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(54) **METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR PLAYING A WAGERING GAME OF CHANCE**

(52) **U.S. Cl. 463/13; 273/292; 273/303; 463/11**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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Representative embodiments provide for methods of playing a wagering game of chance, including dealing an initial hand in a face-up condition to at least one player, and accepting a final bet into a pot thus defining at least one final betting player. The method also includes dealing one or more community cards in a face-up condition, wherein at least one community card is selectively combined with at least one card within each initial hand to define a final hand for each final betting player. The method further includes awarding at least a portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best final hand that comprises a predefined qualifying hand or better. Other embodiments provide for respective gaming tables and individual gaming machines including respectively electronic controllers, each controller configured to execute one or more method steps in accordance with the present embodiments provided for herein.

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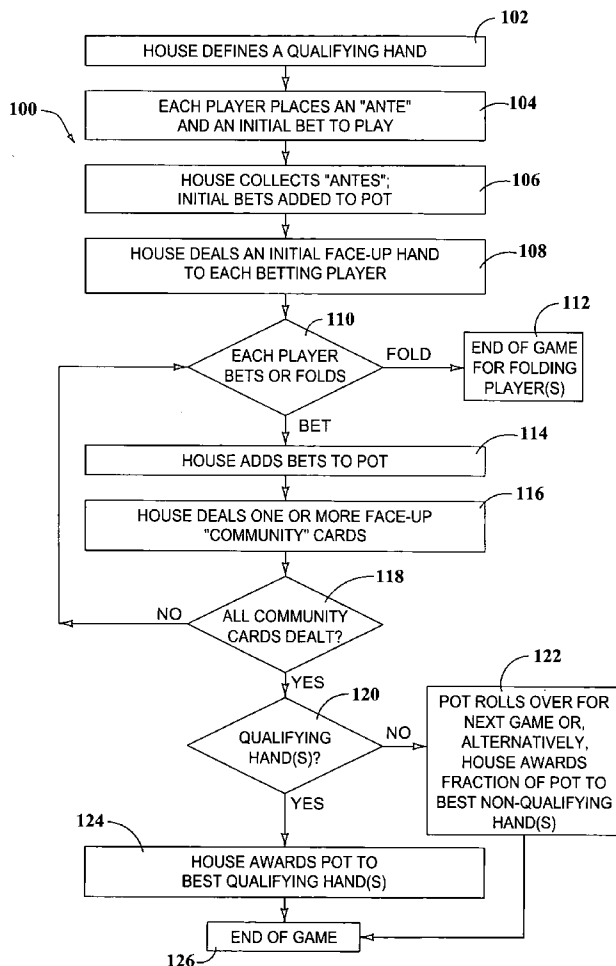
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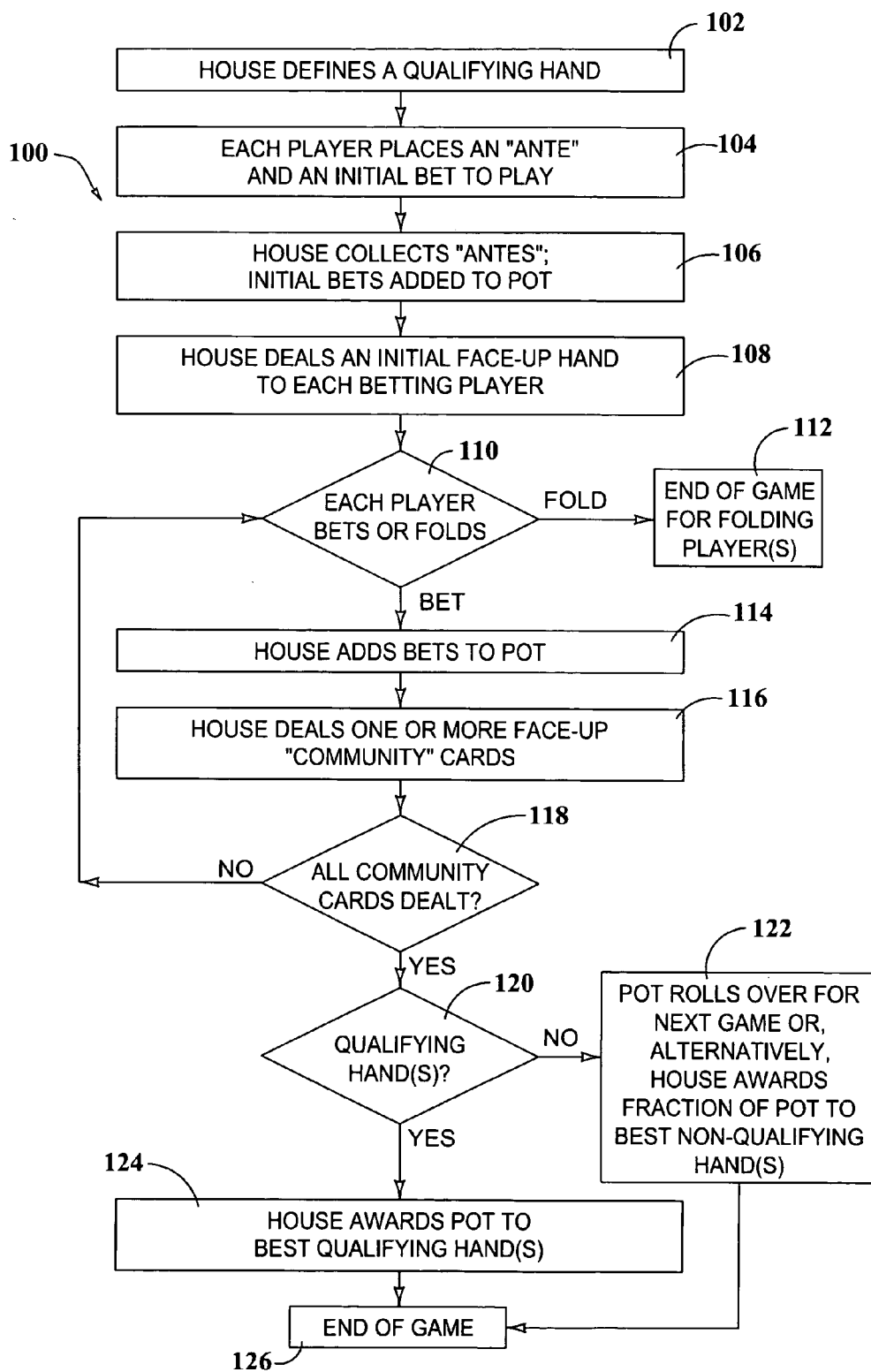


