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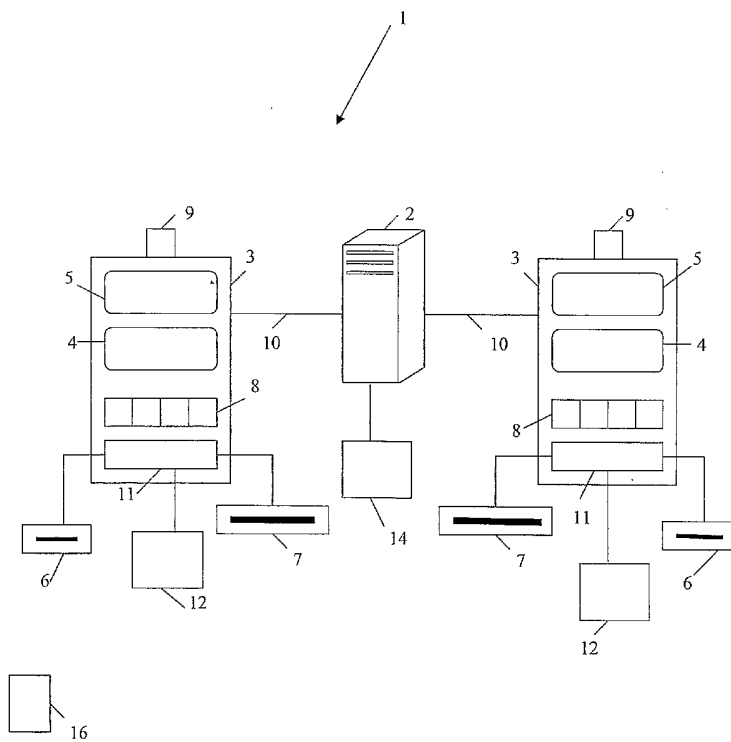
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(54) Title: BINGO GAME APPARATUS WITH ENTERTAINMENT FEATURE



(57) Abstract: A bingo game apparatus comprises a number of player stations, a random event generator capable of generating a number of random events upon which an outcome of a game of bingo is based, a secondary display means corresponding to each player station, the secondary display means being instructable by the player station to display a simulation of the turn of the game of bingo, and a primary display means corresponding to each player station, the primary display means being instructable by the player station to display to a player a simulation of a turn of a different entertainment game. Each player station is operable by a player to place a wager on a turn of the game of bingo. The outcome of the turn of the game of bingo is either an unfavourable outcome in which the player forfeits the wager, and at least one favourable outcome in which the player wins a corresponding prize. The turn of the different entertainment game has an outcome that is an unfavourable outcome when the outcome of the turn of the game of bingo is an unfavourable outcome, and an outcome that causes the player to win

the same corresponding prize as the game of bingo when the outcome of the turn of the game of bingo is a favourable outcome. One of the favourable outcomes of the game of bingo causes the primary display means to display a simulation of a turn of a multistage bonus game causing the player to win the same prize as that associated with the corresponding favourable prize in the game of bingo.

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**BINGO GAME APPARATUS WITH ENTERTAINMENT FEATURE**

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**Field of the Invention**

This invention relates to a bingo game apparatus and, more particularly, to a bingo game apparatus that includes an associated entertainment feature. The invention extends to a method of operation of a bingo game apparatus.

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**Background to the Invention**

There exists a class of electronic gaming systems that can be used to play bingo-type games. A bingo-type game is played with predetermined "cards" in the form of data structures that include a number of symbols randomly arranged in an array of positions. In the course of play, symbols are selected randomly from an available pool of symbols and matched to symbols on the cards. A card having matching symbols arranged in a predetermined pattern is a winning card and qualifies a player with whom that card is associated to win a prize.

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The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) of the United States defines a certain class of game, namely a Class II game, as including the game of bingo, irrespective of whether or not electronic, computer, or other technological aids are used in conjunction with the game.

25

A disadvantage of bingo games is that the probability of winning a prize, or losing, with a particular card is always determined by a fixed set of constraints, which include a number of symbols available in the pool of symbols, the predetermined patterns to be matched, and the number of grid positions on the card. For a given set of constraints, the probability of winning is fixed, and the

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effect of varying the constraints has only a limited effect on the probability of winning a prize.

It is known to modify a Class II bingo game to provide an additional entertainment  
5 feature that will allow a player to win any one of a number of different desirable prizes. This modification consists, essentially, of providing the bingo game with a "skin" that makes the bingo game appears as a different game such as, for example, video slots or video poker. Each winning pattern on a card in the bingo game is mapped as corresponding successful outcome in the skin game, with the  
10 same prize, and is presented to the player as an appropriate outcome of a simulation of a turn of the skin game. The progress of the bingo game and the skin game are displayed to a player simultaneously, with the former being de-emphasised relative to the latter. In this manner the player experience of the bingo game is predominantly that of the skin game with very little, or no,  
15 cognisance taken of the underlying bingo game.

In order to further enhance the player experience it is also known for one or more outcomes of the skin game corresponding to winning patterns on a card in the bingo game to be presented to the player as a participation in a single-stage  
20 bonus game associated with the skin game. The bonus game is presented to the player as having an element of chance in which the player is required to exercise one of a number of options, each with a corresponding outcome. The simulation of the bonus game is such that the player wins the prize associated with the particular winning pattern on the bingo card, irrespective of the choice exercised  
25 by the player in the bonus game.

The applicant has found that enhancements to the above entertainment feature are desirable to maintain player interest in the bingo type game and to avoid players becoming bored with the game.

### Object of the Invention

It is an object of this invention to provide a bingo game apparatus, and a method of operation thereof that will, at least partially, alleviate the abovementioned  
5 difficulties and disadvantages.

### Summary of the Invention

10 In accordance with this invention there is provided a bingo game apparatus, comprising:

a plurality of player stations, each player station being operable by a respective player to place a wager on a turn of a game of bingo;

15 a random event generator activatable to generate a number of random events upon which an outcome of the game of bingo is based, the outcome being either an unfavourable outcome in which the player forfeits the wager, and at least one favourable outcome in which the player wins a corresponding prize; and display means associated with each respective player station, the display means being instructable by the player station to display to the respective player:

20 a) a simulation of the turn of the game of bingo;

b) a simulation of a turn of an entertainment game having an outcome that is unfavourable when the outcome of the turn of the game of bingo is an unfavourable outcome, and a favourable outcome when the outcome of the game of bingo is a favourable outcome, causing the player to win the same  
25 corresponding prize as the game of bingo; and

c) a simulation of a turn of a multistage bonus game, the simulation of the multistage bonus game being randomly activatable whenever the entertainment game has a favourable outcome to cause the player to win the same  
30 corresponding prize as the game of bingo.

30

Further features of the invention provide for the turn of the multistage bonus game to terminate after a randomly selectable number of sequential stages of the

bonus game, and for the prize winnable by the player during a turn of the multistage bonus game to be won at a final stage of the randomly selected number of sequential stages of the bonus game, alternatively for the prize winnable by the player during a turn of the multistage bonus game to be a sum of  
5 sub-prizes winnable by the player at each one of the randomly selectable number of sequential stages of the bonus game.

