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(54) MULTIPLE CONTEST SCORING WITH FLEXIBLE PREDICTION

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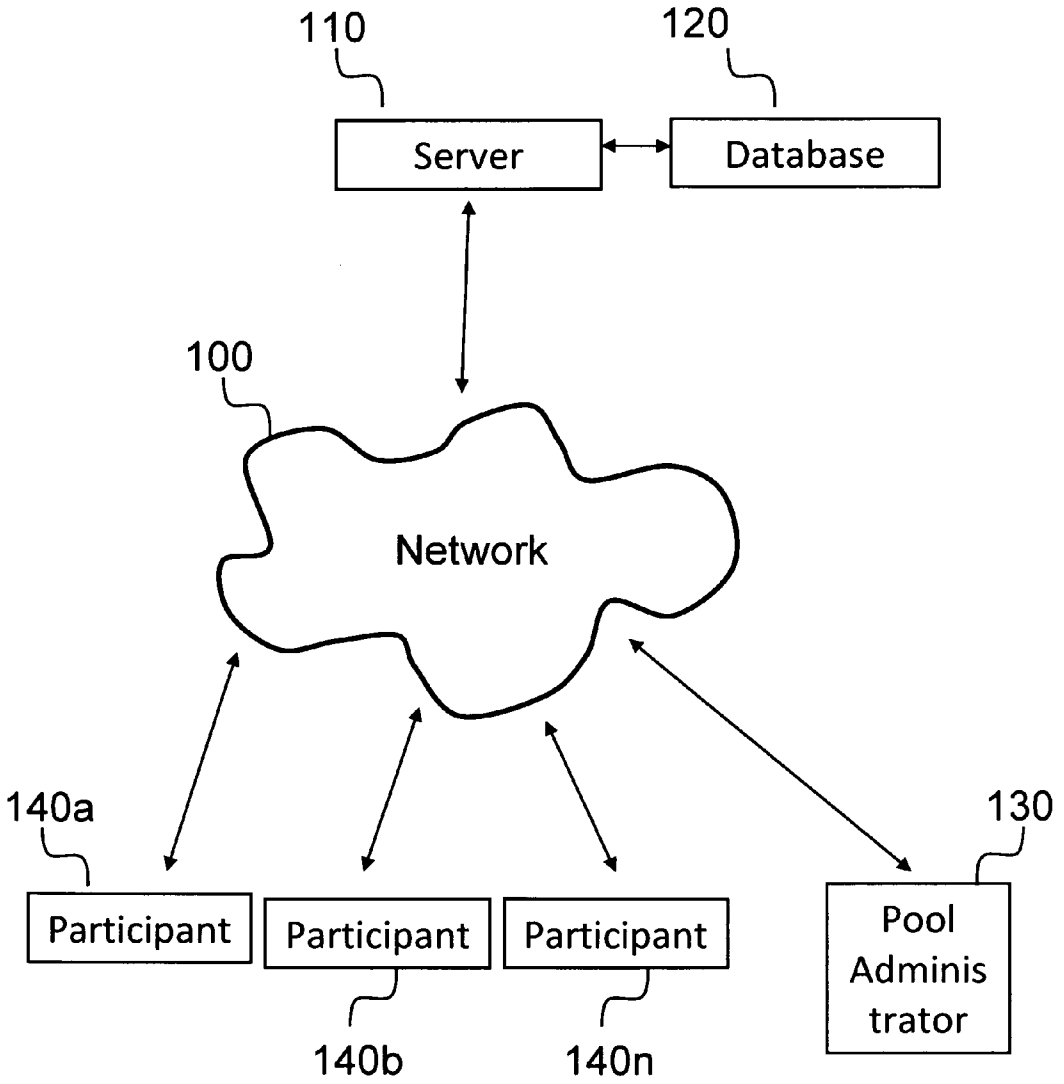
(57) **ABSTRACT**

Embodiments of the invention relate to hosting a competition on a computing device, wherein the competition allows participants to select a first set of predicted winners for a predetermined series of matches in a tournament and a second set of predictions for winners if one or more of the first set of predicted winners are eliminated earlier than predicted. The competition may be implemented in any suitable computing system environment, including, but not limited to, a web-based competition hosted on a remote server, a private or company-based competition hosted on a private or company computer.



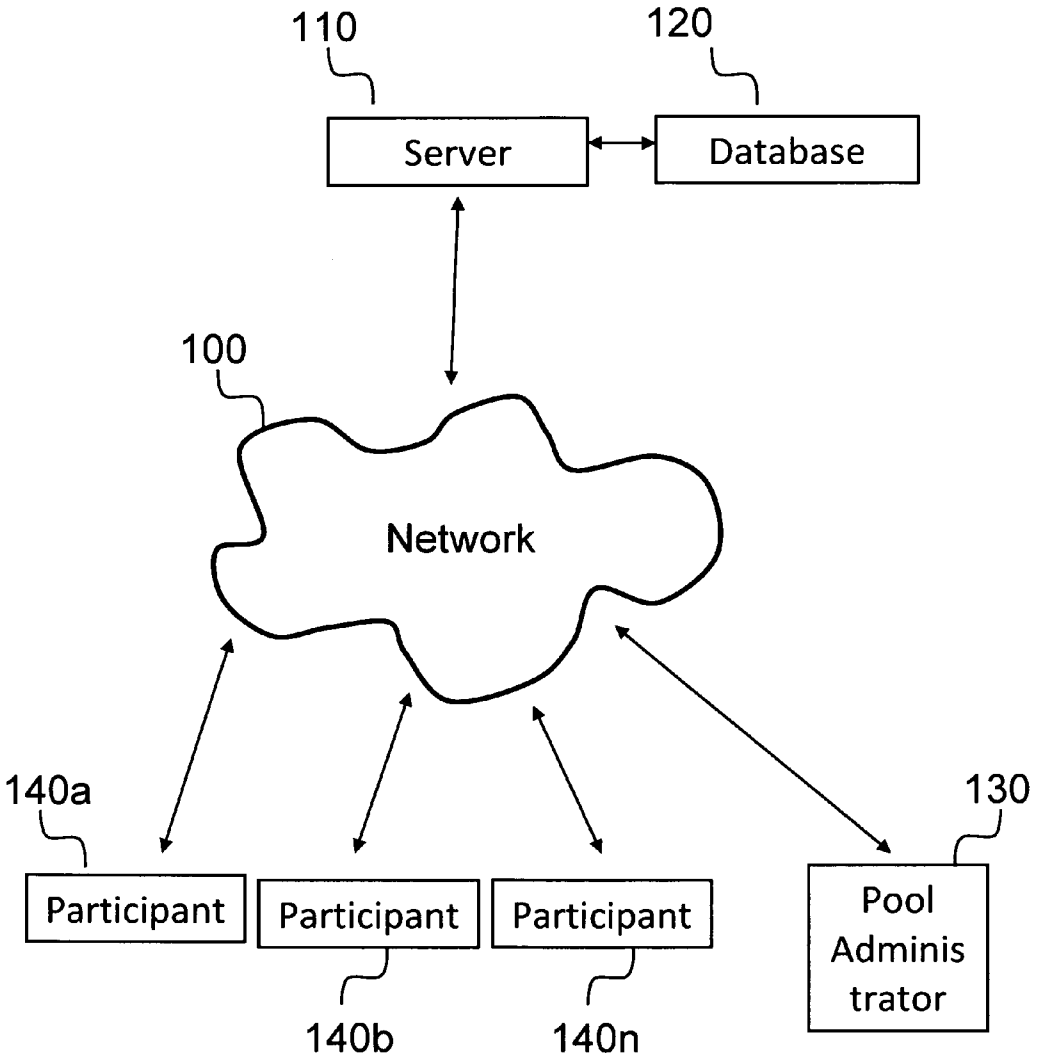

110
120
Server
Database
100
Network
140a
130
Participant
Participant
Participant
Pool Adminis trator
140b
140n