FIG. 1

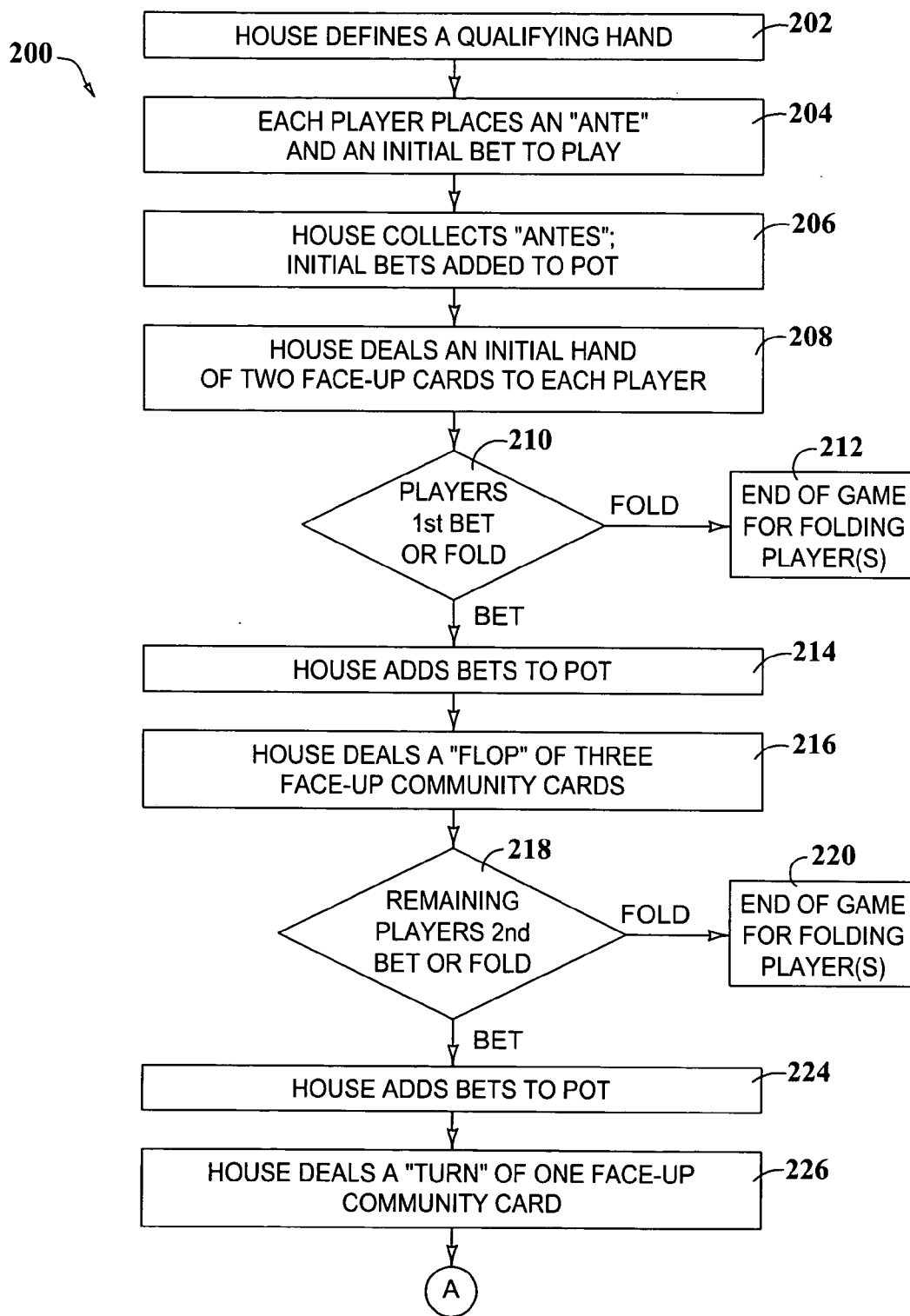


FIG. 2A

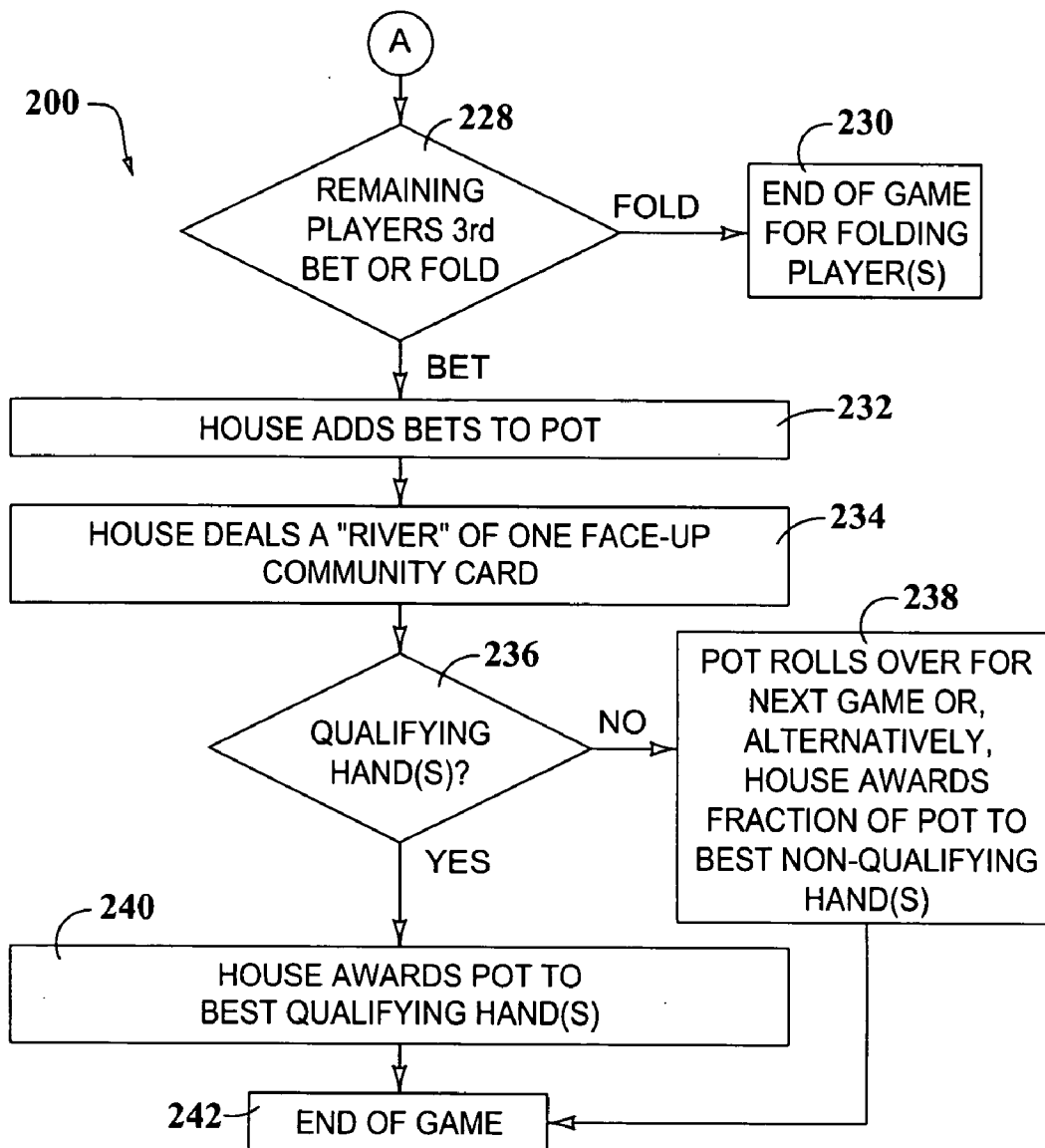


FIG. 2B

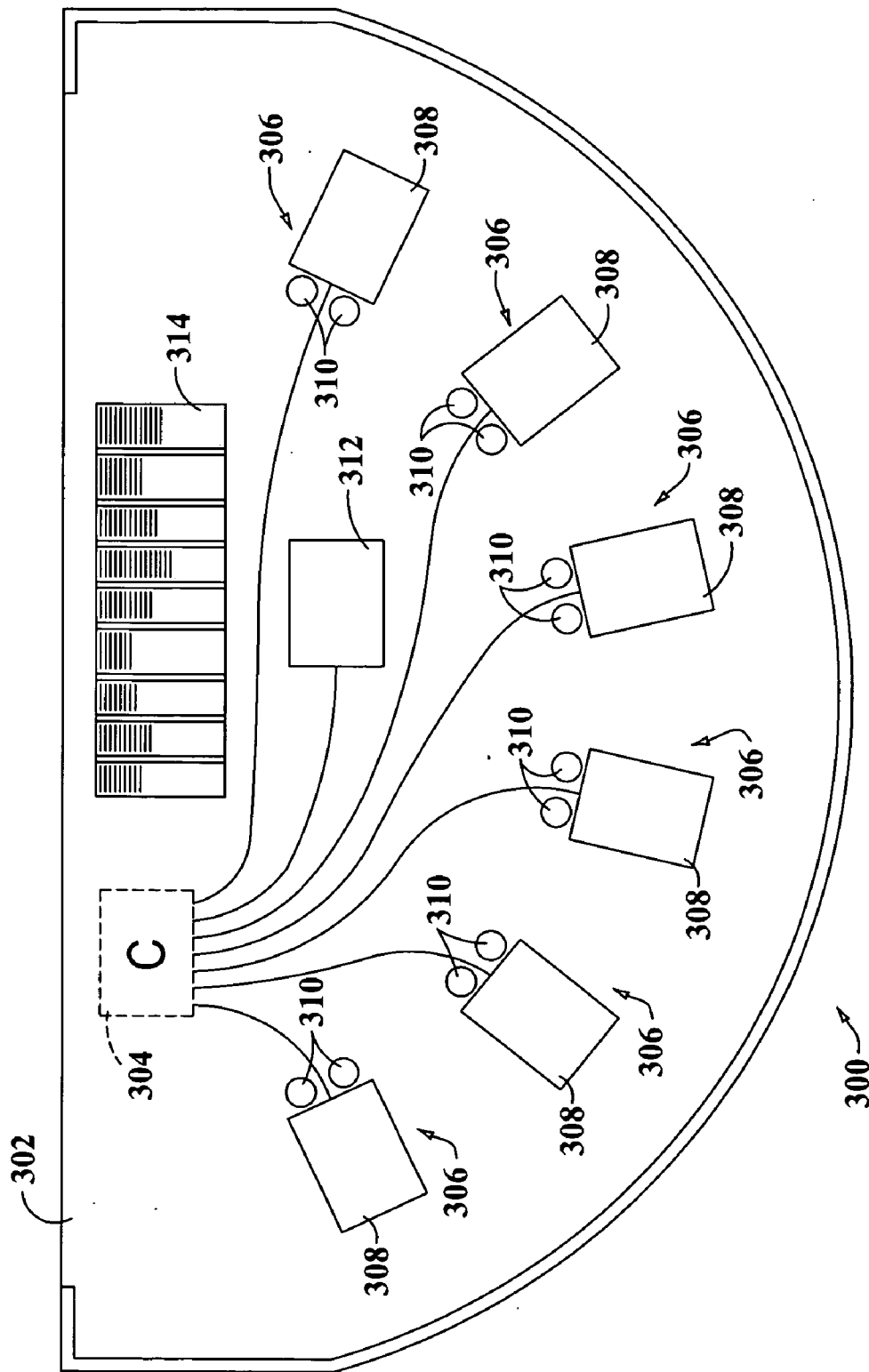


FIG. 3

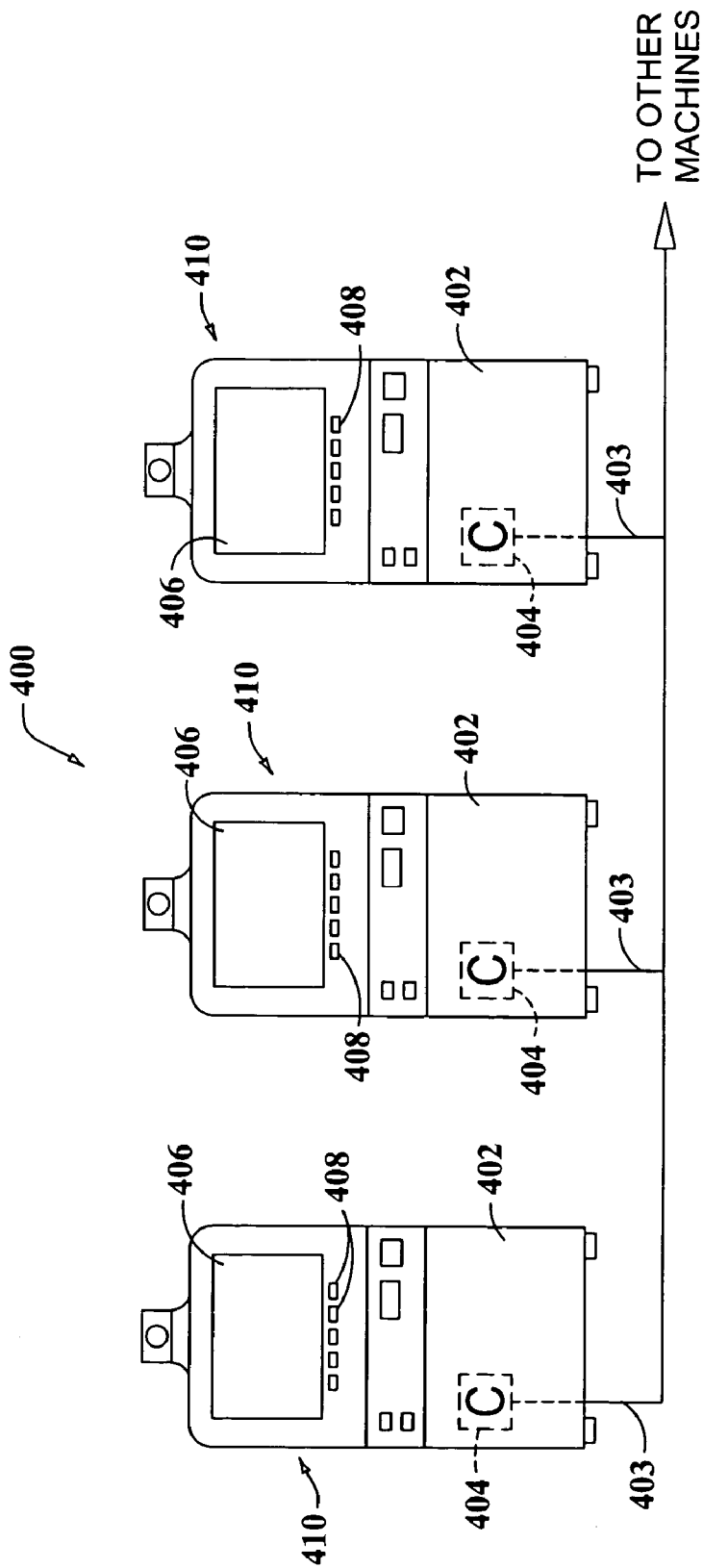


FIG. 4

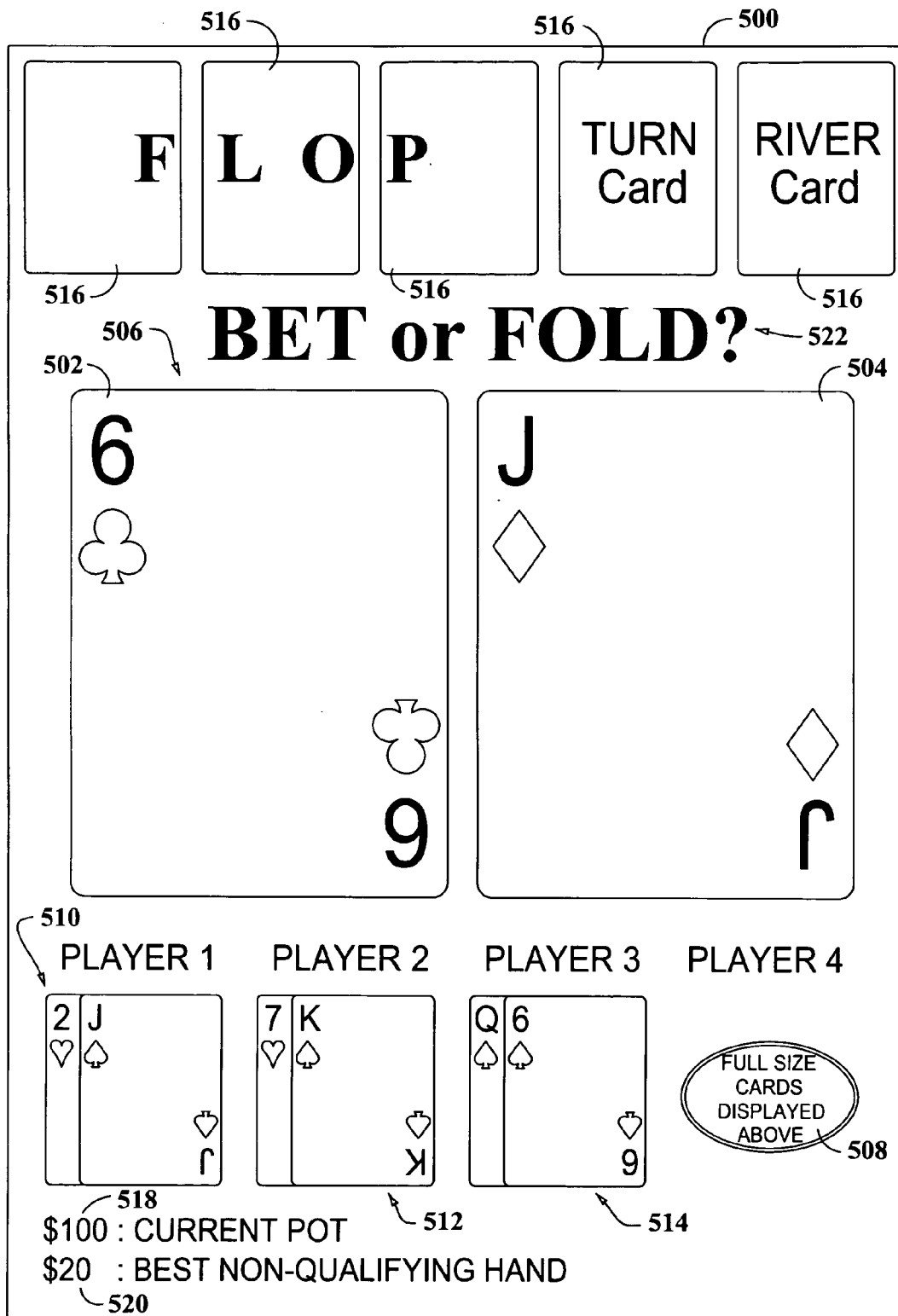


FIG. 5A

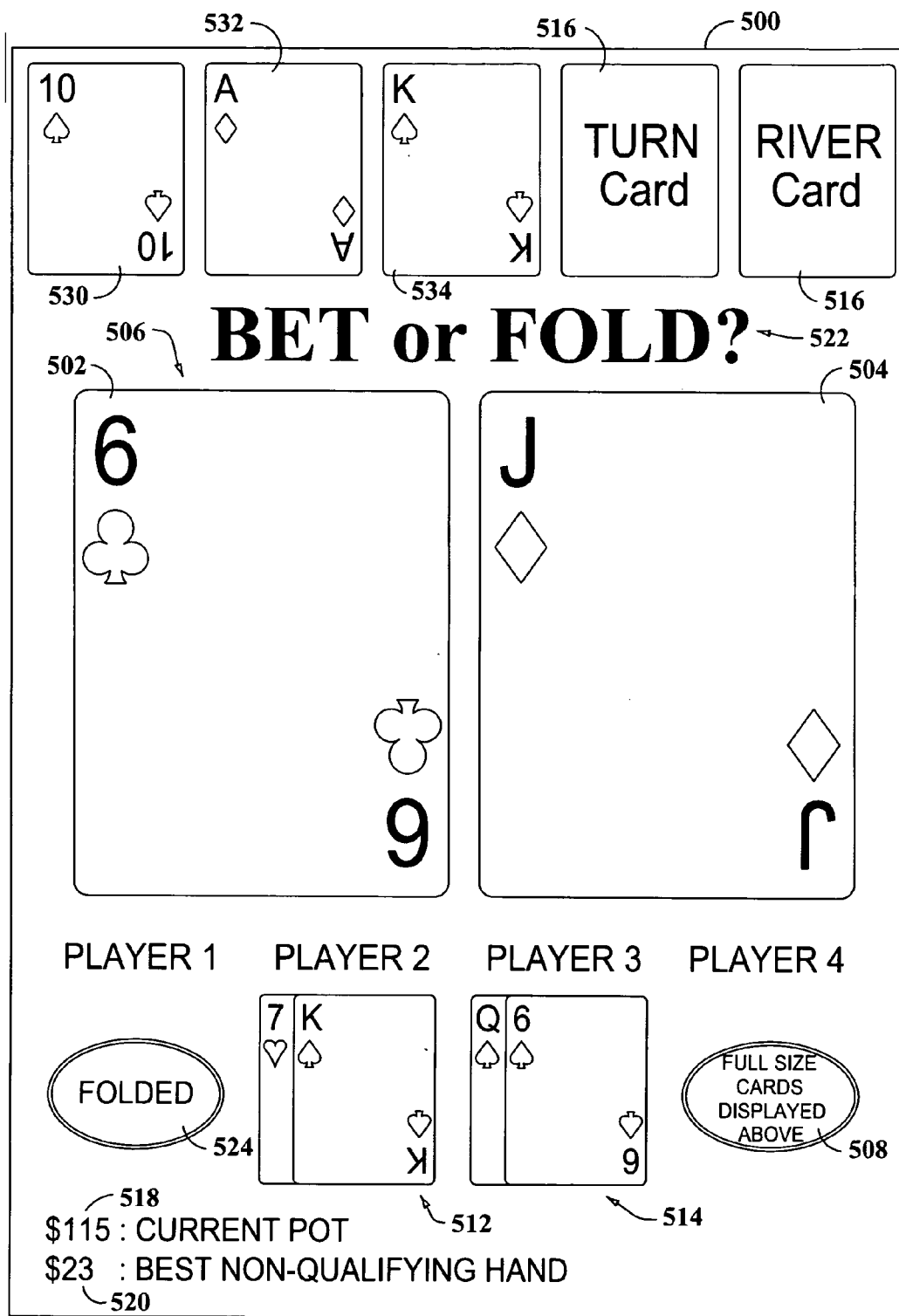


FIG. 5B

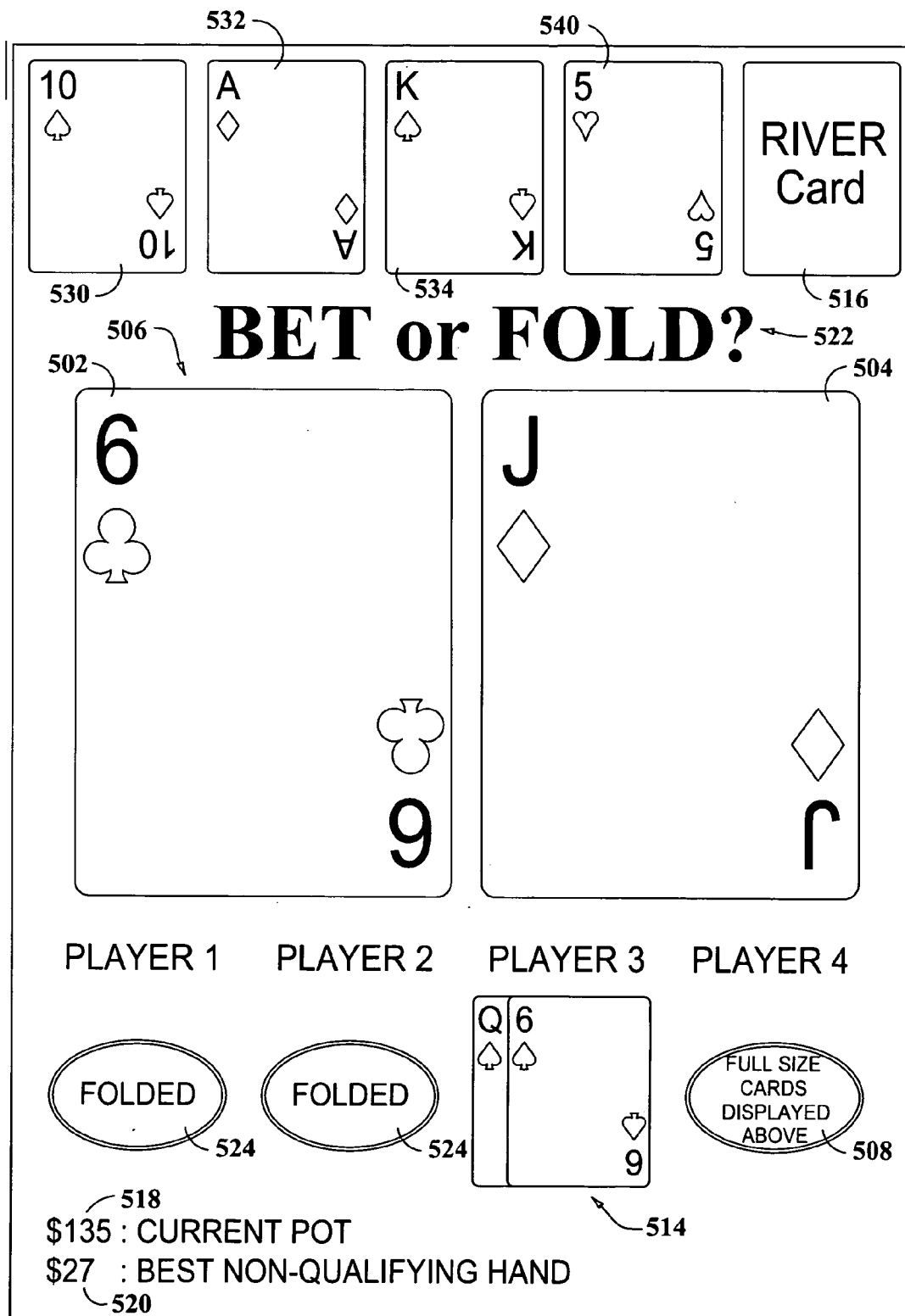


FIG. 5C

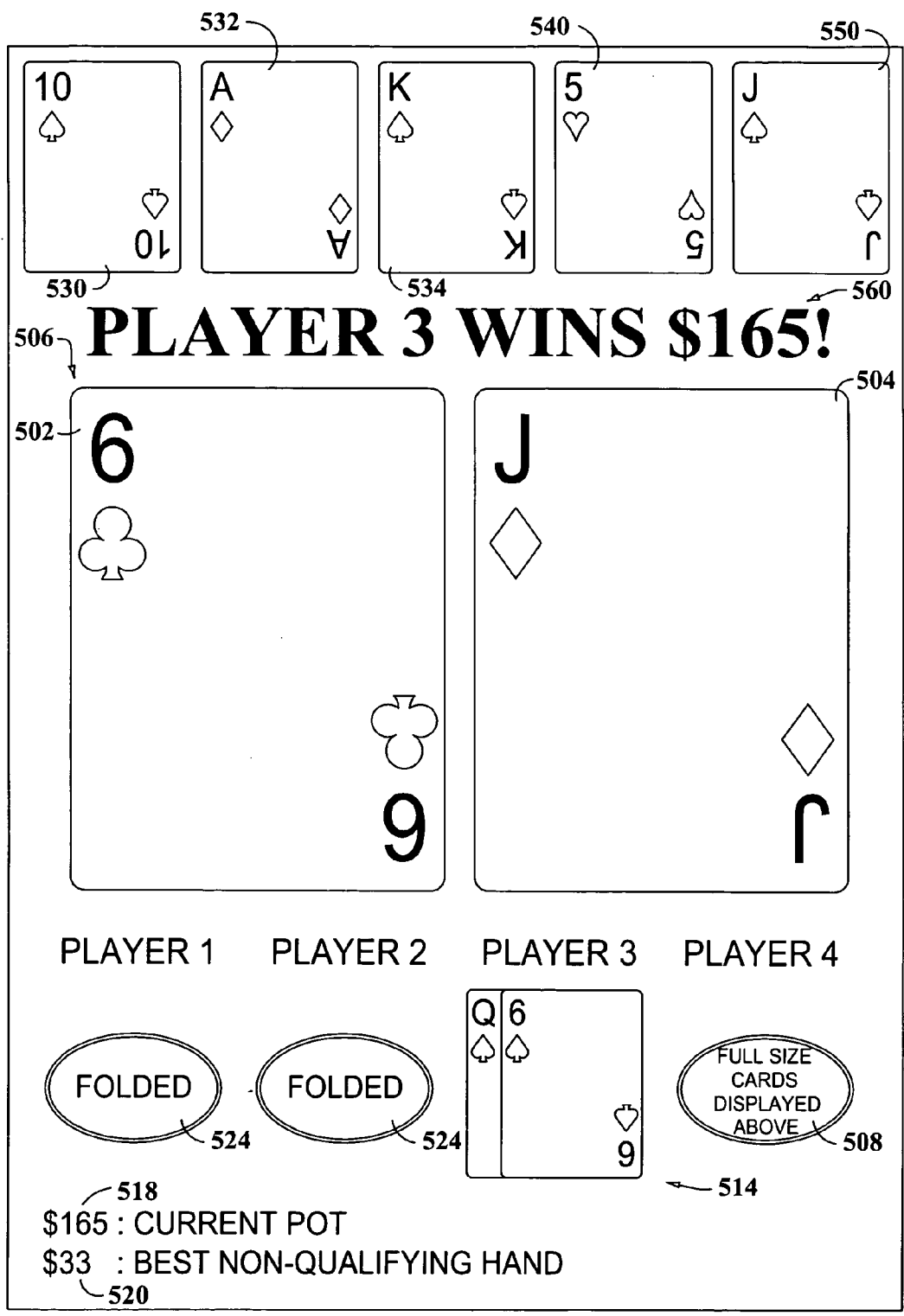


FIG. 5D

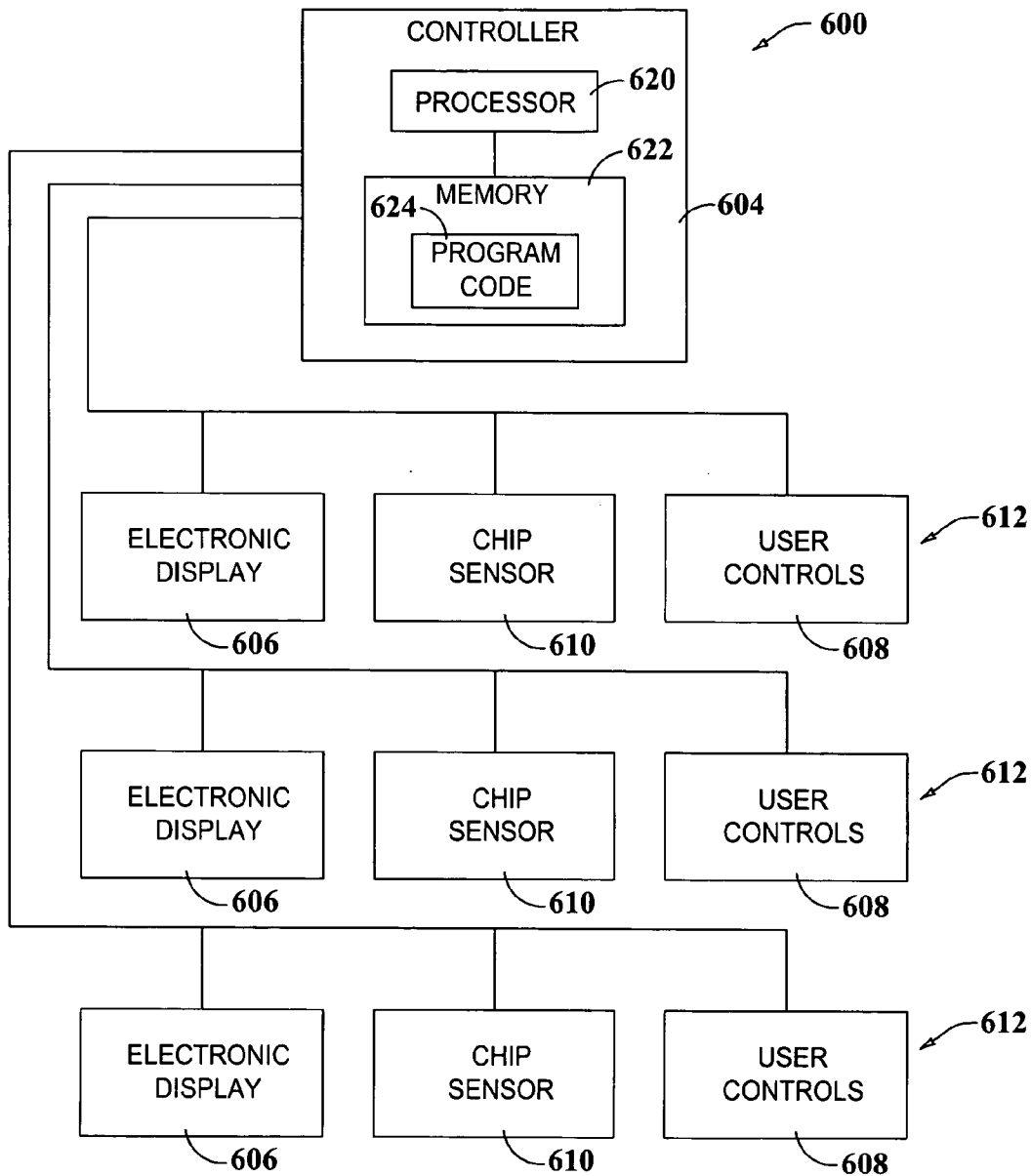


FIG. 6

METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR PLAYING A WAGERING GAME OF CHANCE

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application is a continuation-in-part of, and claims priority under 35 U.S.C. § 120 to, copending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/637,238, filed Aug. 8, 2003, which is hereby incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Various kinds of wagering games of chance (hereinafter, wagering games) are known. Examples of such wagering games include craps, blackjack (twenty-one), baccarat, etc. Play of such a wagering game typically involves a player's individual skill, playing strategy, and some degree of probabilistic chance operating within the rules of the game to determine a winner or winners. Commonly, wagering games are played within a casino, card house, or similar establishment in which players can enjoy numerous amenities such as beverage and food services, cashier services, lines of credit, personal security, or other resources that generally make for an attractive atmosphere in which to play such wagering games.

[0003] Generally, players take significant interest in a particular type of wagering game and the challenge offered in playing that game well. As a result, some degree of variation in the rules and/or other dynamics of play are sought by a number of players so that the particular wagering game of choice continues to provide interest and excitement. Furthermore, an increasing number