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(54) **METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR WORD GAMING**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

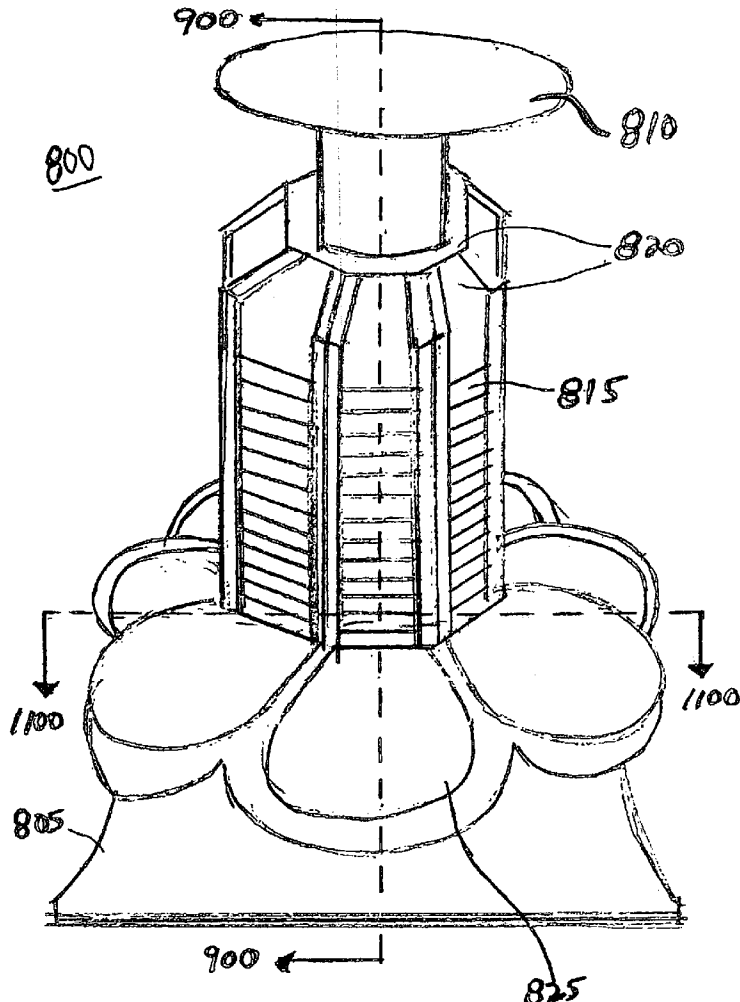
The present invention is directed to a method and apparatus for word gaming and referred to herein as "Word Sport." In various embodiments the word game may include a speed or time factor to add excitement. In one embodiment one, two, or more players, that may include a virtual player (e.g., a computer), are randomly allocated a plurality of game pieces (e.g., 25 each) that have a letter or wild card feature to them. A wild card game piece that modifies the method of play may include, for example, the great equalizer, crash and burn, musical chairs, covet your neighbors play, game piece exchange, or letter conversion to wild card. The game may be played with time constraints using, for example, a game clock. In one variation, the gaming pieces may be managed using a game piece dispensing device that may result in time constraints to the gaming play.

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Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 60/402,533, filed on Aug. 12, 2002. Provisional application No. 60/376,207, filed on Apr. 30, 2002.



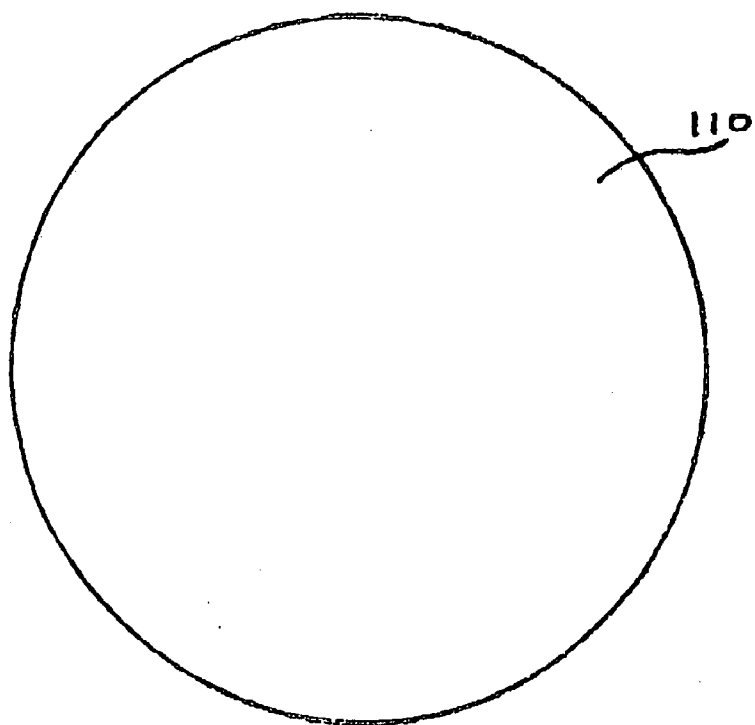
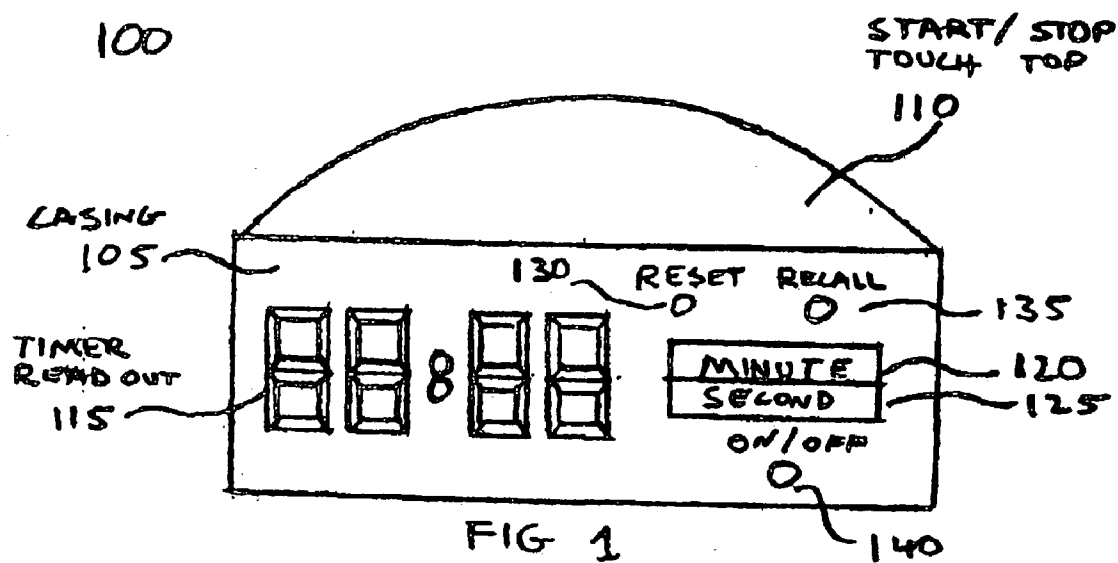
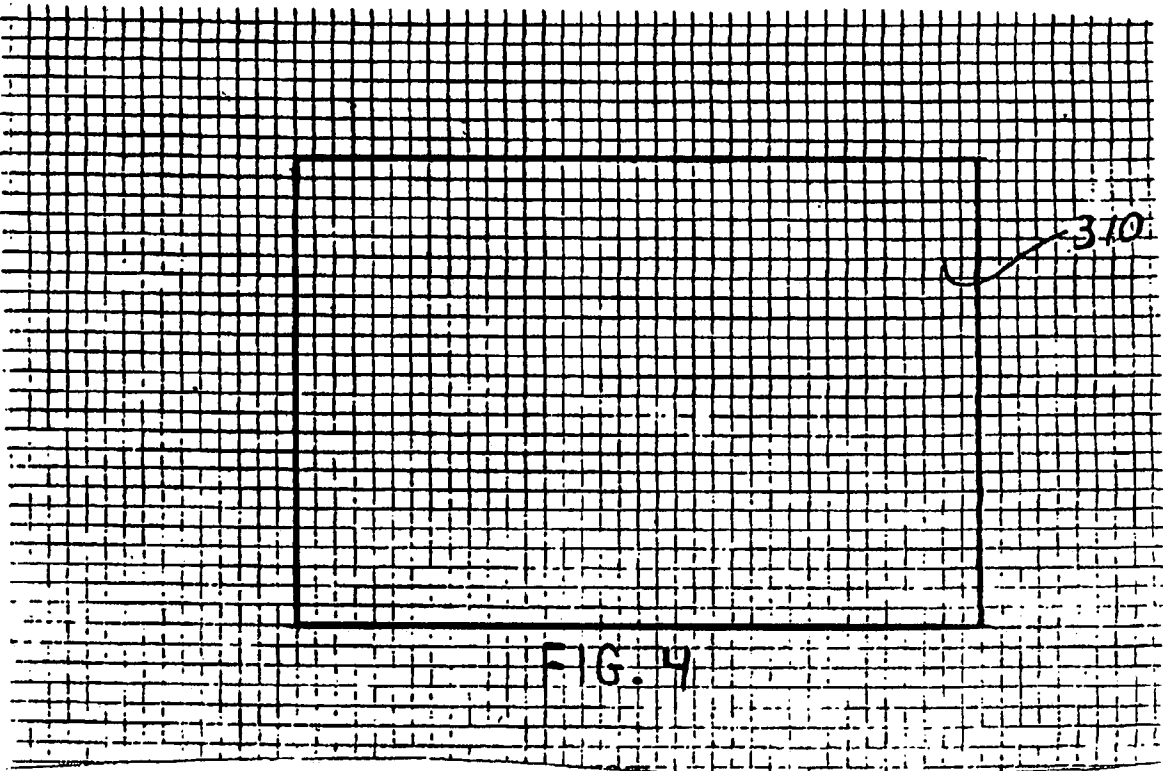
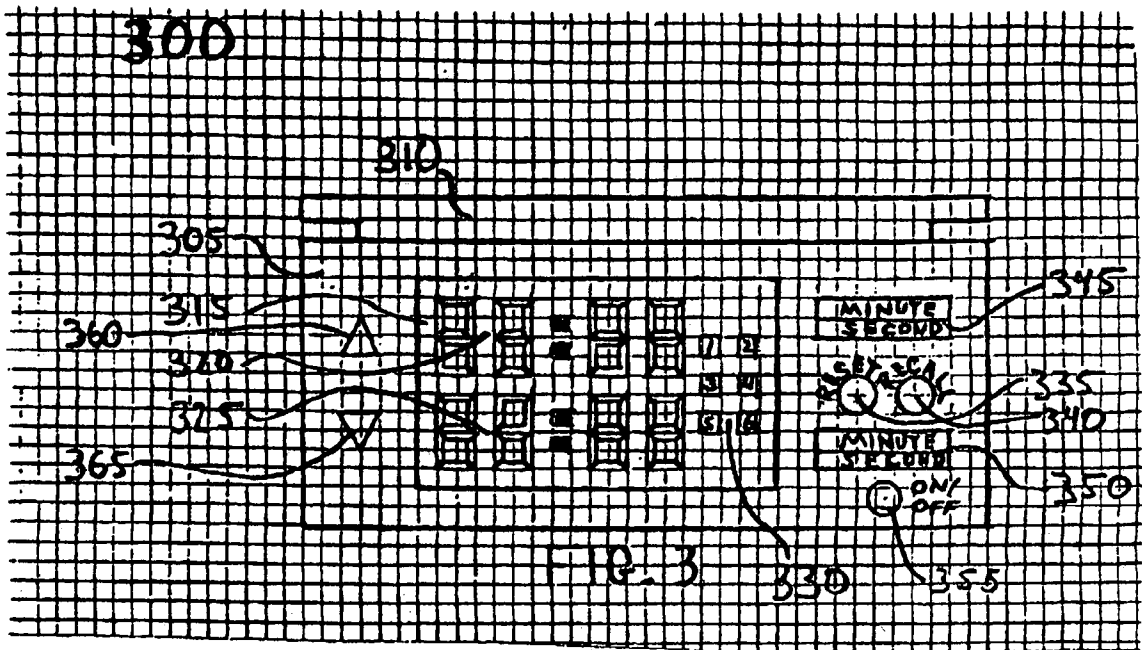


