METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR DEALING OUT
AT LEAST ONE HAND OF CARDS

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ABSTRACT

The invention relates to a method of dealing out at least one hand of cards. Further, the invention relates to a corresponding system. The method of dealing out at least one hand of cards comprises generating electronic game data comprising at least one hand in means for generating game data; transmitting said electronic game data from said means for generating game data to at least one card dealing module comprising a memory via a first physical and/or wireless communication link; storing said electronic game data in the memory of said at least one card dealing module; dealing said at least one hand of cards via said at least one card dealing module, said at least one hand being dealt in accordance with said electronic game data. In this way, the electronic data generation may be postponed until the moment before a start of a tournament e.g. a bridge tournament. Thereby, the hands to be played in e.g. a bridge tournament may be kept secret substantially up to the start of the tournament, when then game data may be transmitted to the at least one card dealing module.
Fig. 1
Fig. 3
Fig. 4
1. Start
2. Connect to VBC
3. Enter device serial number
4. Choose subscription type
5. Confirm
6. Enter member data and credit card details
7. Confirm
8. Receive username and password for internet use
9. The device are assigned a unique identity
10. The device are now ready for direct use
11. Stop

Fig. 6
start

1. connect to VBC

2. identity confirmed

3. select tournament

4. select DRM level

5. confirm

6. DC are transferred from VBC to local device

7. transfer DC to card machine

8. Stop

Fig. 7
A flowchart illustrating the process of playing a game:

1. Start
2. Cards are dealt
3. Make bids
4. Set the contract
5. Choose the lead card
6. Play the cards
7. Enter the result
8. Review statistics
9. End of tournament
10. Transfer game data to VBC
11. Buy an analysis on the games played
12. Stop

Fig. 8
Start

2

connect to VBC

3

identity confirmed

4

choose tournament type and number of games

5

set time and date for VTR

6

invite participants

7

confirm VTR

8

stop

Fig. 9
1. Start
2. Transmit data to each location
3. Transfer DC to card machine
4. Make biddings
5. Set the contract
6. Choose lead card
7. Play the cards
8. Enter the result
9. Transfer result to VBC
10. Receive statistics from VBC
11. End of tournament
12. Transfer game data to VBC
13. Buy an analysis on the games played
14. Stop

Fig. 10
Fig. 11

1. Start
2. Connect to VBC
3. Identity confirmed
4. Select offering
5. Select DRM level
6. Confirm
7. DC are transferred from VBC to local device
8. Transfer DC to card machine
9. Stop
Fig. 12

1. start
2. get the key points of the training lesson
3. read them
4. start playing
5. make bids
6. approval or correction of the bid
7. set the contract
8. comments on the chosen contract
9. see the recommended sequence
10. choose lead card
11. comments on the chosen lead card
12. play the cards
13. enter results
14. game data is transferred to YBC
15. comments on the game
16. stop
start

2

connect to VBC

3

choose match making

4

choose location (country & city)

5

choose date

6

choose single or pair

7

the queries are posted on VBC

8

other VBC members respond on the request

9

date and place are confirmed

10

stop

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Fig. 13
METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR DEALING OUT AT LEAST ONE HAND OF CARDS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to a method of dealing out at least one hand of cards. Further, the invention relates to a corresponding system.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Bridge is one of the world’s most popular card playing games and an estimated 70 million people regularly play bridge around the world.

Bridge is a 4-person game comprising a complex bidding cycle with a plurality of bidding conventions. A central part of any bridge club is the duplicate bridge in which the cards/hands are duplicated such that every person participating in a duplicate bridge tournament will, at the end of the tournament, have had the same cards/hands. For example, at a first table all participants sitting in the west position will have the same hand and the participants sitting at position east, north and south will likewise have the same hands when they are turned, sit at table one. Thereby, the look-factor is substantially eliminated because every participant has had the same hand and/or good cards/hands at one time or another in the tournament.

A barometer tournament in bridge is a tournament, where all participants play the same duplicate hands at the same time i.e. all participants play game number 1 comprising the same set of hands at each respective position at the same time and when all participants have finished game 1, each participant’s result from the first game is displayed on a so-called “barometer” (from which the tournament type has received its name). A tournament may typically comprise 35 games and therefore, in a barometer tournament, it is possible to follow each participant’s position in the tournament after each played game. However, it is a complicated and expensive to pack many games identically and therefore, barometer tournaments are usually only used in the finals where the number of participants are reduced.

US 2006/0183524 discloses a card playing system or network and method particularly suited for playing bridge and other multi-table card games in clubs and tournaments.

EP 0 380 449 discloses a computer terminal for surveying a bridge table in cooperation with a central computer managing a bridge tournament.

However, it remains a problem to allow any number of participants to play in a barometer tournament due to the problem of packing a large number of games identically. Further, it remains a problem to ensure that the deals to be played in a bridge tournament are unknown to the participants of the tournament (and every body else) until the last minute up to the start of the bridge tournament thereby reducing the risk of fraud.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to, among other things, solve the abovementioned problems. The above-mentioned problems are solved by a method of dealing out at least one hand of cards, said method comprising generating electronic game data comprising at least one hand in means for generating game data; transmitting said electronic game data from said means for generating game data to at least one card dealing module comprising a memory via a first physical and/or wireless communication link; storing said electronic game data in the memory of said at least one card dealing module; dealing said at least one hand of cards via said at least one card dealing module, said at least one hand being dealt in accordance with said electronic game data.

By having means for generating game data generating said electronic game data, the data generation may be postponed until the moment before a start of a tournament e.g. a bridge tournament. Thereby, the hands to be played in e.g. a bridge tournament may be kept secret substantially up to the start of the tournament, when then game data may be transmitted to the at least one card dealing module (e.g. a card dealing module at each bridge table participating in said tournament) which may deal out the cards. Thus, the risk of fraud in e.g. a tournament may be reduced.

Further, by having the cards dealt by at least one (mechanical/electronic) card dealing module in connection with the means for generating game data, it is possible to generate an arbitrary number of hands comprising (physical/mechanical) cards and thereby enabling an arbitrary number of participants to participate in e.g. a bridge tournament.

Further, by having at least one (mechanical/electronic) card dealing module dealing out physical/mechanical cards in opposition to purely digital/electronic cards, it is likely that, for example, bridge tournaments in which the present invention is responsible for generating game data and dealing out cards will be able to also attract high-level players, for whom it may be a necessity/requirement to have a bridge hand comprising physical/mechanical cards.

Further, by having means for generating game data generating electronic game data and transmitting said electronic game data to one or more card dealing modules enables private users to participate in e.g. a bridge barometer tournament in which each bridge game may be required to be dealt and played in a certain amount of time, e.g. 8.5 minutes. The means for generating game data in connection with the one or more card dealing module removes the responsibility of dealing the cards from the participants thereby broadening the customer base for e.g. bridge barometer tournaments.

In an embodiment, the method further comprises establishing the first physical and/or wireless communication link after the means for generating game data has generated the electronic game data.

In this way, the card dealing module may be disconnected from the means for generating game data until, for example, right before the moment in which the cards to be dealt by the card dealing module are required to be dealt. For example, 3 minutes before the start of a barometer bridge tournament the card dealing module may be connected to the means for generating game data thus enabling transmission of the electronic game data from the means for generating game data to the card dealing module.

In an embodiment, the method further comprises terminating the first physical and/or wireless communication link after the means for generating game data has transmitted said electronic game data to said card dealing module.