of wagering games can now be played in a manner that is, to some extent, computerized or automated. In such a venue, certain tasks such as, for example, the dealing of cards, accounting for wagers, and the awarding of winnings is handled automatically so that players are better able to concentrate on and enjoy the play of the game.

[0004] Therefore, it is generally desirable to provide methods and apparatus for playing wagering games that provide interest and excitement to the players.

SUMMARY

[0005] The present disclosure provides for any number of different embodiments of a wagering game of chance, and methods and apparatus for performing the same. Typical (but not required) to each embodiment is the use of a standard poker deck, including the optional use of one or more jokers and/or wildcards. Various embodiments are provided wherein each round of betting is by predefined amount. As betting (wagering) during the particular wagering game of chance is performed substantially simultaneously by each player, the overall progress (play) of the game is generally faster than that of known styles of wagering game play.

[0006] Also provided are substantially automated (i.e., electronic) venues for playing various embodiments of the wagering games of chance as provided for herein. Such venues include a wager gaming table configured to provide play for a plurality of players, as well as individual gaming machines that can be played solo or as a multi-player

collective network. Various embodiments provided for herein can also be played in a more traditional environment on a known gaming table (e.g., a poker table) through the use of conventional playing cards and wagering chips, etc. Also, certain embodiments provided for herein include the dealing of all cards in a face-up condition. Numerous variations on the exemplary embodiments described hereinafter can be defined and used in accordance with the scope of the present disclosure.