FIG 2



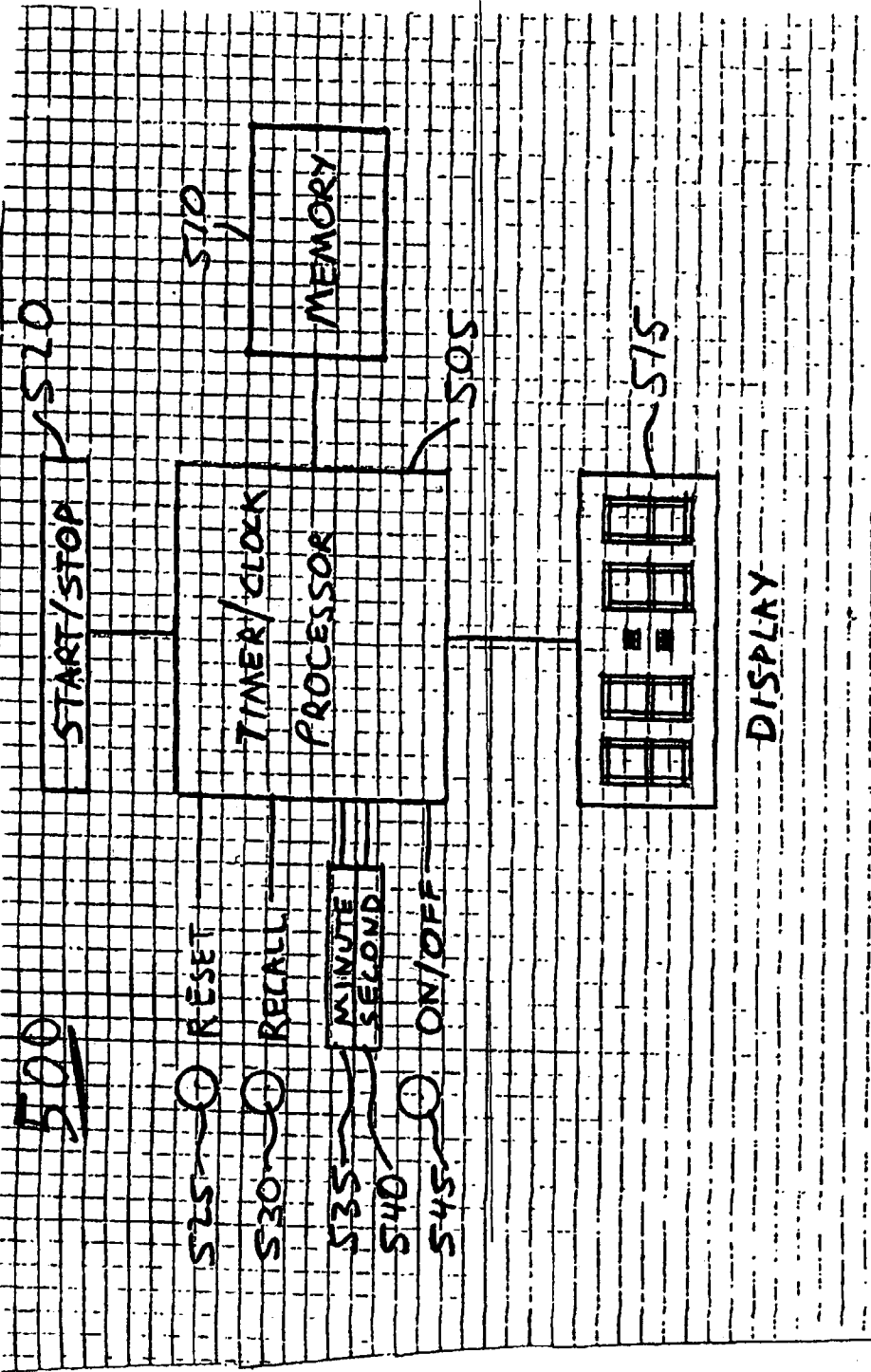


FIG. 5

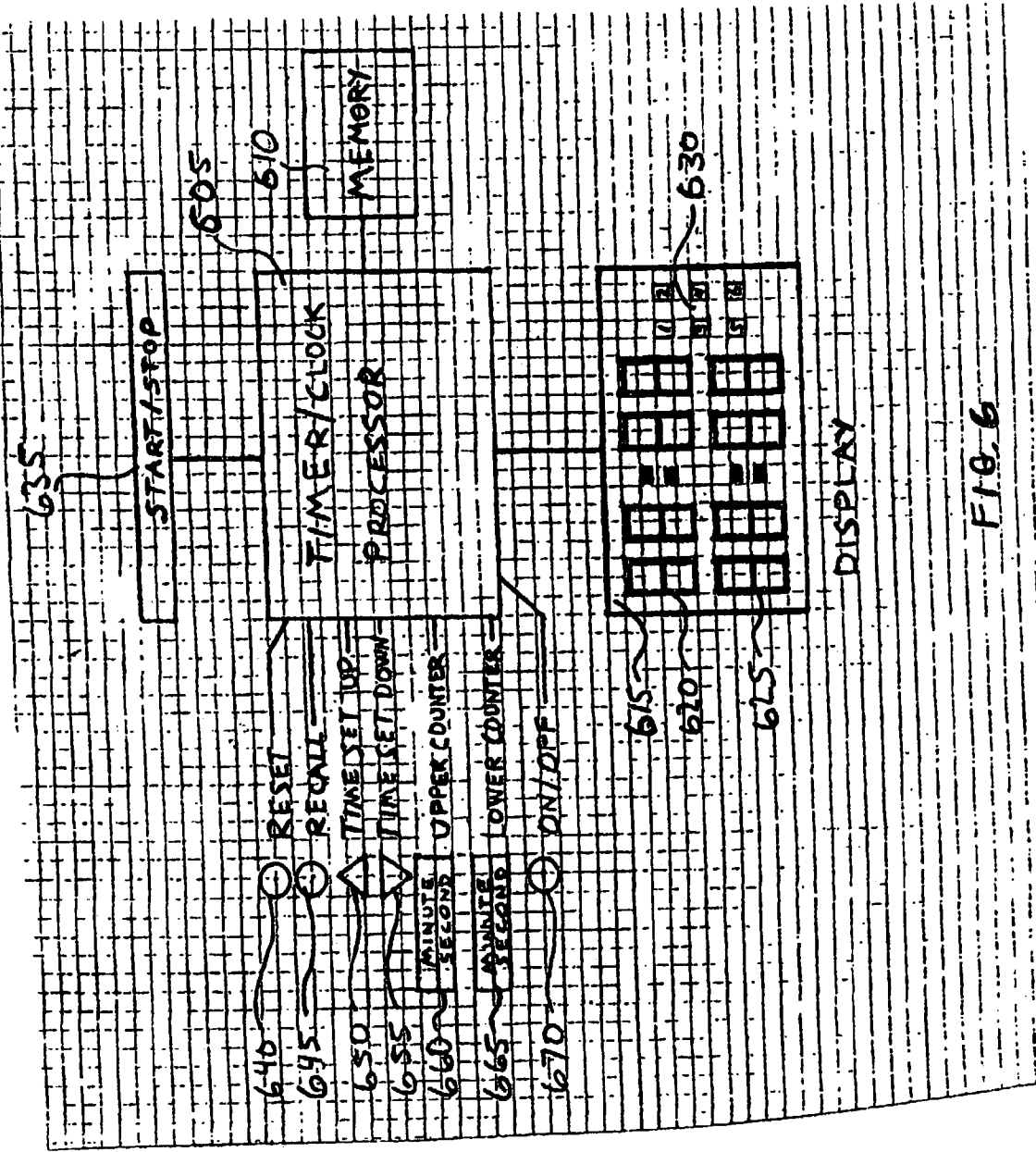


FIG. 6

FIG. 7 A.



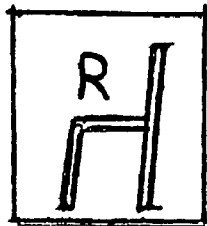
GREAT EQUALIZER

FIG. 7 B.



CRASH AND BURN

FIG. 7 C.



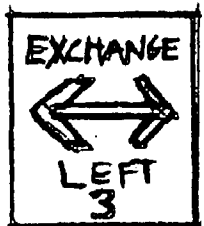
MUSICAL CHAIR
LEFT OR RIGHT

FIG. 7 D.



COVET YOUR NEIGHBORS
TILES

FIG. 7 E.



TILE EXCHANGE
LEFT OR RIGHT
(3 TILES)

FIG. 7 F.



FREE BLANK
(2 TILES)