FIGURE 1

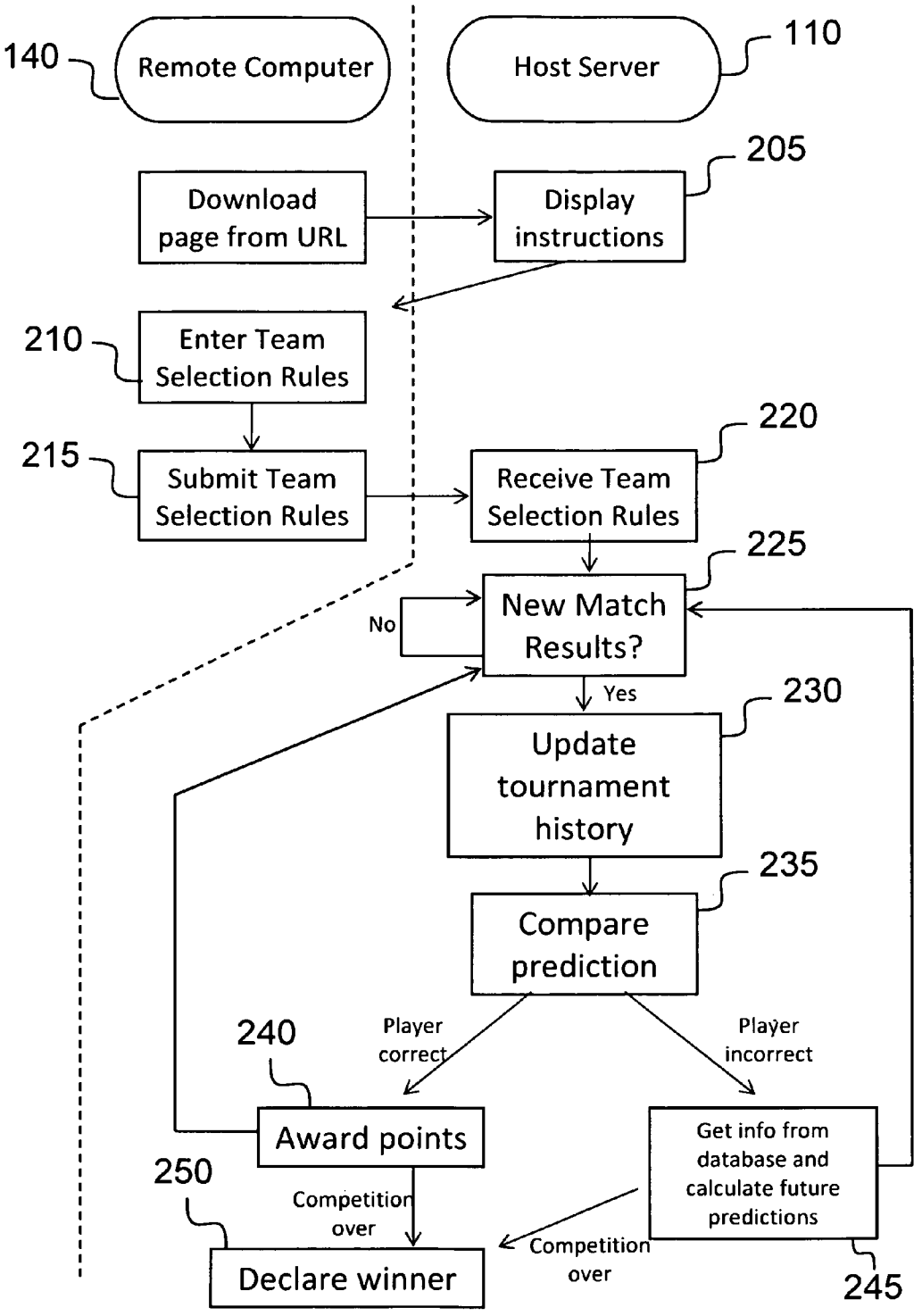

140
Remote Computer
Host Server
110
205
Download page from URL
Display instructions
210
Enter Team Selection Rules
215
Submit Team Selection Rules
220
Receive Team Selection Rules
225
New Match Results?
No
Yes
230
Update tournament history
235
Compare prediction
240
Player correct
Player incorrect
Award points
Get info from database and calculate future predictions
250
Competition over
Competition over
Declare winner
245

FIGURE 2

MULTIPLE CONTEST SCORING WITH FLEXIBLE PREDICTION

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 119(e) of U.S. provisional patent application Ser. No. 61/216,449, entitled MULTIPLE CONTEST SCORING WITH FLEXIBLE PREDICTION, filed on May 18, 2009, which is hereby incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

FIELD OF INVENTION

[0002] Embodiments of the invention relate to computer-implemented competitions.

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0003] Workplace competitions where employees try to predict the outcome of multi-contest sporting events (sports tournaments) are a common form of entertainment and contribute to camaraderie and an enjoyable workplace environment. In order to minimize the loss of productivity suffered by the company due to employee time spent participating in such competitions it is common practice to run the competition in such a way that employees can submit an entry (list of predictions) before the start of the tournament and then either spend time monitoring the outcome or not spend time monitoring the outcome if their work schedule does not permit them to do so. In either case, no additional action is required of the employee once his or her entry has been submitted. Because the employee (player participant) must predict the winner of contests/matches whose teams have not yet been chosen at the time of prediction it is common for many of those predictions to be proven false even before the contest is played. For example, in a "March Madness" (NCAA Men's Basketball National Championship tournament) competition, if the team that a player predicts to be the tournament champion is eliminated in an early round then that player likely has at that early time little or no chance to win the office competition because many of his or her future predictions are already proven to be false.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

[0004] One embodiment of the invention is directed to a computer-implemented method of hosting a competition on at least one computer that permits an outcome prediction to be made for a winner between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing in a match of a tournament, the method comprising retrieving information from a database that stores team selection instructions for a participant in a competition, wherein the team selection instructions for the participant provide i) an initial outcome prediction for one or more matches of a tournament, and ii) a relative ranking of teams that were not initially picked to be playing in the one or more matches; and, computing, on the at least one computer, an adjusted prediction for a match between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing against each other.

[0005] In some embodiments, the team selection instructions are based on a default ranking. In some embodiments, the participant modifies the default ranking. In some embodiments, one of the two teams playing against each other was not initially picked. In some embodiments, both teams playing against each other were not initially picked.

[0006] Another embodiment of the invention is directed to at least one non-transitory computer-readable medium encoded with instructions that, when executed on at least one computer, perform a method of hosting a competition on at least one computer that permits an outcome prediction to be made for a winner between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing in a match of a tournament, the method comprising retrieving information from a database that stores team selection instructions for a participant in a competition, wherein the team selection instructions for the participant provide i) an initial outcome prediction for one or more matches of a tournament, and ii) a relative ranking of teams that were not initially picked to be playing in the one or more matches; and, computing, on the at least one computer, an adjusted prediction for a match between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing against each other.

[0007] Another embodiment of the invention is directed to at least one computer comprising: at least one tangible memory for storing processor-executable instructions for hosting a competition on the at least one computer to permit an outcome prediction to be made for a winner between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing in a match of a tournament; and, at least one hardware microprocessor, coupled to the memory, that executes the processor-executable instructions to retrieve information from a database that stores team selection instructions for a participant in a competition, wherein the team selection instructions for the participant provide i) an initial outcome prediction for one or more matches of a tournament, and ii) a relative ranking of teams that were not initially picked to be playing in the one or more matches, and to compute an adjusted prediction for a match between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing against each other.

[0008] Another embodiment of the invention is directed to a method implemented on at least one computer of participating in a competition hosted on at least one server, wherein the competition permits an outcome prediction to be made for a winner between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing in a match of a tournament, the method comprising prompting, at the at least one computer, a participant to provide team selection instructions for a competition; receiving team selection instructions from the participant; and, sending the team selection instructions to the at least one server.

[0009] Another embodiment of the invention is directed to a computer-implemented method, comprising: entering participant instructions into a database, wherein the instructions specify predictions for each possible game in a tournament (before the start of the tournament), and after a game is completed, computing an adjusted prediction for each game based on the participant instructions and the game result(s).

[0010] Another embodiment of the invention is directed to a computer-implemented method, comprising: entering participant instructions into a database, wherein the instructions specify predictions for each possible game in a tournament, and after a game completed, computing allocated points to the participant wherein the points are based on both the game result(s) and the participant instructions.