[0007] One embodiment provides a method of playing a wagering game of chance, the method including the steps of defining a qualifying hand, and dealing an initial hand in a face-up condition to each of at least one player. The method also includes accepting a final bet into a pot from each player, such that at least one final betting player is defined. The method also includes the step of dealing one or more community cards in a face-up condition, wherein at least one of the community cards is selectively combined with at least one of the cards within each initial hand so as to define a final hand for each final betting player. The method also includes awarding at least a portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand.

[0008] Another embodiment provides a method of playing a wagering game of chance, including the steps of defining a qualifying hand of at least five cards, and of dealing an initial hand of at least one card in a face-up condition to at least one player. The method also includes accepting a first bet into a pot from at least one player such that at least one first betting player is defined, and dealing at least one community "flop" card in a face-up condition. The method further includes accepting a second bet from at least one of the first betting players, thereby defining at least one second betting player, and also dealing at least one community "turn" card in a face-up condition. The method still further includes accepting a third bet from at least one of the second betting players such that at least one final betting player is defined. The method also includes the steps of dealing at least one community "river" card in a face-up condition, wherein each community flop, turn and river card is selectively combinable with each initial hand so as define a final hand comprising five cards for each final betting player. The method further includes awarding at least a portion of the pot to any final betting player that holds a best final hand comprising a qualifying hand.

[0009] Yet another embodiment provides a gaming table, the gaming table including a plurality of user interfaces and an electronic controller. The electronic controller is coupled in signal communication with each of the user interfaces. The electronic controller is suitably configured to define a qualifying hand, and deal an initial hand in a face-up condition to at least one player by way of a corresponding one of the user interfaces. The electronic controller is also configured to register a final bet into a pot from each player, thus defining at least one final betting player, and to deal one or more community cards in a face-up condition by way of at least one of the user interfaces. The electronic controller is further configured such that at least one community card is selectively combined with at least one card within each initial hand so as to define a respective final hand for each final betting player. The electronic controller is also config-

ured to determine an award of at least a portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand.

[0010] Another embodiment provides a computer-accessible storage media including an executable program code. The executable program code is configured to cause a processor to define a qualifying hand, and to deal an initial hand in a face-up condition to at least one player. The executable program code is further configured to cause the processor to register a final bet into a pot from each player, such that at least one final betting player is defined, and to deal one or more community cards in a face-up condition. Therein, at least one community card is selectively combined with at least one card within each initial hand such that a final hand is defined for each final betting player. The executable program code is also configured to determine an award of at least a portion of the pot to any final betting player that has a best final hand comprising a qualifying hand.

[0011] Still another embodiment provides an individual gaming machine, including a user interface and an electronic controller coupled in signal communication with the user interface. The electronic controller is configured to be coupled in signal communication with at least one other electronic controller of another individual gaming machine. The electronic controller is further configured to define a qualifying hand, and to deal an initial hand in a face-up condition to a first player by way of the user interface. The electronic controller is still further configured to register a final bet into a pot from the first player such that a first final betting player is defined, wherein the pot includes another final bet from at least one other final betting player using another individual gaming machine. The electronic controller is also configured to deal one or more community cards in a face-up condition by way of the user interface. In this regard, the electronic controller is configured such that least one community card is selectively combined with at least one card within the initial hand so as to define a final hand for the first final betting player. Also, the electronic controller is further configured such that the one or more community cards are common to the first final betting player and at least one other final betting player. The electronic controller is still further configured to determine an award of at least a portion of the pot to the first final betting player upon achieving a best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand, as compared to another final hand of at least one other final betting player.

[0012] These and other aspects and embodiments will now be described in detail with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] FIG. 1 is a flowchart depicting a method of playing a wagering game of chance in accordance with one embodiment.

[0014] FIG. 2A is a flowchart depicting a method of playing a wagering game of chance in accordance with another embodiment.

[0015] FIG. 2B is a continuation of the flowchart of FIG. 2A.

[0016] FIG. 3 is a plan view depicting a wager gaming table in accordance with still another embodiment.

[0017] FIG. 4 is front elevation view depicting gaming network in accordance with the yet another embodiment.

[0018] FIG. 5A is a front elevation view depicting an exemplary display in accordance with still another embodiment.

[0019] FIG. 5B is a sequential continuation of the exemplary display of FIG. 5A.

[0020] FIG. 5C is a sequential continuation of the exemplary display of FIG. 5B.

[0021] FIG. 5D is a sequential continuation of the exemplary display of FIG. 5C.

[0022] FIG. 6 is a block diagram depicting a control system in accordance with another embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0023] In representative embodiments, the present teachings provide methods and apparatus for playing one or more wagering games of chance.

[0024] Certain terms are used and applied herein that are generally defined as follows:

[0025] House: The house is a game administrator or host for playing a game or games in accordance with the teachings provided for herein. In some circumstances, the house can be generally defined by a casino, or the agents thereof, which is/are authorized to define particular rules or other aspects of playing the game or games provided for herein. In other situations, the house can be defined by one or more individuals hosting or otherwise officiating the play of a game or games as provided herein. Such individuals are commonly referred to as dealers.

[0026] Initial Hand: An initial hand comprises one or more cards dealt in a face-up condition to each of one or more players. Thus, each player has (i.e., holds) a corresponding initial hand. In certain embodiments provided for herein, each player is provided a preliminary hand of two or more cards dealt in a face-up condition, from which one or more of these cards are selectively discarded by the corresponding player in order to define that player's initial hand. An initial hand is generally considered "initial" in the sense that it typically comprises some of the first cards to be dealt during a given instance of a game. An initial hand can also include, along with the one or more cards dealt in a face-up condition to each of one or more players, one or more cards dealt in a face-down condition to each of one or more players.

[0027] Community Card: A community card refers to any card that is available to any of one or more players during a present instance of a game. More particularly, each community card is available to be selectively combined with one or more cards of a player's initial hand in order to define a final hand (described in detail below) for that player. Typically, one or more community cards are dealt in a face-up condition at various respective times during the course of a game or games provided for herein. However, in one variation one or more of the community cards can be dealt in a face-down condition.

[0028] Final Hand: A final hand comprises the selective combination of at least one card from the corresponding player's initial hand with at least one community card so as to result in a predefined total card count. In certain embodi-

ments, a final hand is defined as a total of five cards selectively combined as just described. Other card counts can also be used in accordance with embodiments provided for herein. A final hand is generally considered “final” in the sense that it comprises some selective combination—that is, a subset—of all of the initial hand cards and all of the community cards that were made available (dealt) to the corresponding player during the course of the present game.

[0029] Register: The terms register, registering and registration generally refer to various recording operations performed by automated, or partially automated, embodiments provided for herein. As such, registration typically means the recording of a quantity or entity identification, a player choice or action, or some other game-related data within a computer-accessible storage media (such as a memory, etc.) by a corresponding processor. Non-limiting examples include: registering a bet or bets as they are added to a (the) pot; registering one or more cards as they are selectively discarded by a player; registering a determination of a superior (best) final hand; registering an award of a pot (or portion thereof) to a player; etc.

[0030] Valid Player: A valid player is any player that has met one or more sequential requirements for ongoing participation in a present instance of a game. Typically, a valid player is one that has opted to place the most recently required bet and/or ante in order to advance in play of the present game. In contrast, a player that has opted to quit (i.e., “fold”) is not considered a valid player for purposes of the present instance of a game.

[0031] Turning now to **FIG. 1**, a flowchart **100** depicts a method for playing a wagering game of chance in accordance with one embodiment. While the method depicted by flowchart **100** describes particular steps and order of execution, it is to be understood that other embodiments that respectively include other steps and/or orders of execution can also be used in accordance with the teachings provided for herein.

[0032] In step **102** of flowchart **100**, the house defines a “qualifying hand” for play of the wagering game of chance. The qualifying hand is generally considered a minimum hand necessary for a player to qualify for winning a pot or portion thereof (described hereafter). (However, as will be described below, in one embodiment a portion of the pot can be awarded to a player holding a hand that is not a qualifying hand (i.e., a “non-qualifying hand”, as a sort of consolation award.) The qualifying hand is ranked relative to other hands in accordance with typical rules for high-hand poker. One of skill in the poker gaming arts is familiar with such rankings (i.e., hierarchy of hands), and an exhaustive elaboration is not required for purposes herein. Non-limiting examples of such qualifying hands can include a straight, a flush, a straight flush, three-of-a-kind, four-of-a-kind, a full house, etc. For purposes of example, it is assumed that the qualifying hand is defined to be a flush (i.e., all cards in a hand are of the same suit).

[0033] In step **104**, each of one or more players places (i.e., puts forth) an ante and an initial bet so as to establish their initial participation in the game about to commence. Typically, both the ante and the initial bet are respective amounts of money predefined by the house. The ante and the initial bet can be, but are not necessarily, equal amounts of money. For purposes of the present example, it is assumed

that an ante of one dollar and an initial bet of five dollars are placed by each player. The “ante” is the amount taken by the house in exchange for hosting the wagering game of chance in the present example. As described below, the ante is optional, and the house can use other means (such as talking a percent of, or “rake”, of later bets (from the “pot”) as its compensation for hosting the game. Other methods can also be employed to compensate the house for hosting the game, such as an admission fee charged to players to admit them to physical premises, or a web site, that hosts the game.

[0034] In step **106**, the house collects the ante(s) as its share (also known as “rake” or “cut”) for hosting, or officiating, the present instance of the game. Also, the initial bet(s) are accumulated into a pot that serves as the source of an award or awards to a player or players as described hereinafter. For purposes of example, it is assumed that the pot has just been awarded in its entirety during the last instance of the wagering game of chance, and therefore is starting from zero, having only the initial bet(s) just placed as its content.

[0035] In step **108**, the house deals an initial hand of one or more cards—in accordance with the present embodiment of game being played—in a face-up condition to each of the players participating in the game (i.e., those players that have anted and placed an initial bet; also considered betting players for purposes herein). For purposes of example, it is assumed that an initial hand of two cards is dealt in a face-up condition to each betting player and that a full hand constitutes five cards total for the present embodiment of the game. Other card counts corresponding to other initial hands and/or full hands can also be used. Further, it is assumed that cards used during play are dealt from a standard (fifty-two card) poker deck or its equivalent. Further still, one or more standard jokers, and/or wild cards, can also be used. As a result of the face-up condition of the initial hand (in this example), all players can see (or be otherwise made aware) of the content of each and every initial hand.

[0036] In step **110**, each betting player decides if they are to continue or quit (i.e., “fold”) at this point without further play of the present instance of the game. Those players who elect to quit continue to step **112** below. Those players that elect to continue play place another bet in an amount predefined by the house. In some embodiments, each bet placed during step **110** is in an amount equal to or greater than that of the initial bet or any immediately preceding bet placed during the present instance of the game. However, all bets placed during a given instance of the step **110** are of an equal amount regardless of specific quantity. For purposes of the ongoing example, it is assumed that each player electing to continue places a bet (i.e., a “first bet”) of five dollars. The method of the flowchart **100** now proceeds to step **114** below for those players electing to continue play. It should be pointed out that the “first bet” is to be distinguished from the “initial bet”. That is, an “initial bet” is accepted prior to dealing any cards, and a “first bet” is accepted after a player has received his or her initial hand, and elects to stay in the game by placing a bet. It should also be noted that in one variation no “initial bet” is accepted, and the first act of betting by a player is placing the “first bet” after receiving his or her initial hand. That is, the games provided for herein can be played with or without the use of an “initial bet” (i.e., a bet accepted prior to any cards being dealt to the specific

players). It will also be appreciated that the “first bet” (accepted after the initial hand has been dealt) can also be the “final bet”.

[0037] In step 112, those players electing to quit in step 110 above, do so. The present instance of the game of the flowchart 100 is now ended for those players. However, players that fold at this point are eligible to continue play in the next (sequential) instance of the game and can therefore continue to compete with other players for the same pot, should it (or some portion thereof) not be awarded to a player or players at the end of the present instance of the game.

[0038] In step 114, the house adds any bet or bets placed in step 110 above to the pot. In this way, the pot can be generally considered to be ‘progressive’ in nature, growing in value with each instance of betting (i.e., wagering) that occurs as described in steps 104 and/or 110 above until the pot (or a portion thereof) is awarded to a player or players.

[0039] In step 116, the house deals one or more ‘community’ cards in a face-up condition. Each of the community cards is available to be selectively combined with at least one card within each initial hand—in accordance with the present embodiment of game being played—so as to define a best present hand for each continuing (i.e., betting, or valid, player). For purposes of the present example, it is assumed that three community cards are dealt in a face-up condition, such that each continuing player now has a total of five available cards that can be selectively combined so as to define a present hand of five cards. It is further assumed for purposes of example that each player must include both cards of their initial hand within the selective combination defining their (best) present hand of five cards.

[0040] In step 118, it is determined if all of the community cards have been dealt in accordance with the present embodiment of the game being played. If all community cards have been dealt, then the method of the flowchart 100 proceeds to step 120 below. If one or more community cards are yet to be dealt, then the steps 110-118 are repeated one or more additional times prior to proceeding on to step 120 of the method of the flowchart 100.

[0041] For purposes of the present example, it is assumed that two more community cards remain to be dealt. Thus, under the present example: Step 110 is repeated, in which each presently valid player elects to fold (i.e., proceed to step 112) or place a second (and in this exemplary case, final) bet in order to continue; then step 114 is repeated, in which the second bet(s) is/are added to the pot; then step 116 is repeated, in which two more community cards are dealt in a face-up condition; and then the method of the flowchart 100 returns to step 118, where it is determined whether or not all necessary iterations of steps 110-116 above are complete with respect to the present instance of the game. Under the present example, there are now five community cards total that can be selectively combined with each initial hand (of two cards) so as to define a best present hand (of five cards) for each respective second betting player.

[0042] It is important to understand that there is a bet placed by each continuing player (e.g., during step 110 above, etc.) that defines a final bet. Such a final bet (or bets) is (or are) typically placed during the last iteration of step 110 as performed in accordance with the particular embodi-

ment of the present game. Thus, under the present example, each second betting player has, by definition, placed a final bet and is defined to be a final betting player. Furthermore, each best present hand held by a final betting player is defined to be a (best) final hand. In any event, the method of the flowchart 100 now proceeds to step 120 below.