In this way, the window of opportunity for a fraudulent person to gain access to the card dealing module and/or the means for generating game data is decreasing because the physical and/or wireless communication link between the card dealing module and the means for generating game data may only be open for a limited period e.g. the time it takes to transfer the data from the means for generating game data to the card dealing module.

In an embodiment, transmitting said electronic game data from said means for generating game data to at least one card dealing module is performed via a communication and scoring module.
In this way, the electronic game data may be transmitted from the means for generating game data to the communication and scoring module and from the communication and scoring module to the card dealing module. The communication link between the card dealing module and the communication and scoring module may, for example, be fast e.g. equal to or above 10 Gbit/s (e.g. via a 10 gigabit Ethernet communication link). The communication link between the communication and scoring module and the means for generating game data may, for example, be a communication link slower than the communication link between the card dealing module and the communication and scoring module. For example, the communication link between the communication and scoring module and the means for generating game data may be a 100 Mbit/s communication link. The communication and scoring module may comprise a number of secure communication protocols such as for example https or SSH secure file transfer protocol. Via a secure communication protocol and the communication link between the communication and scoring module and the means for generating game data, the communication and scoring module may receive the electronic game data from the means for generating game data. Using a slow communication link in combination with secure communication protocols may ensure safe delivery of the electronic game data from the means for generating game data to the communication and scoring module.

Via the communication link between the communication and scoring module and the card dealing module, the communication and scoring module may deliver the electronic data to the card dealing module. The delivery of electronic game data to the card dealing module may also be performed using a secure communication protocol. Using the fast communication link may ensure a fast delivery of electronic game data from the communication and scoring module to the card dealing module thereby reducing the risk of unauthorized access to the electronic game data before the cards are dealt in accordance with the electronic game data.

Embodiments of the present invention also relates to a system corresponding to embodiments of the method.

As mentioned, the invention also relates to a system for dealing out at least one hand of cards, said system comprising means for generating electronic game data comprising at least one hand of cards; means for transmitting said electronic game data to said means for generating game data; a memory comprising a memory of said at least one card dealing module comprising a memory via a first physical and/or wireless communication link; means for storing said electronic game data in the memory of said at least one card dealing module; means for dealing said at least one hand of cards via said at least one card dealing module, said at least one hand being dealt in accordance with said electronic game data.

The system and embodiments thereof correspond to the method and embodiments thereof and have the same advantages for the same reasons.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

FIG. 1 shows a bridge table with a card dealing module in the centre.

FIG. 2 shows a plurality of bridge tables e.g. in a local barometer tournament, each bridge table comprising a card dealing module and a communication and scoring module.

FIG. 3 shows an alternative to the embodiment of FIG. 2 in that the system of FIG. 3 only comprises one central card dealing module.

FIG. 4 shows a plurality of barometer tournaments being played simultaneously at a plurality of geographical locations in a plurality of bridge clubs/bridge tournaments.

FIG. 5 shows a Virtual Bridge Club connected physically and/or wirelessly to at least one geographical location.

FIG. 6 shows the steps of a method of setting up a user profile in a Virtual Bridge Club.

FIG. 7 shows the steps of a method of playing a pre-played (e.g. the Monte Carlo Bridge tournament 1991) and/or a pre-scored tournament.

FIG. 8 shows a method of playing a pre-played tournament provided by a Virtual Bridge Club and a card dealing module.

FIG. 9 shows a method of setting up a virtual tournament room.

FIG. 10 shows the steps of playing in a virtual tournament room of a Virtual Bridge Club.

FIG. 11 shows a method of buying a training lesson at a Virtual Bridge Club.

FIG. 12 shows the execution of a training lesson.

FIG. 13 shows a method to find one or more participants to one or more bridge games e.g. if a bridge player arrives at a city and would like to play bridge but does not know of any bridge players in said city.

FIG. 14 shows a schematic drawing of a Virtual Bridge Club.

FIG. 15 shows a schematic drawing of a Bridge Tablet.

FIG. 16 shows a schematic drawing of an embodiment of a card dealing module.

FIG. 17 shows a schematic drawing of an embodiment of card dealing module.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

FIG. 1 shows a bridge table (4) with a card dealing module (1) in the center of the table. Alternatively, said card dealing module (1) may be placed in connection with said table. During a bridge game, said card dealing module (1) may deal out cards to the participants of the bridge game. Said card dealing module (1) may be a BridgeSpinner as described in PA 200601510 and hereinafter incorporated by reference. Alternatively said card dealing module (1) may be any type of card dealing module (1).

FIG. 16 shows an embodiment of a card dealing module (1600). A card dealing module (1600) may, for example, comprise a BridgeSpinner (24) as disclosed in FIG. 1 and FIG. 2 of PA 200601510 and associated text hereinafter incorporated by reference. The BridgeSpinner may provide a mechanical distribution of a deck of cards e.g. according to game data such as for example bridge game data. Further, the card dealing module (1600) may comprise one or more displays that indicates compass direction, vulnerability and dealer position (29), one or more control lamps (30), one or more card compartments (27) which may include cards dealt by the card dealer to each of the hands (N, S, E, W), a number representing the current bridge game being played (26), a dealer marker (28) and a central card compartment (25) e.g. from which a deck of cards may be dealt to the hands (N, S, E, W).
[0043] In embodiment, the card dealing module (1) comprises a chassis and a kernel both comprising an electronic serial number e.g. an ESN or an MEID. The kernel may, for example, comprise a number of card dealing functions of the card dealing module and the chassis may comprise the card compartments (27).

[0044] FIG. 17 shows an embodiment of a card dealing module (1700). In the embodiment, the card dealing module (1700) may comprise mechanical means for dealing out a deck of cards (1701). Additionally, the card dealing module (1700) may comprise an electronic circuit (1702) for controlling said mechanical means (1701). Additionally, said card dealing module (1700) may comprise a memory (1703) e.g. flash memory and/or a volatile memory such as RAM. The memory (1703) may be in electrical connection with said electronic circuit (1702). Additionally, the card dealing module (1700) may comprise means (1704) for receiving and/or transmitting data such as, for example, an antenna e.g. a loop antenna. The means (1704) for receiving and transmitting data may be in electrical connection with said electronic circuit (1701). Via the loop antenna (1704), the card dealing module (1700) may receive bridge game data, e.g. from a remote server such as a Virtual Bridge Club, which may be stored in the memory (1703) via said electronic circuit (1701). The electronic circuit (1702) may read the bridge game data from the memory (1703) and via the mechanical means (1701) deals the deck of cards according to the bridge game data.

[0045] Before a tournament starts, e.g. 3 minutes before, bridge game data for at least one deal are loaded into the card dealing module (1) by connecting the card dealing module together with a communication and scoring module (2), e.g. Bridge Tablet from BrideSpinner. The data-connection (15) of said card dealing module (1) and said communication and scoring module (2) may be physical e.g. via an electrical cable. Alternatively, said physical connection may be via an optical cable. Alternatively or additionally, said data-connection may be wireless e.g. via Bluetooth, IR communication, WLan, etc.

