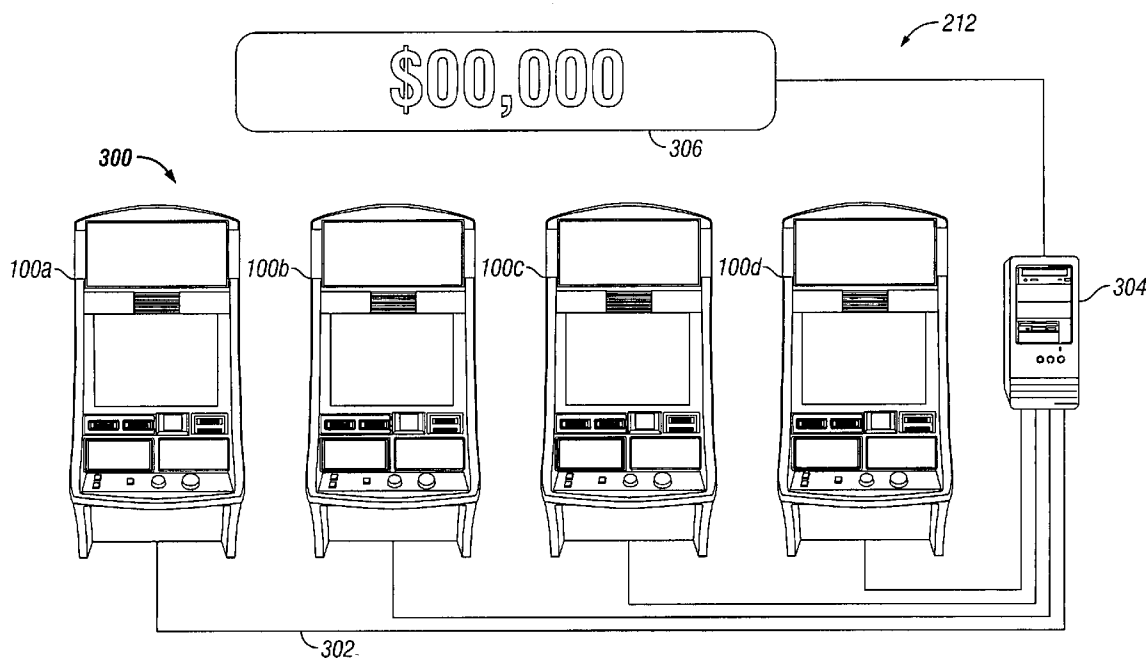




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(19) **United States**(12) **Patent Application Publication**
Englman et al.(10) **Pub. No.: US 2006/0073897 A1**(43) **Pub. Date: Apr. 6, 2006**(54) **WAGERING GAME WITH GROUP JACKPOT****Publication Classification**(75) Inventors: **Allon G. Englman**, Chicago, IL (US);
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(US)(51) **Int. Cl.**
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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **463/42**(57) **ABSTRACT**Correspondence Address:
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CHICAGO, IL 60606 (US)(73) Assignee: **WMS Gaming Inc.**, Waukegan, IL(21) Appl. No.: **11/240,748**(22) Filed: **Sep. 30, 2005****Related U.S. Application Data**(60) Provisional application No. 60/615,482, filed on Oct.
1, 2004.

System and method are disclosed for conducting a wagering game having increased excitement and enjoyment. The method/system of the invention involves a bank of wagering game terminals connected to a bank server. In addition to a basic wagering game, the wagering game terminals allow players to play a bonus game where only one or some of the players may win a prize. In one implementation, the prize is a jackpot composed entirely of game credits won by the players in the bonus game and pooled by the bank server. In another implementation, only players at wagering game terminals that exceed a minimum level of wagering activity may play the bonus game. The player that wins the bonus game receives the jackpot. If there are multiple winners, the jackpot is distributed amongst the winners based on their performance in the bonus game or some other criterion.