Still further features of the invention provide for the display means to display only one of the simulations of the entertainment game and the multistage bonus game  
10 at any instant, for the display means to include a primary display means and a secondary display means, for the secondary display means to display the simulation of the turn of the game of bingo, and for the primary display means to display the simulations of the entertainment game and the multistage bonus game.

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Yet further features of the invention provide for the random event generator to be executable in a gaming server remote from the plurality of player stations, for the gaming server to be communicable with each one of the plurality of remote player stations by means of a communication network, for the entertainment game to be  
20 a game of video slots, for the game of bingo to have 75 uniquely numbered balls, for a random event generated by the random event generator to correspond to the drawing at random of one of the 75 uniquely numbered balls, for a player bingo card associated with the game of bingo to have 25 positions thereon arranged in a 5 by 5 grid, each grid position being numbered with a respective  
25 random number from 1 to 75, for one favourable outcome of the game of bingo to correspond to a game-ending pattern causing the turn of the game of bingo to terminate, for the game-ending pattern to arise when all the numbers on at least one player bingo card match the numbers drawn by the random event generator, for the game of bingo to have a plurality of further favourable outcomes, and for  
30 each one of the plurality of further favourable outcomes to arise when all the numbers in a predetermined pattern on at least one player bingo card match the numbers drawn by the random event generator.

There is also provided for the random event generator to draw at random a first set of 24 of the 75 balls, for the gaming server to transmit data corresponding to the first set of 24 balls to each one of the player stations, for each one of the  
5 player stations to activate a prize claiming means operable by the player to claim any favourable outcome arising from the first set of 24 balls, for the prize claiming means to be a pushbutton on the player terminal, alternatively an activatable icon on the primary display means, and for the prize claiming means to be operable by a player for a predetermined period of time.

10

There is also provided for executing the random event generator to draw at random further balls one at a time, for the gaming server to check for the occurrence of a game ending pattern on any of the player bingo cards after the drawing of each ball, for the gaming server to transmit data corresponding to all  
15 the drawn balls necessary for the occurrence of the game ending pattern to each one of the player stations if the game ending pattern is not the last possible game ending pattern in the turn of the game of bingo, for each one of the player stations to activate the prize claiming means operable by a player to claim a favourable outcome arising from the occurrence of the game ending pattern, and  
20 for the prize claiming means to be operable by a player for a predetermined period of time, and for the gaming server to terminate the turn of the game of bingo if a player claims the favourable outcome within the predetermined period of time.

25 There is yet further provided for the random event generator to draw all the remaining balls if the game-ending pattern is the last possible game-ending pattern in the turn of the game of bingo, for the gaming server to transmit data corresponding to all the drawn balls necessary for the occurrence of the last game ending pattern and the remaining balls to each one of the player stations,  
30 for each one of the player stations to activate the prize claiming means operable by a player to claim a favourable outcome arising from the occurrence of the last possible game-ending pattern, for the gaming server to terminate the turn of the

game of bingo if a player claims the favourable outcome, and for the prize claiming means to remain activated until a player claims the favourable outcome.

The invention extends to a method of operation of a bingo game apparatus,  
5 comprising the steps of:

enabling each one of a plurality of player stations for operation by a respective player to place a wager on a turn of a game of bingo;

activating a random event generator to generate a number of random events upon which an outcome of the game of bingo is based, the outcome being either  
10 an unfavourable outcome in which the player forfeits the wager, and at least one favourable outcome in which the player wins a corresponding prize;

displaying to the respective player on a display means:

- a) a simulation of the turn of the game of bingo;
- b) a simulation of a turn of an entertainment game having an outcome that is  
15 unfavourable when the outcome of the turn of the game of bingo is an unfavourable outcome, and a favourable outcome when the outcome of the turn of the game of bingo is a favourable outcome, causing the player to win the same corresponding prize as the game of bingo; and
- c) a simulation of a turn of a multistage bonus game, the simulation of the  
20 multistage bonus game being randomly activated whenever the entertainment game has a favourable outcome to cause the player to win the same corresponding prize as the entertainment game.

There is further provided for terminating the turn of the multistage bonus game  
25 after a randomly selected number of sequential stages of the bonus game, and for awarding the prize winnable by the player during a turn of the multistage bonus game at a final stage of the randomly selected number of sequential stages of the bonus game, alternatively for awarding the prize winnable by the player during a turn of the multistage bonus game as a sum of sub-prizes  
30 winnable by the player at each one of the randomly selected number of sequential stages of the bonus game.



There is still further provided for displaying only one of the simulations of the entertainment game and the multistage bonus game at any instant, for displaying the simulation of the turn of the game of bingo on a secondary display means, and for displaying the simulations of the entertainment game and the multistage  
5 bonus game on a primary display means.

There is yet further provided for executing the random event generator in a gaming server remote from the plurality of player stations, for providing communication between the gaming server and each one of the plurality of  
10 remote player stations by means of a communication network, for establishing the game of bingo with 75 uniquely numbered balls, for configuring a random event generated by the random event generator to correspond to the drawing at random of one of the 75 uniquely numbered balls, for establishing a player bingo card associated with the game of bingo to have 25 positions thereon arranged in  
15 a 5 by 5 grid, each grid position being numbered with a respective random number from 1 to 75, for establishing one favourable outcome of the game of bingo to correspond to a game-ending pattern causing the turn of the game of bingo to terminate, for determining the game-ending pattern to arise when all the numbers on at least one player bingo card match the numbers drawn by the  
20 random event generator, for establishing the game of bingo to have a plurality of further favourable outcomes, and for determining each one of the plurality of further favourable outcomes to arise when all the numbers in a predetermined pattern on at least one bingo card match the numbers drawn by the random event generator.

25  
There is also provided for drawing at random a first set of 24 of the 75 balls, for transmitting data corresponding to the first set of 24 balls to each one of the player stations, for activating on each one of the player stations a prize claiming means operable by the player to claim any favourable outcome arising from the  
30 first set of 24 balls, and for activating the prize claiming means to be operable by a player for a predetermined period of time.

There is also provided for drawing at random further balls one at a time, for checking for the occurrence of a game ending pattern on any of the player bingo cards after the drawing of each ball, for transmitting data corresponding to all the drawn balls necessary for the occurrence of the game ending pattern to each one  
5 of the player stations if the game ending pattern is not the last possible game ending pattern in the turn of the game of bingo, for activating on each one of the player stations the prize claiming means operable by a player to claim a favourable outcome arising from the occurrence of the game ending pattern, and for activating the prize claiming means to be operable by a player for a  
10 predetermined period of time, and for terminating the turn of the game of bingo if a player claims the favourable outcome within the predetermined period of time.

There is also provided for drawing all the remaining balls if the game-ending pattern is the last possible game-ending pattern in the turn of the game of bingo,  
15 for transmitting data corresponding to all the drawn balls necessary for the occurrence of the last game ending pattern and the remaining balls to each one of the player stations, for activating on each one of the player stations the prize claiming means operable by a player to claim a favourable outcome arising from the occurrence of the last possible game-ending pattern, for terminating the turn  
20 of the game of bingo if a player claims the favourable outcome, and for activating the prize claiming means until a player claims the favourable outcome.