[0046] FIG. 15 shows an embodiment of a communication and scoring module e.g. a Bridge Tablet. A Bridge Tablet (2) may, for example, comprise a memory module, a wireless communication module (Bluetooth, WLan, etc.), a CPU, an operating system, bridgelets and/or other small dedicated pieces of software handling specific functions in the usability, a dedicated web browser for use with a Virtual Bridge Club, a game clock that may be synchronized by the Virtual Bridge Club, and a battery. The Bridge Tablet may have a graphical user interface (GUI) that may be adapted to one or more bridge situations i.e. one or more modes of use. For example, when players around a bridge table are rotating after having played a bridge hand then the Bridge Tablet may be in a first mode in which a display may show the names of the players and where they are positioned (north, south, east, west); the number of the round in a tournament; and the games the players are going to play as shown in (18). The GUI may further provide a second mode, for example a key-in mode (23). Using (21), the players may enter their bids and/or lead cards and using (22), the Bridge Tablet may be in an "enter contract" mode where a contract may be entered. Further, the Bridge Tablet may comprise an on/off button (16), a sound speaker (17), a graphical user interface with a touch screen (18, 23), a reject and/or step-back button (19) and a confirm button (20). The communication and scoring module may comprise an electronic serial number e.g. an ESN or an MEID.

[0047] The communication and scoring module (2) may communicate with said card dealing module (1) via a secure communication protocol e.g. via handshaking communication protocol. Alternatively, said communication between said communication and scoring module (2) and said card dealing module (1) may be performed via any secure communication protocol. Alternatively, said bridge game data may be transmitted from said communication and scoring module (2) to said card dealing module (1) via a non-secure communication protocol e.g. as ASCII text.

[0048] In an embodiment, said card dealing module (1) may be connected directly to a Virtual Bridge Club via a physical and/or wireless data-connection such as for example an optical cable, an electrical cable, Bluetooth, IR communication, WLan, etc. Data-transmission between said card dealing module (1) and said Virtual Bridge Club may be performed via a secure protocol such as handshaking. Alternatively, said data-transmission between said card dealing module (1) and said Virtual Bridge Club may be performed via an un-secure protocol e.g. data may be sent as plain text.

[0049] FIG. 14 shows a schematic drawing of a Virtual Bridge Club. The Virtual Bridge Club may comprise one or more micro-processors (401) connected with a main memory (402) and e.g. one storage device (406) via an internal data/address bus (404) or the like. Additionally, the device (400) may also be connected to or comprise a display (407) and communication means (401) for communication with one or more remote systems (e.g. a communication and scoring module (2) and/or a card dealing module (1)) via a e.g. a communication network. The memory (402) and/or storage device (406) are used to store and retrieve the relevant data together with executable computer code for providing the functionality according to the invention. The micro-processor (401) is responsible for generating, handling, processing, calculating, etc. the relevant parameters according to the present invention.

[0050] The storage device (406) comprises one or more storage devices capable of reading and possibly writing blocks of data, e.g. a DVD, CD, optical disc, PVR, etc. player/recorder and/or a hard disk (IDE, ATA, etc.), floppy disk, smart card, PCMCIA card, etc.

[0051] The memory (402) and/or storage device (406) may, for example, comprise executable code enabling the Virtual Bridge Club, when said executed code is executed in said one or more micro-processors (401) to generate, for example, bridge game data.

[0052] Said generated bridge game data may, for example, be stored in the main memory (402) of said Virtual Bridge Club and from there transmitted via said communication means to one or more card dealing modules (1) and/or one or more communication and scoring modules (2).

[0053] Alternatively or additionally, game data may be received from one or more communication and scoring modules (and/or from one or more card dealing modules) by said communication means and subsequently the received game data may be stored in said memory and/or said storage device.

[0054] The bridge game data may be generated in the Virtual Bridge Club. The Virtual Bridge Club may, for example, be a remote server relative to the bridge table (4) comprising a computer program comprising program code means
adapted to cause the remote server to generate at least one bridge game data comprising e.g. a randomized set of bridge-hands.

[0055] In an embodiment, the bridge game data may be transmitted to a local computer in physical and/or wireless data-connection with said communication and scoring module (2) thereby enabling transmission of bridge game data from said local server to said communication and scoring module (2) and there from to said card dealing module (1).

[0056] Alternatively, said bridge game data may be generated in a local, with respect to the communication and scoring module (2), server including a Virtual Bridge Club, said local server being in physical and/or wireless data-connection with said communication and scoring module (2) thereby enabling transmission of data from said local server to said communication and scoring module (2) and therefrom to said card dealing module (1).

[0057] Alternatively, the communication and scoring module (2) may communicate directly with said Virtual Bridge Club via secure communications protocol e.g. via handshaking communication protocol. Alternatively, said communication between said communication and scoring module (2) and said Virtual Bridge Club may be performed via any secure communication protocol. Alternatively, said bridge game data is transmitted from said Virtual Bridge Club to said communication and scoring module (2) via a non-secure protocol e.g. as ASCII text.

[0058] In the embodiment, where the Virtual Bridge Club is connected to the card dealing module (1) via the communication and scoring module (2), the data-connection (wireless and/or, physical) between the communication and scoring module (2) and the card dealing module (1) may be terminated after the transfer of bridge game data from the communication and scoring module (2) to the card dealing module (1). The termination of the data-connection between the card dealing module (1) and the communication and scoring module (2) may be of such a kind that subsequent data transfer between the card dealing module (1) and the communication and scoring module (2) is not possible before a second data-connection between the card dealing module (1) and the communication and scoring module (2) has been established. The termination of the data-connection between the card dealing module (1) and the Virtual Bridge Club may be digital i.e. data-transfer between the card dealing module (1) and the Virtual Bridge Club is prevented digitally. Alternatively or additionally, the termination of the data-connection between the card dealing module (1) and the Virtual Bridge Club may be physical e.g. by disconnecting one or more data-cables (e.g. optical cable and/or electrical cables) of the card dealing module (1) and/or the communication and scoring module (2).

[0059] In the embodiment, where the Virtual Bridge Club is connected directly to the card dealing module (1), the data-connection (wireless and/or physical) between the Virtual Bridge Club and the card dealing module (1) may be terminated after the transfer of bridge game data from the Virtual Bridge Club to the card dealing module (1). The termination of the data-connection between the card dealing module (1) and the Virtual Bridge Club may be of such a kind that subsequent data transfer between the card dealing module (1) and the communication and scoring module (2) is not possible before a second data-connection between the card dealing module (1) and the communication and scoring module (2) has been established. The termination of the data-connection between the card dealing module (1) and the Virtual Bridge Club may be digital i.e. data-transfer between the card dealing module (1) and the Virtual Bridge Club is prevented digitally. Alternatively or additionally, the termination of the data-connection between the card dealing module (1) and the Virtual Bridge Club may be physical e.g. by disconnecting one or more data-cables (e.g. optical cable and/or electrical cables) of the card dealing module (1) and/or the communication and scoring module (2).
ing module (2) may be established after the Virtual Bridge Club has generated the bridge game data and the data-connection may be terminated when the bridge game data has been transferred from the communication and scoring module to the card dealing module (1).

[0066] In the embodiment where the card dealing module (1) is connected directly to the Virtual Bridge Club, the data-connection between the Virtual Bridge Club and the card dealing module (1) may for example be established when the Virtual Bridge Club has generated the bridge game data and is ready to transfer the bridge game data to the card dealing module e.g. 3 minutes before tournament start. Thus, in this embodiment, the data-connection between the card dealing module (1) and the Virtual Bridge Club may be established after the Virtual Bridge Club has generated the bridge game data and the data-connection may be terminated when the bridge game data has been transferred from the Virtual Bridge Club to the card dealing module (1).