[0011] Another embodiment of the invention is directed to a computer-implemented method, comprising: entering participant instructions into a database, (wherein the instructions specify predictions for each possible game in a tournament) (or wherein the instructions specify relative team rankings for all possible pair-wise games in a tournament), thereby providing a predicted bracket for each participant, computing, on at least one computer, points for each participant based on game outcomes, wherein if a game includes at least one

non-predicted team, the points for the game are computed by accessing the participant instructions that specify the relative rankings of the two teams in the game.

[0012] It should be appreciated that embodiments described herein for a single participant may be used for a plurality of participants in a single competition and thereby may be used to provide scores, statistics, and/or identify winners of a competition.

[0013] Accordingly, certain embodiments relate to a method of running a competition, and/or a method of determining a competition winner.

[0014] Some embodiments, relate to a competition wherein each participant has a chance to score points for each game of a tournament regardless of the outcome of all previous games, wherein each participant selects, prior to the start of the first game, a relative ranking for each team in the tournament, such that any pair-wise combination of teams has a predicted outcome. In some embodiments, the relative ranking is a default ranking. In some embodiments, the default ranking is provided by the contest organizer. In some embodiments, a participant selects a ranking for each team in the tournament. In some embodiments, a participant selects a ranking for at least one team and the remainder of the rankings are provided by the default ranking. In some embodiments, a participant selects at least one team ranking by filling out a bracket, wherein.

[0015] Some embodiments are directed to a method of running a competition to accumulate the most points by predicting the outcome of each match in a multi-match sports tournament, wherein the entrants in the competition are not required to provide any information after the start of the tournament's first match, wherein the number of points accumulated by an entrant regarding any particular match is always in question until the particular match has been played, wherein each participant provides, at the outset, instructions that specify a prediction for any possible match.

[0016] In some embodiments, the instructions are default instructions (e.g., select default ranking). In some embodiments, the instructions are modified default instructions. In some embodiments, the instructions include exceptions to the default instructions.

[0017] Some embodiments are directed to a method of running a bracket-based single elimination tournament prediction contest wherein the entrant's bracket is adjusted after each round using information provided by the entrant before commencement of the tournament.

[0018] Some embodiments are directed to a method comprising: prompting a user for team ranking selections, wherein the selections are provided prior to the first game in a tournament, and sending the selections to a database that maintains the selections during the tournament

[0019] Some embodiments are directed to a method wherein the prompting comprises:

[0020] displaying an interface wherein the user enters information to provide the selections.

[0021] One embodiment is directed to a method of hosting a network-based competition comprising acts of computing and/or awarding points based on actual match results and team ranking information provided by a participant, wherein the team ranking information provides predicted match outcomes and also rules for selecting match outcomes in the event the initially predicted matches do not occur.

[0022] Another embodiment is directed to a method of administering a network-based competition comprising acts of prompting a participant to provide ranking information prior to the start of a tournament.

[0023] Another embodiment is directed to a method of competing in a network-based competition comprising acts of accessing a server and retrieving prompts for participant ranking instructions.

[0024] Another embodiment is directed to a method of awarding points to a participant in a network-based competition.

[0025] Another embodiment is directed to a method for displaying points for a participant in network-based competition.

[0026] Another embodiment is directed to a method for a participant to access results and/or points in a network-based competition.

[0027] Another embodiment is directed to a computer system configured to implement a competition software as described herein.

[0028] Another embodiment is directed to computer-readable medium comprising instructions for implementing a competition software as described herein.

[0029] Accordingly, a user may provide a first round of predictions that provide a higher score, but a subsequent round of predictions that provide at least some score if one or more first predictions are not met.

[0030] Accordingly, a primary outcome of teams and or matches will be awarded a higher number of points, but if one or more teams are not present for certain matches, predictions will be used to generate lower points for alternative winning teams if they were predicted to win based on the participant's team selection rules. The accompanying drawings are not intended to be drawn to scale. In the drawings, each identical or nearly identical component that is illustrated in various figures is represented by a like numeral. For purposes of clarity, not every component may be labeled in every drawing. In the drawings:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0031] FIG. **1** illustrates one embodiment of a networked computing environment in which one or more participants can access a server capable of running a competition with flexible predictions; and,

[0032] FIG. **2** is a flow chart of a method of operation of a competition with flexible prediction, in accordance with one embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF INVENTION

[0033] As web-based competitions have increased in popularity, the benefit of attracting and retaining participants has increased. Applicant has appreciated that such competitions are more attractive if they provide participants with more opportunities to win. Also, participants in a web-based competition are more likely to review or update their status more times if their chance of winning is prolonged. Systems and methods described herein provide a way to increase traffic to a computer that hosts a network-based competition by increasing the duration during which a participant retains a chance of winning the competition.

[0034] For computers (e.g., servers) that are implementing a competition (e.g., an office pool) wherein participants are awarded points for correctly predicting the outcome of one or more contests in an external event (e.g., games or matches in a sport tournament), additional opportunities for the partici-

pants to win can be provided by obtaining information that can be used to award points for contest outcomes (e.g., match winners) that the participants did not predict. This allows a participant in a sports pool, for example, to retain a stake in the pool even if many of the teams predicted to be winners by the participant are actually eliminated early in the tournament.

[0035] Some embodiments provide a method of competition where players predict the outcome of multiple contests where for at least some of the contests the exact participants are not yet determined at the time of prediction. Each player assigns some ranking to all of the possible participants such that for any future contest, that player's choice for winner of the contest can be determined as the contest participant to which the player initially gave the highest ranking. Some embodiments may employ a human interface that allows players familiar with the traditional procedure for running such competitions to easily compete using the new method of competition, the player able to compete without any additional effort, but also able to further customize his entry with some small amount of additional effort. Some embodiments may be implemented as a software application that can be downloaded over the internet.

[0036] Applicant has recognized that most players lose interest in an office competition when they no longer have any chance to win, and also tend to lose interest in the tournament or in watching additional tournament games on television. This is undesirable from the point of view of game sponsors (advertisers) and so there is a need for a new method of running office competitions that allows players to remain "alive" (still with a chance to win) longer yet still does not require action subsequent to the initial entry submission.

[0037] Applicant has recognized that typical competitions (e.g., office pools) relating to events such as sport tournaments are based on participants making predictions for a series of matches, where the predicted results for initial matches define the options for subsequent matches. For example, a participant is asked to predict a first set of winners of a first round of matches, and then predict a second set of winners of a second round of matches amongst the first set of winners, and so on until a final prediction is made for the final match. A participant is awarded points based on the number of correct winners predicted in each round, typically with more points awarded for each correct prediction in later rounds. Applicant has appreciated that this scheme often results in many participants being knocked out of the competition (e.g., having no chance of winning the competition or being within a winning group of the competition, for example, within the top 5%, in the top 3, in the top 5, in the top 10, or other winning group that may be defined by the competition organizer) if a sufficient number of his or her early predictions are incorrect, making it impossible to accumulate any points for subsequent matches where neither team in the match was predicted by the participant. Applicant also has appreciated that a participant can stay in the competition for a longer period (e.g., through more rounds of matches) if the participant provides information that can be used (e.g., by the computer system) to select a winner for a match of a later round of the tournament even if the participant had not predicted either team to be playing in the later match. This allows points to be awarded to the participant for a later match even if both teams predicted by the participant to be playing in the later match were knocked out before reaching that match. In some embodiments, the computer system can award one or more points to a participant for every match being played in the tournament, regardless of the outcome of the prior matches. However, the number of points awarded for the outcome of a match may be lower for matches where neither team was predicted to be playing by the participant than for matches where one or both teams were predicted to be playing.

[0038] It should be appreciated that embodiments of the invention may be used in connection with competitions (e.g., computer-implemented competitions) based on predictions of the outcomes for any tournament having two or more rounds of elimination (of teams or individuals depending on the sport). In some embodiments, the tournament may be a sports tournament, for example, a soccer, basketball, football, hockey, baseball, tennis, badminton, or other tournament. In some embodiments, a tournament may be an elimination tournament where two teams play one or more games and the winner proceeds to the next round whereas the loser is eliminated. In some embodiments, a "match" as used herein refers to the number of games required to obtain a winner and a loser. In some embodiments, a match may be a single game (e.g., a single basketball game) at the end of which the winner proceeds to the next round and the loser is eliminated. In some embodiments, a match may include two or more games (e.g., a number of games for a tennis match, or a series of games such as a best of three, a best of five, or a best of seven game series, e.g., for basketball or hockey, etc.).