#### Brief Description of the Drawings

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A preferred embodiment of the invention is described below, by way of example only, and with reference to the abovementioned drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a functional representation of a bingo game apparatus according to  
30 the invention;

Figure 2 is a partial flow chart of the operation of the apparatus of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a further partial flow chart of the operation of the apparatus of Figure 1; and

5 Figure 4 is a still further partial flow chart of the operation of the system of Figure 1.

### Detailed Description of the Invention

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Referring to Figure 1, a bingo game apparatus is indicated generally by reference numeral (1).

The bingo game apparatus (1) includes a gaming server (2) and two or more  
15 player stations (3) in the form of freestanding kiosks. Each kiosk has a display means comprising primary (4) and secondary (5) display monitors, a magnetic card reader (6), a note validator (7), an array of pushbuttons (8) and a tower light (9). Each kiosk (3) is located remotely from the gaming server (2) and communication between each kiosk and the gaming server is provided by means  
20 of a communication network (10) that is, in this embodiment, the Internet.

Each kiosk (3) includes a processor (11) that operates under a Windows XP operating system, which is well known and commercially available from the Microsoft Corporation of Seattle, Washington, USA. The processor (11) executes  
25 a client software program (12) that performs at least two functions, namely simulating the progress of a game of bingo, and simulating an entertainment feature in the form of a video slots game. The operation of the client software program will be described in more detail in the description that follows.

30 The game of bingo that can be played by a player on the bingo game apparatus (1) comprises a set of 75 predetermined unique symbols that will be referred to, for convenience, as "balls", numbered from 1 to 75, respectively. A player bingo

card has 25 grid positions arranged in an array of five rows and five columns. Each grid position of the array is marked, randomly, with a number between 1 and 75 corresponding to one of the 75 balls available in the game. A player may win a prize by obtaining any one of a number of predetermined patterns of symbols on the bingo card by matching the numbers marked on the grid positions of the bingo card with balls as they are selected (or "drawn") by the gaming server (2) from the 75 available balls. One of the predetermined winning patterns is designated as a game ending pattern ("GEP") that, when obtained by a player, causes the turn of the bingo game to terminate. In this embodiment, the GEP is a "cover all", that is the number of each of the grid positions on the bingo card must match that of a drawn ball. The remaining prize-winning patterns are referred to as intermediate prize-winning patterns ("IPs"), which do not cause the turn of the bingo game to terminate. Some examples of IPs are: the grid positions in a row or a column of the player's bingo card, the grid positions on the diagonals of the bingo card, or the grid positions at the four corners of the bingo card. It will be appreciated that many other patterns of grid positions on the bingo card, whether regular patterns or random patterns may be designated, a priori, as IPs.

The gaming server (2) operates under a Windows NT operating system that is also well known and commercially available from the Microsoft Corporation. The gaming server (2) includes a random event generator in the form of a computer program (14) that is executable to generate random events upon which an outcome of the game of bingo is based. As an illustration, in order to simulate the drawing of a ball, the random event generation program (14) is executable to select, on a random basis, an integer between 1 and 75 that corresponds to the selection of a corresponding one of the predetermined balls. It will be further appreciated that the random event generator (14) can draw any particular ball only once in any single turn of the bingo game.

A player wishing to use the system (1) is first required to register and to create an account on the gaming server (2). Upon registration, the player is issued with a magnetic card token (16) that has a unique player identification number stored

thereon, and a corresponding player account is established on the gaming server (2). The player is then required to pre-fund the account by purchasing credit that will, for convenience, be denominated in this description in "units" of credit. The gaming server (2) stores a credit balance corresponding to the player's account at all times. The player may purchase credit after completion of registration formalities or by inserting banknotes into a note validator (7) on any one of the kiosks (3), which causes the player's credit balance to be to be incremented by the gaming server (2) by the number of units of credit purchased by the player.

10 In order to commence play, a player inserts his magnetic card token (16) into a magnetic card reader (6) of any one of the kiosks (3) that is available for use. When the magnetic card token (16) has been inserted, the magnetic card reader (6) reads the unique player identification number stored on the magnetic card token and the processor (11) transmits the player identification number to the gaming server (2). The gaming server (2) then obtains the player's credit balance and returns it to the kiosk (3) for display to the player on the primary display monitor (4) of the kiosk (3). The client software program (12) checks whether the player's credit balance is greater than a minimum wager size necessary to play a turn of the game of bingo. If the player's credit balance is smaller than the minimum wager size, a message is displayed to the player on the primary display monitor (4) of the kiosk (3) to fund the account by purchasing credit, which the player can do by introducing one or more banknotes into the note validator (7) on the kiosk (3). The player's wager is denominated as an integral number of units of credit. The size of the player's wager is displayed on the primary display monitor (4). There must be sufficient credit in the player's account to cover any wager that is made by the player. The kiosk (3) transmits data relating to the type and size of the wager made by the player across the communication network (6) to the gaming server (2) where it is recorded in a database on an associated storage device (not shown), such as a magnetic or optical storage disk.

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When the player does possess, or has acquired, sufficient credit for a minimum bet size, the client software program (12) presents to the player, on the primary

display monitor (4), a simulation of an entertainment game in the form of a conventional three-reel slot game having an associated prize table. Such three-reel slot games and associated prize tables are well known in the art and will, for this reason, not be described here in detail. The three-reel slot game may have  
5 multiple pay lines, may support multiple-coin wagers and may include multiplier symbols that increase game prizes by predetermined integer multiples. The three-reel slot game may also include bonus symbols that relate to a bonus game associated with the three-reel slot game, the operation of which will be described in detail later in this description. The client software program (12) also presents to  
10 the player, on the secondary display monitor (5), a representation of a bingo card that the player can use to play the turn of a game of bingo, as well as a display of a bingo prize table for the game of bingo. The bingo prize table comprises a list of one or more intermediate prize winning patterns, each with a corresponding intermediate prize for which a player qualifies upon successfully obtaining that  
15 pattern, as well as the game-ending, or cover all, pattern with an associated game-ending prize. In this embodiment the game-ending prize associated with the game-ending bingo pattern is a minor prize, namely one fifth of a unit of credit. Each prize in the bingo prize table corresponds to a prize in the prize table associated with the three-reel slots game, which ensures that any prize-winning  
20 pattern achieved by a player may be represented as a winning outcome of the three-reel slots game that carries the same prize. One or more of the prizes in the prize table of the three-reel slots game is a right to participate in the bonus game associated with the three-reel slots game.

25 One of the buttons on the pushbutton array (8) of the kiosk (3) is labelled "Change Card". The player may activate this button repeatedly, each activation causing the client software program (12) to display a different bingo card, until the player receives a bingo card with which he is satisfied. Only one player may select any particular bingo card in a turn of the game. A further one of the buttons  
30 on the pushbutton array (8) is labelled "Spin". By depressing the Spin button once, progress of the turn of the game of bingo commences and the client

software program (12) animates the three reels of the slot machine game displayed on the primary display screen (4) game to show them spinning.