[0043] In step 120, the house determines if any final betting player has a final hand that comprises (i.e., meets or exceeds) the qualifying hand defined in step 102 above. Under the present example, a qualifying final hand is any final hand comprising a flush (or better). If one or more players have a respective qualifying final hand, then the method of the flowchart 100 proceeds to step 124 below. If none of the players has a qualifying hand, then the method of the flowchart 100 proceeds to step 122 below.

[0044] In step 122, the house sets all of the present pot aside for use in the next instance of playing the wagering game of chance. It is in this way that the pot can be further considered as a progressive pot. The method of the flowchart 100 then proceeds to step 126 in which the present instance of the wagering game of chance is ended without awarding the pot, or any portion thereof, to any player or players. However, in certain other embodiments, a predefined (i.e., predetermined) portion (e.g., 15%, etc.) of the pot is award to a final betting player holding the best final hand that is a non-qualifying final hand. (A “non-qualifying final hand” is a “final hand” (as defined above) that is not a “qualifying hand” (as also defined above).) Other alternative embodiments are described in further detail hereinafter.

[0045] In step 124, the house evaluates and compares any qualifying final hands held by one or more of the final betting players, in accordance with standard (or other defined) hierarchical rules of high-hand poker, in order to determine (i.e., identify) which final hand is the superior (or ‘best’) qualifying final hand. Upon such determination, the pot, or a predefined portion (e.g., 95%, etc.) thereof, is then awarded to the particular final betting player holding the best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand. If two (or more) players hold equivalent superior qualifying final hands, then the (i.e., progressive, or collective) pot can be equally split between them in accordance with the present embodiment of the game.

[0046] In step 126, the present instance of the wagering game of chance is considered complete. Any portion of the pot (or its entirety) that has not been awarded during the most recent instance of the game is carried over as an initial pot (i.e., a starting pot) for one or more additional instances of the wagering game of chance. Thus, in certain embodiments, the method of the flowchart 100 is repeated in an iterative fashion as a sequence of wagering games of chance, wherein the progressive pot grows commensurately until the entire pot or a portion thereof is awarded to a player or players.

[0047] The method of the flowchart 100 generally describes one possible embodiment of playing a wagering game of chance in accordance with certain embodiments provided for herein. Other embodiments corresponding to other steps, procedures and/or orders of execution can also be used. It is important to note that numerous aspects of the method of the flowchart 100 can be suitably varied, typically by the house and/or in accordance with player agreement.

[0048] For example, either or both of the ante and/or the initial bet (e.g., as in step 104 above) can be eliminated

within certain embodiments. In one such embodiment, no ante is placed and the house takes a predefined portion or 'rake' (e.g., 5%, etc.) of the pot at some point during each instance of the game. Other forms of anteing and/or placing an initial bet can also be used.

[0049] In another example, certain embodiments include three rounds of betting (i.e., three iterations of step 110, etc.), thus defining first, second and final bets, respectively. In one or more such embodiments, a player placing a second bet (and, as a matter of course, a first bet prior to the second bet) is defined as a "player who has not folded out". That is, a "player who has not folded out" is a player who has not elected to fold his or her hand at this point in the play of the game, and who has not been disqualified, or required to fold, by any rules of the game at this point. Also, in such an embodiment, one or more of the community cards is selectively combined with one or more of the cards within each initial hand so as to define an "eligible hand" for each player who has not folded out. That is, as used herein the term "eligible hand" means a hand held by a player who is still eligible to continue play of the game at this point (i.e., a player who has not folded out), and comprises any of the cards currently dealt to the player, and any of the community cards the player wishes to combine with other cards in his or her hand. An "eligible hand" may later become "ineligible" by virtue of other cards dealt during play of the game, and in accordance with rules agreed to by the players. (For example, an "eligible hand" can later become a "non-qualifying hand".) Generally, an "eligible hand" entitles a player to continue play of the game at the point in question.

[0050] Thereafter (e.g., in step 124), if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, a predefined portion (e.g., 20%, etc.) of the pot is awarded to that player who has not folded out that holds the best non-qualifying eligible hand. A "best non-qualifying eligible hand" is the "best" hand (as defined by the house or player consensus) that is not a qualifying hand. Other embodiments can include other numbers of betting rounds (e.g., iterations of step 110, etc.).

[0051] In yet another example, certain embodiments include dealing an initial hand (e.g., as in step 108 above, etc.) as follows: two or more cards are dealt in a face-up condition so as to define a respective preliminary hand for each player. Each player then selectively discards at least one of the cards from their preliminary hand so as to define an initial hand for that player. Typically, such dealing of an initial hand is performed after any initial betting and/or anteing, but prior to the dealing of any community cards. Other embodiments including other variations of dealing an initial hand can also be used in accordance with embodiments provided for herein. For example, in combination with other betting schemes, no ante is accepted during play (and the house takes a rake of the pot at the end of play).

[0052] Accordingly, one, all, or any combination of (i) accepting an ante, (ii) accepting an initial bet, and/or (iii) accepting a first bet, as those terms are defined herein, can all be employed within the scope of embodiments provided for herein. Moreover, the timing of accepting one, all, or any combination of the foregoing (i.e., ante, initial bet, and first bet) can also be varied according to the dealing of cards, all within the scope of embodiments provided for herein. In general, at various times during (including prior to) the play of the game, and in accordance with rules established by the

house, players are required to put forth a financial liability (in the way of "bets" and/or an "ante") that will typically be shared in part by the house and one or more of the players, or only put forth a financial liability (in the way of "bets") that will typically be distributed to only one or more of the players. It will be appreciated that a "financial liability" put forth by a player as part of cost of playing the game is accompanied by the probability of a financial gain, should the player win at the game.

[0053] In one example the house can require that each player, in order to play the game, to put forth an "initial bet", a portion of which is allocated to the house, thus removing the requirement for an "ante". It can thus be seen that various schemes for accepting financial liability, and the ultimate distribution of the financial liabilities risked, can be varied according to rules set forth by the house, all within the scope of embodiments provided for herein.

[0054] In still another example, certain embodiments include defining the qualifying hand in accordance with a consensus (i.e., majority opinion) of the players. Thus, in such an embodiment, a player consensus can settle on four-of-a-kind as the (minimum) qualifying hand for use in a wagering game of chance of the present embodiment. Other qualifying hands can also be defined in accordance with other methods provided for herein.

[0055] In another example, certain embodiments include plural rounds of betting (e.g., as in step 110, etc.) wherein each subsequent bet is of an increased amount relative to the most recent prior bet. In one embodiment, for example, a first bet is made comprising one unit of value, followed by second and third bets of two units and three units of value, respectively. Other escalating (or deescalating) betting schemes can also be used in accordance with embodiments provided for herein.

[0056] In yet another example, certain embodiments include three iterations of dealing community cards (e.g., as in step 116, etc.) as follows: On a first iteration, three community cards referred to as 'flop' cards are dealt in a face-up condition (followed by steps 110-114, etc.); and thereafter one community card referred to as a 'turn' card is dealt in a face-up condition (followed by steps 110-114, etc.); and then finally one community card referred to as a 'river' card is dealt in a face-up condition. Other variations, including other formats for dealing community cards, can also be used in accordance with embodiments provided for herein.

[0057] In still other embodiments, any player electing to 'sit out' for the present instance of the game (not participate) forfeits their option to continue playing toward the present progressive pot. Thus, under such an embodiment, the pot at hand is particular to the specific player or players whose game play resulted in the creation and perpetuation of the present progressive pot, and such pot (or some predetermined portion thereof) will not be awarded to another player or other players.

[0058] The method of the flowchart 100 and numerous possible variations thereon are described above in the context of dealing conventional cards (of pasteboard or plastic construction, etc.) to one or more players, while money or playing chips are typically used for purposes of placing antes, placing bets into the pot, and making an award of the

pot (or a portion thereof) to a winning player or players. However, it is within the scope of embodiments provided for herein to play any or all of the various embodiments by way of a gaming table, an individual gaming machine or a network of such machines, or by other means that are at least partially automated, wherein virtual images (i.e., images presented on a display screen) of cards and/or betting chips are used to facilitate play of the game. Certain of such (at least partially) automated means are described hereinafter.

[0059] FIGS. 2A-2B together are a flowchart 200 depicting a method of playing a wagering game of chance in accordance with another embodiment. While the flowchart 200 describes particular steps and order of execution, it is to be understood that other embodiments that respectively include other steps and/or orders of execution can also be used in accordance with the teaching of the present disclosure.

[0060] In step 202 (FIG. 2A), the house defines a qualifying hand of (i.e., comprising) five cards for playing the present wagering game of chance. As described above in regard to step 102 of the flowchart 100 of FIG. 1, the qualifying hand is generally considered a minimum hand necessary for a player to qualify for winning a progressive pot. As also described above, the qualifying hand is ranked relative to other hands in accordance with typical (or otherwise reestablished) rules for playing high-hand poker. For purposes of example, it is assumed that the qualifying hand is defined by a straight (i.e., all five cards in sequential rank order).

[0061] In step 204 of the flowchart 200, each player places an ante and an initial bet as an initial qualification for participating in the present instance of the game. Each of the ante and the initial bet can be, but are not necessarily, of equal amounts. In any case, all antes are of mutually equal amounts, as are all of the initial bets, as respectively predefined by the house. For purposes of ongoing example, it is assumed that each player places an ante of three dollars and an initial bet of five dollars.

[0062] In step 206, the house collects the antes as its share or 'rake' for hosting the present instance of the game. Also, the house adds the initial bets into a pot. As described above with respect to the method of the flowchart 100 of FIG. 1, the pot is generally considered a progressive pot and is the source of an award or awards for one or more players as described hereinafter.

[0063] In step 208, the house deals a respective initial hand of two cards in a face-up condition to each of the players having placed an ante and an "initial bet" (as defined herein above) in step 204 above (i.e., each 'valid' or current player). Thus, each valid player has an initial hand that is visible to, or otherwise ascertainable by, each of the other players.

[0064] In step 210, each of the current players decides to either place a "first bet" (as defined herein above) or to fold (quit). Those players electing to fold proceed to step 212 below. All of the first bets are of mutually equal amounts as predefined by the house. In one embodiment, each first bet is of an amount equal to or greater than the amount of each initial bet. For purposes of ongoing example, it is assumed that each valid player electing to continue places a first bet of five dollars. Each player placing a first bet is now defined

as a first betting player and continues on to step 214 below. As also indicated above, in one variation the requirement to place an "initial bet" can be deleted from the game, and the betting commences with the player or players placing the "first bet". Further, as also indicated above, the requirement for placing an ante can be removed, in which event the house typically takes a rake of any bets placed by the player(s).

[0065] In step 212, each player electing to quit in step 210 above, does so. The present instance of the wagering game of chance of the flowchart 200 is now considered complete for such a player or players.

[0066] In step 214, the house adds all of the first bets placed during step 210 above into the (progressive) pot.

[0067] In step 216, the house deals three community cards, respectively known as 'flop' cards, in a face-up condition. Each 'flop' card is available to be selectively combined with the two cards within each initial hand so as to define a present hand (of five cards) for each first betting player. Thus, each first betting player now has the opportunity to evaluate the relative rank or 'strength' of their present hand with respect to the present hands of the other first betting players.

[0068] In step 218, each first betting player now elects to continue the present game or to fold at this time. Those players electing to fold (quit) proceed to step 220 below. The first betting players electing to continue the game each place a second bet. All of the second bets are of mutually equal amounts as predefined by the house. In one embodiment, each second bet is defined by an amount twice that of each first bet. Other betting schemes or escalating bet strategies can also be used. For purpose of ongoing example, it is assumed that each valid player electing to continue places a second bet of ten dollars, and is thus defined as a second betting player. Regardless of the betting amount, each of the second betting players now proceeds to step 224 below.

[0069] In step 220, each player electing to quit in step 218 above, does so. The present instance of the wagering game of chance of the flowchart 200 is now considered complete for such a player or players.

[0070] In step 224, the house adds each of the second bets placed during step 218 above into the pot.

[0071] In step 226, the house deals one more community card, known as a 'turn' card, in a face-up condition. The 'turn' card and each of the three 'flop' cards are available to be selectively combined with the two cards within each initial hand so as to define a best present hand (of five cards) for each second betting player. Therefore, each second betting player now has the opportunity to evaluate their best present hand with respect to the best present hand of each of the other second betting players.

[0072] In step 228 (FIG. 2B), each second betting player now elects to continue the present game or to quit (fold) at this time. Those players electing to quit proceed to step 230 below. Those second betting players electing to continue each place a third bet—defining a final bet—of mutually equal amounts as predefined by the house. In one embodiment, each final (i.e., third) bet is defined by an amount triple that of each first bet. Other betting strategies or value-escalation (or de-escalation) schemes can also be used. For purposes of ongoing example, it is assumed that each second

betting player electing to continue places a final bet of fifteen dollars, and is thus defined a final betting player. In any case, each of the final betting players now proceeds to step **232** below.

[**0073**] In step **230**, each player electing to quit in step **228** above, does so. The present instance of the wagering game of chance of the flowchart **200** is now considered complete for such a player or players.

[**0074**] In step **232**, the house adds each of the final bets, placed during step **228** above, into the pot.

[**0075**] In step **234**, the house deals one final community card, known as a 'river' card, in a face-up condition. The 'river' card, the 'turn' card and each of the three 'flop' cards are available to be selectively combined with both of the two cards within each initial hand so as to define a best present hand (of five cards), also defined as a final hand, for each final betting player. Thus, under the ongoing example, any three of the five total community cards (i.e., three flop, one turn and one river cards, respectively) can be selectively combined with each initial hand (of two cards) so as to define a final hand (of five cards) for each final betting player.

[**0076**] In step **236**, the house evaluates each of the final hands in accordance with standard (or other predefined) hierarchical rules of high-hand poker, so as to determine if any final betting player holds a final hand that comprises a qualifying hand (under the ongoing example, a straight or better). If one or more players have a respective qualifying final hand, then the method of the flowchart **200** proceeds to step **240** below. If none of the players has a qualifying hand, then the method of flowchart **200** proceeds to step **238** below.

[**0077**] In step **238**, the house sets all of the pot aside (i.e., as a starting pot) for use in the next instance of the wagering game of chance. The method of the flowchart **200** then proceeds to step **242** in which the present instance of the wagering game of chance is ended without awarding the pot, or any portion thereof, to any player or players. However, in certain other embodiments, a predefined portion (e.g., 15%, etc.) of the pot is award to a final betting player holding the best final hand that is a non-qualifying final hand. Other alternative embodiments are described in further detail hereinafter.