[0067] In an additional embodiment, there may further be one or more bidding modules (3) in connection to the bridge table (4). For example, each participant at the table (4) may have a bidding module (3). A participant may use a bidding module to provide a bid. A bid registered in a bidding module may be transmitted to the communication and scoring module (2) either via a physical or a wireless data-connection i.e. via an electrical cable, an optical cable, via IR or via Bluetooth or WLAN. Alternatively, the bidding modules may transmit the bid to a remote computer/server such as a Virtual Bridge Club.

[0068] In an additional embodiment, the bridge table (4) may comprise a number of decks of playing cards (5). For example, the bridge table (4) may comprise one deck of playing cards. Each deck of playing cards may, for example, comprise 13 playing cards of respectively Spades, Hearts, Diamonds and Clubs. A hand of cards may comprise 13 cards e.g. dealt by the card dealing module according to bridge game data. Thus, a deck of playing cards may, for example, be dealt into four hands by a card dealing module, the card dealing module for example dealing the cards according to bridge game data received from a Virtual Bridge Club via a communication and scoring module.

[0069] In an embodiment, the bridge table (4) may comprise two decks of playing cards, a first and a second deck of playing cards. The two decks of playing cards may, for example, be placed in the card dealing module (1) before a tournament start e.g. the first and second decks of cards may be placed in the central card compartment (25). 3 minutes before a tournament start, the card dealing module (1) is connected to the communication and scoring module (2) and bridge game data are transferred from the Virtual Bridge Club to the card dealing module (1) via the communication and scoring module (2). After transfer of the bridge game data, the card dealing module (1) may be disconnected from the communication and scoring module (2).

[0070] The bridge game data may comprise data of a number of bridge games, for example, the bridge game data may comprise data of all the hands of all the bridge games to be played at the bridge table (4) during a tournament. For example, the bridge game data may comprise data of 10 bridge games, each bridge games comprises four hands, a hand for player N, S, W and E respectively. In an example, the bridge game data may comprise a first bridge game data and a second bridge game data and a third bridge game data including data of three bridge games to be played at the bridge table (4).

[0071] Before tournament start, e.g. two minutes before, the card dealing module (1) deals the first deck of playing cards according to the first bridge game data in the bridge game data received from the communication and scoring module (2). The cards of the first deck of playing cards may be dealt into four first hands of the first deck. The four first hands are placed in the respective card compartments (27) of the players (N, S, W, and E) and the players around the bridge table (4) may take their respective first hand of cards at tournament start from their respective card compartment (27) of the card dealing module.

[0072] As the four players around the bridge table (4) plays the first bridge game using the first hands dealt from the first deck of playing cards by the card dealing module (1) according to the first bridge game data, the card dealing module deals the second deck of playing cards according to the second bridge game data. The cards of the second deck of playing cards may be dealt into four second hands of the second deck of cards. The four second hands are placed in the respective card compartments (27) of the players (N, S, W, E).

[0073] A bridge game typically takes 7½ minutes in average to complete. A bridge game may, for example, take between 4 and 12 minutes. The card dealing module (1) may deal the cards in one minute and thus the card dealing module is able to have the second deck of playing cards dealt according to the second bridge game data before the players finish the first deck of playing cards dealt according to the first bridge game data and thus there may be no waiting time between the number of bridge games to be played. When the players have played the first deck of playing cards, the first deck of playing cards may be returned to the central card compartment (25) of the card dealing module (1), and the players may subsequently take their respective second hand dealt from the second deck dealt according to the second bridge game data from the respective card compartments (27).

[0074] As the four players around the bridge table (4) plays the second bridge game using the second hands dealt from the second deck of playing cards by the card dealing module (1) according to the second bridge game data, the card dealing module deals the first deck of playing cards according to the third bridge game data. The cards of the first deck may be dealt into four third hands which may be placed in the respective card compartments (27) of the players (N, S, W, E).

[0075] When the players have played the second deck of playing cards, the second deck of playing cards may be returned to, the central card compartment (25) of the card dealing module (1), and the players may subsequently take their respective third hand dealt from the first deck of cards according to the third bridge game data from the respective card compartments (27) and so on.

[0076] In an additional embodiment, the card dealing module (1) may comprise means for counting the returned playing cards from a deck of playing cards in the central card compartment (25) in order to check whether all the played playing cards from the deck of playing cards have been returned to the card dealing module (1). If all the playing cards in the deck have been returned, the card dealing module (1) may start to deal the playing cards according to bridge game data. If not all the playing cards have been returned to the card dealing module (1), the card dealing module (1) may sound an alarm.
In an embodiment, the card dealing module (1) contains a first deck of playing cards in the central card compartment (25) e.g. before a tournament start. After the card dealing module (1) has received bridge game data from the Virtual Bridge Club via the communication and scoring module (2), the first deck of playing cards are dealt into four first hands according to the bridge game data. The first hands are dealt to the card compartments (27) of the card dealing module. When a tournament starts, the players are placed at the bridge table (4) and a player or a tournament official places a second deck of playing cards in the central card compartment (25). When the second deck of cards is placed in the central card compartment (25), the player’s respective card compartments (27) are opened enabling the players to retrieve their respective first hands. During a first bridge game in which the players play their respective first hands, the card dealing module (1) may deal the second deck of playing cards into; four second hands according to bridge game data and the four second hands may be dealt to the respective four card compartments of the respective players (N, S, W, E). When the players return the first deck of playing cards to the central card compartment (25), the player’s respective card compartments (27) are opened enabling the players to retrieve their respective second hands. In this embodiment, the card dealing module may only be required to hold a single deck of playing cards in the central card compartment at a time and thereby, the card dealing module may be designed with, for example, a lower height, compared to a card dealing module required to hold two or more decks of playing cards at a time.

FIG. 2 shows a plurality of bridge tables e.g. in a local barometer tournament, each bridge table comprising a card dealing module (1) and a communication and scoring module (2). The respective communication and scoring modules (2) for each of the plurality of bridge tables may be physically and/or wirelessly connected to their respective card dealing modules (1). Further, the communication and scoring modules (2) may be physically and/or wirelessly connected to a central base station (7) in physical and/or wireless connection to a local computer (6). The local computers (6) may act as a director for a bridge tournament. Alternatively or additionally, the local computer may be a Virtual Bridge Club generating bridge game data for the plurality of bridge tables. The computer (6), the base station (7), the communication and scoring modules (2) and the card dealing modules (1) may represent a local bridge club and/or a local bridge table. Via e.g. an internet connection (8), the local bridge club and/or local tournament may communicate with other local bridge clubs and/or tournaments. Alternatively or additionally, said local bridge club and/or local tournament may communicate with a Virtual Bridge Club generating bridge game data for at least one local bridge club and/or local tournament.

FIG. 3 shows an alternative to the embodiment of FIG. 2 in that the system of FIG. 3 comprises one central card dealing module (1) which under a tournament may provide cards to a plurality of bridge tables (tables 1-n). Each bridge table has a communication and scoring module (2) for managing each bridge table (4) and enabling each bridge table (4) to communicate bids and/or results to a local computer (6) and/or remote server e.g. a Virtual Bridge Club via a physical and/or wireless data-connection (8).