[0039] In some embodiments, a tournament may be represented by an elimination bracket (a diagrammatic representation of the series of games played during a tournament), leading to a final match. In some embodiments, a tournament may include an initial qualifier round to determine which teams proceed to the elimination bracket. In some embodiments, the initial qualifier round may include round-robin play in groups where teams or individuals within each group play one another and the team(s)/individual(s) with the highest (or two highest, three highest, etc.) number(s) of points are selected to proceed to the elimination bracket.

[0040] It should be appreciated that for any tournament, the winner of a match may be determined using any suitable metric. For example, the winner may be the team that scores the most points. In the event of a tie, any suitable tie-breaker may be used to determine a winner. For example a "shoot out" at the end of a tied soccer match where players take turns shooting against the opposing team's goal-keeper, or "most goals scored" (e.g., during all three First Round matches for two teams having the same win loss-draw record during the First Round of the World Cup Soccer Tournament).

[0041] Any number of approaches can be used to configure a computer system to obtain and/or use participant instructions so that each participant has a stake in the outcome of each match in a tournament, with the possibility of being awarded at least one or a few points for each match. In some embodiments, a participant provides sufficient instructions, prior to the first match in the tournament, to rank each team in the tournament. This information is then used to compute participant points as the tournament progresses. Accordingly, embodiments of the invention provide more options for awarding points to participants than a traditional pool or other competition based on predicting match outcomes. A traditional approach involves making a predictions for each match in a tournament, wherein the winner of a match in a first round plays in a subsequent match against a winner of another match in the first round. If a participant predicts that a particular team will win at least two rounds, but that team is

knocked out before the second round, then the participant cannot win any points from the second round match that the eliminated team was predicted to win. In contrast, embodiments of the invention allow a substitute prediction for a subsequent match if a team that was initially predicted to win that match was knocked out in an earlier round. In some embodiments, in addition to providing instructions that identify an initial series of winners for the matches in a bracket, the participant also provides instructions that allow points to be awarded for substitute teams in the event that one or more of the initially predicted winners were knocked out earlier than initially predicted. It should be appreciated that this additional information may be provided in any suitable form. Accordingly, a participant may use any suitable format to provide team selection rules that can be used to predict a winner for any possible match that could be played during a tournament.

[0042] In some embodiments, a participant i) fills out a traditional or typical bracket representing an initial set of predicted winners, and ii) provides relative rankings of the teams that could play against each other in the event one or more of the initial set of predicted winners is knocked out earlier than predicted. In some embodiments, a participant provides only a team rank from first to last for all the teams in the tournament. This set of rankings can be used to generate a set of initial picks (and these could be displayed in some embodiments).

[0043] In some embodiments, instead of providing a series of team ranks, a participant may provide a prediction for the winner of each possible pair-wise match in a tournament. It should be appreciated that this may provide more flexibility than a relative rank for all teams, because a participant may select match outcomes for certain combinations of teams that are not consistent with other outcomes based only on a simple ranking system (e.g., A beats B, B beats C, but C beats A).

[0044] In some embodiments, a participant may provide a set of exceptions in addition to providing a relative team rank (form first to last). In this way, an outcome of an alternative match may be predicted based on the team rank (i.e., with the higher ranked team predicted to beat the lower ranked team in any match) unless an exception is provided to specifically identify a winner for a defined match regardless of the relative rankings of the two teams.

[0045] In some embodiments, a participant may use a default ranking (e.g., provided by a competition organizer). The default ranking may be based on team seeds from any source. In some embodiments, a participant may modify the default ranking by rearranging the relative ranking of one or a few teams in the default ranking. In some embodiments, a participant may provide exceptions as described above.

[0046] Accordingly, it should be appreciated that the participant may provide team selection rules in any form, provided the selection rules allow a program to identify a predicted winner for any match that could theoretically be played during the tournament.

[0047] It should be appreciated that embodiments of the invention may be used for elimination tournaments, group play tournaments (e.g., round robin format), other suitable formats, or any combination thereof. In some embodiments, team selection rules may be provided prior to the beginning of a first match of a second part of a tournament and after the conclusion of a first part of a tournament (e.g., after preliminary qualifier rounds). However, in many embodiments, team selection rules are provided prior to the start of the first match in a tournament, even if the tournament has one or more initial rounds (e.g., group rounds) prior to an elimination round.

[0048] As discussed herein, a participant's team selection rules may be used to compute the participant's predictions for alternative games that actually occur when one or more of the initially predicted winners are knocked out early. Accordingly, a participant may be awarded points for a winner that was predicted based on team selection rules even if the initially predicted winners (the predicted winners before the start of the first match) lose earlier than predicted. However, it should be appreciated that a participant may be awarded fewer points for a winner of a match that was not one of the initially predicted winners, but that was predicted using the selection rules in view of the actual teams that played the match. It should be appreciated that the number of points awarded for matches at different stages in the tournament and the relative number of points awarded for each match depending on whether the winner was an initially predicted winner or an alternative winner predicted using the participant instructions can be varied from competition to competition (e.g., by a competition organizer, a competition administrator, etc.) depending on different factors that may be adjusted to impact the extent to which participants still have a chance to win as a tournament progresses.

[0049] Accordingly, a participant may be awarded points for correctly predicted outcomes. In some embodiments, a participant is awarded a first number of points for a winning team in an identified match, if that team was included in participant's initial picks for winning teams. In some embodiments, a participant is awarded a second number of points, if the team that won the match was not one of participant's initial picks, but was nonetheless predicted to win that match based on participant's relative ranking of the two teams playing the match. However, it should be appreciated that the second number of points is typically lower than the first number of points to reflect the fact that the winning team was essentially a backup team based on participants rankings, rather than the participant's initial pick for that match.

[0050] It should be appreciated that a program for running a competition according to one of the embodiments described herein may be implemented in any suitable computer environment. In some embodiments, a competition may be implement on a participants computer. In some embodiments, a competition may be implement on a computer or server in a networked set of computers (e.g., a private, company, or other organization network). In some embodiments, a competition may be web-based and participants access a remote server (e.g., using a web browser) to enter information (e.g., identifier information and/or team selection rules), retrieve information (e.g., personal predictions, statistics, and/or results), download a program or part of a program to run aspects of the competition (e.g., to enter information and/or to run statistical predictions based on results at any stage in the competition and participants selections). However, it should be appreciated that certain embodiments of the invention may be performed on any suitable computer system as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect. From the foregoing overview of some embodiments, one of skill in the art can appreciate that embodiments may be constructed based on programming of one or more computer devices. A computer may operate in a networked environment using logical connections to one or more remote computers, such as a remote computer. The remote computer may be a personal computer, a server, a router, a network PC, a peer device or other com-

mon network node, and typically includes many or all of the elements associated with a computer, including a memory storage device. The logical connections may include a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN), and/or other networks. Such networking environments are commonplace in offices, enterprise-wide computer networks, intranets and the Internet.

[0051] FIG. **1** illustrates an example of a suitable computing system environment that may be used in implementing some embodiments of the invention. The computing system environment is only one example of a suitable computing environment and is not intended to suggest any limitation as to the scope of use or functionality of the invention.

[0052] The non-limiting networked computing environment of FIG. **1** includes a network **100**, which may be an unsecured network (e.g., the world wide web or Internet), a local network, a secured network (e.g., a corporate intranet), or include a combination of two or more thereof. Network **100** may include networked computing devices that are physically connected. The physical connection of networked computing devices may be made over any suitable computer communications medium (e.g., wired or wireless communication), as the invention is not limited in this respect. For example, when used in a LAN networking environment, computing devices within the network and/or accessing the network may be connected to the LAN through a network interface or adapter. When used in a WAN networking environment, computing devices within the network and/or accessing the network typically include a modem or other means for establishing communications over the WAN, such as the Internet. The modem, which may be internal or external, may be connected to the system bus via a user input interface, or other appropriate mechanism. In a networked environment, program modules, or portions thereof, may be stored in a remote memory storage device.