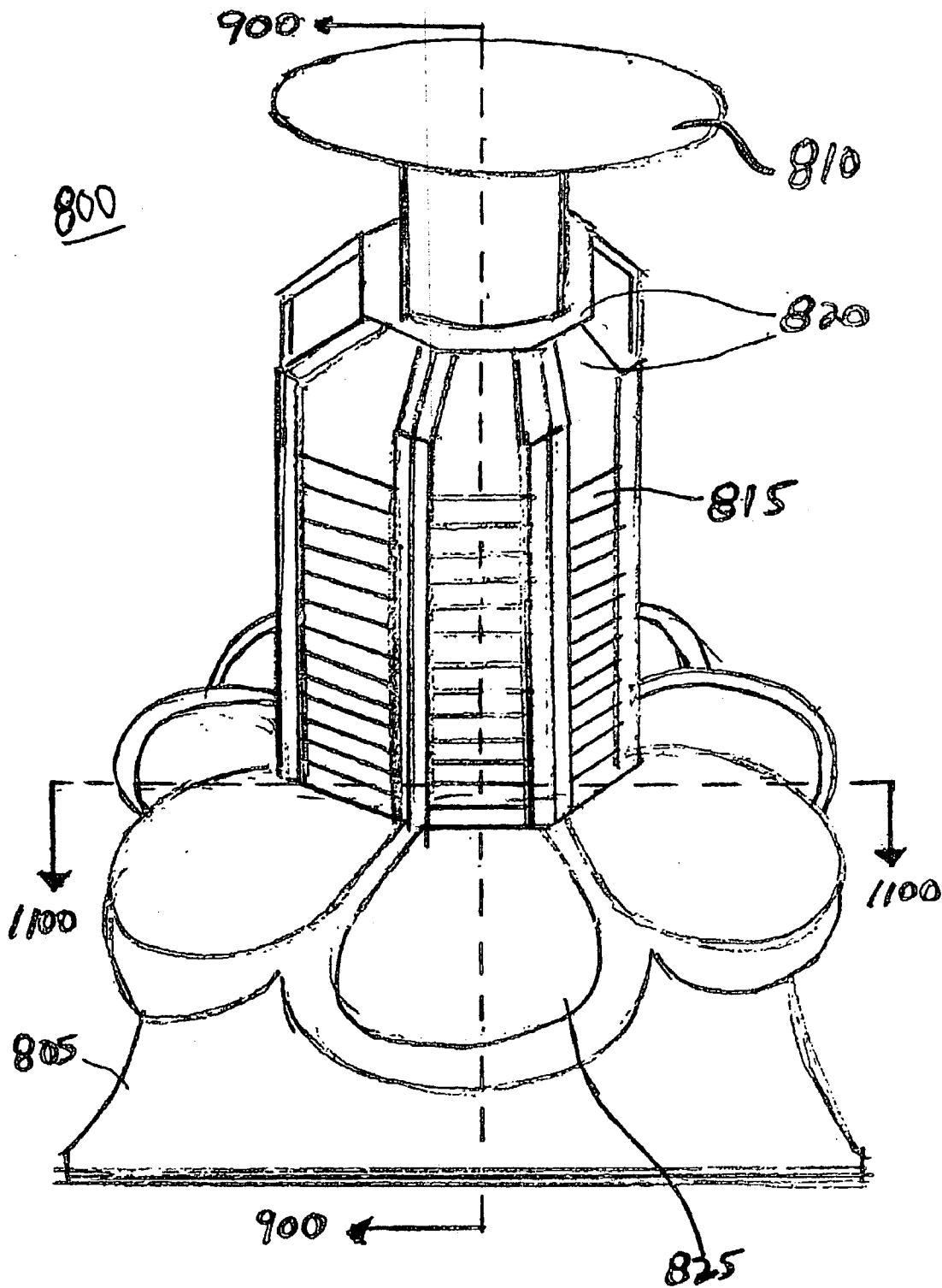


Figure 8

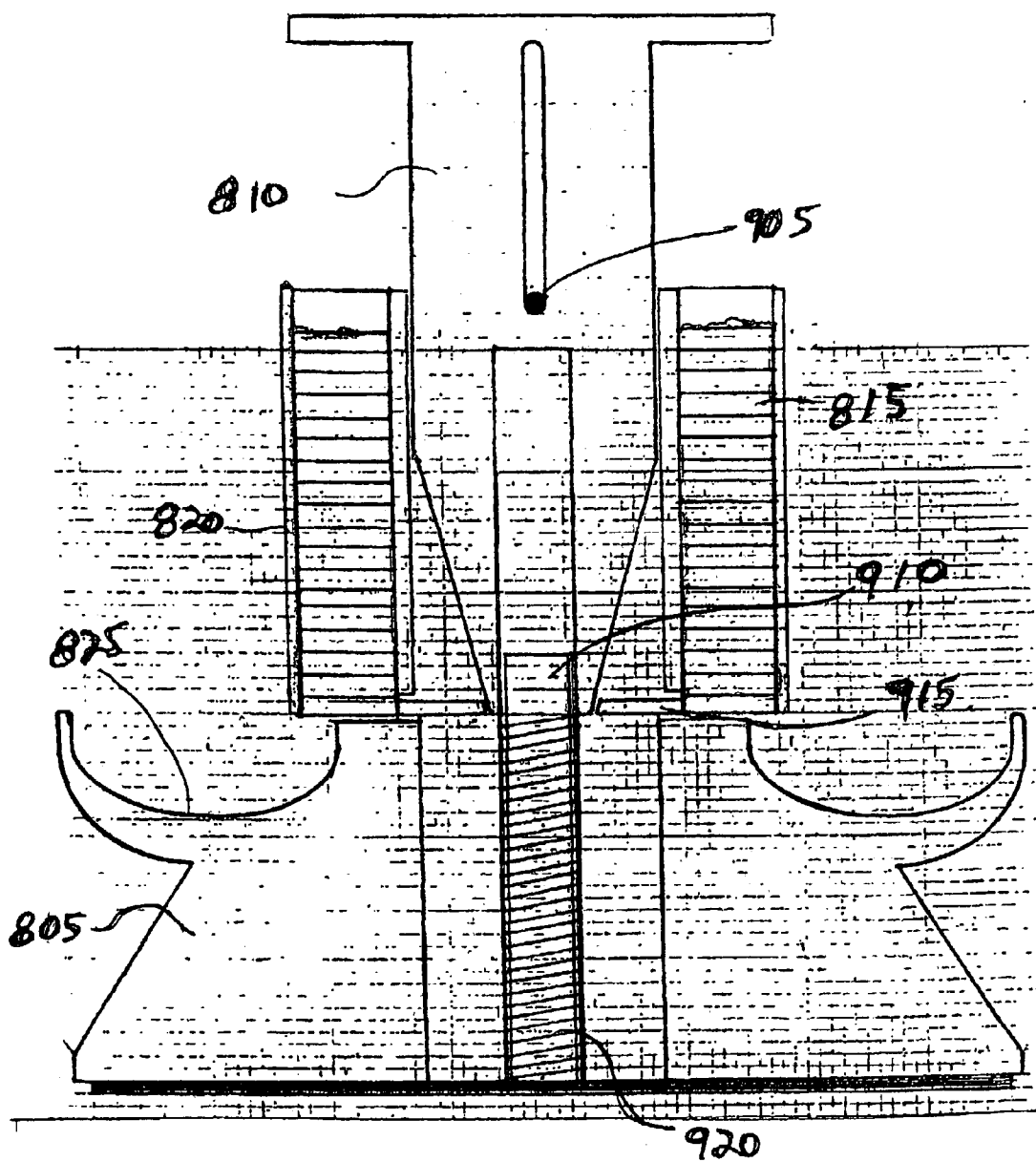


Figure 9

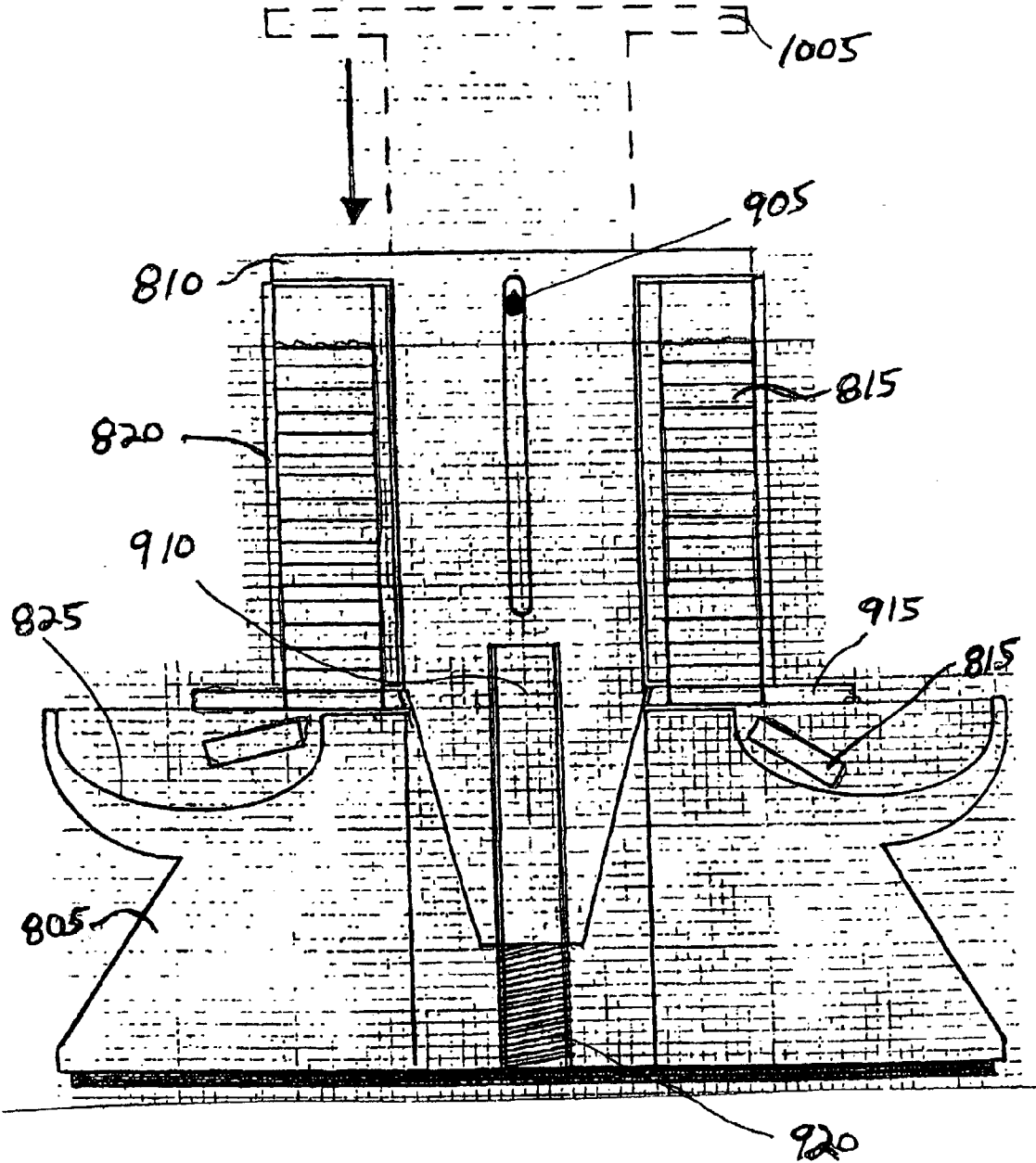


Figure 10

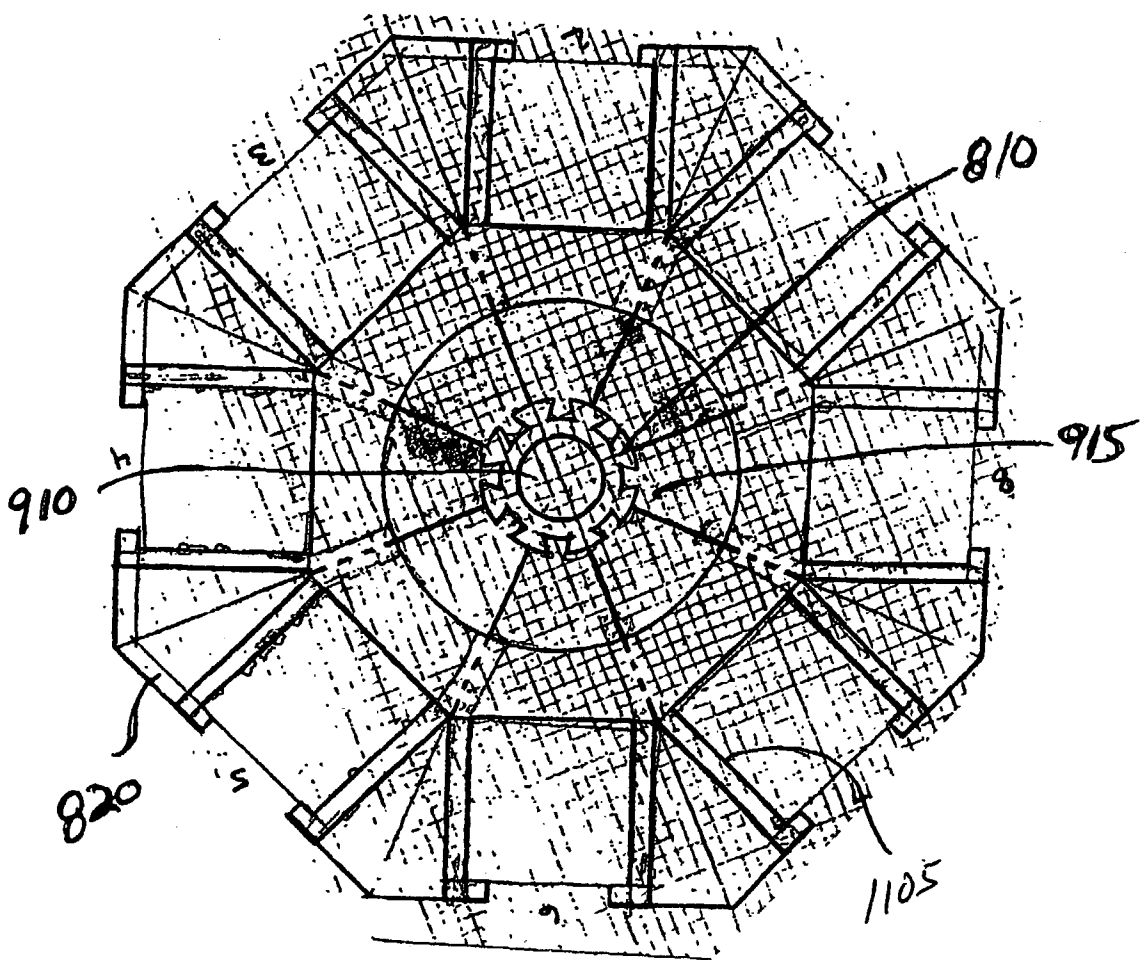