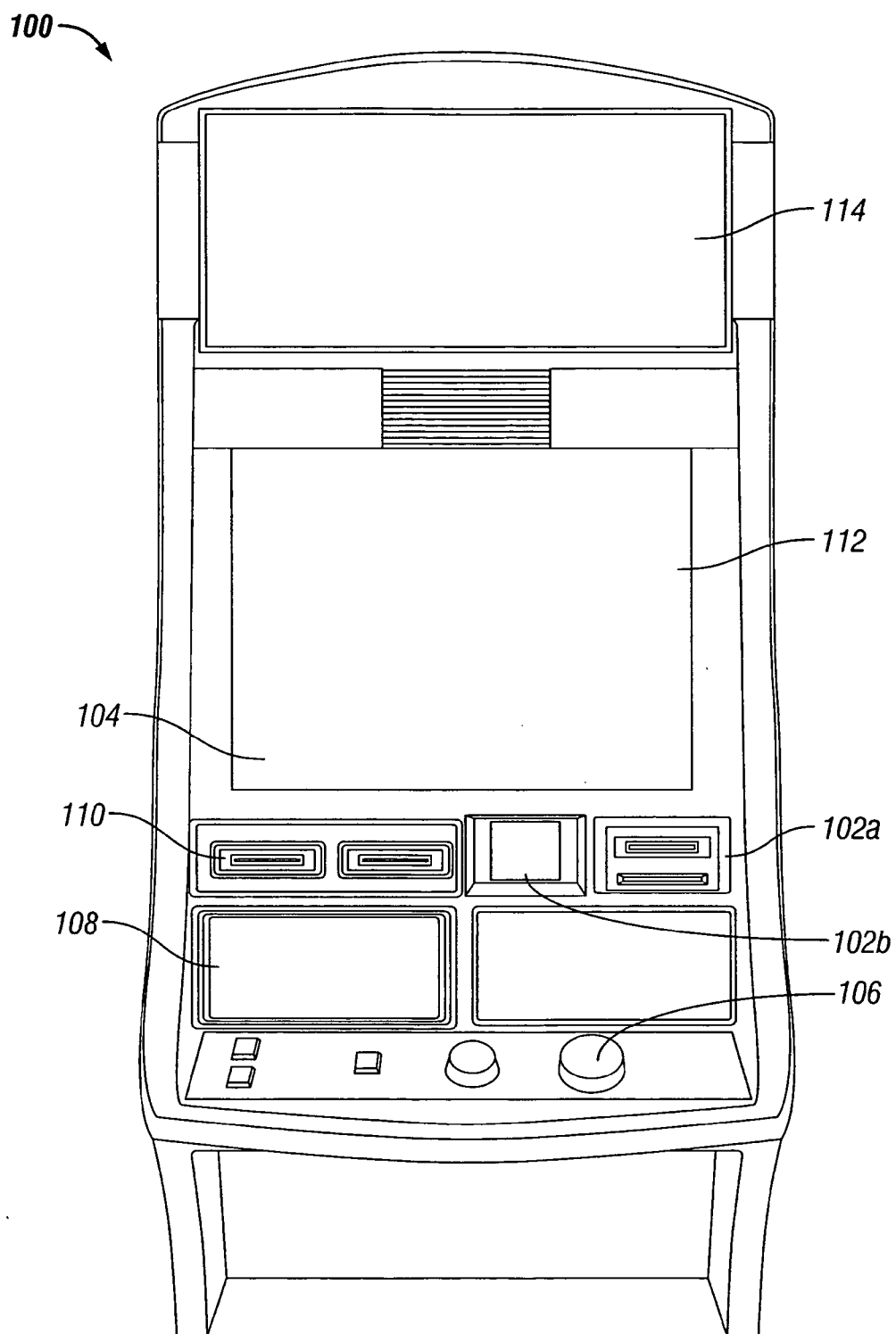


FIG. 1

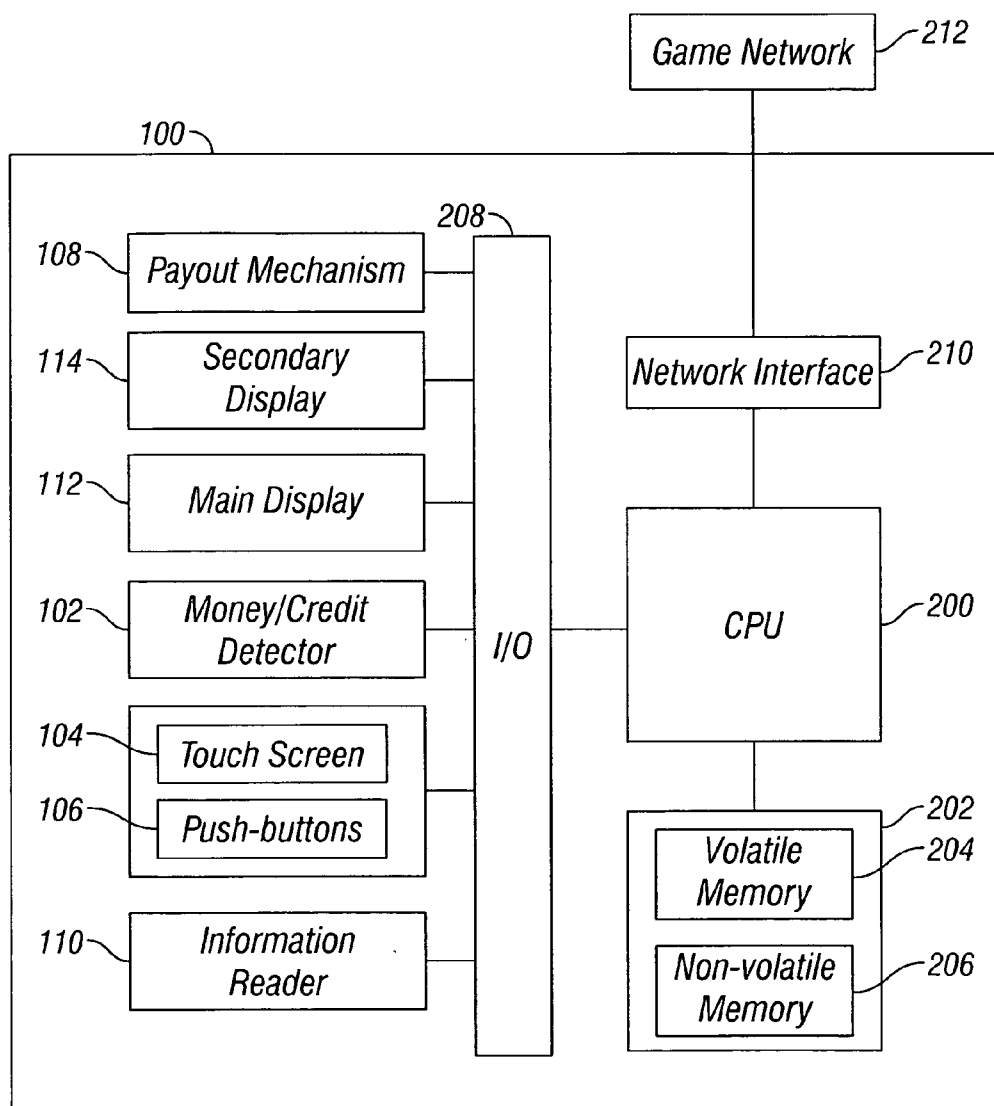


FIG. 2

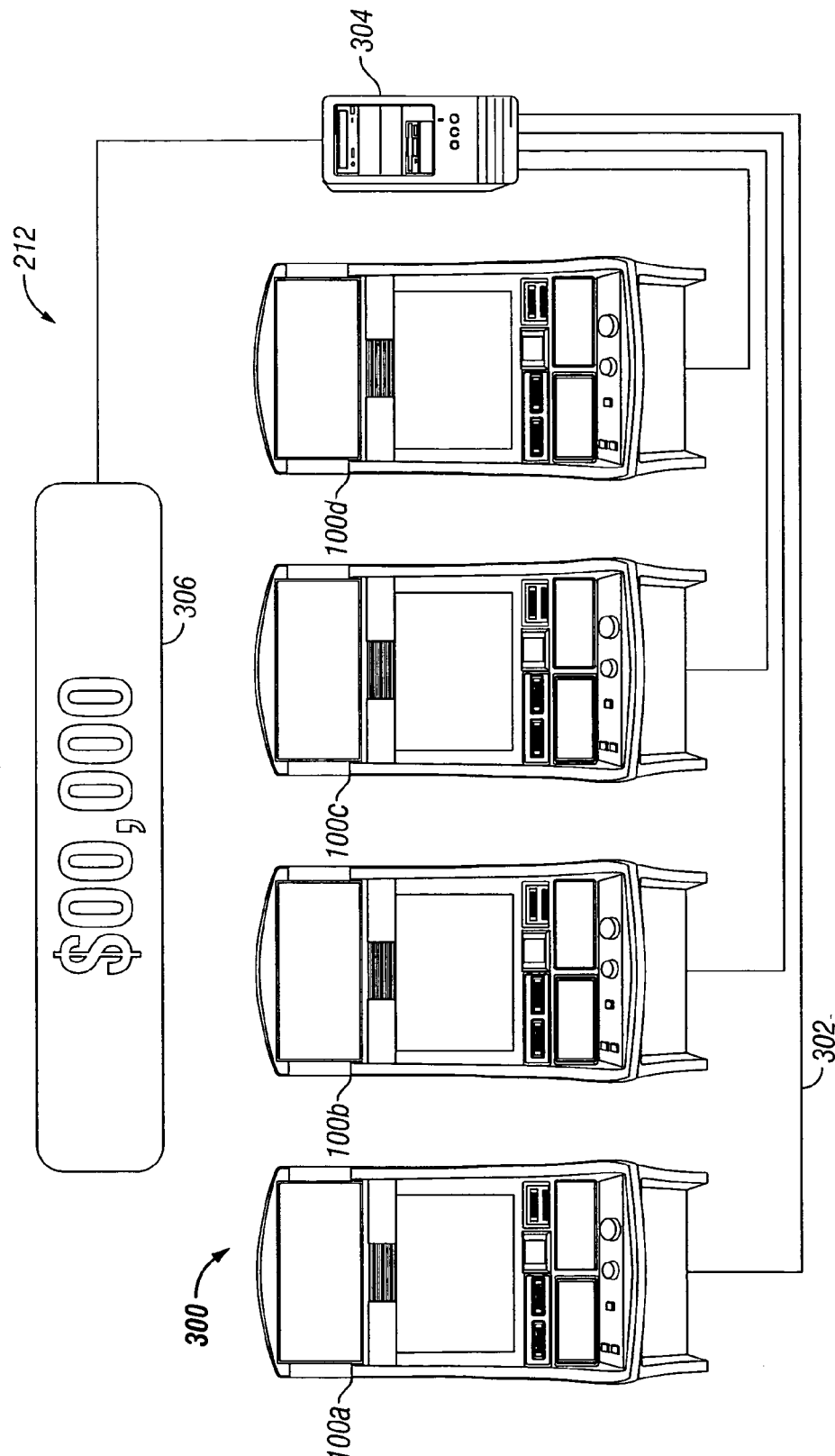


FIG. 3

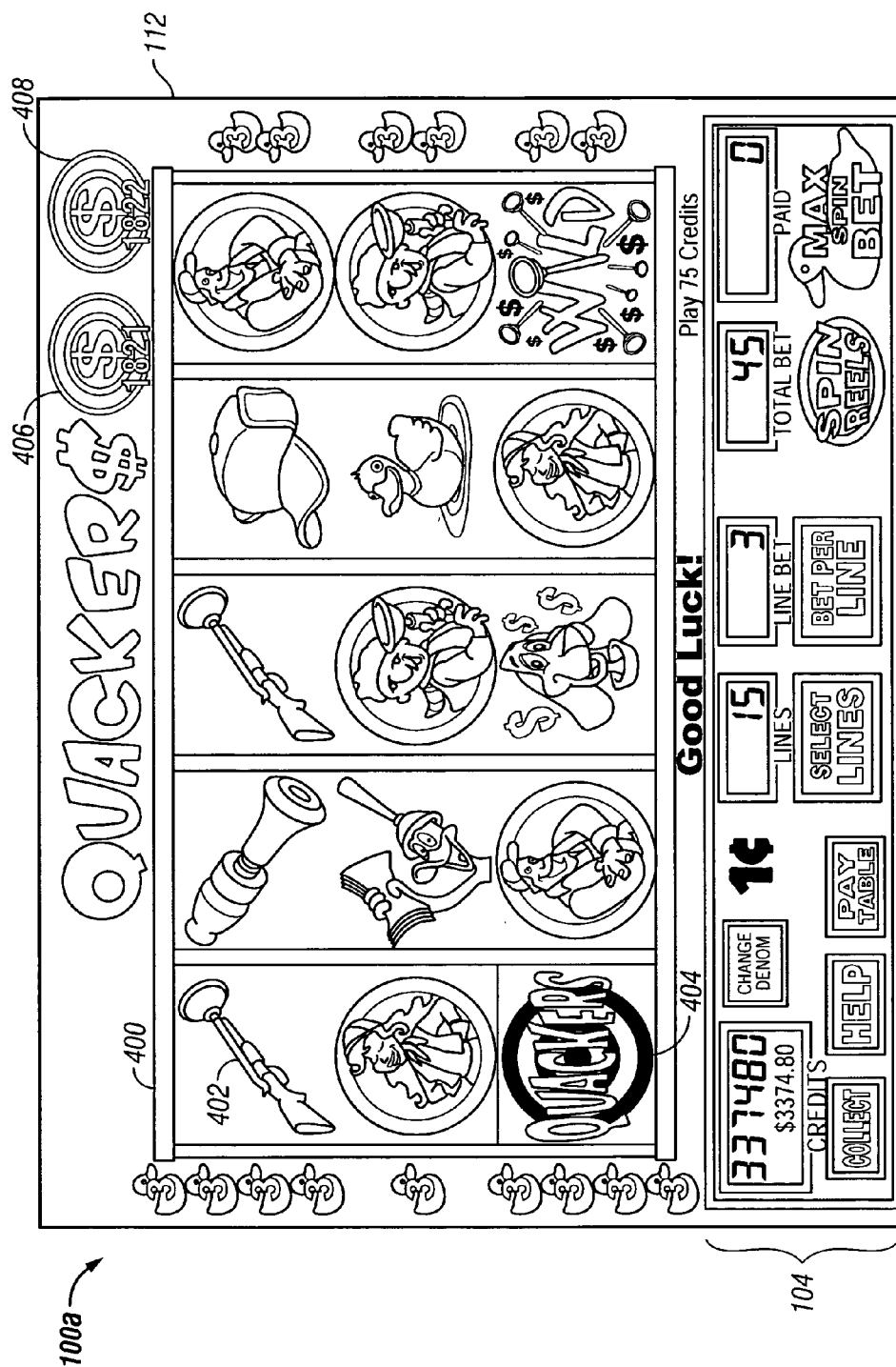


FIG. 4

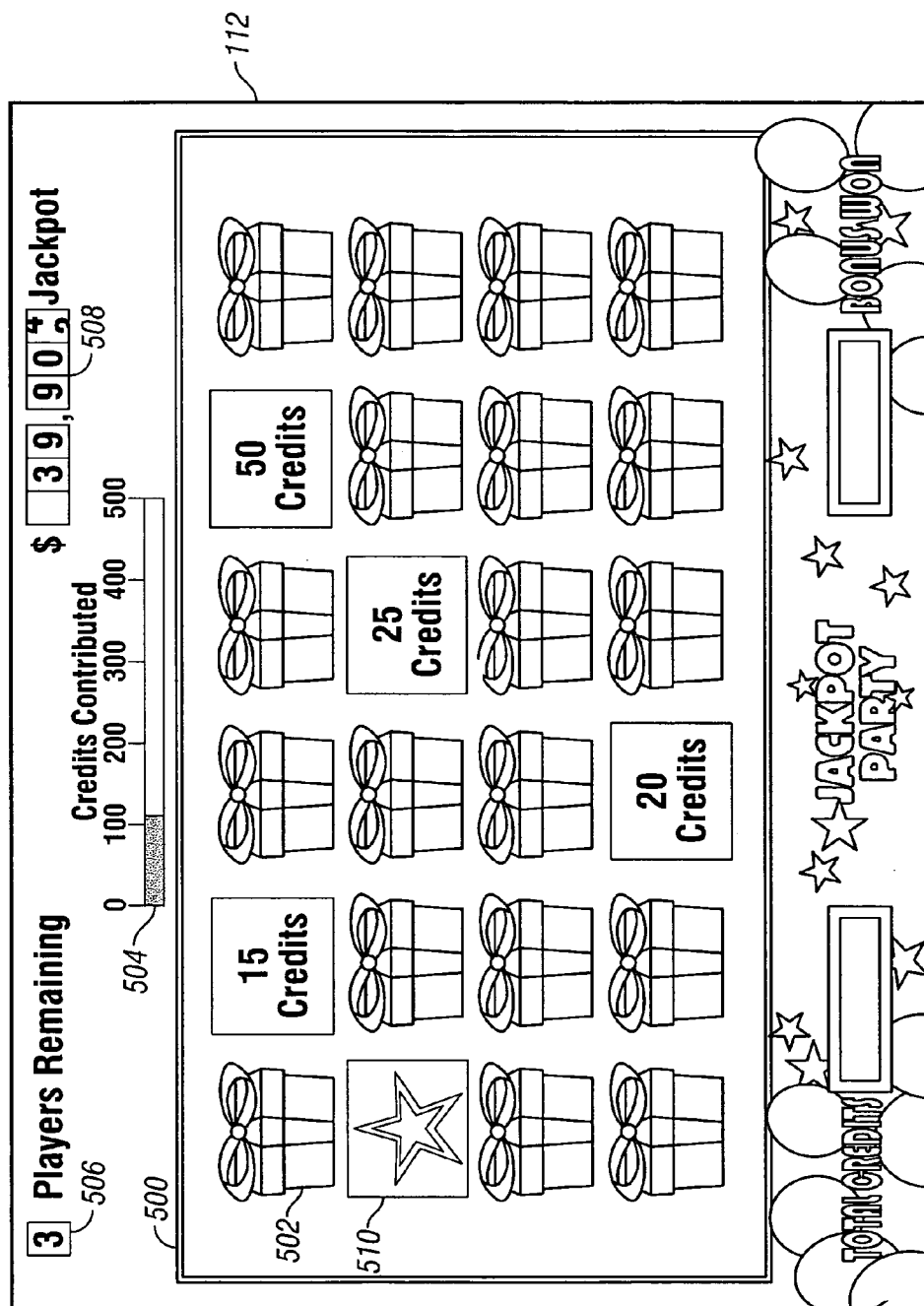


FIG. 5

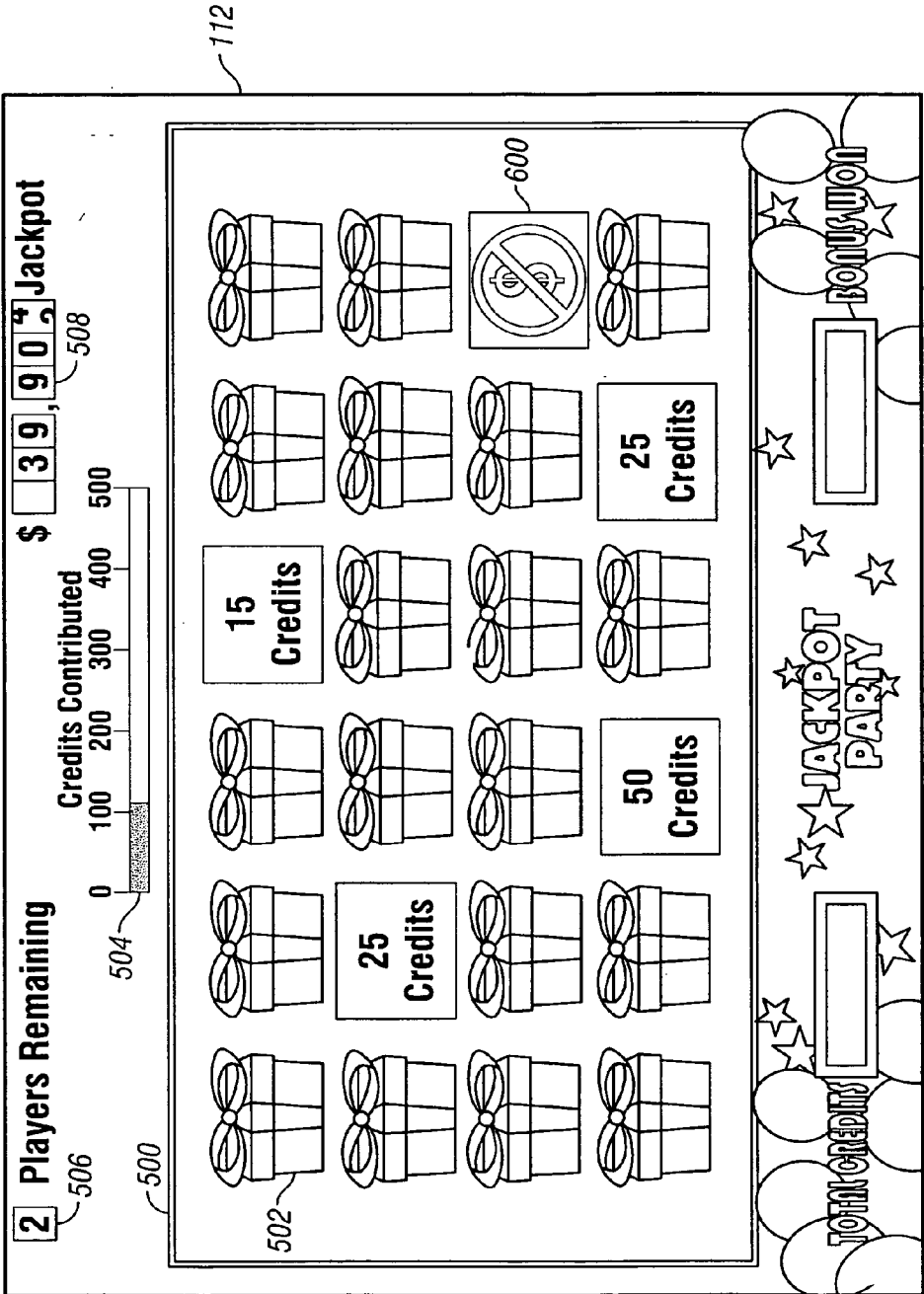


FIG. 6

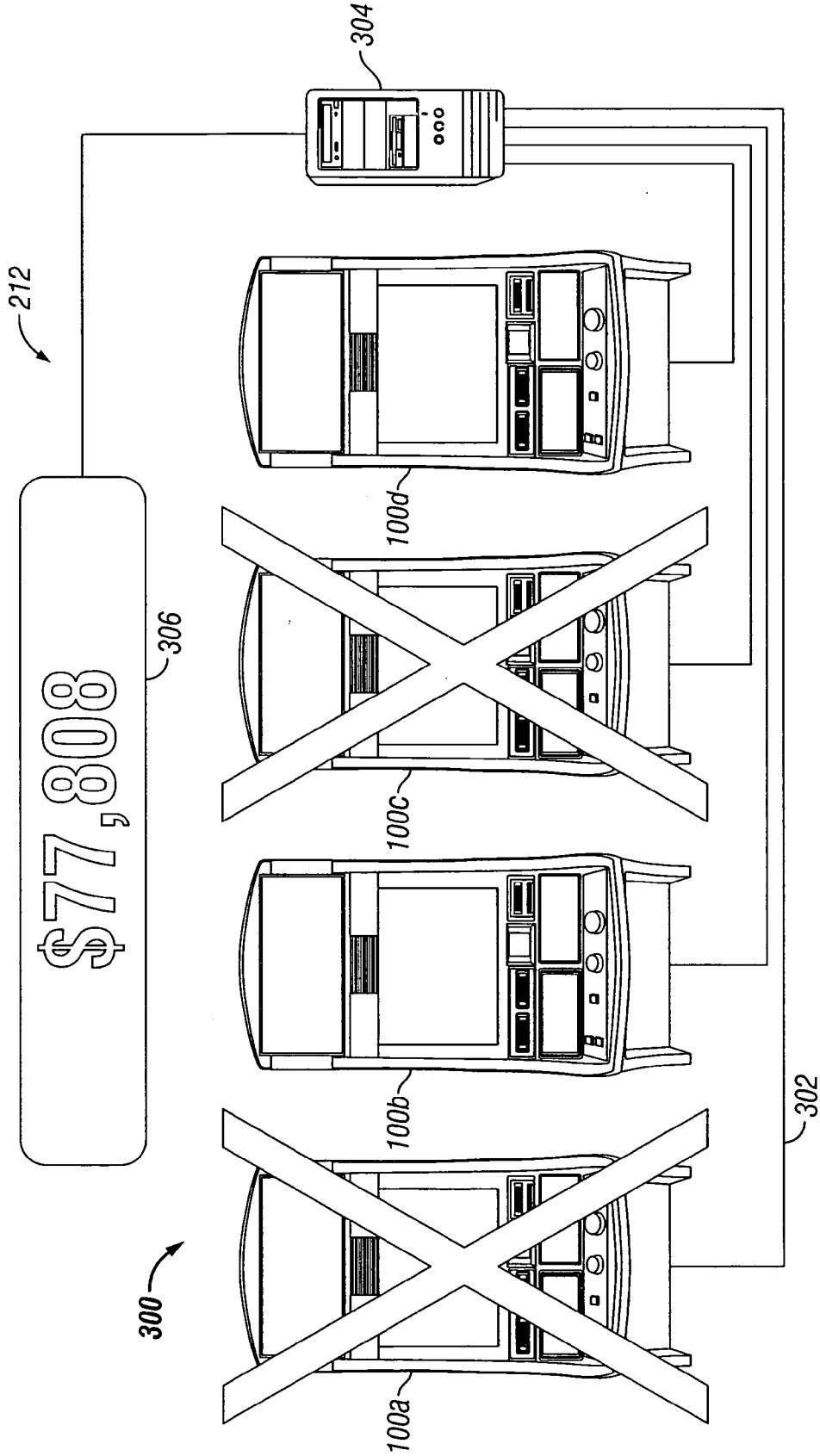


FIG. 7

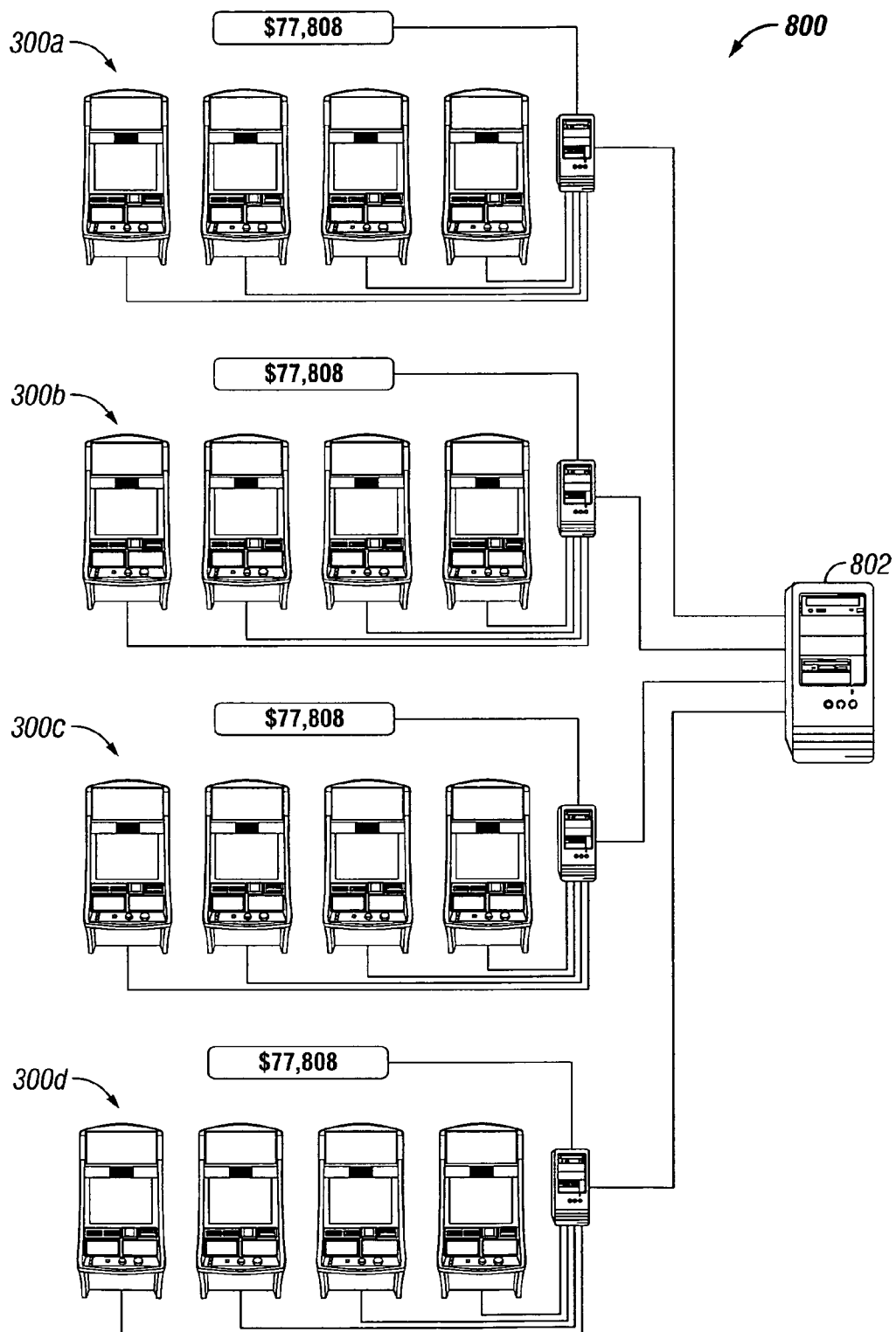


FIG. 8

WAGERING GAME WITH GROUP JACKPOT

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application for patent claims priority to, and hereby incorporates by reference, U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/615,482, entitled "WAGERING GAME WITH GROUP JACKPOT," filed on Oct. 1, 2004 with the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to wagering game terminals and, more particularly, to a method and system of conducting a wagering game in which players at several wagering game terminals compete against each other while striving toward a common goal.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Wagering game terminals, such as slot machines, video poker machines, and the like, have been a cornerstone of the gaming industry for several years. Generally, the popularity of such terminals among players depends on the perceived likelihood of winning money at the terminal and the intrinsic entertainment value of the terminal relative to other available gaming options. Where the available gaming options include a number of competing terminals and the expectation of winning each terminal is roughly the same (or believed to be the same), players are most likely to be attracted to the more entertaining and exciting of the terminals. Consequently, wagering game terminal operators strive to employ the most entertaining and exciting terminals available because such terminals attract frequent play and, hence, increase profitability for the operators. Thus, in the highly competitive wagering game terminal industry, there is a continuing need to develop new types of games, or improvements to existing games, that will enhance the entertainment value and excitement associated with the games.