FIG. 4 shows a plurality of geographical locations (locations a-n) e.g. a plurality of bridge clubs (9), connected via a Virtual Bridge Club (10) in one or more barometer tournaments being played simultaneously. Through the Virtual Bridge Club (10), each participant in a barometer tournament is able to compare his/hers result with one or more other participant’s results in the tournament. The Virtual Bridge Club (10) may act as a bridge game generator, providing bridge game data to the plurality of geographical locations connected either physically or wirelessly (8) to said Virtual Bridge Club. The bridge game data provided to said plurality of locations may be identical and may be provided simultaneously i.e. enabling the plurality of locations to participate in the same barometer tournament irrespective of their geographical location. The one or more card dealing module connected, either directly or indirectly (e.g. through one or more communication and scoring modules) to said Virtual Bridge Club receives said bridge game data from said Virtual Bridge Club and enables a secure and simultaneously dealing out of cards at a plurality of locations according to the bridge game data.

The bridge game data may, for example, comprise information about which hands the participants at position N, S, W, and E should have and/or different games in a tournament, information about dealer and vulnerability, names of participants, tournament movements (i.e. the meaning of the schedule by which the players taking part of the tournament should move during the tournament), and/or a synchronized timer showing the actual time left of a tournament and/or tournament round.

Alternatively, the Virtual Bridge Club may be executed in one of the geographical locations e.g. in “location a” of FIG. 4, and thereby the network of the plurality of geographical locations may be coupled in a point-to-point-like network-structure with the Virtual Bridge Club situated at one of the locations.

FIG. 5 shows a Virtual Bridge Club (10) connected via a physical and/or wireless data-connection (8) to at least one geographical location (9).

A geographical location may comprise a bridge club (9) connected to said Virtual Bridge Club (10) via a wireless (IR, Bluetooth, WLAN, etc.) and/or physical (optical cable, electrical cable) data-connection. The bridge club (9) may comprise a local server (6) transmitting the bridge game data received from the Virtual Bridge Club to one or more communication and scoring modules (2) in said bridge club. Alternatively, said bridge game data may be transmitted directly from said Virtual Bridge Club (10) to one or more communication and scoring modules (2) may be connected to one or more card dealing modules (1) to which the bridge data may be transmitted. Alternatively, said bridge game data may be transmitted directly from said Virtual Bridge Club (10) to said one or more card dealing modules (1).

Alternatively or additionally, a geographical location may comprise one or more private user bridge tables (11). A private user bridge table (11) may be connected to said Virtual Bridge Club (10) via a wireless (IR, Bluetooth, WLAN, etc.) and/or physical (optical cable, electrical cable) data-connection. The private user bridge table (11) may comprise a communication and scoring module (2) receiving the bridge game data and the communication and scoring module (2) may transmit, said bridge game data to a card dealing module (1) connected to said communication and scoring module (2). Alternatively, said bridge game data may be
transmitted directly from said Virtual Bridge Club (10) to said one or more card dealing modules (1).

[0086] Thereby, one or more bridge clubs (9) and/or one or more private user bridge tables (11) may participate in the same tournament via the Virtual Bridge Club (10) and further, the bridge tournament may be a duplicate tournament and further, the tournament may be a barometer tournament.

[0087] In an additional embodiment, at least one of the bridge clubs (9) and/or at least one of the private user bridge tables (11) in a bridge tournament may be monitored by a professional bridge player and/or commentator and/or tutor (12). The professional bridge player and/or commentator and/or tutor (12) may be physical present at one of the locations (9, 11). Alternatively, the professional bridge player and/or commentator and/or tutor (12) may be in any location and from there have access to the Virtual Bridge Club (10), e.g. via a physical and/or wireless data-connection, said Virtual Bridge Club (10) keeping track of the results of each of the participants in the tournament via the one or more communication and scoring modules (2) connected to the one or more card dealing modules (1) in the tournament. Thereby the professional player and/or commentator and/or tutor (12) is enabled to monitor all the participants in a barometer tournament and thereby the professional player and/or commentator and/or tutor (12) is enabled to monitor and/or comment all bids, game data, results, etc.

[0088] By enabling a bridge club in data connection with said Virtual Bridge Club (10) to have access to a tutor (12) may upgrade a club C-club to a class A club thereby increasing the value of the club and the players attracted to the bridge club. An A-club is defined as a club having a high teaching level, often led by one or more international players, and by having enough students to have ranked classes focusing on the specific, skill level of the players and having the teaching focused accordingly.

[0089] The game data of one or more bridge games played may be stored in the Virtual Bridge Club (10).

[0090] In an additional embodiment, the Virtual Bridge Club (10) may provide services to Virtual Bridge Club users e.g. participants of a bridge tournament and/or private users. The services provided by said bridge club may be made available via e.g. a homepage on the Internet which may be accessed by a user via a computer and/or a mobile telephone and/or a communication and scoring module (2), etc. The services provided by the Virtual Bridge Club (10) may comprise statistical analysis of the games played by a user, participation in a virtual barometer tournament, training bridge games, training bidding sequences, coaching by a professional bridge player and/or commentator and/or tutor, bridge game data on already played bridge tournaments (e.g. Monte Carlo 1991, etc.), etc.

[0091] In an additional embodiment, the services provided by the Virtual Bridge Club (10) is controlled by digital rights management (DRM) such that, for example, a user (e.g. a participant in a tournament and/or a private user and/or a director of a bridge club) may purchase a service at the Virtual Bridge Club (10) and agree on using the service in a restricted manner, e.g. only Wednesday, only a certain amount of times, etc., in order to acquire the service at e.g. a reduced price. Alternatively, a user may acquire the service without restrictions.

[0092] In an additional embodiment, a user profile may be created in said Virtual Bridge Club (10) for one or more users e.g. participant in a bridge tournament and/or for one or more private users. Said user profile may comprise a unique identification of said user. The user profile may further comprise a log of the bridge games played by said user in said Virtual Bridge Club (10) and/or the results obtained by said user represented by said user profile. Alternatively or additionally, said user profile may comprise a log over the services requested and/or purchased by said user represented by said user profile on said Virtual Bridge Club (10). Alternatively or additionally, said user profile may comprise one or more conventions of the user represented by said user profile. Additionally, said user profile may comprise demographics of the players, and information on other interests and habits, etc.

[0093] In an additional embodiment, the information stored in a user profile may be used to target the user represented by said user profile with e.g. commercial material and/or training bridge games aimed at helping the user overcoming a bridge game deficiency uncovered by the Virtual Bridge Club (10) e.g. through analysis of the user’s results and bridge game data, etc.

[0094] In an additional embodiment, the user profile data stored in the Virtual Bridge Club (10) may be used to award masterpoints to a given user satisfying the requirements for awarding masterpoints.

[0095] FIG. 6 shows the steps of a method of setting up a user profile in a Virtual Bridge Club (10).

[0096] The method starts at step 1.

[0097] At step 2, a user establishes a data-connection to a Virtual Bridge Club (10), e.g. an internet homepage, via a communication and scoring module (10) (e.g. a Bridge Tablet) and/or a mobile telephone and/or a computer with Internet access, etc.

[0098] At step 3, upon request from said Virtual Bridge Club (10), the user enters a serial number of a card dealing module (1), e.g. a BridgeSpinner, or chooses a guest membership.

[0099] At step 4, the user chooses a type of subscription.

[0100] At step 5, the user confirms the choice of step 4 if said choice is correct ELSE step 4 is repeated.

[0101] At step 6, the user enters information representing said user

[0102] At step 7, the user confirms the choice of step 6 IF said choice is correct ELSE step 6 is repeated.

[0103] At step 8, the Virtual Bridge Club (10) transmits a username and a user password to the user e.g. to the user’s communication and scoring module (2) and/or mobile telephone and/or computer with Internet access.