[0053] A computing device **110** may be connected to the network and act as a server running the competition. The server **110** may be connected to the network via any suitable computer communications medium (e.g., wired or wireless communication). It should be appreciated that any of the connections described herein may use encrypted and/or unencrypted communications. Accordingly, in some embodiments a system may include a combination of encrypted and unencrypted communications. As used herein, a server may be any computer that can be programmed to run the software and that can be accessed by the users (e.g., over the internet, or over the company intranet if all the users are in one location, or possibly no inter-computer communication if all users are going to use the same computer to make their entries).

[0054] It should be appreciated that a plurality of computing devices at the same site or at different locations may act as servers and networked in any suitable configuration for a competition as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect.

[0055] A database **120** may be connected to server **110** and be available to store participant instructions regarding team selection rules for a competition. In some embodiments, the database is directly connected to the server as shown in FIG. **1**. In other embodiments, the database is not directly connected to the server, but may be accessed via a network (e.g., network **100**). However, in some embodiments the database is not a separate device, but instead may be integral to the server (e.g., stored in a non-volatile storage medium such as a hard disk drive).

[0056] It should be appreciated that in some embodiments a system includes a plurality of databases for storing participant instructions. Databases may be connected to each other, network **100**, server **110**, or any combination thereof via any suitable computer communications medium (e.g., wired or wireless communication).

[0057] It also should be appreciated that one or more devices of server **110** and/or database **120** may include public or private portals.

[0058] A competition administrator may access the server from an administrator computing device **130**. It should be appreciated that any suitable computing system may be used by an administrator. An administrator may establish an administrator account and configure a local competition (e.g., an office pool). An administrator may chose a username and password that allows the administrator to perform administrative functions from any suitable computer.

[0059] In some embodiments, computing device **130** is connected to a network as shown in FIG. **1**. However, it should be appreciated that computing device **130** may be directly connected to the server, as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect. It also should be appreciated that a competition administrator may interface directly with the server and not need a separate computing device. Administrator computer **130** may be connected to the network and/or server via any suitable computer communications medium (e.g., wired or wireless communication). In some embodiments, an administrator may configure scoring rules (e.g., the number of points awarded for each match for each round) and tie breakers if any. In some embodiments, an administrator can maintain an access list for participants (e.g., email addresses or other contact information) and may contact participants to address any administrative issues (e.g., the strength of the group password). In some embodiments, an administrator may determine % "goodness" for each place in the "winner group" (e.g., 1^{st} place=60% goodness, 2^{nd}=30% 3^{rd}=10% which may be used in quality coverage and raw coverage determinations and may be used by participants to divide up a prize such as a dollar prize). It should be appreciated that certain embodiments relate to statistical information that may be provided to a participant at any stage in the competition. In some embodiments, a competition administrator may control the types of statistical information that is provided. In some embodiments, statistical information may be calculated on a remote server that hosts the competition. In some embodiments, statistical information may be calculated on a local server or on participant's computer (e.g., using software downloaded from a host server). However, other embodiments may be used as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect. Non-limiting examples of statistical information that may be provided include the likelihood of winning and/or the amount that the participant is likely to win. In some embodiments, a quality coverage may be calculated to represent the expected value of the player's entry. For example, 25% might mean a 50% chance to win half the pot. In some embodiments, a raw coverage may be calculated. A raw coverage is the same as quality coverage except that every game is considered a toss-up (meaning the experts' perception of the strength of the teams is not taken into account). However, other statistical information may be provided as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect. In some embodiments, an administrator may run software on an administrator computer to provide further enhanced statistics. In some embodiments, an administrator

may host a competition results page on an administrator server while receiving match results, new advertisement placement, and/or other information from a host server.

[0060] In some embodiments, a group password may be sent by an administrator to provide access. The administrator may set up a separate password protected account for each participant and for the administrator.

[0061] In some embodiments, an administrator (e.g., a private office pool administrator) desiring further enhanced statistics generation (for example, to determine that a first player has a certain percentage chance, for example more or less than 50%, for example 43.5%, to finish higher or lower than a second player) can download software to host a pool on their own server and use of their own computational power while receiving match results and periodically receiving new advertisement placements from a host server portal. In some embodiments, an administrator may obtain further enhanced statistics for display by a host server portal.

[0062] In some embodiments, a competition program may determine when a participant no longer has a chance of winning a tournament (e.g., based on the actual results at that point in the tournament, the rounds/matches left to play, the participant points and predictions, and the point totals and predictions of other participants). A participant who no longer can win automatically may be informed that they are "out" of the tournament in some embodiments (e.g., by e-mail).

[0063] In some embodiments, a participant can set up a submission (e.g., of picks and predictions) and optionally save it in an account (e.g., a password protected account). In some embodiments, changes to the submission can be made until the first game of the tournament starts.

[0064] In some embodiments an administrator runs a competition program from a server. In some embodiments, an administrator organizes a competition on his own computer and interacts with a host server. In some embodiments, a database may be managed on the administrator's computer. However, other configurations may be used. In some embodiments, the reason for distributing and/or implementing different parts of a competition program on different computers is to capture additional computer power. This may be important if large numbers of participants enter a competition (e.g., 500-1,000; 1,000-10,000; 10,000-100,000; 100,000-500,000; 500,000-1,000,000; or more); large numbers of competitions are being implemented separately; and/or sophisticated statistical features are provided. In some embodiments, if there are millions of private pools it may be more efficient to determine who is "OUT" at any given time by running certain statistical calculations on a local server for each private pool rather than on a central server for all pools. Accordingly, an administrator may run software on his/her own computer to provide further enhanced statistics but still use a host portal to display the results. In some embodiments, the tournament will be run on a host server, but an administrator may periodically download data to the administrator's computer, run the simulations, and then upload the results back to the server for display.

[0065] Participants may access the competition on the server from any suitable remote computing device. A plurality of participants may use different remote computing devices **140***a*, **140***b* . . . **140***n*. Each device independently may be a personal computer, a work computer, a publicly accessible computer, a laptop, or any other computing device as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect. Remote computing devices **140***a*-**140***n* may be connected to the network via any suitable computer communications medium (e.g., wired or wireless communication).

[0066] Regardless of the specific hardware used to implement participant access to server **110**, the environment illustrated by FIG. **1** may include multiple devices, any of which may be connected to server **110** via a network. In some embodiments, server **110** itself may include a network of devices. Any one or more server devices may be part of a secured network (e.g., protected by a firewall) in some embodiments.

[0067] It should be appreciated that any of the computer communications media referred to herein may include (whether via a wired connection, a wireless connection or connection over any other suitable media) one or more access points, routers, switches, hubs, secure tunnels or other network elements to other devices on a network (some or all of which may be secured). It also should be appreciated that networked computing devices may communicate with each other by unidirectional or bi-directional network links, or a combination thereof.

[0068] FIG. **2** illustrates a non-limiting embodiment of a flow chart of a method of operation of a computer implemented (e.g., network-based) competition that provides scoring opportunities for a participant even if the participant's initial picks are knocked out of a tournament earlier than predicted. The left side of the dashed line include acts on a participant computer (e.g., a user or client). Acts on the right side of the dashed line include acts on a server (e.g., a host server or an administrator server). In FIG. **2**, participant **140** contacts a competition server in act **200** (e.g., downloads a page from the URL) and receives a prompt in act **205** requesting team selection rules to be submitted prior to the tournament beginning. Participant enters the rules in act **210** and submits the rules to the tournament server in act **215**. It should be appreciated that this process may be repeated for a plurality of participants (e.g., all the participants in a competition). Depending on the size of the tournament, the number of participants may range from about 5-10 to more than one million. However, any number may participate as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect. For each participant, the rules define the participant's initial picks for each match, and also provide predictions for alternative team matchups if the participant's initial picks are knocked out earlier than predicted. The tournament server **110**, receives the participant rules in act **220**. The participant rules may be maintained on the server (e.g., in memory or other database on the server) or sent to a separate database (e.g., on a separate computing device) for storage and/or later retrieval. After the tournament has started, the competition server checks for match results in act **225**. When a match is finished and a winner is determined, the information is received by the server in act **230** and compared to the participant's team selection rules in act **235**. In **235**, if the winner of the match was correctly predicted (e.g., either as an initial pick or as a recalculated prediction) by the participant, points are awarded in **240** and the participant's initial prediction is not altered for subsequent matches. However, if the winner of the match is determined in **235** to be different from the participant's prediction is (e.g., either initial pick or recalculated prediction) then i) no points are awarded (or fewer points are awarded depending on how the scoring system is set up), and ii) the participant's predictions are recalculated in **245** using the participant's team selection rules for the teams that will be playing next instead of participant's prior prediction. For each

participant, this procedure is repeated after each match (or after each round of matches, or other parameter) until the final match is played. At that point a winner, or set of winners may be determined in act **250**.

