enhanced gaming table, an interface to a table management system for gaming tables, kiosks, virtual gaming devices, e.g. for online gaming, or other device within the system.

[0016] In the first embodiment eight electronic gaming devices **12**A-**12**H are shown in FIG. **1**. The other gaming devices **121**, as shown in FIG. **1**, represent an infinite amount of gaming devices **12** as placed throughout a casino or other environment. The present invention is not limited to a specific number of gaming devices **12**. Typically, the gaming devices **12** are organized into banks or groups within the casino. A player **14** is defined as a patron visiting the casino who makes a wager while playing the gaming device **12** or utilizes the gaming device for any other purpose.

[0017] The gaming devices **12** are connected via a network **16** to one or more computers **18**, which are generally located at a remote or central location. The network **16** may utilize wires, i.e., hardwired, or be wireless. For clarity and ease of description, only a single computer **18** is shown in FIG. **1**, however, this should not be construed in any way as limiting the gaming system **10** of the present invention to only one computer **18**. The computer **18** includes a processor **20** running a computer **18** application program and maintains one or

more player tracking databases **22**. The processor **20** and the databases **22** are operatively coupled with one another.

[0018] At least one player tracking account **24** is setup within the player tracking database **22**. The player tracking account **24** and the player tracking database **22** store attributes of a player **14**. Theses attributes may include, but are not limited to, name, age, sex, location of residence, amount of money wagered in gaming devices **12** and/or at gaming tables, number of points, i.e., comp points earned, amount of time playing gaming devices **12** and/or at gaming tables, length of stay at casino, and date and/or time of game play.

[0019] Referring to FIG. **2**, each gaming device **12** may include a central processing unit **26** (CPU), a currency management device **28**, a main display **30**, a RAM **32** as a memory device and a ROM **34** (generally provided as an EPROM). The CPU **26** is mainly composed of a microprocessor unit (not shown) and performs various calculations and motion controls necessary for the progress of the game. The currency management device **28** detects the insertion of a coin or a bill and determines the value of the coin or bill. The main display **30** displays **30**, **36** images as part of the game to the player **14**. The RAM **32** temporarily stores programs and data necessary for the progress of the game, and the ROM **34** stores, in advance, programs and data for controlling basic operation of the gaming machine, such as the booting operation thereof, game code and graphics. Of course, other variations of the gaming device **12** may be implemented as are known to those skilled in the art.

[0020] In the first embodiment, a communication mechanism **38** is used as an interface between the gaming device **12** and the player **14** for communication between the player **14** or other operators and the processor **20**, and, more specifically, for providing the identity of the player **14** to the processor **20** and the database **22**. In the illustrated embodiment, an auxiliary display **36** is included in the communication mechanism **38** to display information to the player **14** and/or other operators of the gaming device **12**. The communication mechanism **38** also includes an input apparatus **40** for allowing input by the player **14** and/or other operator(s). The communication mechanism **38** and the input apparatus **40** are operatively coupled to the processor **20** via the network **16**. In the first embodiment, the player **14** is identified via an identification card (not shown) and/or an identification number. A card reader **42** is disposed within the communication mechanism **38** to receive the identification card and read the identification number and/or other data from the identification card. In the first embodiment, the identification card includes a magnetic stripe or surface which encodes the identification number. The card reader **42** includes a magnetic head (not shown) for reading the identification number from the magnetic stripe or surface. In other embodiments (not shown), the identification card may have a bar code read by a bar code scanner or an RFID tag read by a RFID scanner.

[0021] The communication mechanism **38** may also include at least one pushbutton **44**, such as a numeric keypad (not shown), for manually entering the identification number. Furthermore, a touchscreen panel **46** may be disposed over the auxiliary display **36** for allowing the player **14** or other operators to enter information, such as the identification number, or to make other selections. Those skilled in the art realize other suitable implementations for the input device. The communication mechanism **38** may also include a printer **48**.

[0022] As shown in FIG. **3**, the method **100** of the present invention includes a first step **102** of establishing a player identification of the player **14** at the gaming device **12**. In the system **10** of the first embodiment, as described above, the player may be established by reading the identification number from the identification card with the card reader **42** or by the player **14** manually entering the identification number.

[0023] After the player **14** is identified, the method **100** continues with a second step **104** of retrieving a player **14** attribute from the player tracking database **22**. As mentioned above, the player tracking database **22** may track numerous player **14** attributes. In the first embodiment, the player **14** attribute retrieved from the player tracking database **22** is the amount of points earned. Those skilled in the art realize that casinos typically award points based on the amount wagered in gaming devices **12**, length of time playing a table game, or other casino activity. Therefore, when the player **14** is playing a gaming device **12**, his or her points will typically increase over time based on the amount wagered and other factors. Points may also be increased by purchases in the casino, casino promotions, or by other techniques.