[0004] One concept that has been successfully employed in existing wagering game terminals to enhance player entertainment is the use of progressive games. In the gaming industry, a "progressive" game involves collecting coin-in data from participating wagering game terminals (e.g., slot machines), contributing a percentage of that coin-in data to a progressive jackpot amount, and awarding that jackpot amount to a player upon the occurrence of a certain jackpot-won event. A jackpot-won event typically occurs when a "progressive winning position" is achieved at a participating wagering game terminal. If the wagering game terminal is a slot machine, a progressive winning position may, for example, correspond to alignment of progressive jackpot reel symbols along a certain payline. The initial progressive jackpot is a predetermined minimum amount. That jackpot amount, however, progressively increases as players continue to play the slot machine without winning the jackpot. Further, when several wagering game terminals are linked together such that several players at several wagering game terminals compete for the same jackpot, the jackpot progressively increases at a much faster rate, which leads to further player excitement.

[0005] Another concept that is often employed is a secondary or "bonus" game played in conjunction with a

"basic" game. The bonus game may include any type of game, either similar to or entirely different from the basic game, and is initiated by the occurrence of certain pre-selected events or outcomes of the basic game. The addition of such a bonus game has been found to produce a significantly higher level of player excitement than the basic game alone because it provides an additional chance to play, which increases the player's overall expectation of winning.

[0006] In existing wagering game terminals, the basic game and the bonus game are played on an individual, stand-alone basis. That is, each player plays and wins at his or her own wagering game terminal with little or no participation from other players at other wagering game terminals. There are presently no arrangements where players at several wagering game terminals may play in competition against each other. Nor are there any arrangements where a player's success benefits the players against whom he or she is competing. It has been observed, however, that the active participation of other players generates a substantial amount of excitement and enjoyment for all players involved.

[0007] Accordingly, what is needed is a wagering game terminal that is capable of providing increased excitement and entertainment value over existing wagering game terminals. More specifically, what is needed is a wagering game terminal that can provide a wagering game in which a player may compete against other players while both players strive toward a common goal.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] The present invention is directed to a method and system for conducting a wagering game having increased excitement and enjoyment over existing wagering games. The method/system of the invention involves a bank of wagering game terminals connected to a bank server. In addition to a basic wagering game, the wagering game terminals allow players to play a bonus game where only one or some of the players may win a prize. In one implementation, the prize is a jackpot composed entirely of game credits won by the players in the bonus game and pooled by the bank server. In another implementation, only players at wagering game terminals that exceed a minimum level of wagering activity may play the bonus game. The player that wins the bonus game receives the jackpot. If there are multiple winners, the jackpot is distributed amongst the winners based on their performance in the bonus game or some other criterion.

[0009] In general, in one aspect, the invention is directed to a wagering game system. The system comprises a plurality of wagering game terminals, each wagering game terminal capable of conducting a wagering game in which an outcome is randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes, the plurality of outcomes including a special-event outcome. The system further comprises a network to which the wagering game terminals are connected, the network initiating a special-event game session on eligible ones of the wagering game terminals upon occurrence of the special-event outcome on one of the wagering game terminals. The network is configured to apply all monetary amounts won in the special-event game session to a special-event jackpot and to award the jackpot to one or more players at a conclusion of the special-event game session.

[0010] In general, in another aspect, the invention is directed to a method of operating wagering game terminals.

The method comprises the step of conducting a wagering game on a plurality of wagering game terminals, each wagering game having an outcome that is randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes, the plurality of outcomes including a special-event outcome. The method further comprises displaying a special-event game on eligible ones of the wagering game terminals upon occurrence of the special-event outcome on any wagering game terminal. All monetary amounts won by players playing the special-event game are applied to a special-event jackpot, and the special-event jackpot is awarded to one or more players at a conclusion of the special-event game based on a performance of the one or more players in the special-event game.

[0011] In general, in still another aspect, the invention is directed to a wagering terminal. The wagering game terminal comprises a wager input device for accepting a wager from a player at the wagering game terminal, and a display unit for displaying a wagering game, the wagering game having an outcome that is randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes, the plurality of outcomes including a bonus outcome. The bonus outcome triggers a bonus game session on the wagering game terminal in which the player competes against other players at other wagering game terminals for a jackpot. The jackpot is composed entirely of monetary amounts won by the player and the other players during the bonus game session pooled together.

[0012] In general, in yet another aspect, the invention is directed to a method of playing a wagering game at wagering game terminals. The method comprises the step of conducting a wagering game on the wagering game terminals, each wagering game having an outcome that is randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes, the plurality of outcomes including a bonus outcome. Upon occurrence of the bonus outcome on any wagering game terminal, a bonus game is initiated on eligible ones of the wagering game terminals in which players try to advance from one round to another. All monetary amounts won by players playing the bonus game are applied to a jackpot, the jackpot to be awarded to one or more players at a conclusion of the bonus game. Players completing a higher number of rounds of the bonus game are awarded a larger portion of the jackpot, but a higher number of rounds completed results in a greater jackpot overall so that all players receiving a portion of the jackpot benefit from the higher number of rounds completed.

[0013] In general, in still another aspect, the invention is directed to a method of building a jackpot in a bonus game involving multiple wagering game terminals. The method comprises the steps of determining which ones of the multiple wagering game terminals are eligible for the bonus game and initiating the bonus game on each eligible wagering game terminal. The method further comprises the steps of contributing to the jackpot a predetermined portion of the monetary amounts won by players playing the bonus game and awarding the jackpot to one or more players at a conclusion of the bonus game based on a performance of said one or more players in said bonus game.

[0014] In general, in yet another aspect, the invention is directed to a method of awarding a jackpot in a bonus game involving multiple wagering game terminals. The method comprises the steps of determining which ones of the multiple wagering game terminals are eligible for the bonus

game and initiating the bonus game on each eligible wagering game terminal. The method further comprises the steps of contributing to the jackpot a predetermined portion of the monetary amounts won by players playing the bonus game and awarding the jackpot to one or more players, but less than all participating players, at a conclusion of the bonus game based on a performance of the one or more players in the bonus game.

[0015] In general, in still another aspect, the invention is directed to a method of conducting a bonus game involving multiple wagering game terminals. The method comprises the steps of determining which ones of the multiple wagering game terminals are eligible for the bonus game and then initiating the bonus game on each eligible wagering game terminal. The method further comprises the steps of contributing to a jackpot a predetermined portion of the monetary amounts won by players playing the bonus game and awarding the jackpot to one or more players at a conclusion of the bonus game based on a performance of the one or more players in the bonus game. Each player's probability of winning the jackpot depends on a wagering activity of the player.

[0016] The above summary of the present invention is not intended to represent each embodiment, or every aspect, of the present invention. The detailed description and figures will describe many of the embodiments and aspects of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] The foregoing and other advantages of the invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and upon reference to the drawings, wherein:

[0018] **FIG. 1** illustrates a perspective view of a wagering game terminal according to one embodiment of the invention;

[0019] **FIG. 2** illustrates the wagering game terminal of **FIG. 1** in more detail;

[0020] **FIG. 3** illustrates a bank of wagering game terminals connected to a bank server according to one embodiment of the invention;

[0021] **FIG. 4** illustrates a main screen at one of the wagering game terminals in the bank of wagering game terminal according to one embodiment of the invention;

[0022] **FIG. 5** illustrates an exemplary bonus game that may be played at one of the wagering game terminals in the bank of wagering game terminals; and

[0023] **FIG. 6** illustrates another exemplary bonus game that may be played at another one of the wagering game terminals in the bank of wagering game terminals;

[0024] **FIG. 7** illustrates the bank of wagering game terminals of **FIG. 1** after elimination of one or more wagering game terminals; and

[0025] **FIG. 8** illustrates several banks of wagering game terminals connected together to form a super bank according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0026] While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments have

been shown by way of example in the drawings and will be described in detail herein. It should be understood, however, that the invention is not intended to be limited to the particular forms disclosed. Rather, the invention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

[0027] As alluded to above, embodiments of the invention provide a system and method for playing a wagering game where players at several wagering game terminals may compete against each other in a bonus game. The eligibility of the players to participate in and win the bonus game is based on the amounts wagered at the wagering game terminals. In one embodiment, instead of keeping their individual winnings, all monetary amounts won by the players in the bonus game are contributed to a pool or jackpot that one or more of the players may subsequently win. Player identification and tracking of the player is not necessary to the practice of the invention, although these features may certainly be incorporated into the invention. In most embodiments, however, players may participate in the group wagering game on an anonymous basis with respect to the wagering game terminals.