The bingo-type game is a multiplayer game and at least two players are required  
5 in order to play the game. If the player is the first to participate in the turn of the game, the player's details are added to a game queue (not shown) in the gaming server (2), and the client software program (12) initiates a 3-second countdown timer. This countdown timer provides a 3 second interval during which further  
10 players may join the game. An advisory message is displayed to the player in the game queue (not shown) that additional players are awaited by the system (1). If a second player does not join the game before expiry of the 3-second countdown timer, the timer is re-initiated, upon expiry thereof, for a further 3-second period and the advisory message is re-displayed to the first player in the game queue. If  
15 a second player joins the game by inserting his magnetic card token (10) into a magnetic card reader (6) of a different kiosk (3), the second participating player's details are also added to the game queue, the 3-second countdown timer is cancelled and the bingo simulation software program (12) initiates a second, further countdown timer of 1,5 seconds. The purpose of this second countdown timer is to permit participation in the game by additional players other than those  
20 already in the game queue.

At the expiry of the 1,5-second countdown timer, the gaming server (2) checks that there are still two players in the game queue and establishes a game in  
25 accordance with the player selections. The gaming server (2) reduces the credit balance of each participating player by a corresponding amount wagered by that player.

At this stage of the game, the random event generation program (14) randomly  
30 selects  $n - 1$  balls from the 75 balls available, where  $n$  is the number of grid positions on the bingo card, which is, in this embodiment, 25. The gaming server (2) thus effectively "draws" 24 balls. The gaming server (2) transmits a data packet containing the numbers of the balls that have been drawn by the gaming

server (2) to the kiosk (3) of each participating player. The client software program (12) in each kiosk (3) decodes the data packet and displays the balls drawn by the gaming server (2) on the secondary display monitor (5) of that kiosk. A further button on the pushbutton array (8) of each kiosk (3) is labelled  
5 "Daub". When a kiosk (3) receives the data packet relating to the balls drawn by the gaming server (2), the client software program of the kiosk enables the Daub button and initiates a third 1,5-second countdown timer.

The game of bingo is participative in nature and each participating player is  
10 required to activate the Daub pushbutton on the pushbutton array (8) of his respective kiosk (3) prior to expiry of that kiosk's third countdown timer. Upon doing so, the 24 drawn balls are matched with the numbers appearing on that player's bingo card and any matching numbers are displayed in a contrasting colour on the secondary display monitor (5). If any player fails to activate the  
15 Daub button on the kiosk (3) prior to the expiry of the third 1,5-second countdown timer, that player forfeits any prizes that he may have won after selection of the first 24 balls by the gaming server (2). It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that it will be impossible for a player to obtain a game ending pattern, or cover-all, on the basis of the first 24 balls selected by the gaming server (2), as at  
20 least 25 balls are required for this to occur. Therefore the game of bingo must continue further, before terminating.

The gaming server (2) then selects further balls, one at a time. After each ball selection the gaming server (2) checks each of the player cards in use by players  
25 for the occurrence of a cover-all game-ending pattern. If no game-ending pattern has occurred, the gaming server (2) will select another ball and check again. This process repeats, one ball at a time, until a game-ending pattern arises. In order to promote a fast-moving game, the gaming server (2) does not transmit data relating to a newly selected ball to the various player kiosks (3) until a game-  
30 ending pattern has arisen on any of the player cards. As soon as the game-ending pattern arises, the gaming server (2) checks whether it is a last possible game-ending pattern achievable for that turn of the game. If it is the last possible



game-ending pattern, the gaming server (2) then selects all the remaining balls, one at a time, without any further checks. If it is not the last possible game-ending pattern, the gaming server (2) transmits a data packet containing data relating only to the balls selected thus far to the various kiosks (3) for display to the players on the secondary display monitors (5) of the kiosks. Each player will then have a further period of 1,5 seconds, as measured by a fourth countdown timer within which to activate the Daub button a further time. If any player eligible to win a prize associated with the game-ending pattern fails to activate the Daub button on the kiosk (3) prior to the expiry of the fourth 1,5-second countdown timer, that player forfeits the game-ending prize. This forfeiture is known, in bingo, as "sleeping the bingo". Each time any player activates the Daub button on any kiosk (3), the client program (12) transmits data relating to such activation to the gaming server (2), together with an associated time stamp, in order that the gaming server may determine which prizes, if any, the player qualifies for. As soon as any player activates the Daub button, that player's bingo card is updated to reflect any matching numbers drawn thus far by the gaming server (2).

If a player, or players, with a game-ending pattern does not activate the Daub button within the permitted time, the gaming server (2) will continue to select a single ball at a time until a further game-ending pattern is reached. If a player with a game-ending pattern does activate the Daub button within the permitted time, the turn of the bingo game terminates.

Once the game-ending pattern is obtained and claimed by one or more qualifying players, the gaming server (2) determines the prizes won by the various players, whether for obtaining any intermediate patterns or the game-ending pattern. The determination is made according to the following rules:

1. to qualify for a prize associated with an intermediate pattern or a game-ending pattern, the player must have obtained the required pattern of balls on his bingo card and daubed within the specified time period, that is before the next ball is selected by the gaming server (2);

2. if two or more players obtain and claim the game-ending pattern by daubing, the first player to daub will be awarded the prize associated with the game-ending pattern;
  3. if two or more players obtain and claim a same intermediate pattern, they  
5 are each awarded a prize associated with that intermediate pattern; and
  4. any player qualifying for and claiming more than one prize, whether intermediate or game-ending, will only be awarded the largest of the prizes.
- 10 Once the gaming server (2) has completed the prize determination as described above, the credit balances of the various player accounts of the participating players are updated on the gaming server (2) and transmitted by the gaming server to the various kiosks (3) for display to the respective players on the primary display monitors (5). At the same time, the client software program (12)
- 15 of each kiosk (3) causes the animation of the spinning reels of the three-reel slot game to slow down and to cause the reels to come to rest at positions that correspond to the prize won by the player in the underlying bingo game. Where a player has not won an intermediate prize in the bingo game, the reels will stop with a result that does not correspond to a prize in the slots prize table. Where a
- 20 player has won an intermediate prize in the bingo game, the reels will stop at a result that is associated with a prize in the slots prize table that is equal to the prize in the bingo prize table associated with the intermediate pattern obtained by that player.
- 25 It is possible that, after the gaming server (2) has selected all 75 balls, no participating player claims a game-ending pattern within the allowed time period. In such an instance, the client software program (12) displays a prominent message to each player, on the primary display monitor (5), to daub. In order to urge the participating players to terminate the turn of the game of bingo, the
- 30 gaming server (2) instructs the client software program (12) in each kiosk (3) to cause the tower light (9) of each kiosk to flash in order to prompt the participating players to daub again in order to bring the turn of the game to an end. In this

instance, the client software program (12) does not initiate a countdown timer, and only the player who obtained the last possible game-ending pattern will be able to end the turn of the game by daubing.