[0024] The method **100** continues with a third step **106** of comparing the player **14** attribute to a predetermined entry criteria of a plurality of contests. In the first embodiment, this comparison is performed by the processor **20**. Each of the contests may offer a different prize, and therefore appealing to the likes and interests of different players **14**. Therefore, casinos utilizing the present invention are able to better appeal to broader variety of customers. For example, the prize for a first contest may be a round of golf while the prize for a second contest may be dinner for two in a restaurant. Obviously, some patrons of the casino are not golfers and may not be interested in the first contest. Accordingly, the second contest may possibly appeal to those patrons.

[0025] Furthermore, various contests may be disparate in their overall value. For example, the prize for a third contest may be a new car. Due this disparity between prize values of the various contests, the number of points required to enter each contest may also be unequal. For example, the first contest may require that the player **14** have earned 100 points for entry, the second contest may require 120 points, and the third contest require 300 points.

[0026] The method **100** further includes a fourth step **108** of presenting a list of eligible contests that are available for entry by the player **14**. This list is based on the comparison of the player **14** attribute (e.g., points) to the predetermined entry criteria. The method **100** may also include the step presenting a list of ineligible contests that are not available for entry by the player **14** based on the comparison of the player **14** attribute to the predetermined entry criteria. In the first embodiment, this list (or lists) is/are displayed on the auxiliary display **36** of the communication mechanism **38**. An example of listings of both eligible and ineligible contests is shown in FIG. **4**. The list of ineligible contests may be differentiated from the list of eligible contests using any of numerous techniques known to those skilled in the art. One such technique is to "gray out" the ineligible contests, as is shown in FIG. **4**. The number of points necessary for each eligible and ineligible contest may also be displayed on the auxiliary display **36**. This allows the player **14** to see how many additional points are needed before being able to enter the currently ineligible contests.

[0027] Referring again to FIG. **3**, in a fifth step **110** of the method **100**, the player **14** is allowed to select one of the eligible contests to enter from the list of eligible contests. In the first embodiment, the player may use the input apparatus

40 to make this selection. If the input apparatus 40 includes the touchscreen panel 46, the player 14 may simply touch the eligible contest shown on the auxiliary display 36 that he/she wishes to enter. Otherwise, the at least one pushbutton 44 may be used to select the eligible contest. Furthermore, the player 14 may elect not to enter a contest or request to be reminded later about available contests.

[0028] In one embodiment, after selecting one of the eligible contests, the player 14 may be automatically, i.e., electronically entered into that particular contest. The computer 18 and processor 20 may keep track of which players 14 are entered into each contest. Alternatively, a separate contest control server (not shown) may be used to track the players 14 entered into each contest. Either way, the computer 18 or contest control server may randomly choose a winning entry from a plurality of entries to each contest. The computer 18 or contest control server may use a random number generator (RNG) to randomly or pseudo-randomly pick the winning entry. The drawing, i.e., picking of the winner, may take place at a prespecified time or at a random or pseudo-random time within an allotted range of time. Furthermore, after the drawing, the entry of each player 14 may be transferred to another related drawing for a different prize, i.e., a second-chance drawing.

[0029] In another embodiment, after selecting one of the eligible contests, an entry ticket may be printed for the selected contest. In the first embodiment, the ticket may be printed by the printer 48 of the communication mechanism 38. The player 14 may then take the ticket to a designated place for entry into the contest. Typically, the ticket would be placed inside a drum where tickets for all entries are randomized by rotating or spinning the drum. A winning ticket would then be drawn from the drum. The ticket may contain identifying information, such as, but not limited to, the name of the player 14, the identification number of the player 14, the casino name, the machine code where printed, and/or the time and date of the drawing.

[0030] By providing an entry into the selected contest, the player 14 may be required to exchange, i.e., give up, a certain number of points for entry into one of the eligible contests. By exchanging the points, the points would not be able to be used for other contests or to make other casino-related purchases. However, depending on the configuration by the casino, the player 14 may not be required to exchange the points for entry into one of the contests.

[0031] The communication mechanism 38 may be implemented outside of the gaming device 12 for allowing the player 14 to enter one of the contests. Referring again to FIG. 1, the communication mechanism 38 may be implemented in a kiosk 50, a host work station 52, and/or a host remote console 54, which are each operatively coupled to the computer 18 via the network 16. The kiosk 50 is independent from the gaming devices 12 and allows the player 14 to view and select from the list of eligible and ineligible contests. The host work station 52 is typically mounted in a fixed location for use by a casino employee. The host remote console 54 is typically a handheld and portable unit, allowing the casino employee to roam around the casino and enter players 14 in eligible contests.