[**0078**] In step **240**, the house further compares any qualifying final hands held by the final betting players, in order to determine (i.e., identify) which final hand is the superior (or 'best') qualifying final hand. Upon such determination, the pot, or a predefined portion (e.g., 95%, etc.) thereof, is then awarded to the particular final betting player holding the best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand. If two (or more) players hold equivalent superior qualifying final hands, then the (i.e., progressive, or collective) pot can be equally split between them in accordance with the present embodiment of the game.

[**0079**] In step **242**, the present instance of the wagering game of chance is considered complete. Any portion of the pot (or its entirety) that has not been awarded during the most recent instance of the game is carried over as an initial pot (i.e., a starting pot) for one or more additional instances of the wagering game of chance. Therefore, in certain embodiments, the method of the flowchart **200** is repeated as

a sequence of instances of the wagering game of chance, wherein the pot grows in accordance therewith, until the pot (in its entirety or a portion thereof) is awarded to a player or players.

[**0080**] The method of the flowchart **200** of **FIGS. 2A-2B** generally describes one possible embodiment of playing a wagering game of chance in accordance with the present teachings. Other embodiments corresponding to other steps, procedures and/or orders of execution can also be used. It is important to note that numerous aspects of the flowchart **200** can be suitably varied, typically by the house and/or in accordance with player agreement.

[**0081**] For example, either or both of the ante and/or the initial bet (e.g., as in step **204** above) can be eliminated within certain embodiments provided for herein. In one such embodiment, no ante is placed and the house takes a predefined portion or 'rake' (e.g., 5%, etc.) of the pot at some point during each instance of the game. Other forms of anteing and/or placing an initial bet can also be used.

[**0082**] In another example, certain embodiments include dealing an initial hand (e.g., as in step **208** above) as follows: three or more cards are dealt in a face-up condition so as to define a preliminary hand for each player. Each player then selectively discards at least one of the cards from their preliminary hand so as to define an initial hand (of two cards) for that player. Typically, such dealing of an initial hand is performed after any initial betting and/or anteing, but prior to the dealing of any community cards. Other embodiments including other variations of dealing an initial hand can also be used in accordance with the present teachings.

[**0083**] In yet another example, a second betting player (i.e., each player electing to place a second bet as, for example, in step **218** above) is "a player who has not folded out" (as defined above). Also, in such an embodiment, any three of the five community cards is selectively combined with the two cards within each initial hand so as to define an eligible hand for each player who has not folded out. Thereafter (e.g., in step **240** above), if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, a predefined portion (e.g., 20%, etc.) of the pot is awarded to that player who has not folded out that holds the best non-qualifying eligible hand.

[**0084**] In still another example, certain embodiments include defining the qualifying hand in accordance with a consensus or majority opinion of the players. Thus, in such an example, a player consensus can settle on four-of-a-kind as the (minimum) qualifying hand for use in a wagering game of chance of the embodiments provided for herein. Other qualifying hands can also be defined in accordance with other methods of the embodiments provided for herein.

[**0085**] In still other embodiments, any player electing to 'sit out' for the present instance of the game as defined, for example, by failing to place an ante and/or an initial bet, etc., forfeits their option to continue playing toward the present progressive pot. Thus, under such an embodiment, the pot at hand is particular to the specific player or players whose game play resulted in the creation and advancement of the present progressive pot, and such pot (or some predetermined portion thereof) will not be awarded to another player or other players.

[**0086**] The method of the flowchart **200** and numerous possible variations are understood to be described above in

the context of dealing conventional cards to one or more players, while money or playing chips are typically used for purposes of placing antes, placing bets into the pot, etc. However, it is within the scope of the present embodiments to play any or all of the variations of the method of the flowchart **200** of **FIGS. 2A-2B** by way various respective means that are at least partially automated. Certain of such means are described hereinafter.

[**0087**] The methods described above can also incorporate the use of “wild cards”, such as jokers or other special cards as predefined by the house or in accordance with player consensus, which can be designated by a player as whatever value the player chooses to facilitate achieving a qualifying hand, or a best qualifying hand.

[**0088**] As can be seen by the respective examples depicted in flowcharts **100** (**FIG. 1**) and **200** (**FIGS. 2A-2B**), one feature in accordance with the present embodiments provided for herein is that play of the wagering game of chance amongst the players can be performed essentially simultaneously. That is, each time a fold or bet option is presented, all of the players can elect their respective options simultaneously, versus the sequential order of betting and/or folding as is traditional in typical card-based games (e.g., poker, etc.) This feature of certain embodiments provided for herein allows for generally faster play.

[**0089**] Another feature of the various embodiments provided for herein is that the house can take the ante, thus ensuring a known income for the house. The house can establish the ante to cover its costs of hosting the game, as well as making a profit. Further, the house can elect to put some of the ante money into a special jackpot to enhance attractiveness of the game. Such a special jackpot can be awarded, for example, to a player upon achieving a final hand comprising a royal flush, etc. Further still, the house can change the amount of the ante between games (e.g., increase the ante to cover higher costs or make additional profit, or lower the ante to attract more players). One benefit of this arrangement of the house taking the ante is that the players know that they are essentially playing against one another, versus playing against the house. Consequently, players may be more inclined to play the game since there is essentially a guarantee that all bets (or a substantial portion thereof) will eventually be won by one of the players, and not by the house.

[**0090**] **FIG. 3** is a plan view depicting a wager gaming table (hereafter, table) **300** in accordance with still another embodiment. The wager gaming table **300**, substantially as depicted in **FIG. 3**, is commercially available from DigiDeal Corporation of Spokane, Washington. The table **300** includes a playing surface **302**. The playing surface **302** can be formed from any suitable material such as, for example, felt, satin, etc. Other materials can also be used to form the playing surface **302** of the table **300**.

[**0091**] The table **300** also includes an electronic controller **304**. The electronic controller **304** can be defined by any suitable controller usable to control the play of one or more embodiments of the wagering game(s) of chance of provided for herein (e.g., the methods of the flowcharts **100** and **200** above, or any suitable corresponding variations, respectively). As such, the controller **304** can be suitably defined by a microprocessor-based controller, a state-machine, a dedicated-purpose integrated controller, etc. The controller

304 is commercially available in the form of a proprietary (DCS) platform from DigiDeal Corporation of Spokane, Wash.

[**0092**] In one embodiment, the electronic controller **304** includes a computer-accessible storage media (i.e., memory, storage disk, etc., not shown) including an executable program code. Such an executable program code (not shown) is configured to cause a corresponding processor to perform various operations in accordance with one or more embodiments of a wagering game of chance as provided for herein. One of skill in the computer engineering and electronic arts can appreciate that the electronic controller **304** can be defined by a number of suitable different embodiments, and that further elaboration is not required for purposes of understanding the presently described embodiment.

[**0093**] The table **300** also includes a plurality of user interfaces **306**. Each user interface **306** is coupled in signal communication with the electronic controller **304**. Each user interface **306** includes an electronic display **308** that is coupled in signal communication with the electronic controller **304**. In certain embodiments, the electronic display **308** can be a touch-sensitive electronic display. Other embodiments of electronic display **308** can also be used. In any case, the electronic displays **308** are configured to display information to, and receive input from, a player during play of a wagering game of chance at the table **300**. Non-limiting examples of such displayed information include images of playing cards, present amount of a (progressive) pot, present amount to be awarded to a best non-qualifying final hand, etc. Examples of player (i.e., user) input include selection of cards to discard during dealing of an initial hand, election to bet or fold, etc. Other kinds of information can be displayed, and other types of player input received, by way of the electronic display **308**.

[**0094**] As further depicted in **FIG. 3**, each user interface **306** further includes one or more chip sensors **310**. Each chip sensor **310** is configured to provide a signal to the electronic controller **304** indicative of the presence and/or total face value of any wagering chips (not shown) resting upon the chip sensor **310**. One of skill in the electronic arts is aware of a number of suitable such embodiments of chip sensor **310** and further description is not needed for purposes herein.

[**0095**] In another embodiment of the table **300** (not shown), the chip sensors **310** are not included. In such an embodiment (not shown), “virtual” chips can be displayed to, and manipulated by (i.e., selected, put forth during a wager, etc.), players using associated electronic displays **308**. Thus, in such an embodiment, tangible wagering chips are not used, and any antes and/or wagering corresponding to the play of the present wagering game of chance are handled by way of the electronic displays **308**.

[**0096**] The table **300** can also include a dealer display **312**, although in many embodiments no dealer display is used. The dealer display **312** can be defined by any suitable electronic display for displaying information to a dealer (typically representing the house). In one embodiment, the display **312** is substantially the same as one of the plurality of electronic displays **308**. Other forms of electronic display and/or dealer interface (not shown) can also be used. In any event, the dealer display **312** is coupled in signal communication with the electronic controller **304** and is configured

to display information to and receive input from a dealer (typically representing the house) during play of the wagering game at the table **300**.

[0097] Typically such information displayed on the dealer display **312** can include, for example, the amount of a progressive pot and/or jackpot, identification of a player or players at the table **300** in possession of (i.e., holding) a qualifying final hand and/or best non-qualifying final hand, etc. Information provided to the dealer can be presented, for example, in the form of an “ante meter”, a “wager meter”, etc., or as any other desirable graphical representation.

[0098] The table **300** further includes a chip tray **314**. The chip tray **314** is configured to support a plurality of suitable wagering chips for use during play of the wagering game of chance at the table **300**. The chip tray **314** is generally positioned to be readily used by a dealer. A more elaborate description of the chip tray **314** is not necessary to an understanding of the present embodiments provided for herein. In the variation described above wherein “virtual” chips can be used with the table **300** the chip tray can be eliminated.

[0099] Typical use of the table **300** is as follows: to begin, it is assumed that the house offers play of a wagering game of chance in accordance with any of the present embodiments provided for herein (e.g., according to the method of the flowchart **100** of **FIG. 1**, or the method of the flowchart **200** of **FIGS. 2A-2B**, etc.) to interested players by way of the table **300**. Those players interested in playing the wagering game of chance generally seat themselves, one person each, within usable adjacency to the user interfaces **306**. As depicted in **FIG. 3**, the table **300** can accommodate up to six players. Other tables **300** (not shown) having other player accommodation capacities can also be used.

[0100] Next, a dealer begins play of the instant game at the table **300** by way of appropriate input (i.e., password entry, startup actuation, etc.) to the controller **304** using dealer hands controls (such as buttons, etc., not shown) or, if provided, the dealer display **312**. Thereafter, the controller **304** assumes general control of the game in substantial accordance with the methods described above in regard to the wagering game of chance of the flowchart **100** of **FIG. 1** or the flowchart **200** of **FIGS. 2A-2B**, including, for example, providing graphical displays of cards, value of the progressive pot, present value of a potential award to a player who has not folded out, etc., to each of the electronic displays **308** currently used by a player. In response, players provide their desired respective inputs directly to the dealer who can then input them into the electronic controller **304** or, if such capability is provided, directly to the electronic controller **304** via their respective electronic displays **308**. Such displays and player inputs (if provided) are performed in accordance with the currently used embodiments of wagering games of chance provided for herein.

[0101] During such play, the players place their corresponding antes and/or bets in the form of wagering chips on their respective chip sensors **310**. These wagering chips are collected for the house by the dealer, generally into the chip tray **314**, while the electronic controller **304** can keep track of (i.e., register, or record) the total ante, discrete bets (first, second, final, etc.) from each player, the valid or folded status of each player, the present value of the progressive pot, the present value of a jackpot (if any), cards selectively

discarded from preliminary hands during the establishment of initial hands, etc. In various alternate configurations certain of these functions (e.g., accounting for the antes, etc.) can be performed by a live dealer and not by the controller **304**. Furthermore, the electronic controller **304** can determine (i.e., identify) and indicate to the dealer and/or players (by way of the electronic displays **308** and/or dealer display **312**) when a player or players is/are to be awarded the pot (or a predefined portion thereof), or any special jackpot or other award that may apply, in accordance with the wagering game of chance in progress.

[0102] Other operations can also be performed by the electronic controller **304** corresponding to the play and/or officiating of the current instance of the game of the embodiments provided for herein. For example, in an embodiment (not shown) of the table **300** in which tangible chips are not used, the electronic controller **304** receives antes and wagers, and awards the collective pot and/or any jackpots, through the use of virtual chips (i.e., credits) displayed and manipulated on the electronic displays **308**. Still other operations of the electronic controller **304** can be performed. For example, the controller **304** can be used to provide audio output for informational purposes, enhancing excitement of the play of the game, or supplementing visual play of the game. In this way, the table **300** provides for play of one or more variations of the wagering game of chance (selectively), by two or more players, in accordance with the embodiments provided for herein and in a manner that is substantially automated by virtue of the electronic controller **304**, the user interfaces **306** and the dealer display **312** (when provided).

[0103] It is to be understood that certain embodiments of the controller **304** can be linked in communication with a central computer or database (not shown) of the house so that information regarding the present status of the wagering game of chance in progress can be related to the central computer. Thus, for example, the current value of the pot, the total amount of credit in use, the current awarding of a pot (or portion thereof), etc., for the table **300** can be recorded and/or verified for security purposes using the central computer (not shown). Further exemplary use of the table **300** is explained hereinafter in regard to **FIGS. 5A-5D**.

[0104] **FIG. 4** is a front elevation view depicting a gaming network **400** in accordance with the yet another embodiment. The gaming network **400** includes a plurality of individual gaming machines (hereafter, gaming machine) **402**. Each gaming machine **402** includes an electronic controller **404**. The electronic controller **404** can be defined by any suitable electronic controller usable to control the gaming machine **402** in accordance with one or more embodiments of a wagering game of chance of as provided for herein (e.g., the method of the flowchart **100** of **FIG. 1**, the method of the flowchart **200** of **FIG. 2**, and/or any respective variations thereon).