[0069] In some embodiments, in act **205**, a user is instructed to enter one or more team selection rules (e.g., to use the left mouse button to drag a team to where he or she wants to place it in a bracket or a ranking table, and is told that not all sections of the entry form are required). In some embodiments, only rankings are required, and other sections (e.g., visual prompts) may be used to help in producing the rankings. In some embodiments, the user may be notified that he/she can click on a link to be shown how the entry will be scored. In some embodiments, a user ranks the teams from 1 to N where N is the number of teams in the tournament and "1" corresponds to the best team. Software running in the user's browser assists the user in creating the rankings using zero, one, or more alternate representations, for example an elimination bracket which displays one possible prediction of tournament results which is consistent with the user's current choice of rankings. However, the team selection rules may be entered in any suitable form as described herein provided they provide rules for selecting an initial set of winners and alternative winners for matches that may occur if one or more of the initially predicted winners in eliminated earlier than predicted. It should be appreciated that the instructions to the user may be in the form of visual prompts (e.g., generated by the browser having accessed appropriate instructions from a host server).

[0070] In some embodiments, in act **210**, a browser (e.g., Javascript running in the browser) maintains consistency between different sections of the entry form. The user can fill out a traditional bracket, while doing so making implications regarding his ranking of the teams. For example, in some embodiments the browser updates rankings when the user alters the bracket and updates the bracket (by removing inconsistent portions) when the user alters rankings.

[0071] In some embodiments, in act **215**, a user submits the selection to the database and/or server (e.g., clicks on a "Submit" button which posts data to a PHP script, or PERL script, or other type of software running on the server).

[0072] In some embodiments, in act **220**, the server acquires user instructions (e.g., a lock on the database so that entry of the user data is atomic). In some embodiments, after storing the user data, the script sends an email to the user as confirmation of entry. In some embodiments, the server stores the information on a server database. In some embodiments, the information is sent to a separate database. In some embodiments, user entries are stored in a text file on the server (e.g., the text file is written by a script running on the server). To be more space efficient with a large number of users, a database such as an SQL database may be used in some embodiments. In some embodiments, the data may be stored on a hard disk drive either on the server that runs the script or on an associated file server elsewhere.

[0073] In some embodiments, in act **225**, the server monitors and/or downloads match information from any suitable source (e.g., an RSS feed from a news organization or a sports organization, for example the NCAA, FIFA, etc.).

[0074] In some embodiments, in act **230**, the server stores match results in the database.

[0075] In some embodiments, in act **235**, software running on the server scores user entries and updates the database. It should be appreciated that in some embodiments this process of scoring (e.g., awarding points) and updating the database may be performed automatically (e.g., at predetermined time intervals, after a match result is known, after a round of matches) or when prompted by an administrator and/or user (e.g., participant), as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect.

[0076] In some embodiments, in act **240** and/or in act **245**, after updating current results for all players, statistical information may be computed (e.g., all possible endings are analyzed to produce statistics, for example identifying who still has a chance to win).

[0077] In act **250**, participants may be informed of final results (e.g., by receiving a message such as "Tournament is over, please check the results, and thanks for playing" or other message). This message may be sent out by e-mail to all participants, participants who have not previously be knocked out, or any combination of participants, as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect.

[0078] It should be appreciated that one or more of these acts may be omitted as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect.

[0079] It should be appreciated that a "user" as described herein may be a participant in a competition regardless of whether it is a private, company, or publicly accessible, or other web-based tournament.

[0080] In some embodiments, the server may generate a bracket or other display for the participant to review. This may be done at any stage, for example as part of the prompt, or later after the selections are made and the first set of winners are picked.

[0081] In some embodiments, different parts of a competition program may be implemented on different computing devices. The following scenarios are non-limiting embodiments and other configurations also may be used as aspects of the invention are not limited in this respect.

[0082] Scenario 1): A server handles everything except entry form running in the player's browser. In an open pool where the host is the administrator, the only action happening on some other computer is when the player enters rankings. The player would download the form from the host server, fill it out while assisted by the downloaded Javascript, then submit which calls a script on the server which saves the entry. Viewing the results would be downloading a page from the host server.

[0083] Scenario 2): Same as scenario 1 except that the administrator configures the private pool before players can enter. The administrator assigns the "goodness criterion" (1^{st} place is 60%, 2^{nd} place is 30%, etc) and creates a group password. Optionally, the administrator creates a restricted access list.

[0084] Scenario 3): Same as scenario 2 except that the administrator periodically runs software on the administrator computer to create further enhanced statistics and then uploads the statistics to the host server for display.

[0085] Scenario 4): The administrator downloads software and hosts the pool on the administrator server. After the initial download, the administrator's server need only communicate with the host server to obtain match results and/or to update advertisement placement.

[0086] It should be appreciated that regardless of the configuration, a host server in a commercial setting may provide advertisements and/or updated advertisements whenever an administrator and/or participant computer communicates with the host server.

[0087] Other embodiments relate to methods of designing an configuring a competition program. For example, different parameters may be selected to tailor a program for a particular tournament. For example, different programs may be designed for March Madness than for the World Cup. However, in some embodiments a core program may be designed to be readily tailored for different tournaments. In some embodiments, a designer may tailor the number of teams, points per match, definition of a match (for example the First Round of the World Cup may be defined to be two matches for each team where the teams making it to the Round of 16 "beat" the two teams in their group that don't make the Round of 16, and the teams that didn't make the Round of 16 "lost" to the teams that did make it).

[0088] Other embodiments relate to methods and devices for delivering or distributing software for a competition as described herein. For example, software may be distributed over the interne. In some embodiments, an application may be installed on a host servers. In some embodiments, a CD, DVD or other computer-storage medium may be distributed with the application, for example if statistical analyses are to be performed on an administrator's computer.

[0089] The following examples provide non-limiting illustrations of certain embodiments.

EXAMPLES

Example 1

An Employee of a Company Wishes to Run a March Madness Office Competition

[0090] The March Madness tournament starts with 65 participants (teams), a pair of teams playing for the right to continue in the tournament a couple of days before the rest of the games begin; for this example that pair of teams is considered to be a single team in a 64 team tournament.

[0091] The employee downloads a software application that implements an embodiment of a competition program. When run, the software application sets up an internal company web page that other employees of the company can access, the web page optionally implementing password protection giving access only to players who have been invited to join the competition.

[0092] Players use a graphical user interface (GUI) to prepare their entries in the competition (commonly referred to as a "bracket"). The top half of the computer screen presented by the GUI shows the bracket, which represents the single elimination format of March Madness. The bottom half of the computer screen shows the player's team rankings, showing 64 teams in order (multiple columns) from top-ranked (#1, best team) to bottom ranked (#64, worst team). The bracket is initialized with blank inputs for all game winners and the rankings are initialized as per the NCAA Coaches Poll rankings.

[0093] When the player uses his computer mouse to move (drag) a team forward in the bracket (top half of the computer screen) he has implied that he thinks that team will win some particular game, which also implies that he thinks that team is better than some other team or teams, and so the software application will update the player's team rankings (bottom half of the computer screen) accordingly by moving the predicted winner "above" (closer to or equal to #1) all teams that were implied to be weaker teams by the mouse action. If the player moves a team up or down in his team rankings then the rankings might become inconsistent with his bracket, and so the software application will update the player's bracket to remove the inconsistencies if any (teams predicted to win games over another team which is above them in the rankings will be removed from the appropriate positions in the bracket). When the player is satisfied with his team rankings he clicks on a submit button which enters his team rankings in the office competition. He can choose to submit his rankings after filling out the bracket as he has done in previous years (without using his mouse to directly alter the rankings on the bottom half of his computer screen) and the rankings submitted will not in any way contradict the information contained in his bracket.