[0104] At step 9, the Virtual Bridge Club (10) assigns a unique identification to a communication and scoring module (2) in connection with said card dealing module (1) identified by the serial number.

[0105] At step 10, the user is enabled to acquire services from the Virtual Bridge Club (10) e.g. via said communication and scoring module (2) (e.g. said Bridge Tablet) and/or said mobile telephone and/or said computer connected to the Internet. For example, the user may request analysis of the bridge games played by the user and stored on the Virtual Bridge Club (10).

[0106] At step 11, the method ends.

[0107] In an additional embodiment, step 4 comprises choosing a subscription from the group of: paying for one time services and unlimited use of services paid with a monthly flat fee.
In an additional embodiment, step 6 comprises entering information such as:
- Name and address of the user;
- Age and gender;
- How many years the user has been playing bridge;
- Optionally entering the name of a bridge partner;
- The conventions by which the user plays;
- Optionally entering one or more memberships of bridge clubs;
- Number of masterpoints. Alternatively, the masterpoints may be collected directly from a national bridge league;
- Credit card details.

FIG. 7 shows the steps of a method of playing pre-played (e.g. the Cavendish cup 1983) or fictitious pre-scored tournaments.

The method starts at step 1.

At step 2, a user establishes a data-connection to a Virtual Bridge Club (10), e.g. an Internet homepage, via a communication and scoring module (2) (e.g. a Bridge Tablet and/or a mobile telephone and/or a computer with Internet access, etc.).

At step 3, the user confirms the user identity by entering a password and a username acquired during setting up a user profile at the Virtual Bridge Club (10), as disclosed in FIG. 6 and associated text.

At step 4, the user chooses a service e.g. the user may choose a tournament played by random participants on certain skill levels that match the users own skill level enabling a fair standard of reference. Further, the results scored by the user may be ranked for further use. Alternatively or additionally, the user may choose a high-profile tournament wherein the user and associated participants play at a level substantially equal to the level of the high-profile participants that participated in the tournament. Alternatively, the high-profile tournament may be played with a handicap. Alternatively, any pre-played and/or pre-scored tournament may be chosen as a service at the Virtual Bridge Club (10) and thereby chosen by the user.

At step 5, the user chooses what kind of digital right service (e.g. tournament) should be acquired with; for example, a service may be bought as a one-time use, a time-limited use, a pre-selected number of uses, and/or an unlimited use of the service. The price of a service may depend on the type of DRM e.g. one-time use of a tournament may be set at a lower price than unlimited use of said tournament.

At step 6, the user confirms the choice of step 5 if said choice is correct. ELSE step 5 is repeated. IF the user confirms the choice, a financial transaction between the user (e.g. via the communication and scoring module (2)) and the Virtual Bridge Club (10) takes place in which the user pays for the service.

At step 7, bridge game data representing the bought service is transferred from the Virtual Bridge Club (10) to the user’s Bridge Tablet (2) (communication and scoring module) and/or mobile phone and/or computer with Internet access.

At step 8, the bridge game data is transferred from the user’s communication and scoring module (2) (e.g. Bridge Tablet and/or mobile phone and/or computer with Internet access) to the card dealing module (1). After transfer of bridge game data from the communication and scoring module (2) to the card dealing module (1), the communication and scoring module (2) may be disconnected from the card dealing module (1). The card dealing module (1) may then deal a number of hands in accordance with the acquired bridge game data.

At step 9, the method ends.

By enabling a user to buy e.g. training lessons (e.g. comprising of pre-programmed game data and instructional comments on one or more issues trained) directly on a communication and scoring module (2), e.g. a Bridge Tablet, the user is enabled to increase his/her bridge skill level in an efficient and easy manner.

Further, by having one or more special game packages focusing on training specific problems in the game, comprising e.g. special game data and/or teaching manuals etc., lower level clubs may upgrade their service and/or teaching level.

FIG. 8 shows a method of playing a pre-played tournament provided by a Virtual Bridge Club and a card dealing module.

At step 1, the method starts.

At step 2, the cards are dealt by a card dealing module (1) in accordance with bridge game data acquired by a user from a Virtual Bridge Club (10).

At step 3, the bidding starts. The bidding continues until a first, a second and a third player have made a pass bid.

At step 4, the bid made by a fourth player constitutes a contract. The contract is entered into a communication and scoring module (2) and may from there be transmitted to said Virtual Bridge Club (10).

At step 5, a lead card is chosen. The value of the lead card is entered into the communication and scoring module (2) and may from there be transmitted to the Virtual Bridge Club (10).

At step 6, the cards dealt by the card dealing module (1) are played by said first, second, third and fourth players.

At step 7, the result of the bridge game played is entered into the communication and scoring module (2) and may from there be transmitted to said Virtual Bridge Club (10). The played cards are returned to the card dealing module (1). The Virtual Bridge Club (10) performs a statistical analysis on the transmitted result and transmits the statistical result to said communication and scoring module (2). Alternatively, if the contract, the lead card and the result have not been transmitted from the communication and scoring module (2) to the Virtual Bridge Club (10), the communication and scoring module (2) may perform the statistical analysis.

At step 8, the participants may review the statistical analysis on the communication and scoring module (2), i.e. un-played bridge game data exist in the card dealing module (1), the method returns to step 2 and continues from step 2. ELSE IF un-played bridge game data does not exist in the card dealing module (1), the method continues at step 8.

At step 9, the tournament ends. The card dealing module (1) may have stored gaming data comprising information on how the cards have been played in one or more bridge games in the tournament as disclosed in the above-mentioned incorporated reference PA 200601510. The communication and scoring module (2) may be reconnected to the card dealing module (1) in case the communication and scoring module (2) has been disconnected from the card dealing module (1). The gaming data may be transferred from the card dealing module (1) to the communication and scoring module (2).

At step 10, the gaming data may be transmitted from the communication and scoring module (2) to the Virtual Bridge Club (10) and any other relevant parties.
Bridge Club (10) via a physical and/or wireless data connection. The Virtual Bridge Club (10) may perform analysis of the games played based on the gaming data. The gaming data obtained from said first, second, third and fourth players playing the tournament may therefore become part of the statistical data for the tournament. Therefore, the statistical data of each tournament in the Virtual Bridge Club (10) grows with the number of sold tournaments via the Virtual Bridge Club (10).

At step 11, the participants may buy one or more analysis of the one or more bridge games played in said tournament.

At step 12, the method ends.

FIG. 9 shows a method of setting up a virtual tournament room.

The method starts in step 1.

At step 2, a user establishes a data-connection to a Virtual Bridge Club (10) e.g. from a communication and scoring module (2).

At step 3, the user confirms the user identity by entering a password and a username acquired during setting up a user profile at the Virtual Bridge Club (10), as disclosed in FIG. 6 and associated text.

At step 4, the user chooses scoring or IMP scoring to set the frame of a tournament and a number of bridge games to be played in said tournament.

At step 5, a date and a time is set for the tournament. The user setting up the virtual tournament room may set a condition for participation to be that the virtual tournament is played simultaneously at the participating bridge tables thereby enabling a comparison of a running score during the tournament.

At step 6, the user invites one or more participants to join the tournament and card dealing devices (1) associated with the participants are prepared to receive the bridge game data.

At step 7, the tournament is confirmed by the user and afterwards by the invited participants. The tournament may be put on standby until the data and time chosen in step 5.

The method ends in step 8.

FIG. 10 shows the steps of playing in a virtual tournament room in a Virtual Bridge Club (10).