5 When a player has won and claimed an intermediate prize, as specified in the bingo prize table, the client software program (12) of a kiosk (3) may, at random, cause the animation of the spinning reels of the three-reel slots game to slow down and to come to rest at a position where one or more bonus symbols are displayed on the three reels. In this instance, the player qualifies to participate in  
10 a bonus game, and the client software program (12) replaces the simulation of the three-reel slots game on the primary display monitor (4) with a simulation of the bonus game. The bonus game is a multi-stage, or multi-level, game in which each stage incorporates an element of chance and that requires the player to exercise one or more of a number of available options. At each stage of the  
15 bonus game, the client software program (12) either terminates the bonus game by causing the player to win a prize, or causes the player to proceed to the next level in the bonus game. The client software program (12) terminates the bonus game by causing the player to win a prize at the then active stage of the game, the prize being equal to the prize due to the player for achieving his winning  
20 pattern in the underlying bingo game. The number of stages of the bonus game through which the player progresses before the bonus game terminates is determined randomly by the client software program (12). Each stage of the multistage bonus game has a different theme, look and feel and presents the player with a different set of options to exercise in order to maintain player  
25 interest in the bingo game. It is, however, important that the prize won by the player in the bonus game be the same as the prize that the player is due in the bingo game.

It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the elements of the game that  
30 relate to the bingo-type game are all presented to a participating player on the secondary display monitor (5), while all the elements of the game that relate to the video slots game and the bonus game are presented to the player on the

primary display monitor (4). This implies that only one of the simulations of the three-reel slots game and the bonus game can be displayed on the primary display monitor (4) at any instant. In this manner, the player is able to enjoy an experience associated with a game of slots, whilst, in reality playing a game of participative bingo. It will be further appreciated that the slots game is merely an entertainment feature used to represent any prizes won by the participating players in the game of bingo. This is advantageous as the system may be used to enable players to experience a slots game in jurisdictions where participative games of chance such as bingo are permitted and games such as video games are not permitted, such as Class II gaming jurisdictions.

The use of a multi-stage bonus game in conjunction with an entertainment "skin", the three-reel slot game, enhances the attractiveness of the bingo game to players due to the unpredictability of the bonus feature, and helps to maintain player interest in the game.

Numerous modifications are possible to this embodiment. Firstly, a kiosk (3) may only be equipped with a single display monitor, in which case the elements displayed separately on the primary and secondary display monitors (4 and 5) are combined for presentation to a player. In this instance, the bingo-related elements may be presented in reduced scale adjacent the slots-related elements in order to maintain the emphasis on the presentation of the slots game. Secondly, the pushbutton array (8) may be dispensed with and replaced with a touch-sensitive area on the primary display monitor. Further, the entertainment element of the bingo-type game may be a simulation of a game other than a three-reel slots game such as, for example, a game of video poker. Still further, the parameters of the underlying bingo game, such as number of balls, bingo card layouts and winning patterns of symbols may be altered to enhance the attractiveness of the bingo game to players and to provide for bigger prizes to be won.

In addition, the operation of the multistage bonus game may be such that the player is able to win sub-prizes at more than one level, or at every level, of the bonus game. In this variation of the embodiment, the total of all the sub-prizes won by the player during the various stages of the multistage bonus game is  
5 equal to the prize due to the player for achieving his winning pattern in the underlying bingo game.

The invention therefore provides a system for playing a bingo-type game that includes an entertainment feature having a bonus element that will allow  
10 participating players to play the game with minimal emphasis on the bingo elements of the game, and that will promote player participation in the game.

Claims

1. A bingo game apparatus, comprising:  
a plurality of player stations, each player station being operable by a  
5        respective player to place a wager on a turn of a game of bingo;  
a random event generator activatable to generate a number of random  
events upon which an outcome of the game of bingo is based, the  
outcome being either an unfavourable outcome in which the player forfeits  
the wager, and at least one favourable outcome in which the player wins a  
10        corresponding prize; and  
display means associated with each respective player station, the display  
means being instructable by the player station to the respective player:  
a) a simulation of the turn of the game of bingo;  
b) a simulation of a turn of an entertainment game having an outcome that  
15        is unfavourable when the outcome of the turn of the game of bingo is an  
unfavourable outcome, and a favourable outcome when the outcome of  
the game of bingo is a favourable outcome, causing the player to win the  
same corresponding prize as the game of bingo; and  
c) a simulation of a turn of a multistage bonus game, the simulation of the  
20        multistage bonus game being randomly activatable whenever the  
entertainment game has a favourable outcome to cause the player to win  
the same corresponding prize as the entertainment game.
2. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 1 in which the turn of the  
25        multistage bonus game terminates after a randomly selectable number of  
sequential stages of the bonus game.
3. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 2 in which the prize winnable  
30        by the player during a turn of the multistage bonus game is won at a final  
stage of the randomly selected number of sequential stages of the bonus  
game.

4. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 2 in which the prize winnable by the player during a turn of the multistage bonus game is a sum of sub-prizes winnable by the player at each one of the randomly selectable number of sequential stages of the bonus game.
- 5
5. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 1 in which the display means displays only one of the simulations of the entertainment game and the multistage bonus game at any instant.
- 10
6. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 1 in which the display means includes a primary display means and a secondary display means, the secondary display means displaying the simulation of the turn of the game of bingo, and the primary display means displaying the simulations of the entertainment game and the multistage bonus game.
- 15
7. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 1 in which the random event generator is executable in a gaming server remote from the plurality of player stations, the gaming server being communicable with each one of the plurality of remote player stations by means of a communication
- 20
- network.
8. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 1 in which the entertainment game is a game of video slots.
- 25
9. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 1 in which the game of bingo has 75 uniquely numbered balls and a random event generated by the random event generator corresponds to the drawing at random of one of the 75 uniquely numbered balls.
- 30
10. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 9 in which a player bingo card associated with the game of bingo has 25 positions thereon arranged

in a 5 by 5 grid, each grid position being numbered with a respective random number from 1 to 75.

- 5 11. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 10 in which one favourable outcome of the game of bingo corresponds to a game-ending pattern causing the turn of the game of bingo to terminate, the game-ending pattern arising when all the numbers on at least one player bingo card match the numbers drawn by the random event generator.
- 10 12. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 11 in which the game of bingo has a plurality of further favourable outcomes, each one of the plurality of further favourable outcomes arising when all the numbers in a predetermined pattern on at least one player bingo card match the numbers drawn by the random event generator.
- 15 13. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 9 in which the random event generator draws at random a first set of 24 of the 75 balls and transmits data corresponding to the first set of 24 balls to each one of the player stations.
- 20 14. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 13 in which each one of the player stations activates a prize claiming means operable by the player to claim any favourable outcome arising from the first set of 24 balls.
- 25 15. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 14 in which the prize claiming means is any one of a pushbutton on the player terminal or an activatable icon on the display means.
- 30 16. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 15 in which the prize claiming means is operable by a player for a predetermined period of time.



17. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 13 in which the random event generator draws at random further balls one at a time, and in which the gaming server checks for the occurrence of a game ending pattern on any of the player bingo cards after the drawing of each ball.
- 5
18. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 17 in which the gaming server transmits data corresponding to all the drawn balls necessary for the occurrence of the game ending pattern to each one of the player stations if the game ending pattern is not the last possible game ending pattern in the turn of the game of bingo.
- 10
19. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 18 in which each one of the player stations activates the prize claiming means operable by a player to claim a favourable outcome arising from the occurrence of the game ending pattern, the prize claiming means being operable by a player for a predetermined period of time.
- 15
20. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 19 in which the gaming server terminates the turn of the game of bingo if a player claims the favourable outcome within the predetermined period of time.
- 20
21. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 17 in which the random event generator draws all the remaining balls if the game-ending pattern is the last possible game-ending pattern in the turn of the game of bingo, and the gaming server transmits data corresponding to all the drawn balls necessary for the occurrence of the last game ending pattern and the remaining balls to each one of the player stations.
- 25
22. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 21 in which each one of the player stations activates the prize claiming means operable by a player to claim a favourable outcome arising from the occurrence of the last
- 30

possible game-ending pattern, and in which the gaming server terminates the turn of the game of bingo if a player claims the favourable outcome.

5 23. A bingo game apparatus as claimed in claim 22 in which the prize claiming means remains activated until a player claims the favourable outcome.

24. A method of operation of a bingo game apparatus, comprising the steps of:

10 enabling each one of a plurality of player stations for operation by a respective player to place a wager on a turn of a game of bingo;

activating a random event generator to generate a number of random events upon which an outcome of the game of bingo is based, the outcome being either an unfavourable outcome in which the player forfeits the wager, and at least one favourable outcome in which the player wins a

15 corresponding prize;

displaying to the respective player on a display means:

a) a simulation of the turn of the game of bingo;

b) a simulation of a turn of an entertainment game having an outcome that is unfavourable when the outcome of the turn of the game of bingo is an

20 unfavourable outcome, and a favourable outcome when the outcome of the game of bingo is a favourable outcome, causing the player to win the same corresponding prize as the game of bingo; and

c) a simulation of a turn of a multistage bonus game, the simulation of the multistage bonus game being randomly activated whenever the

25 entertainment game has a favourable outcome to cause the player to win the same corresponding prize as the entertainment game.

25. A method as claimed in claim 24 that includes a step of terminating the turn of the multistage bonus game after a randomly selected number of

30 sequential stages of the bonus game.

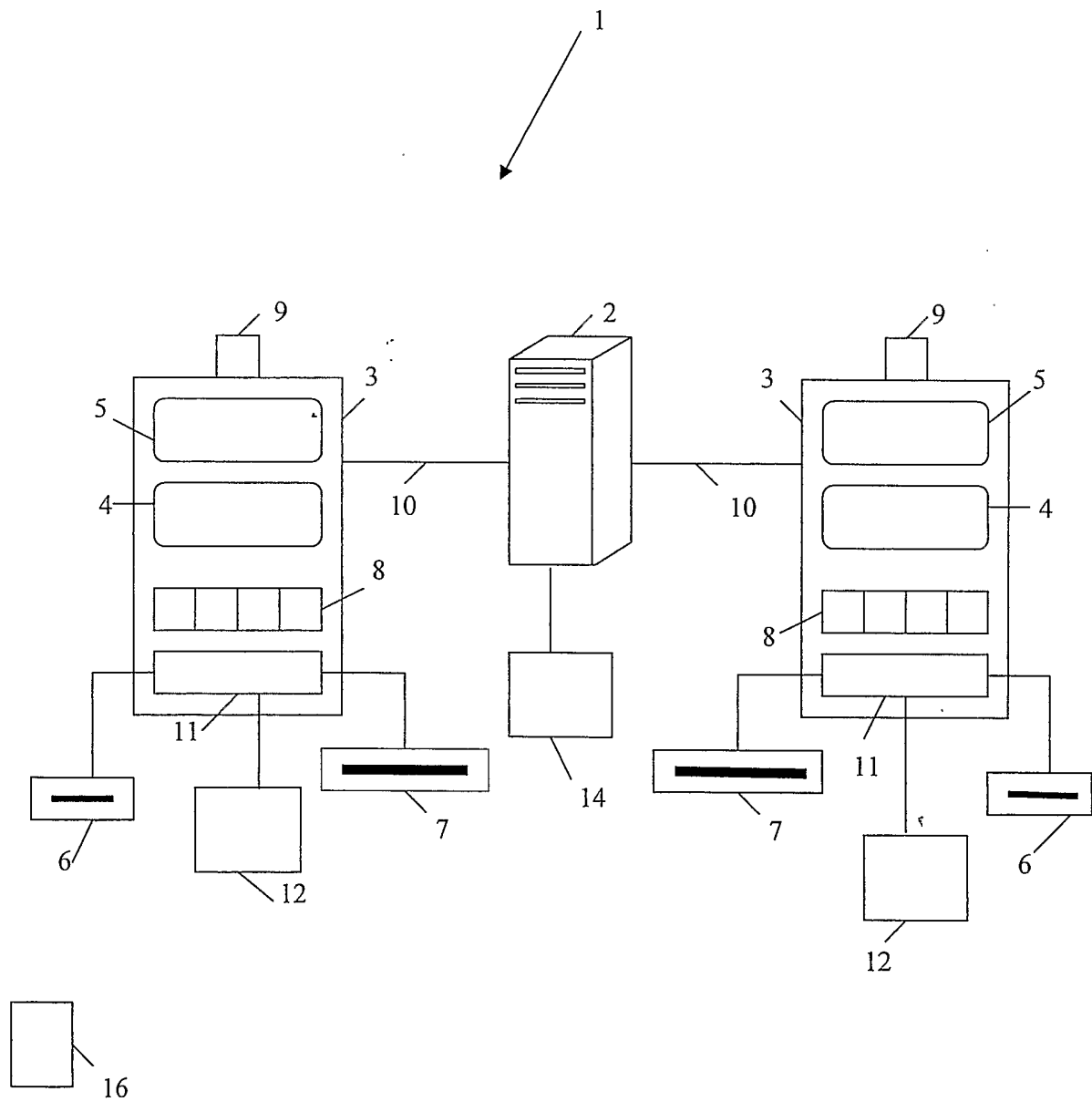
26. A method as claimed in claim 25 in which the prize winnable by the player during a turn of the multistage bonus game is awarded at a final stage of the randomly selected number of sequential stages of the bonus game.
- 5 27. A method as claimed in claim 25 in which the prize winnable by the player during a turn of the multistage bonus game is awarded as a sum of sub-prizes winnable by the player at each one of the randomly selected number of sequential stages of the bonus game.
- 10 28. A method as claimed in claim 24 in which only one of the simulations of the entertainment game and the multistage bonus game is displayed at any instant.
- 15 29. A method as claimed in claim 24 in which the simulation of the turn of the game of bingo is displayed on a secondary display means, and the simulations of the entertainment game and the multistage bonus game are displayed on a primary display means.
- 20 30. A method as claimed in claim 24 in which the random event generator is executed in a gaming server remote from the plurality of player stations, and communication is provided between the gaming server and each one of the plurality of remote player stations by means of a communication network.
- 25 31. A method as claimed in claim 24 in which the game of bingo is established with 75 uniquely numbered balls, and a random event generated by the random event generator is configured to correspond to the drawing at random of one of the 75 uniquely numbered balls.
- 30 32. A method as claimed in claim 31 which includes a step of establishing a player bingo card associated with the game of bingo to have 25 positions

thereon arranged in a 5 by 5 grid, each grid position being numbered with a respective random number from 1 to 75.