[0028] FIG. 1 shows a perspective view of an exemplary wagering game terminal 100 according to embodiments of the invention. The wagering game terminal 100 may be operated as a stand-alone terminal, or it may be connected to a network of wagering game terminals. Further, the wagering game terminal 100 may be any type of wagering game terminal and may have varying structures and methods of operation. For example, the wagering game terminal 100 may be a mechanical wagering game terminal configured to play mechanical slots, or it may be an electromechanical or electrical wagering game terminal configured to play a video casino game, such as blackjack, slots, keno, poker, etc. In the example shown, the wagering game terminal 100 is a video slot machine.

[0029] As shown, the wagering game terminal 100 includes input devices, such as a wager acceptor 102 (shown as a card wager acceptor 102a and a cash wager acceptor 102b), a touch screen 104, a push-button panel 106, a payout mechanism 108, and an information reader 110. The wagering game terminal 100 further includes a main display 112 for displaying information about the basic wagering game and, in some embodiments, a secondary display 114 for displaying a pay table and/or game-related information or other entertainment features. While these typical components found in the wagering game terminal 100 are described briefly below, it should be understood that numerous other elements may exist and may be used in any number of combinations to create variation of the wagering game terminal 100.

[0030] The wager acceptors 102a and 102b may be provided in many forms, individually or in combination. For example, the cash wager acceptor 102a may include a coin slot acceptor or a note acceptor to input value to the wagering game terminal 100. The card wager acceptor 102b may include a card-reading device for reading a card that has a recorded monetary value with which it is associated. The

card wager acceptor 102b may also receive a card that authorizes access to a central account that can transfer money to the wagering game terminal 100.

[0031] The payout mechanism 108 performs the reverse function of the wager acceptors 102a and 102b. For example, the payout mechanism 108 may include a coin dispenser or a note dispenser to dispense money or tokens from the wagering game terminal 100. The payout mechanism 108 may also be adapted to receive a card that authorizes the wagering game terminal 100 to transfer credits from the wagering game terminal 100 to a central account.

[0032] The push button panel 106 is typically offered, in addition to the touch screen 104, to provide players with an option on making their game selections. Alternatively, the push button panel 106 may facilitate player input needed for certain aspects of operating the game, while the touch screen 104 facilitates player input needed for other aspects of operating the game.

[0033] The outcome of the basic wagering game is displayed to the player on the main display 112. The main display 112 may take a variety of forms, including a cathode ray tube (CRT), a high resolution LCD, a plasma display, LED, or any other type of video display suitable for use in the wagering game terminal 100. As shown here, the main display 112 also includes the touch screen 104 overlaying the entire display (or a portion thereof) to allow players to make game-related selections. Alternatively, the wagering game terminal 100 may include a number of mechanical reels that display the game outcome.

[0034] In some embodiments, the information reader 110 is a card reader that allows for identification of a player by reading a card with information indicating the player's identity. Currently, identification is used by casinos for rewarding certain players with complimentary services or special offers. For example, a player may be enrolled in the gaming establishment's players' club and may be awarded certain complimentary services as that player collects points in his or her player-tracking account. The player inserts his or her card into the player-identification card reader 110, which allows the casino's computers to register that player's wagering at the wagering game terminal 100. Then, the wagering game terminal 100 may use the secondary display 114 for providing the player with information about his or her account or other player-specific information. Also, in some embodiments, the information reader 110 may be used to restore assets that the player achieved during a previous gaming session and had saved.

[0035] As shown in FIG. 2, the various components of the wagering game terminal 100 are controlled by a central processing unit (CPU) 200, such as one or more microprocessors or microcontrollers. To provide the gaming functions, the CPU 200 executes a game program that generates a randomly selected game outcome. The CPU 200 is also coupled to or includes a local memory 202. The local memory 202 may be in the form of one or more volatile memories 204 (e.g., a random-access memory (RAM)) and one or more non-volatile memories 206 (e.g., an EEPROM). Communication between the peripheral components of the wagering game terminal 100 and the CPU 200 is controlled by the CPU 200 through input/output (I/O) circuits 208. The CPU 200 also communicates with external systems via a

network interface unit **210**. Although the I/O circuit **208** and network interface unit **210** are shown here as individual components, it should be appreciated that both of these units may include a number of different types of components.

[0036] As alluded to above, the wagering game terminal **100** may be a stand-alone terminal, or it may be part of a network **212** that connects multiple wagering game terminals **100** together. The network **212** may be a peer-to-peer network, a client/server network, or any other suitable network architecture. **FIG. 3** illustrates an example where the network **212** is a client/server network. The network **212** includes a bank **300** of wagering game terminals **100a**, **100b**, **100c**, **100d** connected via network connections **302** (e.g., Ethernet, TCP/IP, etc.) to a bank sever **304**. Although only four wagering game terminals **100a-d** are shown here, those having ordinary skill in the art will recognize that the bank **300** may include fewer or more wagering game terminals without departing from the scope of the invention. Preferably, the wagering game terminals **100a-d** are located close to one another to enhance the sense of competition and camaraderie and also to allow the players to more easily see a jackpot display **306** mounted above the wagering game terminals **100a-d**. The jackpot display **306** displays the current bank jackpot, which may be either a preset amount or an unspecified amount accumulated by the players at the wagering game terminals **100a-d** (as will be explained below).

[0037] The wagering game terminals **100a-d** are similar to the wagering game terminal **100** (see **FIG. 1**) in that they have many of the same features and components. For example, the wagering game terminals **100a-d** allow players to play a basic, terminal-level wagering game. Each wagering game terminal **100a-d** may be configured to play a different basic wagering game, or they all may be configured to play the same basic wagering game. Furthermore, the wagering game terminals **100a-d** may share a common theme, such as the PowerBall® lottery, or each wagering game terminal **100a-d** may have its own theme that is different from the other wagering game terminals **100a-d**.

[0038] In some embodiments, one or more functions of the wagering game terminals **100a-d** may reside on the bank sever **304** instead of, or in addition to, the wagering game terminals **100a-d**. The bank sever **304** may then conduct the basic and/or bonus games (or portions thereof) for each of the wagering game terminals **100a-d** connected to the network **212**, including providing the input data and information needed to operate the basic and/or bonus games. The bank sever **304** may also control the progressive jackpots mentioned previously that are contributed to by all or some of the wagering game terminals **100a-d** in the network **212** (e.g., terminal-level jackpots that only each terminal **100a-d** contributes to, bank-level jackpots that are contributed to by all of the terminals **100a-d** in a particular bank, and wide-area jackpots that are contributed to by a larger number of terminals **100a-d**, such as multiple banks).

[0039] In addition to the basic wagering game, the wagering game terminals **100a-d** also allow players to participate in a bank-level or group-level special event conducted by the bank sever **304**. The special event, which may be a group-level bonus game, allows players at eligible wagering game terminals to compete against each other to win a jackpot. Eligibility may be determined based on the wager amounts

or the “turnover” at the wagering game terminals **100a-d**. To help ensure that only players who have actually wagered may play, the wager amounts or the turnover may be obtained as close to the start of the bonus game as possible.

[0040] In one embodiment, eligibility is determined by periodically obtaining wager information from the wagering game terminals **100a-d** connected to the bank sever **304**. For example, the bank sever **304** may request that the wagering game terminals **100a-d** forward their wager information to the bank sever **304** at certain intervals, such as every 30 seconds, every minute, and so forth. The wager information allows the bank sever **304** to determine whether a player was playing at a wagering game terminal **100a-d** when the bonus game is started. This avoids unduly awarding a bonus game to a player who has not actually been playing at the wagering game terminal, but had just stepped up to the wagering game terminal when the group wagering game began.

[0041] The content of the wager information may include, for example, the wager amounts or the turnover and the time when the wagers were placed. The term “turnover” as used herein refers to the amount wagered at any wagering game terminal **100a-d** over a predefined interval (e.g., 30 seconds, 1 minute, etc.). Eligibility is then determined based on the wager amounts or the turnover at the wagering game terminals **100a-d**, and not on player identification. In one embodiment, players at all wagering game terminals connected to the bank sever **304** may play regardless of their wagering activities as long as the players are currently playing at the wagering game terminals. In another embodiment, however, the bank sever **304** may have additional requirements as to which wagering game terminals (i.e., which players) are eligible. For example, the bank sever **304** may require a turnover of at least \$1 per unit of time (e.g., a 30 second interval) at the wagering game terminal in order for the player to play the bonus game.