[0094] The software application will stop accepting player entries when the first game of the tournament begins. A player's prediction for any particular game is that the team he ranked higher of the two teams playing will win the game. Unlike previous office competitions where the player's prediction might not include either of the two teams playing in a particular game, using this method of scoring the player always has a chance to be correct until the game is played. Players get points for each correct prediction (one point per game in the first round, two points per game in the second round, four points per game in the third round, eight points per game in the fourth round, sixteen points per game in the fifth round, and thirty-two points for the sixth round game for a maximum total of 192 points) and the player with the most points at the end of the tournament is declared the winner of the competition. Each game day during the tournament, the software application retrieves game results over the Internet and publishes office competition standings with various statistics including which of the players still have a chance to win the competition.

[0095] Computer simulation of one hundred random (weighted random player brackets and weighted random game outcomes) ten-player office competitions resulted in an average of 5.5 players remaining (still had a chance to win) after three rounds using traditional bracket scoring, whereas using the new rankings scoring method an average of 8.9 players remained in the competition after three rounds. In one simulation, to create both weighted random player brackets and game outcomes, S2/(S1+S2) was used as the probability that team seeded S1 (regional seed number 1-16) would beat team seeded S2. For the final four, every game was considered to be a toss-up. First a bracket was created for the player and then rankings were created from the ordering implied by the bracket. The player's rankings were not adjusted after applying the implied rules even though such tweaking may provide a more dramatic illustration of the benefits of obtaining participant instructions for more than the initially predicted winners.

[0096] More people have a chance to win their office competition for a longer time, there is prolonged interest in the tournament games, and therefore more advertising dollars are spent to reach larger late-tournament audiences (specifically fourth round games).

Example 2

An Employee of a Company Wishes to Run a World Cup Soccer Office Competition

[0097] The format of the World Cup Soccer championship is as follows: 32 teams are arranged into eight groups of four teams per group. In the first round of competition each team plays three games, one game against each of the other three

teams in their group. Two teams from each group advance to the second round (referred to as "The Round of Sixteen").

[0098] Starting with the round of sixteen the rest of the competition is a single elimination tournament which can be represented with a bracket similar to the one used for March Madness. The initial positions in this bracket are determined by the results of the first round games. The team in a group with the best first round record is placed at some predetermined position in the bracket and the team with the second-best first round record is placed at some other predetermined position in the bracket. Before the tournament begins, without knowledge of the results of the first round games and therefore without knowledge of the initial positions or even identities of teams in the bracket, a player cannot know how to fill out the bracket.

[0099] The employee downloads (from the internet) and initializes the software application (as in Example 1 above) except that the employee configures the software application to run in World Cup Soccer mode instead of in March Madness mode. When in World Cup Soccer mode the GUI does not present a bracket, it only displays rankings for the teams.

[0100] Though the application could display a bracket and maintain consistency between rankings and bracket as in Example 1 above, it is not necessarily required for backward compatibility with previous years' competitions which for the World Cup Soccer competition have not traditionally used brackets for entries. Each office player rearranges the team rankings until he is satisfied with his entry at which time he clicks on the submit button to enter the competition.

[0101] The software application will stop accepting player entries when the first game of the tournament begins. Each player receives one point for each team he ranked in the top sixteen teams that in fact advances to the round of sixteen. For the single elimination portion of the tournament (round of sixteen until the end), a player's prediction for any particular game is that the team he ranked higher of the two teams playing will win the game. Players get points for each correct prediction (two points per game in the second round, the round of sixteen, four points per game in the third round, eight points per game in the fourth round, and sixteen points for the fifth round game for a maximum total of 80 points) and the player with the most points at the end of the tournament is declared the winner of the competition. Each game day during the tournament, the software application retrieves game results over the internet and publishes office competition standings with various statistics including which of the players still have a chance to win the competition.

Example 3

A Participant Wishes to Enter a Web-Based Competition Relating to the Outcomes of a Tournament

[0102] The participant receives an email from the person in his office who has volunteered to run the company March Madness pool this year (the "administrator"). The participant clicks on a link in the email which brings up a browser prompting him to enter the group password contained in the email from the administrator. After entering the password, the browser prompts him to create a password protected private account for himself. The participant then proceeds to specify an ordering of the 65 tournament teams by dragging teams up or down in a list displayed by his browser, thus specifying rankings of the teams in the March Madness tournament. When finished, the participant clicks on "Submit" to enter the competition. The user can return to his private account at any time before the start of the tournament and make changes to his rankings. Once the tournament has started the participant can view how he is doing in the competition by clicking on a link to the competition results page which was also included in the original email from the competition administrator. The participant's entry is scored based on his or her team rankings and the actual results of games played in the tournament. In this example, the prediction information and statistical calculations are stored and implemented on a host server. However, other configurations may be used as described herein.

[0103] It should be appreciated that though the examples specifically refers to workplace competitions, the invention is applicable to any competition between players whether or not the players belonged to any particular group before joining the competition.

[0104] Having thus described several aspects of at least one embodiment of this invention, it is to be appreciated that various alterations, modifications, and improvements will readily occur to those skilled in the art.

[0105] Such alterations, modifications, and improvements are intended to be part of this disclosure, and are intended to be within the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, the foregoing description and drawings are by way of example only.

[0106] The above-described embodiments of the present invention can be implemented in any of numerous ways. For example, the embodiments may be implemented using hardware, software or a combination thereof. One or more acts described herein may be automated in a suitable computing environment. When implemented in software, the software code can be executed on any suitable processor or collection of processors, whether provided in a single computer or distributed among multiple computers (e.g., general purpose computers). It should be appreciated that any component or collection of components that perform the functions described above can be generically considered as one or more controllers that control the above-discussed functions. The one or more controllers can be implemented in numerous ways, such as with dedicated hardware, or with general purpose hardware (e.g., one or more processors) that is programmed using microcode or software to perform the functions recited above.

[0107] Further, it should be appreciated that a computer may be embodied in any of a number of forms, such as a rack-mounted computer, a desktop computer, a laptop computer, or a tablet computer. Additionally, a computer may be embedded in a device not generally regarded as a computer but with suitable processing capabilities, including a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), a smart phone or any other suitable portable or fixed electronic device.

[0108] Also, a computer may have one or more input and output devices. These devices can be used, among other things, to present a user interface. Examples of output devices that can be used to provide a user interface include printers or display screens for visual presentation of output and speakers or other sound generating devices for audible presentation of output. Examples of input devices that can be used for a user interface include keyboards, and pointing devices, such as mice, touch pads, and digitizing tablets. As another example, a computer may receive input information through speech recognition or in other audible format.

[0109] Such computers may be interconnected by one or more networks in any suitable form, including as a local area

network or a wide area network, such as an enterprise network or the Internet. Such networks may be based on any suitable technology and may operate according to any suitable protocol and may include wireless networks, wired networks or fiber optic networks.

[0110] Also, the various methods or processes outlined herein may be coded as software that is executable on one or more processors that employ any one of a variety of operating systems or platforms. Additionally, such software may be written using any of a number of suitable programming languages and/or programming or scripting tools, and also may be compiled as executable machine language code or intermediate code that is executed on a framework or virtual machine.

[0111] In this respect, the invention may be embodied as a computer readable medium (or to multiple computer readable media) (e.g., a computer memory, one or more floppy discs, compact discs, optical discs, magnetic tapes, flash memories, circuit configurations in Field Programmable Gate Arrays or other semiconductor devices, or other tangible computer storage medium) encoded with one or more programs (e.g., a plurality of instructions) that, when executed on one or more computers or other processors, perform methods that implement the various embodiments of the invention discussed above. The computer readable medium or media can be transportable, such that the program or programs stored thereon can be loaded onto one or more different computers or other processors to implement various aspects of the present invention as discussed above.