[0032] Obviously, many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. The invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described within the scope of the appended claims.

1. A method of providing a contest entry to a player comprising the steps of:
- allowing a player to place wager(s) on one or more games at a plurality of gaming devices;
- tracking the wagers placed by the player, awarding the player a number of points as a function thereof, and recording the number of points award the player in a player tracking database;
- establishing a player identification of the player at one of the gaming devices;
- retrieving a total number of points associated with the player from a player tracking database in response to establishing the player identification;
- comparing the total number points associated with the player to a predetermined entry criteria of a plurality of contests; and
- presenting a list of eligible contests that are available for entry by the player based on the comparison of the player attribute to the predetermined entry criteria.

2. A method as set forth in claim 1 further comprising the step of allowing the player to select one of the eligible contests to enter from the list of eligible contests.

3. A method as set forth in claim 2 further comprising the step of entering the player in the one of the eligible contests selected by the player.

4. A method as set forth in claim 2 further comprising the step of printing an entry ticket for the one of the eligible contests selected by the player.

5. A method as set forth in claim 2 wherein the player attribute is further defined as points and further comprising the step of exchanging a certain number of points for entry into one of the eligible contests.

6. A method as set forth in claim 1 further comprising the step of selecting not to enter any of the eligible contests.

7. A method as set forth in claim 6 wherein the player attribute is further defined as points and further comprising the step of presenting the number of points needed to enter each eligible contest and each ineligible contest.

8. A method as set forth in claim 1 further comprising the step of presenting a list of ineligible contests that are not available for entry by the player based on the comparison of the player attribute to the predetermined entry criteria.

9. A method as set forth in claim 1 further comprising the step of updating the player attribute based on playing of the gaming device by the player.

10. A gaming system, the gaming system including a plurality of gaming devices which allow a player to place wager (s) on one or more games, the gaming system for tracking the wagers placed by the player, awarding the player a number of points as a function thereof, and recording the number of points award the player in a player tracking database, comprising:
- a player tracking database storing player attributes of a player, including a total number of points associated with the player;
- a gaming device for reading a player identification of the player;
- a processor operatively coupled to said database and said gaming device for comparing the total number of points associated with the player to predetermined entry criteria of a plurality of contests; and
- a communication mechanism operatively coupled to said processor for presenting a list of eligible contests that are

available for entry by the player based on the comparison of the player attribute to the predetermined entry criteria.

11. A gaming system as set forth in claim **10** further comprising an input apparatus operatively coupled to said processor for selecting one of the eligible contests to enter from the list of eligible contests.

12. A gaming system as set forth in claim **10** wherein said communication mechanism is disposed within said gaming device and includes a display.

13. A gaming system as set forth in claim **11** wherein said input apparatus is disposed within said gaming device and includes at least one pushbutton.

14. A gaming system as set forth in claim **11** wherein said input apparatus is disposed within said gaming device and includes a touchscreen panel.

15. A gaming system as set forth in claim **11** further comprising a printer for printing an entry ticket for the one of the eligible contests selected by the player.

16. A method for providing a comp to a player of a gaming machine, comprising the steps of:

establishing a plurality of drawings which may be entered by the player, each drawing having a set of predetermined entry criteria;

establishing a player account for the player, the player account being stored in a computer coupled to the gaming machine, the computer for awarding the player one or more comps, each comp have an associated number of bonus points, the player account for storing information (1) related to the player, (2) related to the player's play of one or more gaming machines, and (3) the bonus points;

establishing an identification of the player at the gaming machine;

comparing the information stored in the player account to the predetermined entry criteria for each drawing;

establishing a list of drawings for which the player meets the respective predetermined entry criteria and displaying the list of drawings to the player on the gaming machine; and,

allowing the player to select one of the drawings and responsively entering the player into the drawing.

17. A method, as set forth in claim **16**, including the step of:

displaying a list of the drawings for which the player does not meet the entry requirements.

18. A method, as set forth in claim **17**, wherein the list of drawings for which the player does not meet the entry requirements includes the entry requirements.

19. A method, as set forth in claim **17**, wherein each entry to each drawing costs a predetermined number of bonus points to be deducted from the bonus points stored in the player account.

20. A method, as set forth in claim **1**, wherein the contest is one of a drawing, raffle, a sweepstakes, and a pool.

21. A gaming system, as set forth in claim **10**, wherein the contest is one of a drawing, raffle, a sweepstakes, and a pool.

* * * * *