[0042] In some embodiments, instead of the bank sever **304** determining eligibility for the wagering game terminals **100a-d**, each wagering game terminal **100a-d** may determine its own eligibility. In that case, the bank sever **304** simply notifies the wagering game terminals **100a-d** that a bonus game is about to begin. Each wagering game terminal **100a-d** then determines whether it is eligible and only those wagering game terminals **100a-d** that are eligible will inform their respective players of the opportunity to participate in the bonus game. The wagering game terminals **100a-d** that are not eligible will simply ignore the notification from the bank sever **304**.

[0043] In embodiments where eligibility is contingent upon a minimum turnover amount, the period in which eligibility is considered may be the same as the turnover interval. For other embodiments where a minimum turnover amount is not required, the eligibility period is not necessarily the same as the turnover interval and may be longer or shorter. In either case, the eligibility period may be defined to expire before the group wagering game begins. Then, a new eligibility period may start either immediately after the previous eligibility period expires (i.e., without any break in between), or it may begin some predetermined amount of time after the previous eligibility period expires. In some embodiments, the eligibility period may be defined simply as, for example, a 30-second or one-minute interval imme-

diately preceding the beginning of the bonus game, regardless of the frequency or timing of the bonus game.

[0044] Thus far, player eligibility has been discussed irrespective of the identity of the player or the type of terminal-level wagering games conducted by the wagering game terminals 100a-d. However, in some embodiments, player eligibility may be determined by using the player's identification to track accumulated wagers on the wagering game terminals 100a-d. In that case, the player's identification may be read via the player-identification card reader 110 (see FIGS. 1-2) and used to monitor the wagers. If the player has accumulated a certain minimum wager amount over a predetermined time period, then he or she may play the bonus game. The player's identification may also be used for other activities, such as awarding monthly prizes and so forth.

[0045] Operation of the above exemplary bank 300 of wagering game terminals is described with respect to FIGS. 4-7. FIG. 4 illustrates the main display 112 of one of the wagering game terminals 100a-d, for example, the first wagering game terminal 100a. Shown on the main display 112 is a basic wagering game, for example, a video slot machine having a "Quackers" theme. Touch screen buttons 104 allow players to place bets, select paylines, and otherwise control the video slot machine. The video slot machine includes a plurality of reels, one of which is indicated at 400. Each reel 400 contains several symbols 402, including a special-event symbol 404, which may be a "Quackers" symbol or the like. The occurrence of the special-event symbol 404 in the basic wagering game triggers a special event, such as a bonus game, on all eligible wagering game terminals 100a-d on the bank 300 of wagering game terminals.

[0046] During the course of normal play, the bank server 304 periodically assesses the players at the wagering game terminals 100a-d on their level of turnover. As mentioned earlier, turnover refers to the amount of money wagered at the wagering game terminal over a predetermined interval (e.g., 30 seconds, one minute, etc.). Players who have a level of turnover that exceeds a minimum eligibility requirement receive an eligibility indicator on the main display 112 of their wagering game terminal 100a-d. In the example shown, the eligibility indicator may be in the form of a virtual token 406. In some cases, the virtual token 406 may include an identifier for identifying the wagering game terminal, such as a terminal number (e.g., number 1821). Then, additional virtual tokens 408 may be displayed on the main display 112 to show the eligibility of neighboring players. In some embodiments, the same color may be used for all virtual tokens 406 and 408, or different colors may be used to reflect different levels of turnover.

[0047] When the special-event symbol 404 occurs, a special event, such as a bonus game, is triggered on the wagering game terminals 100a-d. The bonus game here may be a type of bonus game where players compete against each other, and may include an individual game or a group game. In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, all monetary amounts won by the players during the bonus game is contributed to a jackpot. This allows the players to build up the jackpot from scratch at the start of each bonus game. At the conclusion of the bonus game, one or more players are awarded the jackpot based on their performance

during the bonus game. The player's performance may be measured, for example, according to the number of rounds the player completed in the bonus game, the total monetary amount the player contributed to the jackpot, and other similar performance measures. Furthermore, the performance may be measured relative to other players, or it may be compared against casino standards.

[0048] FIG. 5 illustrates an exemplary bonus game that is displayed on one of the wagering game terminals 100a-d upon occurrence of the special-event symbol 404. A similar or identical bonus game is displayed on all eligible wagering game terminals 100a-d at this time. This bonus game may be displayed on the main display 112 of the wagering game terminals 100a-d, or it may be displayed on the secondary display 114. In the example shown, the bonus game is an individual bonus game that each player plays at his or her own wagering game terminal 100a-d independently of other players, although at the same time as other players. In accordance with embodiments of the invention, each player plays the bonus game in competition with other players participating in the bonus game, as will be explained below.

[0049] The bonus game here may be a player selection game where each player is presented with an array 500 of picks. In one embodiment, the picks may be in the form of presents 502, each present revealing a prize when selected. The prizes may include, for example, various amounts of game credits, a game-advancement symbol, and a game-termination symbol. Selection of the game-termination symbol (FIG. 6) results in the bonus game being terminated for the player. Selection of the game-advancement symbol results in the player automatically advancing to the next round of the bonus game, which may be a similar player selection game, or it may be an entirely different type of game. Regardless, whether the player selects a game-advancement symbol or a game-termination symbol depends more on chance than on any player skills. However, as will be described further below, some players may be given a higher probability of selecting one or the other type of symbol, depending on the player's wagering activity.

[0050] In some embodiments, all participating players start each round of the bonus game together so that the pace of the game is dictated by the slowest player. Advancing players start the next round of the bonus game only when all instances of the previous round have been completed. In other embodiments, all participating players proceed through the rounds of the bonus game at their own pace so that no player is waiting on any other player. In a case where there is only one participating player or eligible wagering game terminal (e.g., during casino off-peak periods), that player naturally controls his or her own pace in the bonus game.

[0051] In one embodiment of the invention, all game credits uncovered by participating players are pooled by the bank server 304 to build up the jackpot. Thus, in this embodiment, the entire jackpot is made of the players' winnings from the bonus game (as opposed to wagers from the basic wagering game). As a result, no additional funding is needed for the jackpot, since the funding is already factored into the bonus game. The above arrangement does, however, result in a curious combination of competition and camaraderie. On one hand, each player wants the other players to be terminated so that he or she can win the

jackpot. But each player also wants the other players to continue playing as long as possible before being terminated in order to build up the jackpot.

[0052] In other embodiments, only a certain portion of the players' winnings from the bonus game are contributed to the jackpot and the players keep the rest. In still other embodiments, the players keep all or substantially all of their winnings from the bonus game and the jackpot is funded mostly or entirely through another mechanism (e.g., the expected value from the players' wagers). In these embodiments, the players have a chance to both keep some or all of their bonus game winnings and also win the jackpot.

[0053] In the example of FIG. 5, the player has selected four different credit amounts: 15 credits, 50 credits, 25 credits, and 20 credits. Thus, the player has contributed a total of 110 game credits to the jackpot in the current bonus game, as indicated by a player contribution meter 504. A remaining-players indicator 506 indicates the number of players remaining (e.g., 3 players) in the bonus game, and a jackpot indicator 508 indicates the current total value (e.g., \$39,903) of the jackpot. In addition to the various credit amounts, the player has also selected a game-advancement symbol 510, which may be a star symbol in one embodiment. When this happens, the current round of the bonus game is stopped and the player automatically advances to the next round of the bonus game.

[0054] Alternatively, as can be seen in FIG. 6, it is also possible for the player to select a game-termination symbol 600. When this happens, the current round of the bonus game simply stops and the player is returned to the basic wagering game. The remaining-players indicator 506 is thereafter decremented on the wagering game terminals 100a-d of each remaining player to reflect the decreased number of players. This latter aspect is illustrated graphically in FIG. 7, where players at the first and third wagering game terminals 100a and 100c have now been eliminated from the bonus game. Note that the size of the jackpot has grown from \$0 to more than \$77,000 and will continue growing to an unspecified amount as long as players continue contributing to the jackpot.

[0055] In some embodiments, the bank server 304 may provide different players with a different number of game-advancement symbols 510 or game-termination symbols 600. The bank server 304 may use an algorithm that involves the turnover for a player to determine the number of game-advancement or game-termination symbols 510 or 600 that will be provided to the player. For example, players who have a higher turnover may be given more game-advancement symbols 510, or fewer game-termination symbols 600, than other players. In this way, players who wager more have a more favorable chance of selecting a game-advancement symbol 510 and advancing than players who wager less.