Figure 11

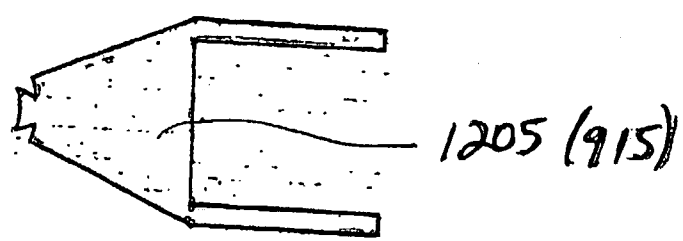


Figure 12

Figure 13A

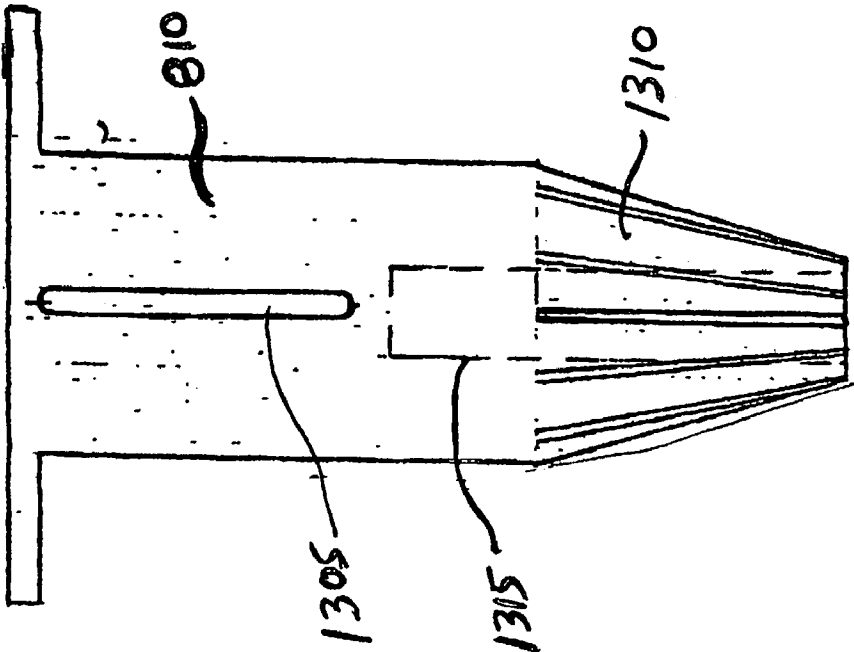
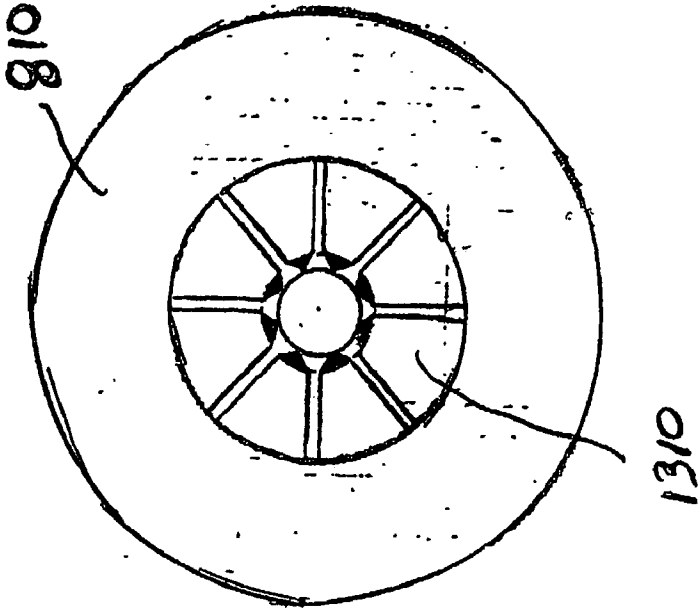