The method starts at step 1.

At step 2, bridge game data comprising one or more bridge hands in a bridge tournament is transmitted from a Virtual Bridge Club (10) to one or more geographical locations (locations a-n) comprising one or more card dealing modules (1).

At step 3, said bridge game data is transmitted from the Virtual Bridge Club (10) to the one or more card dealing modules (1).

At step 4, each participant in said bridge tournament provides a bid at a bidding module (3).

At step 5, a contract is set between the participants e.g. using a number of communication and scoring modules (2).

At step 6, a lead card is chosen.

At step 7, the participants in the tournament play the respective hands via the one or more card dealing modules (1).

At step 8, the result obtained by each participant of the bridge game is entered into a communication and scoring module (2) at each bridge table (4).

At step 9, each communication and scoring module (2) communicates the result of each respective participant at each respective bridge table (4) connected to said communication and scoring module (2) to said Virtual Bridge Club (10).

At step 10, said Virtual Bridge Club (10) transmits statistical data representing the played game at each respective bridge table (4) to each communication and scoring module (2).

At step 11, IF un-played bridge game data exist in the one or more card dealing modules (1), the method returns to step 4 and continues from step 4. ELSE IF un-played bridge game data does not exist in the one or more card dealing modules (1), the tournament is finished.

At step 12, transferring game data from said one or more card dealing modules (1) to said Virtual Bridge Club (10) and performing at least one statistical analysis on said game data in said Virtual Bridge Club (10).

At step 13, enabling each participant in the tournament to buy at least one analysis of one or more games played in the tournament.

At step 14, the method stops.

In an additional embodiment, step 2 comprises transmitting bridge game data comprising one or more bridge hands in a bridge tournament from a Virtual Bridge Club (10) to one or more communication and scoring modules (2) in one or more geographical locations.

Step 3 of this additional embodiment comprises transferring said bridge card data from said one or more communication and scoring modules (2) to one or more card dealing modules (1) and disconnecting said communication and scoring module (2) from said card dealing module (1) after transmission of said bridge game data.

Step 3 of this additional embodiment may further comprise connecting said one or more communication and scoring modules (2) to the one or more card dealing modules (1) just before tournament start e.g. 3 minutes before the tournament starts.

Step 12 of this additional embodiment comprises reconnecting said one or more communication and scoring modules (2) to said one or more card dealing modules (1) and transferring game data from said one or more card dealing modules (1) to said Virtual Bridge Club (10) via said one or more communication and scoring modules (2).

Step 12 of this additional embodiment may further comprises disconnecting said one or more communication and scoring modules (2) from said one or more card dealing modules (1) when game data has been transferred from said one or more card dealing modules (1) to said Virtual Bridge Club (10).

In a further additional embodiment, step 8 comprises entering information about the contract played, lead card played and the result of the bridge game played. Step 12 of this further additional embodiment comprises transferring data comprising the order in which the cards of the bridge game have been played.

FIG. 11 shows a method of buying a training lesson at a Virtual Bridge Club (10).

The method starts in step 1.

At step 2, a user establishes a data-connection to a Virtual Bridge Club (10) e.g. via a communication and scoring module (2) and/or mobile phone and/or computer with internet access.
At step 3, the user confirms the user identity by entering a password and a username acquired during setting up a user profile at the Virtual Bridge Club (10), as disclosed in FIG. 6 and associated text.

At step 4, the user chooses one or more training lessons. A lesson may, for example, comprise training in bridge conventions. Alternatively or additionally, a lesson may comprise training in playing bridge.

At step 5, the user chooses what kind of digital right the lesson should be associated with; for example, a lesson may be bought as a one-time use, a time-limited use, a pre-selected number of uses, and/or an unlimited use of the lesson. The price of a lesson may depend on the DRM type e.g. one-time use of a lesson may be set at a lower price than unlimited use of said lesson. A lesson may, for example, comprise a number of training hands to be played.

At step 6, the user confirms the choice of step 5. If said choice is correct ELSE step 5 is repeated. IF the user confirms the choice, a financial transaction between the user and the Virtual Bridge Club (10) takes place in which the user pays for the lesson.

At step 7, bridge game data representing the bought one or more lessons is transferred from the Virtual Bridge Club (10) to the user’s communication and scoring module (2) (e.g. Bridge Tablet and/or mobile phone and/or computer with internet access).

At step 8, the bridge game data representing the hands to be played in the one or more lessons is transferred from the user’s communication and scoring module (2) (e.g. Bridge Tablet and/or mobile phone and/or computer with internet access) to the card dealing module (1). After transfer of bridge game data from the communication and scoring module (2) to the card dealing module (1), the communication and scoring module (2) may be disconnected from the card dealing module (1). The card dealing module (1) may then deal a number of hands in accordance with the acquired bridge game data. The bridge game data associated with teaching the lesson stored in the communication and scoring module (2) (e.g. Bridge Tablet and/or mobile telephone and/or computer with internet access) may be used to comment on the bridge game played by the user.

At step 9, the method stops.

FIG. 12 shows the execution of a training lesson.

The method starts in step 1.

At step 2, one or more participants of a training lesson are instructed in the objective(s) of the training lesson by a Bridge Tablet (communication and scoring module (2)) and/or a mobile telephone and/or a computer with internet access.

At step 3, a first, a second, a third and a fourth participant around a bridge table (4) go through the key points of the chosen training lesson and optionally discuss these.

At step 4, the lesson starts e.g. by one or more card dealing modules (1) dealing out a hand according to the training lesson.

At step 5, each participant provides a bid and this is registered in one or more communication and scoring modules (2) (e.g. Bridge Tablet and/or bidding modules (3)).

At step 6, one or more bids are evaluated and commented by the one or more communication and scoring modules (2). If a bid differs from the recommended bid, the differing bid is changed to the recommended bid by the one or more communication and scoring modules (2) before the next bid is set.

At step 7, a contract is set between the participants.

At step 8, the one or more communication and scoring modules (2) provide comments to each participant on their biddings and on the contract.

At step 9, the recommended bidding sequence is displayed on the one or more communication and scoring modules (2) (Bridge Tablets). Each bid in the bidding sequence may be selected for a comment, stored in said one or more communication and scoring modules (2). The recommended bid sequence may comprise artificial bids and may refer to a bidding convention suitable for the played hands.

At step 10, a lead card is chosen, the value of which may be input into the one or more communication and scoring modules (2).

At step 11, the recommended lead card is displayed on the one or more communication and scoring modules (2) (Bridge Tablets). If the recommended lead card differs from the chosen lead card, the chosen lead card is exchanged by the recommended lead card such that the hands may be played according to the purpose of the training lesson.

At step 12, the hands are played.

In step 13, the results of the played game are entered into the one or more communication and scoring modules (2) (Bridge Tablets) e.g. the number of tricks acquired by the participant having the contract.

At step 14, gaming data comprising the results of the played bridge game are transferred from the one or more communication and scoring modules (2) (Bridge Tablets) to the Virtual Bridge Club (10), said Virtual Bridge Club (10) performing at least one statistical analysis on the gaming data.

At step 15, the at least one statistical analysis is transmitted from the Virtual Bridge Club (10) to the one or more communication and scoring modules (2) (Bridge Tablets), and the one or more communication and scoring modules (2) (Bridge Tablets) comments on the result and the sequence of the game. The comments may be based on the statistical analysis.

At step 16, the method ends.