[0056] The above scheme may be implemented for all rounds of the bonus game as a way to reward players who wager more. It may also be implemented only for the initial round of the bonus game as a sort of first-pass filter to quickly reduce the number of participating players. Then, players who make it to the subsequent rounds are given an equal number of game-advancement symbols 510 or game-termination symbols 600. Other techniques for reducing the number of participating players may also be used without

departing from the scope of the invention, including increasing the eligibility requirements, and so on. Note that while the number of game-advancement symbols 510 or game-termination symbols 600 for a given player is determined by the bank server 304, the placement of the symbols 510 and 600 in the array 500 may be determined by each wagering game terminal 100a-d independently of the bank server 304. An exemplary implementation of the above scheme is shown in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1

Turnover	Virtual Token	Star Symbols
\$0-\$2.50	Bronze Coin	1
\$2.51-\$5.00	Silver Coin	2
\$5.01-\$10.00	Gold Coin	3

[0057] In TABLE 1, if a player bets more than the \$10 shown in the third row during a turnover interval, he or she will be given more than three game-advancement symbols 510 (e.g., star symbols). Thus, if the player bets \$13 during a turnover interval, he or she will be given five game-advancement symbols 510 (i.e., $3+2=5$ star symbols).

[0058] At the conclusion of the bonus game, the jackpot is awarded to one or possibly several of the participating players, but not all of the participating players. Of course, if there is only one player to begin with, then that player will be awarded the jackpot, assuming he or she endures to the conclusion of the bonus game. In one embodiment, the bonus game is concluded when a certain number of rounds have been completed, in which case all remaining players will share the jackpot. The jackpot may be shared evenly by all the remaining players, or it may be divided according to each player's contribution to the jackpot, or some other criterion.

[0059] In another embodiment, the bonus game is concluded when only one player remains in the bonus game, in which case that player is awarded the entire jackpot. In yet another embodiment, the bonus game is concluded when there are no players remaining in the bonus game and the last player to be terminated is awarded the entire jackpot. The main difference in these two implementations, of course, is that in the latter case, the last player can continue to build the jackpot until he or she is terminated, thus further increasing the size of the jackpot.

[0060] In yet another embodiment, instead of awarding the entire jackpot to one winning player, it is possible to share the jackpot with some of the eliminated players. For example, the second and/or third place players may be awarded a percentage of the total jackpot, even though they did not win the bonus game. Under this arrangement, the second and/or third place players will compete against the first-place player until they are eliminated, then they will root for the first-place player to continue playing, since they will receive a percentage of any additional credits that the first-place player contributes to the jackpot.

[0061] Sometimes, a bonus game may be initiated while a player is in the middle of a basic wagering game. When that happens, the player is usually unable to participate in the new bonus game. In order not to exclude these players from the bonus game, in one embodiment, players may be "grand-

fathered" into the bonus game whereby they retain the opportunity to play the bonus game for a predetermined time period (e.g., up to one minute). After the player completes the basic wagering game, he or she may then start playing the bonus game. This arrangement allows the players to wrap up their basic wagering games without losing the opportunity to play the bonus game. It is also possible to freeze or suspend the basic wagering game while the player plays the bonus game, then resume the basic wagering game when the bonus game is concluded.

[0062] While only a single game bank 300 (see FIG. 3) has been described thus far, in some embodiments, it is possible to link several game banks together over a LAN or WAN to form a super bank 800, such as the one shown in FIG. 8. As can be seen, the super bank 800 is composed of several game banks 300a, 300b, 300c and 300d, each having its own bank server, that are connected to a super bank server 802. The super bank 800 operates in a similar way to the game bank 300 of FIG. 3, except that it conducts a bonus game involving players at multiple game banks 300a-d.

[0063] To determine player eligibility, wager information is provided periodically from the game banks 300a-d to the super bank server 802. Eligibility may again be based on the wager amounts or the turnover at the wagering game terminals, irrespective of player identity or the types of game played at the wagering game terminals. It is also possible to determine eligibility on a per bank basis instead of a per wagering game terminal basis so that all wagering game terminals at a game bank 300a-d may be eligible based on the total wager amounts or the total turnover for an entire game bank 300a-d.

[0064] From the foregoing, a number of advantages of the invention can be discerned, including a bonus game where players at a bank of wagering game terminals can play against each other while also rooting for each other, thus fostering both competition and camaraderie. In addition, since the performance of the players depends more on chance than on skill, the playing field is substantially level for all players. It is possible, however, to reward certain players who wager more by awarding those players with more opportunities to advance. Further, embodiments of the invention can result in an unspecified jackpot amount that depends entirely on the players' performances, thus giving the players a greater sense of control and ownership over the bonus game.

[0065] While the present invention has been described with reference to one or more particular embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that many changes may be made thereto without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Each of these embodiments and obvious variations thereof is contemplated as falling within the spirit and scope of the claimed invention, which is set forth in the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A wagering game system, comprising:

a plurality of wagering game terminals, each wagering game terminal capable of conducting a wagering game in which an outcome is randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes, including a special-event outcome; and

a network to which said wagering game terminals are connected, said network initiating a special-event game session on eligible ones of said wagering game terminals upon occurrence of said special-event outcome on one of said wagering game terminals;

wherein said network is configured to apply all monetary amounts won in said special-event game session to a special-event jackpot and to award said jackpot to one or more players at a conclusion of said special-event game session.

2. The wagering game system according to claim 1, wherein said special-event game session includes an initial round and each player's probability of advancing beyond said initial round depends on said player's wager amounts prior to beginning said special-event game session.

3. The wagering game system according to claim 1, wherein said special-event game session includes multiple rounds and each player's probability of advancing beyond each round depends on said player's wager amounts prior to beginning said special-event game session.

4. The wagering game system according to claim 1, wherein said conclusion of said special-event game session occurs when only one player remains, said server awarding all of said jackpot to said one remaining player.

5. The wagering game system according to claim 1, wherein said conclusion of said special-event game session occurs when only one player remains, said server awarding a portion of said jackpot to one or more eliminated players based on a performance of said eliminated players or on a final size of said jackpot.

6. The wagering game system according to claim 1, wherein said conclusion of said special-event game session occurs when no player remains, said server awarding a portion of said jackpot to one or more eliminated players based on a performance thereof.

7. The wagering game system according to claim 1, wherein said conclusion of said special-event game session occurs when a certain number of rounds is completed, said server dividing said jackpot between all players remaining at said conclusion.

8. The wagering game system according to claim 1, wherein said wagering game is a slot machine game and said special-event outcome includes a special symbol appearing on said slot machine game.

9. The wagering game system according to claim 1, wherein each eligible wagering game terminal displays a current number of players participating in said special-event game session.

10. A method of operating wagering game terminals, comprising:

conducting a wagering game on a plurality of wagering game terminals, each wagering game having an outcome that is randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes, including a special-event outcome;

displaying a special-event game on eligible ones of said wagering game terminals upon occurrence of said special-event outcome on any wagering game terminal;

applying all monetary amounts won by players playing said special-event game to a special-event jackpot; and

awarding said special-event jackpot to one or more players at a conclusion of said special-event game based on a performance of said one or more players in said special-event game.

11. The method according to claim 10, wherein said special-event game is composed of an array of picks from which a player may select one-by-one to reveal a prize, including game credits, a game-termination symbol, and a game-advancement symbol.

12. The method according to claim 11, further comprising giving each player a number of game-advancement symbols or game-termination symbols based on said player's wagering activity on said wagering game.

13. The method according to claim 11, further comprising compiling said player's wagering activity on said wagering game before a start of said special-event game.

14. The method according to claim 13, wherein said player's wagering activity on said wagering game is compiled for a predetermined interval before said start of said special-event game.

15. The method according to claim 10, wherein said performance of said one or more players in said special-event game is determined relative to other players playing said special-event game.

16. The method according to claim 10, wherein said performance of said one or more players in said special-event game is determined relative to a gaming establishment standard for said special-event game.

17. A computer readable storage medium encoded with instructions for directing a wagering game terminal to perform the method of claim 10.

18. A method of building a jackpot in a bonus game involving multiple wagering game terminals, comprising:

determining which ones of said multiple wagering game terminals are eligible for said bonus game;

initiating said bonus game on each eligible wagering game terminal;

contributing to said jackpot a predetermined portion of monetary amount won by player playing said bonus game; and

awarding said jackpot to one or more players at a conclusion of said bonus game based on a performance of said one or more players in said bonus game.

19. The method according to claim 18, wherein said predetermined portion includes substantially all of said monetary amounts won by said players playing said bonus game.

20. The method according to claim 18, wherein said predetermined portion includes substantially less than all of said monetary amounts won by said players playing said bonus game and a remainder of said jackpot is funded by another mechanism.

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