Figure 13B



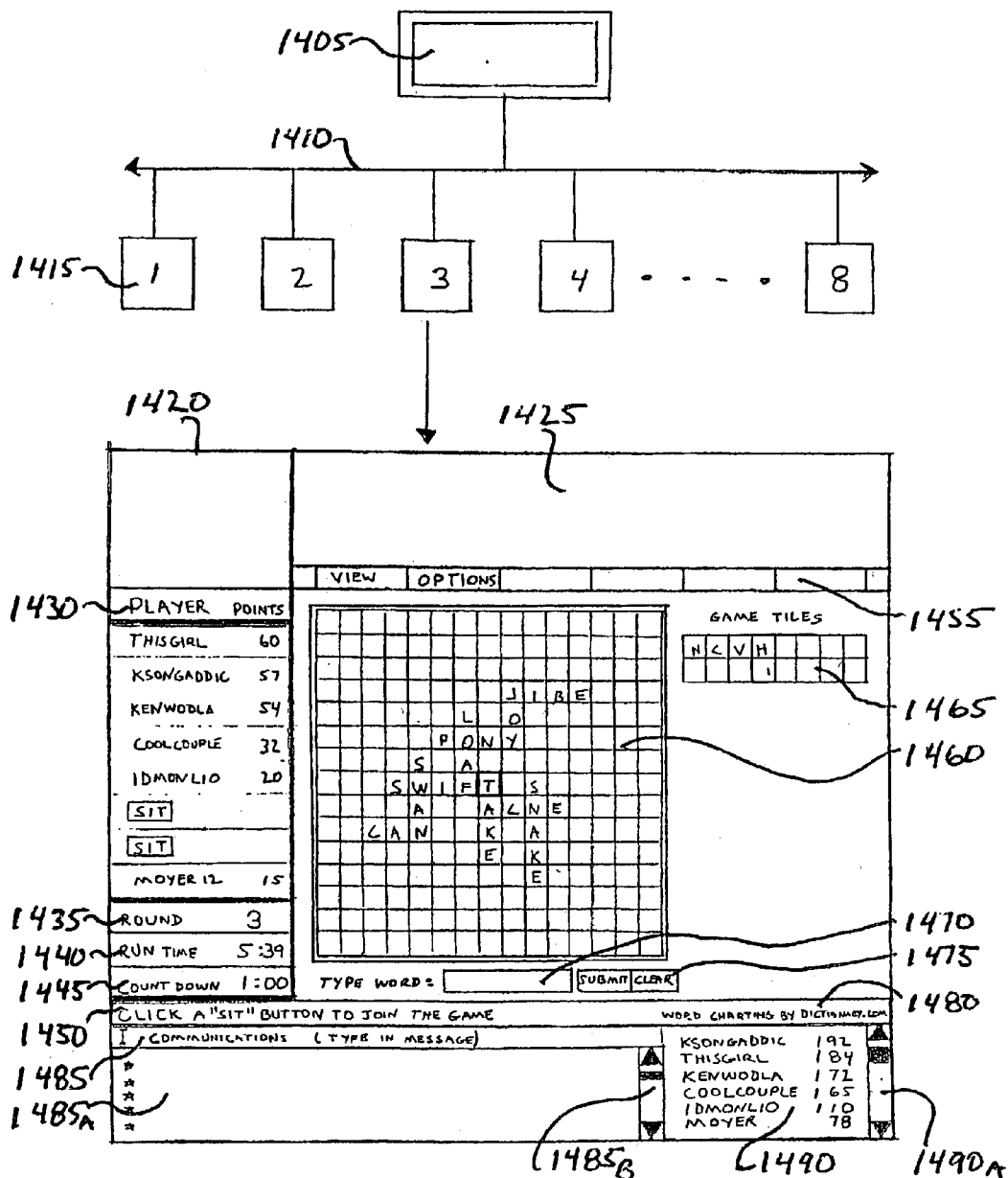


FIG 14

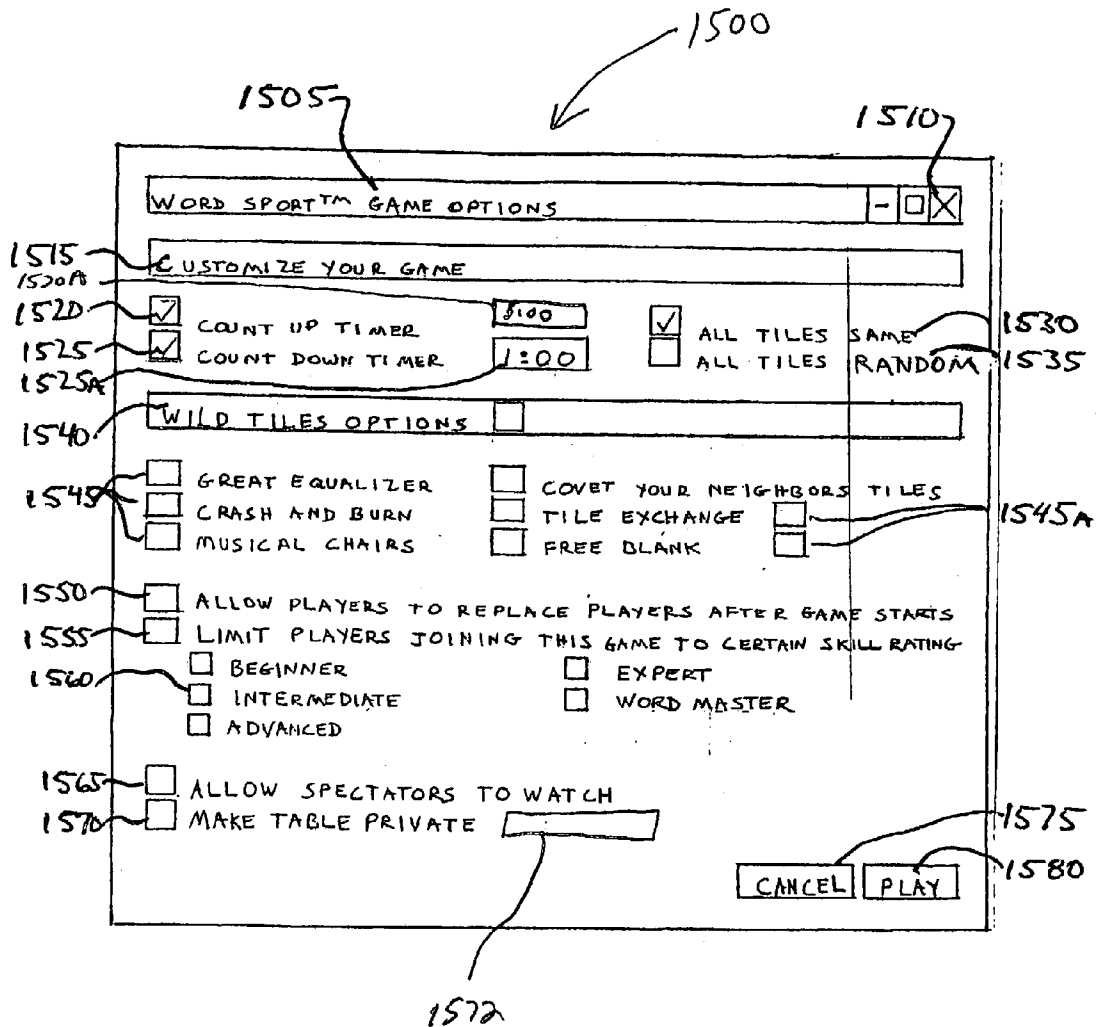


FIG 15

Fig. 16

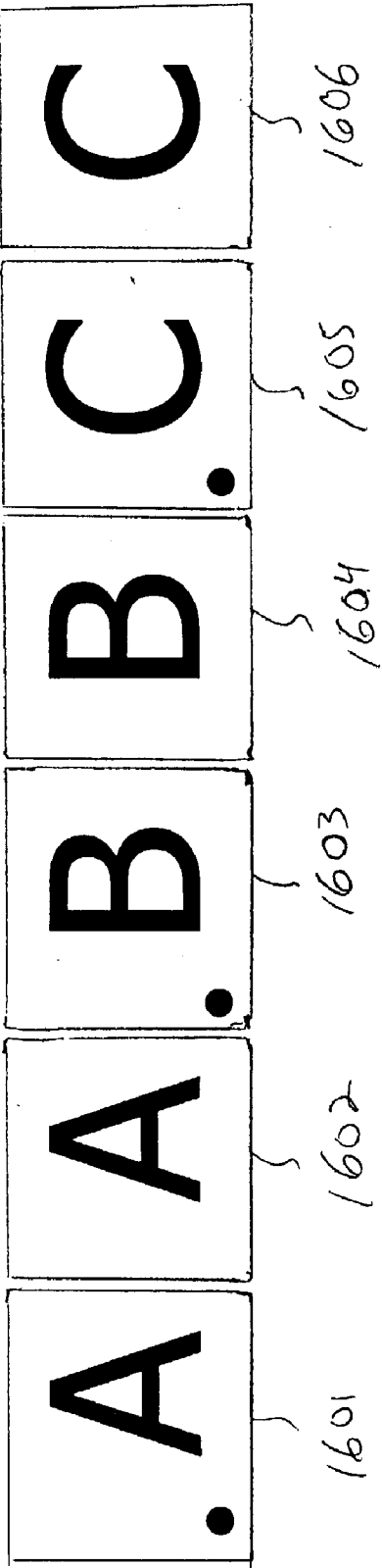
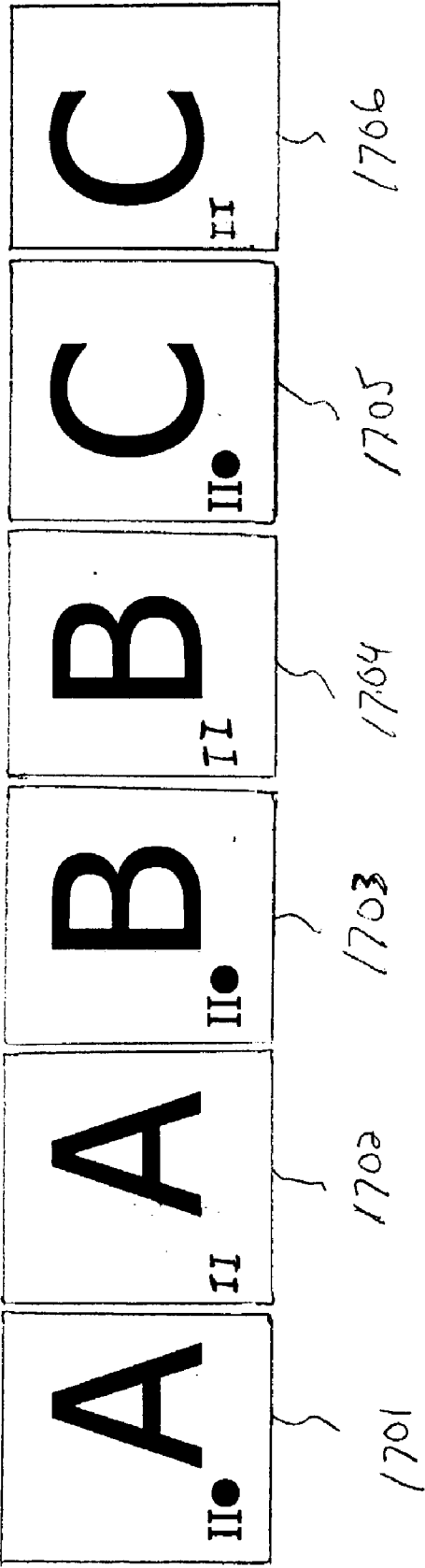


Fig. 17



METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR WORD GAMING

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application relates to and claims priority from provisional patent application serial No. 60/402,533 filed Aug. 12, 2002 and provision patent application serial No. 60/376,207 filed Apr. 30, 2002.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention pertains to systems and methods for gaming. In particular, the invention involves systems and methods for word gaming that may be generally applicable to gaming.

BACKGROUND

[0003] A number of word games have been known in the past. One example is the board game Scrabble™ by Hasbro. Scrabble™ was invented in 1931 by out of work architect Alfred Mosher Butts and is an effective and fun way to improve your vocabulary. In Scrabble™, word formation can be from simple to complex. However, Scrabble™ is a board game and players (up to only four per game) must wait their turn to make their play. This slows down the pace of the game considerably. All versions of Scrabble; Standard, Deluxe, Travel and Junior are just different shades of the same game and require a board. Further, there is little, if any, substantive player interaction and the requirement of using a physical board is somewhat limiting on the place and method of play. Although Scrabble™ has a blank game tile that may be used to represent any letter of the alphabet, Scrabble™ does not have any game pieces that change the method or sequence of play.

[0004] Similarly, there are no time constraints for the players to be concerned about while playing Scrabble™. Each player plays in his turn. When one of the players has used all their allocated letter tiles in correct words, the game ends and the highest point total from all of each players used letter tiles wins the game. As such, the players only have one method of scoring; using letter tiles in word formations. As a result, the play of the game is somewhat slow and monotonous. Including a time aspect might make the game more exciting.

[0005] Since forming words or taking a players turn in Scrabble™ has no time constraints, Scrabble™ does not include a time keeping device. Time keeping devices, particularly clocks, have been well known in the past. One use of clocks is for keeping track of time in games or sporting events. For example, the stop watch has been used extensively for timing such activities as racing in swimming, sprinting, car racing, etc., to determine relative speed of the racing participants during a particular race and between respective races. However, the stop watch typically counts either up or down unless reset. To count down, a value of time must be entered into the clock as a start time.

[0006] Scrabble™ also does not have a means for distributing game tiles one at a time simultaneously to all players upon request from one of the plurality of players. Nor does Scrabble™ have a time saving means for sorting game tiles into full and half-sets.