- 5 33. A method as claimed in claim 32 in which one favourable outcome of the game of bingo is established to correspond to a game-ending pattern causing the turn of the game of bingo to terminate and the game-ending pattern is determined to arise when all the numbers on at least one player bingo card match the numbers drawn by the random event generator.
- 10 34. A method as claimed in claim 33 in which the game of bingo is established to have a plurality of further favourable outcomes, and for determining each one of the plurality of further favourable outcomes to arise when all the numbers in a predetermined pattern on at least one bingo card match the numbers drawn by the random event generator.
- 15 35. A method as claimed in claim 31 in which a first set of 24 of the 75 balls is drawn at random and data corresponding to the first set of 24 balls is transmitted to each one of the player stations.
- 20 36. A method as claimed in claim 35 in which a prize claiming means is activated on each one of the player stations, the prize claiming means operable by the player for a predetermined period of time to claim any favourable outcome arising from the first set of 24 balls.
- 25 37. A method as claimed in claim 35 that includes the steps of drawing at random further balls, one at a time, and checking for the occurrence of a game-ending pattern on any of the player bingo cards after the drawing of each ball.
- 30 38. A method as claimed in claim 37 in which data corresponding to all the drawn balls necessary for the occurrence of the game-ending pattern is

transmitted to each one of the player stations if the game-ending pattern is not the last possible game-ending pattern in the turn of the game of bingo.

- 5 39. A method as claimed in claim 38 that includes a step of activating the prize claiming means on each one of the player stations for a predetermined period of time, the prize claiming means being operable by a player to claim a favourable outcome arising from the occurrence of the game-ending pattern.
- 10 40. A method as claimed in claim 39 in which the turn of the game of bingo is terminated if a player claims the favourable outcome within the predetermined period of time.
- 15 41. A method as claimed in claim 37 in which all the remaining balls are drawn if the game-ending pattern is the last possible game-ending pattern in the turn of the game of bingo, and data corresponding to all the drawn balls necessary for the occurrence of the last game ending pattern and the remaining balls is transmitted to each one of the player stations.
- 20 42. A method as claimed in claim 41 which includes the further steps of activating a prize claiming means on each one of the player stations, the prize claiming means being operable by a player to claim a favourable outcome arising from the occurrence of the last possible game-ending pattern, and terminating the turn of the game of bingo if a player claims the  
25 favourable outcome.
43. A method as claimed in claim 42 in which the prize claiming means is activated until a player claims the favourable outcome.



**Figure 1**

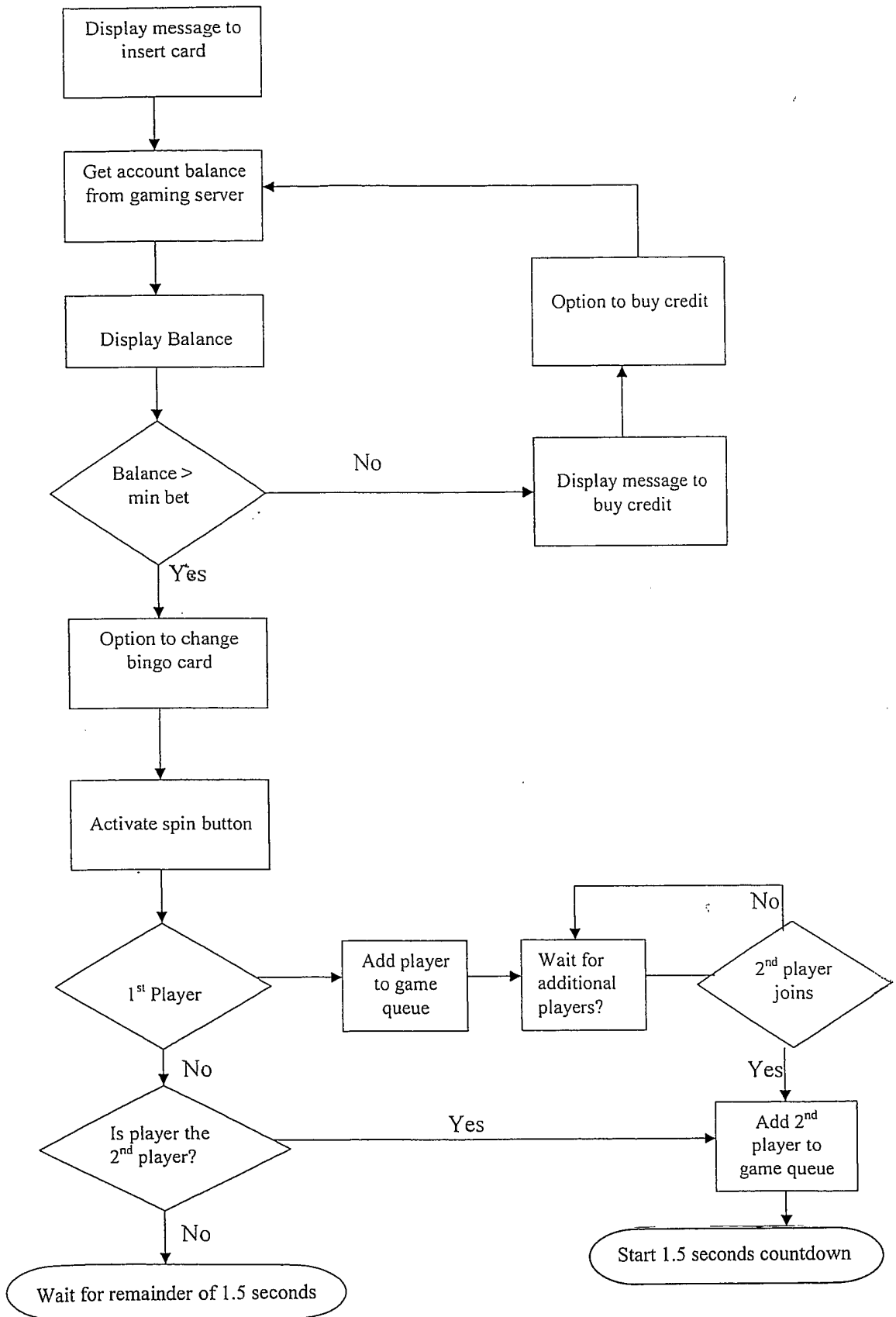
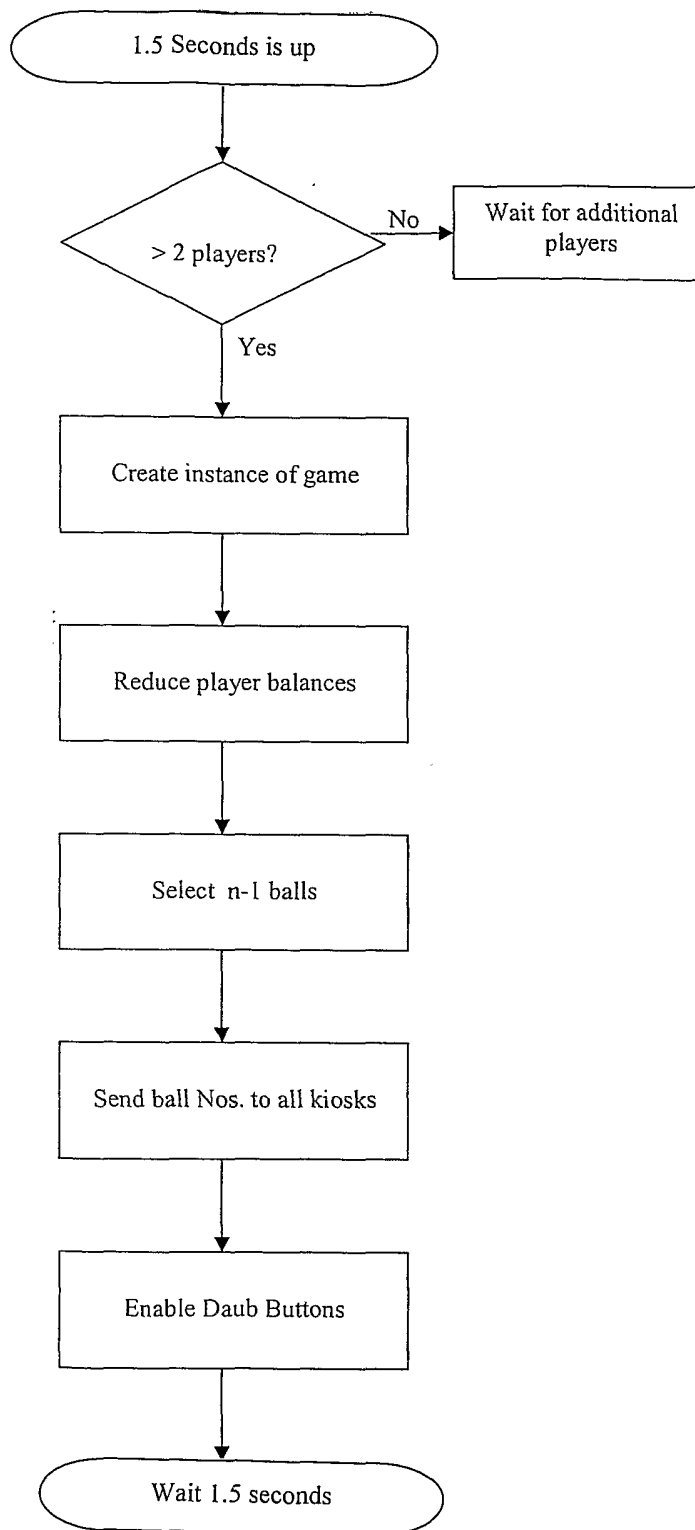