[0112] In this respect, it should be appreciated that one implementation of the above-described embodiments comprises at least one computer-readable medium encoded with a computer program (e.g., a plurality of instructions), which, when executed on a processor, performs some or all of the above-discussed functions of these embodiments. As used herein, the term "computer-readable medium" encompasses only a computer-readable medium that can be considered to be, a machine or, a manufacture (i.e., article of manufacture). A computer-readable medium may be, for example, a tangible medium on which computer-readable information may be encoded or stored, a storage medium on which computer-readable information may be encoded or stored, and/or a non-transitory medium on which computer-readable information may be encoded or stored. Other non-exhaustive examples of computer-readable media include a computer memory (e.g., a ROM, a RAM, a flash memory, or other type of computer memory), a magnetic disc or tape, an optical disc, and/or other types of computer-readable media that can be considered to be a process, a machine, a manufacture, and/or a composition of matter.

[0113] Computing devices and systems described herein may include a variety of computer readable media. As described herein, computer readable media can be any available media that can be accessed by computer and includes both volatile and nonvolatile media, removable and non-removable media. It should be appreciated that a system memory may include computer storage media in the form of volatile and/or nonvolatile memory such as read only memory (ROM) and random access memory (RAM). A basic input/output system (BIOS), containing the basic routines that help to transfer information between elements within computer, such as during start-up, is typically stored in ROM. RAM typically contains data and/or program modules that are immediately accessible to and/or presently being operated on by the processing unit.

[0114] Device drives and their associated computer storage media discussed described herein, provide storage of computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules and other data for a computing device. For example, a hard disk drive may store an operating system, application programs, other program modules, and program data. A user may enter commands and information into a computing device through input devices such as a keyboard and pointing device, commonly referred to as a mouse, trackball or touch pad. Other input devices (not shown) may include a microphone, joystick, game pad, satellite dish, scanner, or the like. These and other input devices are often connected to a processing unit through a user input interface that is coupled to the system bus, but may be connected by other interface and bus structures, such as a parallel port, game port or a universal serial bus (USB). A monitor or other type of display device also may be connected to the bus via an interface, such as a video interface. In addition to the monitor, computers may also include other peripheral output devices such as speakers, and printers, which may be connected through an output peripheral interface.

[0115] In addition, it should be appreciated that the reference to a computer program which, when executed, performs the above-discussed functions, is not limited to an application program running on a host computer. Rather, the term computer program is used herein in a generic sense to reference any type of computer code (e.g., software or microcode) that can be employed to program a processor to implement the above-discussed aspects of the present invention.

[0116] It should be appreciated that in accordance with several embodiments of the present invention wherein processes are implemented in a computer readable medium, the computer implemented processes may, during the course of their execution, receive input manually (e.g., from a user).

[0117] The terms "program" or "software" are used herein in a generic sense to refer to any type of computer code or set of computer-executable instructions that can be employed to program a computer or other processor to implement various aspects of the present invention as discussed above. Additionally, it should be appreciated that according to one aspect of this embodiment, one or more computer programs that when executed perform methods of the present invention need not reside on a single computer or processor, but may be distributed in a modular fashion amongst a number of different computers or processors to implement various aspects of the present invention.

[0118] Computer-executable instructions may be in many forms, such as program modules, executed by one or more computers or other devices. Generally, program modules include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc. that performs particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. Typically the functionality of the program modules may be combined or distributed as desired in various embodiments.

[0119] Also, data structures may be stored in computer-readable media in any suitable form. For simplicity of illustration, data structures may be shown to have fields that are related through location in the data structure. Such relationships may likewise be achieved by assigning storage for the fields with locations in a computer-readable medium that conveys relationship between the fields. However, any suit-

able mechanism may be used to establish a relationship between information in fields of a data structure, including through the use of pointers, tags or other mechanisms that establish relationship between data elements.

[0120] Various aspects of the present invention may be used alone, in combination, or in a variety of arrangements not specifically discussed in the embodiments described in the foregoing and is therefore not limited in its application to the details and arrangement of components set forth in the foregoing description or illustrated in the drawings. For example, aspects described in one embodiment may be combined in any manner with aspects described in other embodiments.

[0121] Also, the invention may be embodied as a method, of which an example has been provided. The acts performed as part of the method may be ordered in any suitable way. Accordingly, embodiments may be constructed in which acts are performed in an order different than illustrated, which may include performing some acts simultaneously, even though shown as sequential acts in illustrative embodiments.

[0122] Use of ordinal terms such as "first," "second," "third," etc., in the claims to modify a claim element does not by itself connote any priority, precedence, or order of one claim element over another or the temporal order in which acts of a method are performed, but are used merely as labels to distinguish one claim element having a certain name from another element having a same name (but for use of the ordinal term) to distinguish the claim elements.

[0123] Also, the phraseology and terminology used herein is for the purpose of description and should not be regarded as limiting. The use of "including," "comprising," or "having," "containing," "involving," and variations thereof herein, is meant to encompass the items listed thereafter and equivalents thereof as well as additional items.

[0124] Having described several embodiments of the invention in detail, various modifications and improvements will readily occur to those skilled in the art. Such modifications and improvements are intended to be within the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, the foregoing description is by way of example only, and is not intended as limiting. The invention is limited only as defined by the following claims and the equivalents thereto.

What is claimed is:

1. A computer-implemented method of hosting a competition on at least one computer that permits an outcome prediction to be made for a winner between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing in a match of a tournament, the method comprising

retrieving information from a database that stores team selection instructions for a participant in a competition, wherein the team selection instructions for the participant provide i) an initial outcome prediction for one or more matches of a tournament, and ii) a relative ranking of teams that were not initially picked to be playing in the one or more matches; and,

computing, on the at least one computer, an adjusted prediction for a match between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing against each other.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein the team selection instructions are based on a default ranking.

3. The method of claim **2**, wherein the participant modifies the default ranking.

4. The method of claim **1**, wherein one of the two teams playing against each other was not initially picked.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein both teams playing against each other were not initially picked.

6. At least one non-transitory computer-readable medium encoded with instructions that, when executed on at least one computer, perform a method of hosting a competition on at least one computer that permits an outcome prediction to be made for a winner between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing in a match of a tournament, the method comprising

retrieving information from a database that stores team selection instructions for a participant in a competition, wherein the team selection instructions for the participant provide i) an initial outcome prediction for one or more matches of a tournament, and ii) a relative ranking of teams that were not initially picked to be playing in the one or more matches; and,

computing, on the at least one computer, an adjusted prediction for a match between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing against each other.

7. At least one computer comprising:

to at least one tangible memory for storing processor-executable instructions for hosting a competition on the at least one computer to permit an outcome prediction to be made for a winner between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing in a match of a tournament; and,

at least one hardware microprocessor, coupled to the memory, that executes the processor-executable instructions to retrieve information from a database that stores team selection instructions for a participant in a competition, wherein the team selection instructions for the participant provide i) an initial outcome prediction for one or more matches of a tournament, and ii) a relative ranking of teams that were not initially picked to be playing in the one or more matches, and to compute an adjusted prediction for a match between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing against each other.

8. A method implemented on at least one computer of participating in a competition hosted on at least one server, wherein the competition permits an outcome prediction to be made for a winner between two teams that were not initially picked to be playing in a match of a tournament, the method comprising

prompting, at the at least one computer, a participant to provide team selection instructions for a competition;

receiving team selection instructions from the participant; and,

sending the team selection instructions to the at least one server.

9. A computer-implemented method, comprising:

entering participant instructions into a database, wherein the instructions specify predictions for each possible game in a tournament before the start of the tournament, and

after a game is completed, computing an adjusted prediction for each game based on the participant instructions and the game result(s).

10. A computer-implemented method, comprising:

entering participant instructions into a database, wherein the instructions specify predictions for each possible game in a tournament, and

after a game completed, computing allocated points to the participant wherein the points are based on both the game result(s) and the participant instructions.

11. A computer-implemented method, comprising:

entering participant instructions into a database, wherein the instructions specify predictions for each possible game in a tournament or wherein the instructions specify relative team rankings for all possible pair-wise games in a tournament, thereby providing a predicted bracket for each participant,

computing, on at least one computer, points for each participant based on game outcomes,

wherein if a game includes at least one non-predicted team, the points for the game are computed by accessing the participant instructions that specify the relative rankings of the two teams in the game.

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