[0007] The present invention addresses the deficiencies of Scrabble™ to provide an exciting, fast moving, anywhere, anytime word game.

SUMMARY

[0008] The present invention is directed to a method and apparatus for word gaming and referred to herein as "Word Sport." In general, the word game may be played anywhere, anytime, and may be played without a board. Further, in various embodiments the word game will include a speed or time factor to add excitement. In one embodiment one, two, or more players, that may include a virtual player (e.g., a computer), are randomly allocated a plurality of game pieces or tokens (e.g., 25 each) that have a letter or wild card feature to them. Wild card game pieces may be a blank that may take on any letter value, or be a game piece that modifies the method of play and increases player interaction. A wild card game piece that modifies the method of play may include, for example, the great equalizer, crash and burn, musical chairs, covet your neighbors play, game piece exchange, move to a chair right/left, or letter conversion to wild card. The game may be played with time constraints using, for example, a game clock. In one variation, the gaming pieces may be managed using a game piece dispensing device that may result in time constraints to the gaming play.

[0009] The objective of the word game is to link letters together to form words. The words may be assembled in a crisscross or diagonal linking fashion similar to a cross word puzzle. Since there is no game board needed, in one variation one or more words of a particular player may be formed separately without any linking to other words formed by that same player. Of course, the words may be linked to one another. Each letter may, but need not, have a particular point value associated with it and the point value may, but need not, be indicated on a tile containing the letter. Each word may have a point value associated with it. Linked words may have higher word point values than separate stand alone words. Finally, the first person to finish the game by using all their letters to form words may be given more points for finishing faster than the other players, e.g., bonus points. There may be points allocated for first (e.g., 10 points), second (e.g., 8 points), third (e.g., 5 points), etc. place finishes. The place of finish may be associate with the amount of time it takes for a player to use all their game pieces (e.g., 25 game pieces). Scoring may include any one or more of these point methods. The player to accumulate the most point in a round, wins the round. The game may consist of multiple rounds and even be played in a tournament format.

[0010] In one variation, the word game may be played for speed. In this case, the game may be timed using a gaming clock. For example, the present invention may include a gaming clock that will track time in two directions, reversing direction upon a single user input or action. For example, the gaming clock may count time in one direction until activated a first time and then it will count in the opposite direction for a predetermined amount of time and sound an alarm to indicate time is expired. In one embodiment the gaming may start counting up in time in response to a first input until a player action or input is received. Once the player action or input is received, the game clock may count down for a predetermined amount of time. When the predetermined amount of time is expired an alarm may sound. In another embodiment the gaming clock may count down first and then count up until a predetermined amount of time has expired.

[0011] The gaming clock may be integral to a computer or have a case containing control electronics, a numeric display, and various input buttons. The numeric display may display the time counting up and/or down. This numeric display may have a single time read-out or multiple time read-outs and there may be one or more displays. The various input buttons may include a reset button, a recall button, and one or more programming buttons (e.g., second, minute, hour). Further, the top of the case may have a start/stop input button that may be activated by one or more players during a game. In one embodiment the case of the gaming clock may be rounded and the start/stop button may have a circular shape with a curved top surface for player interface. Of course, the various time displays and input buttons may be formed as part of an image on a computer display screen and activated by various events or user input.

[0012] In another embodiment, the gaming clock may be used to play a variation of Scrabble™, referred to herein as "Speed Scrabble," or used in a variation of Word Sport, referred to herein as "Speed Word Sport." The gaming clock may be programmed to count up or down for a predetermined time before an "end-of-game" alarm is activated. In this case, let's say the gaming clock is set to count down for 2 minutes after a particular player action, e.g., a player finishing first pushing the start/stop input button on the gaming clock. Next, the clock is started to count up at the beginning of the game. For example, one of the players may push the start/stop input button to start the game clock counting up. Then, the first player to finish his allocated lettered or blank game pieces into words may push the start/stop input button to stop the game clock count-up. Next, the control electronics may store this "winning time" into memory and/or store it on a "winning time" display. The gaming clock then begins to count down until the programmed predetermined end-of-game time, e.g., 2 minutes, is reached. When the predetermined end-of-game time has elapsed, an end of game alarm sounds and all players are instructed to stop forming words with their allocated game pieces.

[0013] In a further embodiment, a game piece dispenser may be used. In this case, the timing clock may, but need not be used. Regardless, the game piece dispenser will add a time dimension to the game by indicating to all players how quickly game pieces are being requested by various players. In any case, the game piece dispenser helps to organize the game pieces to ensure each player gets the same number of game pieces and that each player is given a new game piece at approximately the same time as the fastest player. To achieve this, the exact number of game pieces, tokens, or tiles for each player may be placed in individual reservoirs. The reservoirs may be inter-related so that each time one of the players requests a new game piece, all players are given a new game piece. In one variation, the game piece dispenser may be a multi-reservoir dispenser having, for example, eight reservoirs. The reservoirs may be filled with game pieces for the number of players that will be playing the word game. In a preferred embodiment the game pieces may be square tiles and stacked with their number (or insignia) down in a vertical reservoir or magazine. The bottom of each reservoir may have an ejection device that upon actuation pushes the game tile at the bottom of the reservoir into a dispensing tray. All ejection devices may be actuated simultaneously so that all players receive an additional game piece at the same time, for example, when one of the players

needs another game piece. The game piece dispenser may include a plunger section that is pushed down by a player. The plunger works integrally with the ejection devices to dispense the game pieces to the various players thorough, for example, designated dispensing trays. Of course, the game piece dispenser may be provided electronically when the word game is played on a computer system.

[0014] In a further embodiment the game pieces may include a means for sorting one or more full sets into half-sets. This may be achieved by including a unique design on half the game pieces and/or a set designator on a complete set. These may be used so that when a full set is to be divided in half or two or more full sets are combined, the game pieces may be quickly and easily separated or allocated into desired full sets and/or half-sets.

[0015] In various embodiments, the word game may be implemented via an electronic gaming means, for example, over the Internet and/or played in a competitive tournament manner.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] The objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become more readily apparent to those skilled in the art upon reading the following detailed description, in conjunction with the appended drawings, in which:

[0017] **FIG. 1** depicts a side view of an exemplary gaming clock according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0018] **FIG. 2** illustrates a top view of the exemplary gaming clock illustrated in **FIG. 1**;

[0019] **FIG. 3** depicts a side view of an exemplary gaming clock according to another embodiment of the present invention;

[0020] **FIG. 4** illustrates a top view of the exemplary gaming clock illustrated in **FIG. 3**;

[0021] **FIG. 5** illustrates an exemplary block diagram for the circuitry of one gaming clock according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0022] **FIG. 6** illustrates another exemplary block diagram for the circuitry of the second gaming clock according to another embodiment of the present invention;

[0023] **FIGS. 7A-7F** illustrate various exemplary wild cards for an enhanced Word Sport game, according to another embodiment of the present invention;

[0024] **FIG. 8** is a perspective view of a gaming tile dispenser that may be useful in playing Word Sport, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0025] **FIG. 9** is a cross-sectional view of a gaming tile dispenser taken across line **900** of **FIG. 8** that indicates the action of dispensing game tiles, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0026] **FIG. 10** is a cross-sectional view of a gaming tile dispenser taken across line **900** of **FIG. 8** that may be useful in playing Word Sport, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0027] **FIG. 11** is a cross-sectional view of a gaming tile dispenser taken across line **1100** of **FIG. 8** and illustrates the gaming tile reservoir cross-section, plunger cross-section

and tile ejection tab of the gaming tile dispenser, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0028] FIG. 12 illustrates a tile ejection tab that may be used in the gaming tile dispenser of FIG. 8, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0029] FIG. 13A illustrates a side view of an exemplary plunger for use in the gaming tile dispenser in FIG. 8, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0030] FIG. 13B illustrates a bottom view of an exemplary plunger for use in the gaming tile dispenser in FIG. 8, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0031] FIG. 14 illustrates an exemplary internet approach to playing the Word Sport game including a graphical user interface (GUI);

[0032] FIG. 15 illustrates a second exemplary GUI for a Word Sport options page;

[0033] FIG. 16 illustrates an exemplary design for a first set of lettered tiles according to one embodiment of the present invention; and

[0034] FIG. 17 illustrates an exemplary design for a second set of lettered tiles that may compliment the first set of lettered tiles shown in FIG. 16, according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0035] The present invention is directed generally toward methods and systems for improving word gaming. The present invention results in improved word gaming by introducing a time factor to pick up the tempo significantly, introduce interactive oriented wild cards to enhance more substantive fun interaction amongst players, include more players (up to eight) per game, and/or enhanced scoring opportunities, while using word formation as the basis for game play. "Word Sport" . . . the fast break word game . . . is the answer to enhance word gaming. Word Sport eliminates the game board and introduces, for example, a touch top gaming clock, a touch top game piece dispenser, wild card game pieces that change the method of play and increase interaction among players, and/or unique game piece designs that enable quick sorting of game pieces for accommodating different numbers of players. In Word Sport, word tiles similar to Scrabble™ that may have numeric values and unique set or half-set designators may be utilized as the typical game piece. These game pieces may be of any shape, but in a preferred embodiment are square and larger than a Scrabble™ letter tile. With variations in the method of play according to Word Sport, in general the players don't wait their turn to make their play, because it's always their turn. All contestants may be in constant play forming words.