[0105] In one embodiment (not shown), the controller **404** includes a processor and a computer-accessible storage media including an executable program code. The executable program code (not shown) is configured to cause the processor to perform numerous operations in accordance with one or more embodiments of the wagering games of chance provided for herein. Other forms of electronic controller **404** can also be used. In any case, each of the

electronic controllers **404** is configured to be coupled in mutual data communication thus defining a network of gaming machines **402**. In this way, the electronic controllers **404** can communicate with each other so as to conduct a multi-player instance of a wagering game of chance of the embodiments provided for herein, wherein each player participates in the game by way of a respective gaming machine **402**. Although the gaming machines **402** are depicted as being directly connected to one another by communication cables **403**, it is appreciated that the gaming machines **402** can be placed in communication by other known means such as the Internet or other network configurations. In another embodiment (not shown), the individual gaming machines **402** are networked by way of wireless communication. Other embodiments can also be used.

[0106] Each gaming machine **402** also includes an electronic display **406**. Each electronic display **406** is coupled in signal communication with the corresponding electronic controller **404** of the particular gaming machine **402**. Each electronic display **406** can be defined by any suitable such electronic display configured to display various kinds of information in accordance with the present instance of a wagering game of chance of the embodiments provided for herein. Such displayed information can include, for example, images of playing cards, present amount of the progressive pot, any applicable jackpot values, present amount of an award for the best non-qualifying final hand, etc. Other suitable information can also be displayed. Typically, each electronic display **406** is defined by a touch-sensitive electronic display such that each constitutes a user (player) interface to the respective electronic controller **404**. Other forms of electronic display **406** can also be used as well as other user input devices (such as buttons, keys, light pens, etc. not shown, can also be used).

[0107] Each gaming machine **402** can (optionally) include additional user interface controls **408**. Controls **408** are typically provided in the form of pushbuttons. Other types of user interface controls **408** can also be used. The electronic display **406** and controls **408** are collectively referred to as a user interface **410** within a particular gaming machine **402**.

[0108] Operation of the gaming network **400** is generally as follows: for purposes of example, it is initially assumed that all of the gaming machines **402** of the gaming network **400** are presently configured (selectively set) to play one or more embodiment (version, or type) of a wagering game of chance of as provided for herein, for example in accordance with the method of the flowchart **200** of FIG. 2.

[0109] Next, each player deposits money into their respective gaming machine **402** so as to establish a corresponding amount of playable credit, referred to herein as prepaid credits. This can be done, for example, by way of a conventional currency acceptor (not shown) as is known in the art. The wagering game of chance then commences once all of a predetermined number of players have secured their respective gaming credits. For purposes of example, it is assumed that a game includes an initial count of four players, each participating by way of a respective gaming machine **402**.

[0110] Thereafter, the electronic controllers **404** operate in cooperation with each other and with their respective user interfaces **410** so as to carry out play of the current wagering game. Generally, play is conducted as a succession

(sequence) of such wagering games of chance until at least one progressive pot (or a predetermined portion thereof) has been awarded. Furthermore, any other applicable awards (e.g., best non-qualifying final hand, etc.) are also provided during play under the control of the electronic controller(s) **404**. Typically, individual players can exit (depart from) the game at any appropriate time of their choosing (e.g., at the beginning of the next game, after folding, etc.), while other (new) players can join at correspondingly appropriate times by way of associated gaming machines **402** of the gaming network **400**.

[0111] Thus, the gaming network **400** is generally configured to provide for multi-user, substantially random-access (i.e., individually selected entry to and exit from) play of a wagering game of chance of the embodiments provided for herein. In another embodiment of the gaming network **400**, each of the electronic controllers **404** is configured to permit a player to select from a menu of different variations of the wagering games provided for herein (various betting amounts or schemes, inclusion of the selection of an initial hand from a preliminary hand, etc.) to play against other corresponding players within the same gaming network **400**.

[0112] For example, a gaming network **400** (not shown) can be provided that includes ten gaming machines **402**, of which four are presently being used to play one or more embodiments of a wagering game of chance as provided for herein, while the remaining six are used to play another embodiment of a wagering game. Other possible such game playing combinations within a single gaming network **400** can also be performed.

[0113] In yet another embodiment, the controller **404** of each gaming machine **402** is configured to permit a player to selectively choose to play a wagering game of chance of the embodiments provided for herein in a solitaire or "individual play" mode. In such an embodiment, the player is effectively playing against the controller **404**, and there is no interaction or competition against other players. Other various embodiments of playing wagering games of chance as provided for herein can also be used. Further exemplary use of the gaming network **400** is explained hereinafter in regard to the exemplary displays of FIGS. 5A-5D.

[0114] FIG. 5A is a front elevation view depicting an exemplary display **500** in accordance with still another embodiment. The display **500** can be provided by way of the electronic displays **308** of the table **300** of FIG. 3, by way of the electronic displays **406** of the gaming machines **402** of FIG. 4, or by any other suitable means (not shown). It is to be understood that the display **500** is intended to show exemplary details that are provided to a player during typical automated play of a wagering game of chance of the embodiments provided for herein, and that other details (not shown) can also be displayed. Alternatively, certain details as depicted in the display **500** of FIGS. 5A-5D can also be omitted in particular embodiments of a wagering game of chance as provided for herein. For purposes of example, it is assumed that the display **500** includes information typically displayed during a four player version of the wagering game of chance of the method of flowchart **200** of FIGS. 2A-2B above, and that a qualifying hand has been pre-defined as a flush (or better). Other displays (not shown) including and/or excluding certain information and images (as described hereinafter) can also be used in accordance with other embodiments provided for herein.

[0115] The display 500 of FIG. 5A includes a pair of card images (hereinafter, cards) 502 and 504, respectively. The cards 502 and 504 collectively define an initial hand 506 for a particular player designated as Player 4, as indicated in conjunction with a “DISPLAYED ABOVE” icon 508. Also included in the display 500 are initials hands 510, 512 and 514 corresponding to a Player 1, Player 2 and Player 3, respectively. Furthermore, the display 500 of FIG. 5A includes five placeholders 516 indicating the respective future locations of three “flop” cards, one “turn” card, and one “river” card that are as yet to be dealt during the course of the present wagering game of chance.

[0116] The display 500 of FIG. 5A also includes the present value of the progressive pot 518, as well as a best non-qualifying final hand award 520. As depicted in FIG. 5A, the best non-qualifying hand award 520 is assumed to equal 20% of the present pot 518. Furthermore, the display 500 includes a query line 522. As depicted in FIG. 5A, the query line 522 instructs Player 4 to provide input corresponding to placing a first bet, or folding at this time and quitting the game. Other query lines (not shown) can also be provided in accordance with the present embodiment and/or status of the wagering game in progress. For purposes of ongoing example, it is assumed that Player 2, Player 3 and Player 4 respectively elect to place a first bet (of five dollars each) and continue play of the game, while Player 1 elects to fold. Reference is now directed to FIG. 5B.

[0117] FIG. 5B is a sequential continuation of the display 500 of FIG. 5A. The display 500 as depicted in FIG. 5B includes the same elements 502-522 as described above in regard to the display 500 of FIG. 5A, with the following changes and/or additions: the initial hand 510 of Player 1 has been replaced with a “FOLDED” icon 524; the displayed value of the pot 518 has increased by fifteen dollars in accordance with the first bets; the displayed value of the non-qualifying best final hand award 520 has increased three dollars; and the placeholders 516 representing the future location of three “flop” cards have been replaced by three “flop” card images 530, 532 and 534, respectively. At this point, each of the remaining valid players (i.e., Players 2, 3 and 4) must decide whether to place a second bet or fold. For purposes of the ongoing example, it is assumed that Player 2 elects to fold at this time, while Player 3 and Player 4 each elect to place a second bet (of ten dollars each) and continue play of the game. Reference is now directed to FIG. 5C.

[0118] FIG. 5C is a sequential continuation of the display 500 of FIG. 5B. The display 500 as depicted in FIG. 5C includes the same elements 502-534 as described above in regard to the display 500 of FIG. 5B, with the following changes and/or additions: the initial hand 512 of Player 2 has been replaced with a “FOLDED” icon 524; the displayed value of the pot 518 has increased by twenty dollars in accordance with the second bets; the displayed value of the non-qualifying best final hand award 520 has increased by four dollars; and the placeholder 516 representing the future location of the “turn” card has been replaced by a “turn” card image 540. At this time, each of the valid players (i.e., Players 3 and 4) must decide whether to place a final bet or fold. For purposes of the ongoing example, it is assumed that both Player 3 and Player 4 elect to place a final bet (of fifteen dollars each) and continue play of the game. Reference is now directed to FIG. 5D.

[0119] FIG. 5D is a sequential continuation of the display 500 of FIG. 5C. The display 500 as depicted in FIG. 5D includes the same elements 502-540 as described above in regard to the display 500 of FIG. 5C, with the following changes and/or additions: the placeholder 516 representing the future location of the “river” card has been replaced by a “river” card image 550; the displayed value of the pot 518 has increased by thirty dollars in accordance with the final bets; the displayed value of the non-qualifying best final hand award 520 has increased by six dollars; and the query line 522 has been replaced with an award notification 560 indicating that Player 3 has been awarded the entire present pot (one hundred sixty-five dollars). As depicted in FIG. 5D, Player 3 has been awarded the pot for holding the best final hand (i.e., a flush in spades) comprising a qualifying hand, as compared to Player 4 who is the only other final player in the present instance of the game.

[0120] At this point, the present instance of the wagering game of chance as depicted in FIGS. 5A-5D is considered complete, as is the (presumed) sequence of games leading up to the award of the pot to Player 3. Thus, under this example, it is assumed that any future play of the same embodiments of the wagering game of chance will begin with the creation of a new pot (starting from zero, not shown), the reestablishment of the best non-qualifying hand award in accordance with the progress (i.e., growth) of the new pot, and can include different and/or a new number of players, and/or the redefinition of the qualifying hand in accordance with the principles of the embodiments provided for herein. Other embodiments and variations of the wagering game of chance can also be played in accordance with embodiments provided for herein, using displays (not shown) of information that are correspondingly varied from those depicted in FIGS. 5A-5D.

[0121] FIG. 6 is block diagram depicting a control system 600 in accordance with another embodiment. The control system 600 includes an electronic controller 604, which in turn includes a processor 620. The processor 620 can be defined by any microprocessor or microcontroller suitable for use with the present embodiment. One of skill in the embedded control or electrical engineering arts is aware of numerous such processors 600 and further elaboration is not needed for an understanding of the present embodiment.

[0122] The controller 600 also includes a memory 622. The memory 622 is coupled in data communication with the processor 620. The memory 622 can be defined by any suitable computer-accessible storage media such as RAM-type memory, ROM-type memory, EPROM-type memory, etc. Other types of suitable memory 622 can also be used. In any case, the memory 622 is configured to cooperate with the processor 620 during normal operation of the control system 600.

[0123] The memory 622 includes a program code 624. The program code 624 is configured to cause the processor 620 to execute method steps (i.e., instructions) in accordance with one or more embodiments of a wagering game as provided for herein. For example, the program code 624 can be defined so as to cause the processor 620 to execute steps in accordance with the method of the flowchart 200 of FIGS. 2A and 2B. Other program codes 624 corresponding to other embodiments (i.e., wagering games of chance) as provided for herein can also be used. The program code 624

can be further configured to cause the processor 620 to perform other related or auxiliary functions, such as communication with a centralized computer (not shown), communication and/or cooperation with other control systems 600, etc. In one or more embodiments of the control system 600, the program code 624 is provided by way of a computer-accessible storage media such as a CD-ROM, magnetic disk or disks, magnetic tape, etc., and copied or moved into the memory 622. In this manner, for example, the program code 624 of the memory 622 can be readily updated as new versions of the program code 624 become available, or reloaded in the event that the contents of memory 622 become corrupted.

[0124] As depicted in FIG. 6, the control system 600 includes a plurality of user interfaces 612 that are coupled in data communication with the electronic controller 604. In the interest of example, a total of three user interfaces 612 are depicted in FIG. 6. However, it is to be understood that any suitable number of such user interfaces 612 can be used in accordance with a corresponding embodiment of the control system 600. Each user interface 612 includes an electronic display 606, a chip sensor 610 and a set of user controls 608. Each electronic display 606, chip sensor 610, and user controls 608 can be respectively defined by any such embodiments suitable for use with other embodiments provided for herein. For example, each of the electronic displays 606 and chip sensors 610 can be respectively defined substantially as described above in regard to the electronic displays 308 and the chip sensors 310 of the wager gaming table 300 of FIG. 3. In a further example, each of the user controls 608 can be substantially defined as described above in regard to the user interface controls 408 of the gaming machines 402 of FIG. 4. Other suitable definitions of the electronic display 606, chip sensor 610 and user controls 608 of each user interface 612 can also be used.

[0125] The control system 600 of FIG. 6 can be defined as desired so as to perform numerous functions in accordance with playing a wagering game of chance of the embodiments provided for herein in a substantially automated venue. Thus, various embodiments of the control system 600 of FIG. 6 can be suitably defined so as to provide for the controller 304 and user interfaces 306 of the table 300 of FIG. 3. Similarly, other embodiments of the control system 600 of FIG. 6 can be suitably defined so as to provide for the controller 404 and user interface 410 of each gaming machine 402 of FIG. 4. Yet another embodiment a method of playing a wagering game of chance, including defining a qualifying hand, dealing a hand to at least two players, and accepting a bet into a pot from each player. The method further includes awarding at least a first portion of the pot to player having a best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand. If no player has a qualifying final hand, the method includes awarding a predetermined portion of the pot to any player who has a best non-qualifying hand.

[0126] While the above methods and apparatus have been described in language more or less specific as to structural and methodical features, it is to be understood, however, that they are not limited to the specific features shown and described, since the means herein disclosed comprise preferred forms of putting the embodiments provided for herein into effect. The methods and apparatus are, therefore, claimed in any of their forms or modifications within the

proper scope of the appended claims appropriately interpreted in accordance with the doctrine of equivalents.

I claim:

1. A method of playing a wagering game of chance, comprising:

defining a qualifying hand;

dealing an initial hand in a face-up condition to at least one player;

accepting a final bet into a pot from each player, thus defining at least one final betting player;

dealing one or more community cards, wherein at least one community card is selectively combined with at least one card within each initial hand such that a final hand is defined for each final betting player; and

awarding at least a portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand.

2. The method of claim 1 further comprising, if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, repeating dealing an initial hand and accepting a final bet and dealing one or more community cards, and including in the pot at least a portion of any previous pot or pots until at least a portion of the pot is awarded.

3. The method of claim 1 further comprising, if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, awarding a predetermined portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best non-qualifying final hand.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the one or more community cards are dealt in a face-up condition.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the qualifying hand is defined by a house.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising collecting an ante for a house from at least one player before dealing the initial hand.