FIG. 13 shows a method to find one or more participants to one or more bridge games e.g. if a bridge player arrives at a city and would like to play bridge but does not know of any bridge players in said city.

The method starts in step 1.

At step 2, a user establishes a data-connection to a Virtual Bridge Club (10) e.g. via a communication and scoring module (2) and the user confirms the user identity by entering a password and a username acquired during setting up a user profile at the Virtual Bridge Club (10), as disclosed in FIG. 6 and associated text.

At step 3, the user chooses via said communication and scoring module (2) a match making service being on said Virtual Bridge Club (10), for example, in a collection of community based services on said Virtual Bridge Club (10).

At step 4, the user chooses via said communication and scoring module (2) a location in which the user would like to find one or more participants for one or more games of bridge.

At step 5, the user chooses via said communication and scoring module (2) a date and a time when the user wishes to play bridge.

At step 6, via said communication and scoring module (2) the user posts if the user is a single player or if the user is playing with a partner i.e. in a pair.
At step 7, via said communication and scoring module (2) the user posts the inquiry comprising the location, the date and time and the number of participants sought at the Virtual Bridge Club (10). Alternatively or additionally, the enquiry is pushed to Virtual Bridge Club (10) members living substantially at the location e.g. in the same city as the user posting the enquiry may presently be in.

At step 8, one or more participants interested in said inquiry may respond to said inquiry via their respective communication and scoring modules (2) thereby enabling said user and said one or more participants to play bridge.

At step 9, the time and the place for the one or more games of bridge are agreed upon e.g. in a virtual tournament room on said Virtual Bridge Club (10) as disclosed in FIG. 9 and associated text. Alternatively or additionally, said user and said one or more participants may agree on a personal meeting.

In the embodiment of FIG. 13, the enquiry may be made by e.g. a bridge club seeking other bridge clubs and/or users to play.

In an embodiment of a method of doing business, the method of doing business comprises establishing a physical and/or wireless communication link between a user communication and scoring module and means for generating electronic game data; providing a plurality of services to the user communication and scoring module by the means for generating electronic game data; enabling a user to choose at least one service from said plurality of services via said user communication and scoring module; enabling the user to choose a digital rights management type associated with said at least one chosen service; providing the at least one chosen service to the user communication and scoring module via said physical and/or wireless communication link from said means for generating electronic game data; charging said user via said physical and/or wireless communication link for said chosen at least one service, said charging depending on said digital rights management type; enabling the user to electronically pay the means for generating electronic game data for the chosen at least one service via said user communication and scoring module.

In an embodiment, a player owning a first card dealing module (1) comprising a first kernel and a first chassis may take the first kernel comprising a first electronic serial number from the first card dealing module (1) to e.g. a physical bridge club comprising a second chassis with a second electronic serial number of a second card dealing module (1). The first kernel may be connected to the second chassis.

When the second card dealing module (1) comprising the first kernel and the second chassis is connected to e.g. a communication and scoring module (2), one or more services (e.g. Monte Carlo Bridge tournament 1991) may be downloaded from the Virtual Bridge Club to the second card dealing module. Additionally, information such as the electronic serial number of the first kernel and the second kernel may be transmitted from the second card dealing module (1) to the Virtual Bridge Club.

From the information received by the Virtual Bridge Club from the second card dealing module regarding the player’s first kernel being connected to the second chassis, the Virtual Bridge Club may determine to pay a commission to the player e.g. for spreading information regarding the card dealing module (1) and/or the Virtual Bridge Club and/or the services available from the Virtual Bridge Club. The commission may, for example, comprise a cash commission and/or a number of services for free from the Virtual Bridge Club.

In general, any of the technical features and/or embodiments described above and/or below may be combined into one embodiment. Alternatively or additionally any of the technical features and/or embodiments described above and/or below may be in separate embodiments. Alternatively or additionally any of the technical features and/or embodiments described above and/or below may be combined with any number of other technical features and/or embodiments described above and/or below to yield any number of embodiments.

Although some embodiments have been described and shown in detail, the invention is not restricted to them, but may also be embodied in other ways within the scope of the subject matter defined in the following claims. In particular, it is to be understood that other embodiments may be utilised and structural and functional modifications may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention.

Device claims enumerating several means, several of these means can be embodied by one and the same item of hardware. The mere fact that certain means are recited in mutually different dependent claims or described in different embodiments does not indicate that a combination of these means cannot be used to advantage.

It should be emphasized that the term “comprising/ comprising” when used in this specification is taken to specify the presence of stated features, integers, steps or components but does not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, integers, steps, components or groups thereof.

1-16. (canceled)
17. A method of dealing out at least one hand of cards, said method comprising generating electronic game data comprising at least one hand in means for generating game data; transmitting said electronic game data from said means for generating game data to at least one card dealing module comprising a memory via a first physical and/or wireless communication link; storing said electronic game data in the memory of said at least one card dealing module; dealing said at least one hand of cards via said at least one card dealing module, said at least one hand being dealt in accordance with said electronic game data.

18. A method according to claim 17, wherein the method further comprises establishing the first physical and/or wireless communication link after the means for generating game data has generated the electronic game data.
19. A method according to claim 17, wherein the method further comprises terminating the first physical and/or wireless communication link after the means for generating game data has transmitted said electronic game data to said card dealing module.
20. A method according to claim 17, wherein transmitting said electronic game data from said means for generating game data to at least one card dealing module is performed via a communication and scoring module.
21. A system for dealing out at least one hand of cards, said system comprising means for generating electronic game data comprising at least one hand of cards; means for transmitting said electronic game data from said means for generating game data to at least one card
dealing module comprising a memory via a first physical and/or wireless communication link;
means for storing said electronic game data in the memory of said at least one card dealing module;
means for dealing said at least one hand of cards via said at least one card dealing module, said at least one hand being dealt in accordance with said electronic game data.

22. A system according to claim 21, wherein the first physical and/or wireless communication link is established after the means for generating electronic game data has generated the electronic game data.

23. A system according to claim 21, wherein the first physical and/or wireless communication link is disconnected after the means for generating electronic game data has transmitted said electronic game data to said card dealing module.

24. A system according to claim 21, wherein the system further comprises a communication and scoring module via which said electronic game data from said means for generating electronic game data transmits the electronic game data to the at least one card dealing module.

25. A method according to claim 18, wherein the method further comprises terminating the first physical and/or wireless communication link after the means for generating game data has transmitted said electronic game data to said card dealing module.

26. A method according to claim 18, wherein transmitting said electronic game data from said means for generating game data to at least one card dealing module is performed via a communication and scoring module.

27. A method according to claim 19, wherein transmitting said electronic game data from said means for generating game data to at least one card dealing module is performed via a communication and scoring module.

28. A system according to claim 22, wherein the first physical and/or wireless communication link is disconnected after the means for generating electronic game data has transmitted said electronic game data to said card dealing module.

29. A system according to claim 22, wherein the system further comprises a communication and scoring module via which said electronic game data from said means for generating electronic game data transmits the electronic game data to the at least one card dealing module.

30. A system according to claim 23, wherein the system further comprises a communication and scoring module via which said electronic game data from said means for generating electronic game data transmits the electronic game data to the at least one card dealing module.

31. A method according to claim 27, wherein transmitting said electronic game data from said means for generating game data to at least one card dealing module is performed via a communication and scoring module.

32. A system according to claim 30, wherein the system further comprises a communication and scoring module via which said electronic game data from said means for generating electronic game data transmits the electronic game data to the at least one card dealing module.