Figure 2



**Figure 3**



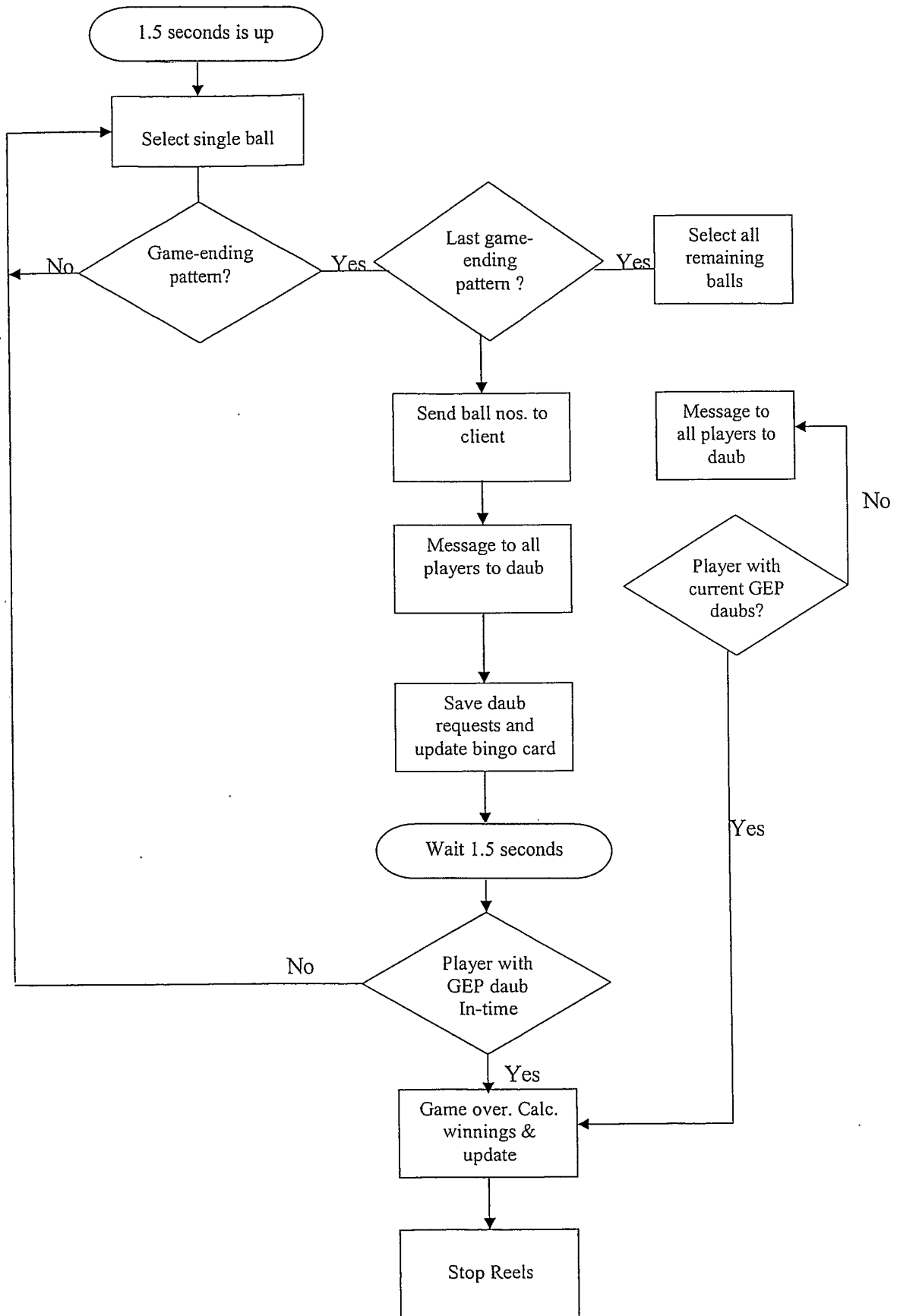


Figure 4