7. The method of claim 1 further comprising accepting an initial bet into the pot from at least one player before dealing the initial hand.

8. The method of claim 1 further comprising accepting a first bet into the pot from at least one player before accepting the final bet.

9. The method of claim 8 further comprising accepting a second bet into the pot from at least one player after accepting the first bet and prior to accepting the final bet.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein accepting the second bet defines at least one player who has not folded out, the method further comprising:

selectively combining at least one card within each initial hand with at least one community card so as to define an eligible hand for each player who has not folded out; and

if no final betting player has a qualifying final hand, awarding a predetermined portion of the pot to any player who has not folded out having a best non-qualifying eligible hand.

11. The method of claim 9 wherein:

the first bet is defined by an amount less than the second bet; and

the second bet is defined by an amount less than the final bet.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein the qualifying hand is defined by one of a straight, a flush, a straight flush, three-of-a-kind, or four-of-a-kind.

13. The method of claim 1 wherein:

the dealing one or more community cards comprises dealing one or more community "flop" cards in a face-up condition, and thereafter dealing one or more community "turn" cards in a face-up condition, and thereafter dealing one or more community "river" cards in a face-up condition; and

the final bet is accepted prior to dealing the one or more community river cards.

14. The method of claim 1 wherein dealing the initial hand comprises:

dealing a preliminary hand comprising two or more cards in a face-up condition to at least one player; and

receiving at least one card selectively discarded from each preliminary hand so as to define the initial hand for at least one player prior to dealing one or more community cards.

15. The method of claim 1 wherein each final hand is evaluated in accordance with a predetermined ranking of poker hands so as to determine the best final hand.

16. The method of claim 1 wherein at least one player plays the wagering game of chance by way of an electronic gaming table.

17. The method claim 1, wherein at least one player plays the wagering game of chance by way of an individual gaming machine.

18. The method of claim 1 wherein:

at least two players play the wagering game of chance by way of respective individual gaming machines; and

each of the individual gaming machines are coupled in signal communication.

19. A method of playing a wagering game of chance, comprising:

defining a qualifying hand comprising five cards;

dealing an initial hand of at least one card in a face-up condition to at least one player;

accepting a first bet into a pot from at least one player thus defining at least one first betting player;

dealing at least one community "flop" card in a face-up condition;

accepting a second bet from at least one first betting player thus defining at least one second betting player;

dealing at least one community "turn" card in a face-up condition;

accepting a third bet from at least one second betting player thus defining at least one final betting player;

dealing at least one community "river" card in a face-up condition, wherein each community flop, turn and river card is selectively combinable with each initial hand so as define a final hand comprising five cards for each final betting player; and

awarding at least a portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand.

20. The method of claim 19 further comprising, if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, repeating accepting a first bet and dealing at least one community flop cards and accepting a second bet and dealing at least one community turn card and accepting a third bet and dealing at least one community river card, and including in the pot at least a portion of any previous pot or pots until at least a portion of the pot is awarded.

21. The method of claim 19 further comprising, if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, awarding a predetermined portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best non-qualifying final hand.

22. The method of claim 19 further comprising collecting an ante for a house from at least one player before dealing the initial hand.

23. The method of claim 19 further comprising accepting an initial bet into the pot from at least one player before dealing the initial hand.

24. The method of claim 19 wherein:

the second bet is defined by an amount greater than the first bet; and

the third bet is defined by an amount greater than the second bet.

25. The method of claim 24 wherein the second bet is equal to double the amount of the first bet.

26. The method of claim 19 further comprising:

selectively combining each final hand with each community flop, turn and river card so as to define an eligible hand of five cards for each second betting player; and

if no final betting player has a qualifying final hand, awarding a predetermined portion of the pot to any second betting player having a best non-qualifying eligible hand.

27. The method claim 19 wherein the qualifying hand is defined by one of a straight, a flush, a straight flush, three-of-a-kind, or four-of-a-kind.

28. The method of claim 19 wherein dealing the initial hand is defined by:

dealing a preliminary hand of at least three cards in a face-up condition to at least one player; and

receiving at least one card selectively discarded from each preliminary hand so as to define an initial hand of two cards for each player prior to accepting the first bet.

29. The method of claim 19 wherein each final hand is evaluated in accordance with a predetermined ranking of poker hands so as to determine the best final hand.

30. The method of claim 19 wherein at least one player plays the wagering game of chance by way of an electronic gaming table.

31. The method of claim 19 wherein at least one player plays the wagering game of chance by way of an individual gaming machine.

32. The method of claim 19 wherein:

at least two players play the wagering game of chance by way of respective individual gaming machines; and

each of the individual gaming machines are coupled in signal communication.

- 33.** A gaming table, comprising:
a plurality of user interfaces; and
an electronic controller coupled in signal communication with each of the user interfaces, the electronic controller configured to:
define a qualifying hand;
deal an initial hand in a face-up condition to at least one player by way of a corresponding one of the user interfaces;
register a final bet into a pot from each player, thus defining at least one final betting player;
deal one or more community cards by way of at least one of the user interfaces, wherein at least one community card is selectively combined with at least one card within each initial hand such that a final hand is defined for each final betting player; and
determine an award of at least a portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand.
- 34.** The gaming table of claim 33 wherein the electronic controller is further configured to, if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, repeat dealing an initial hand and registering a final bet and dealing one or more community cards, and register in the pot at least a portion of any previous pot or pots until at least a portion of the pot is awarded.
- 35.** The gaming table of claim 33 wherein the electronic controller is further configured to, if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, determine an award of a predefined portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best non-qualifying final hand.
- 36.** The gaming table of claim 33 wherein the electronic controller is further configured to deal one or more community cards in a face-up condition.
- 37.** The gaming table of claim 33 wherein the electronic controller is further configured to:
register a first bet into the pot from at least one player prior to registering the final bet; and
register a second bet into the pot from at least one player after registering the first bet and prior to registering the final bet.
- 38.** The gaming table of claim 37 wherein the electronic controller is further configured such that registering the second bet into the pot defines at least one player who has not folded out, the electronic controller further configured to:
selectively combine at least one card within each initial hand with at least one community card so as to define an eligible hand for each player who has not folded out; and
if no final betting player has a qualifying hand, determine an award of a predefined portion of the pot to any player who has not folded out having a best non-qualifying eligible hand.
- 39.** The gaming table of claim 33 wherein the electronic controller is further configured such that the qualifying hand is defined by one of a straight, a flush, a straight flush, three-of-a-kind, four-of-a-kind, or higher.
- 40.** The gaming table of claim 33 wherein the electronic controller is further configured such that dealing one or more community cards comprises:
dealing one or more community “flop” cards in a face-up condition, and thereafter dealing one or more community “turn” cards in a face-up condition, and thereafter dealing one or more community “river” cards in a face-up condition by way of at least one of the user interfaces, respectively; and
wherein registering the final bet is performed prior to dealing one or more community river cards.
- 41.** The gaming table of claim 33 wherein the electronic controller is further configured such that dealing an initial hand comprises:
dealing a preliminary hand comprising two or more cards in a face-up condition to at least one player by way of a corresponding one of the user interfaces; and
registering at least one card selectively discarded from at least one preliminary hand by a corresponding player so as to define an initial hand for at least one player prior to dealing one or more community cards.
- 42.** The gaming table of claim 33 wherein the electronic controller is further configured to evaluate each final hand in accordance with a predetermined ranking of poker hands so as to determine the best final hand.
- 43.** The gaming table of claim 33 wherein each user interface comprises a display screen configured to display graphical images of the cards dealt by the electronic controller.
- 44.** The gaming table of claim 43 wherein each display screen is further configured to display a current status of the pot as registered by the electronic controller.
- 45.** The gaming table of claim 33 wherein each user interface comprises at least one playing chip sensor.
- 46.** A computer-accessible storage media including an executable program code, the executable program code configured to cause a processor to:
define a qualifying hand;
deal an initial hand in a face-up condition to at least one player;
register a final bet into a pot from each player, thus defining at least one final betting player;
deal one or more community cards, wherein at least one community card is selectively combined with at least one card within each initial hand such that a final hand is defined for each final betting player; and
determine an award of at least a portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand.
- 47.** The computer-accessible storage media of claim 46 wherein the executable program code is further configured to cause the processor to, if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, repeat dealing an initial hand and registering a final bet and dealing one or more community cards, and register in the pot at least a portion of any previous pot or pots until at least a portion of the pot is awarded.
- 48.** The computer-accessible storage media of claim 46 wherein the executable program code is further configured to cause the processor to, if no final betting player holds a

qualifying final hand, determine an award of a predefined portion of the pot to any final betting player having a best non-qualifying final hand.

49. The computer-accessible storage media of claim 46 wherein the executable program code is further configured to deal the one or more community cards in a face-up condition.

50. The computer-accessible storage media of claim 46 wherein the executable program code is further configured to cause the processor to:

register a first bet into the pot from at least one player prior to registering the final bet; and

register a second bet into the pot from at least one player after registering the first bet and prior to registering the final bet.

51. The computer-accessible storage media of claim 50 wherein the executable program code is further configured such that registering the second bet into the pot defines at least one player who has not folded out, the executable program code further configured to cause the processor to:

selectively combine at least one card within each initial hand with at least one community card so as to define an eligible hand for each player who has not folded out; and

if no betting player has a qualifying hand, determine an award of a predefined portion of the pot to any player who has not folded out having a best non-qualifying eligible hand.

52. The computer-accessible storage media of claim 46 wherein the executable program code is further configured such that the qualifying hand is defined by one of a straight, a flush, a straight flush, three-of-a-kind, or four-of-a-kind.

53. The computer-accessible storage media of claim 46 wherein the executable program code is further configured such that dealing one or more community cards comprises:

dealing one or more community “flop” cards in a face-up condition, and thereafter dealing one or more community “turn” cards in a face-up condition, and thereafter dealing one or more community “river” cards in a face-up condition; and

wherein registering the final bet is performed prior to dealing one or more community river cards.

54. The computer-accessible storage media of claim 46 wherein the executable program code is further configured such that that dealing an initial hand comprises:

dealing a preliminary hand comprising two or more cards in a face-up condition to at least one player; and

registering at least one card selectively discarded from at least one preliminary hand by a corresponding player so as to define an initial hand for at least one player prior to dealing one or more community cards.

55. The computer-accessible storage media of claim 46 wherein the executable program code is further configured cause the processor to evaluate each final hand in accordance with a predetermined ranking of poker hands so as to determine the best final hand.

56. An individual gaming machine, comprising:

a user interface; and

an electronic controller coupled in signal communication with the user interface, the electronic controller configured to be coupled in signal communication with at least one other electronic controller of another individual gaming machine, the electronic controller configured to:

define a qualifying hand;

deal an initial hand in a face-up condition to a first player by way of the user interface;

register a final bet into a pot from the first player thus defining a first final betting player, the pot including another final bet from at least one other final betting player using another individual gaming machine;

deal one or more community cards in a face-up condition by way of the user interface, wherein at least one community card is selectively combined with at least one card within the initial hand such that a final hand is defined for the first final betting player, and wherein the one or more community cards are common to the first final betting player and at least one other final betting player; and

determine an award of at least a portion of the pot to the first final betting player upon achieving a best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand as compared to another final hand of at least one other final betting player.

57. The individual gaming machine of claim 56 wherein the electronic controller is further configured to, if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, repeat dealing an initial hand and registering a final bet and dealing one or more community cards, and register in the pot at least a portion of any previous pot or pots until at least a portion of the pot is awarded.

58. The individual gaming machine of claim 56 wherein the electronic controller is further configured to, if no final betting player holds a qualifying final hand, determine an award of a predefined portion of the pot to the first final betting player upon achieving a best non-qualifying final hand as compared to another final hand of at least one other final betting player.

59. The individual gaming machine of claim 56 wherein the electronic controller is further configured to:

register a first bet into the pot from the first player prior to registering the final bet; and

register a second bet into the pot from the first player after registering the first bet and prior to registering the final bet.

60. The individual gaming machine of claim 59 wherein the electronic controller is further configured such that registering the second bet into the pot defines a first player who has not folded out, the pot including another second bet from at least one other player who has not folded out using another individual gaming machine, and wherein the electronic controller is further configured to:

selectively combine at least one card within the initial hand with at least one community card so as to define an eligible hand for the first player who has not folded

out, wherein the one or more community cards are common to the first player who has not folded out and at least one other player who has not folded out; and

if no player who has not folded out has a qualifying hand, determine an award of a predefined portion of the pot to the player who has not folded out upon achieving a best non-qualifying eligible hand as compared to another eligible hand of at least one other player who has not folded out.

61. The individual gaming machine of claim 56 wherein the electronic controller is further configured such that the qualifying hand is defined by one of a straight, a flush, a straight flush, three-of-a-kind, or four-of-a-kind.

62. The individual gaming machine of claim 56 wherein the electronic controller is further configured such that dealing one or more community cards comprises:

dealing one or more community "flop" cards in a face-up condition, and thereafter dealing one or more community "turn" cards in a face-up condition, and thereafter dealing one or more community "river" cards in a face-up condition by way of the user interface, respectively; and

wherein registering the final bet is performed prior to dealing one or more community river cards.

63. The individual gaming machine of claim 56 wherein the electronic controller is further configured such that dealing the initial hand comprises:

dealing a preliminary hand comprising two or more cards in a face-up condition to the player by way of the user interface; and

registering at least one card selectively discarded from the preliminary hand by the first player so as to define an initial hand the player prior to dealing one or more community cards.

64. The individual gaming machine of claim 56 wherein the electronic controller is further configured to compare the final hand of the first betting player with another final hand of at least one other final betting player in accordance with a predetermined ranking of poker hands so as to determine the best final hand.

65. The individual gaming machine of claim 56 wherein the user interface comprises a display screen configured to display graphical images of the cards dealt by the electronic controller.

66. The individual gaming machine of claim 65 wherein the display screen is further configured to display a current status of the pot as registered by the electronic controller.

67. A method of playing a wagering game of chance, comprising:

defining a qualifying hand;

dealing a hand to at least two players;

accepting a bet into a pot from each player;

awarding at least a first portion of the pot to player having a best final hand that comprises a qualifying hand; and

if no player has a qualifying final hand, awarding a predetermined portion of the pot to any player who has a best non-qualifying hand.

* * * * *