[0036] In one embodiment of the present invention, a touch top gaming clock may be introduced to enhance the urgency of time constraints, and which speeds up the tempo of the game. The constraint of time compresses activity which gets the player's adrenalin going. Sporting events which use a time clock (e.g. basketball and football) are typically more exciting then those that don't (e.g. baseball and tennis). Then notice how exciting things get in the final minute of play. Now imagine that kind of activity and excitement in a word game. With skillful players (e.g.,

Masters), the game can become fast and furious. In Word Sport, players may score bonus points for first, second and third place timed finishes. These timed finishes can also be compared from players within one or more games, one or more rounds, one or more sessions, one or more matches and/or one or more tournaments, to another. World record time finishes may also be established. Original letter set bundling could be used to establish beginner, intermediate and master categories and record setting times established for each category.

[0037] Another dimension of Word Sport may employ a device referred to herein as a touch top game piece (e.g., tile) dispenser. The touch top game piece dispenser may be preloaded with all, or a subset or all, the letter or wild card game pieces needed for all the players participating in a game. The touch top game piece dispenser is a fast and accurate way to distribute the game pieces. It can handle, for example, up to eight players in a game situation. The touch top game piece dispenser may include a spring loaded plunger that actuates a sliding game piece ejector. In a preferred embodiment, the touch top game piece dispenser does not require batteries.

[0038] Another variation of the present invention may include the concept of encroaching on the play of others. In this embodiment the game may include, for example, six to eight optional wild card game pieces that can spice up play by modifying the standard method of play where each player constructs words with their allocated game pieces. The method of play modifying game pieces may include, for example, "The Great Equalizer", "Crash and Burn", "Musical Chairs", "Take Chair Right", "Take Chair Left", "Covet your Neighbors Game Pieces", "Tile Exchange", in addition to the Free Blank. The manner in which these wild card game pieces modify the standard method of play will be described in detail below. However, suffice it to say that each adds player interaction and a twist to the standard method of play to add excitement to Word Sport. In any case, none, one, some or all of the wild card game pieces may be used in game play. The random appearance of the wild cards may be similar to the secret square on the favorite T.V. game show Jeopardy.

[0039] A still further dimension of Word Sport may include unique game piece designations used to quickly and easily sort multiple full sets mixed together into separate full sets or a full set into half-sets. This approach may speed up the sorting of game pieces for use with varying numbers of players.

[0040] Now the method and system of playing Word Sport will be described in more detail as it relates to specific embodiments. First, the gaming clock will be described. Then the wild cards will be described in some detail. Next, one embodiment of the touch top game piece will be described in detail. Then a computerized version of Word Sport will be described. Finally, an example of a unique game piece separation method will be provided. However, it should be recognized that these embodiments are merely exemplary and although often directed more specifically to a physical game, the concepts presented are equally generally applicable to play of Word Sport in an electronic medium such as on a computer or interactively on a computer network such as the Internet.

[0041] In one variation the present invention includes a method and/or apparatus for tracking time. This method

and/or apparatus are particularly useful for tracking time during a game. In various embodiments described herein, a gaming clock and method for playing a word game, e.g., Word Sport, is described. However, one skilled in the art will recognize that the timing aspect and/or gaming clock of the present invention is not limited to Word Sport but may be used in other games and/or applications.

[0042] Referring to **FIG. 1**, a gaming clock **100** according to the present invention may have a case **105** containing control electronics (one example shown in **FIG. 5**), a numeric display **115**, and various input buttons (e.g., **110-135**). The numeric display **115** may display the time counting up and/or down. This numeric display **115** may have a single time read-out as shown or multiple time read-outs, and there may be one or more displays. The various input buttons may include a reset button **130**, recall button **135**, one or more programming buttons such as a second button **125** a minute button **120**, and an hour button (not shown). Further, the top of the case may have a start/stop input button **110** that may be activated by one or more players during a game. In one embodiment the case of the gaming clock may be rounded and the start/stop button may have a circular shape with a curved top surface for player interface. Power for the gaming clock may be provided by, for example, batteries or an AC/DC transformer connected to 120 volts AC from a standard wall outlet. An on/off button or switch **140** may also be included for ease of activation/deactivation.

[0043] The timer read out **115** is coupled to an electronic clock that can count-up and count-down time. The electronic clock may include, for example, a ring oscillator and counting circuit. These items may be included in a Timer Clock/Processor **505** (see **FIG. 5**). The start time may be set to, for example, zero minutes and zero seconds, by depressing the reset button **130** or the minute **120** and/or second **125** buttons. In any case, the start/stop input button **110** may be depressed to activate the clock timer to count up in time, count down in time, and/or to stop counting time.

[0044] An exemplary operation of the gaming clock **100** will now be described with reference to one application, use in a game that is referred to herein as "Word Sport", the fast break word game. In this word game, that may be played without a game board, players never wait their turn to make their play . . . because it's always their turn. Everyone is in constant play forming words from start to finish of the game. At times, the game is fast and furious. Given the requirements of a competitive game situation, the start/stop input button **110** (or touch top) may upon first activation (e.g., pushing down on the top of the start/stop button **110**) start a count-up timer mode. When a first player completes the game by making words out of his allotment of lettered (e.g., one of A-Z letters) pieces, he may push down the stop/start button **110**. This results in the stop/start input button **110** being activated a second time (e.g., the pressing of the start/stop button **110**), the time that has passed based on the count-up time is stopped and may be stored in a memory (see **FIG. 5**) for later recall. This time is the winning time and receives a first place finish.

[0045] Next, or simultaneously, the gaming clock **100** may reverse time and a count-down time-out is started. The count-down time-out may be achieved using the same electronic clock circuitry or a separate electronic clock circuitry and may be started within a few micro-seconds of

the second activation of the stop/start input button **110**. In a preferred embodiment the count-up and count-down timer are included in the same electronic clock circuitry. The count down timer may be preset to any time duration desired (e.g., a two minute count down, a one minute count down, etc.). This time duration may be entered by pressing the minute button **120** and/or second button **125**.

[0046] A second place finisher may enter his time by pressing the start/stop input button a third time within the preset count down time. The second place may then be stored to memory for later recall. A third place finish may likewise be entered for later recall. Fourth, fifth, and so on, finish times may also be entered if so desired and may be entered into memory. When the preset count-down time expires, an alarm (e.g., audible sound and/or visual light) may indicate the end of play. All the registered time stored in memory (first, second, etc.) may then be revealed by pressing the recall button **135**. All the stored time and programmed timer start times may be cleared by pressing the reset button **130** one or more times.

[0047] If no player presses the start/stop input button **110** during the count-down time-out before the alarm indicates end of play, the second, third, and fourth place players may be identified by the points accumulated from the game pieces or tiles for completed words.

[0048] Although the gaming clock **100** has been described as first counting up and then counting down, the gaming clock **100** may first count down and then count up. In this case, the reset button **130** and recall button **135** may be pressed simultaneously to set the timer clock at an initial non-zero time which will be counted down. In a further variation, a word game may be played without using the count-up time feature, and may use only a one minute count down that would be started after one of the players becomes the first player to finished completing his allotment of word tiles. This simplified method of play may speed up conclusion of the game. In this case, one may also use a simplified count down clock timer, a mechanical timer, or simply a one minute sand timer instead of the electronic digital timer.

[0049] **FIG. 2** illustrates an exemplary top view of start/stop input button **110**. In this case it is shown to be circular. This shape is particular advantageous when playing a game in the round, giving players on any side equal surface area to push the start/stop input button **110**. However, any shape may be used including an oval, a square, a rectangle, etc.

[0050] Referring to **FIG. 3**, a gaming clock **300** according to another embodiment of the present invention may have a case **305** containing control electronics (one example shown in **FIG. 6**) a numeric display **315**, and various input buttons (e.g. **335-365**). The numeric display **315** may display the time counting up on the upper display **320** and or counting down on the lower display **325**. This numeric display **315** may have a multiple time readout as shown or a single time readout and there may be one or more additional displays (e.g. display **330**) which may indicate one through six or more recall times which are stored in memory. The various input buttons may include a reset button **335**, a recall button **340** and one or more programming buttons such as a minute/second buttons for the count up timer **345**, the count down timer **350** and an hour button (not shown). There may also be time set direction buttons, **360** for up and **365** for down, for advancing and reversing both count up and count

down clocks to a desired time. Button **355** turns the unit on or off. Further, the entire top of the case may have a start/stop input button **310**, also known as a touch top that may be activated by any player during game play. In this embodiment, the case of the gaming clock may be square or rectangular and the start/stop touch top **310** may also be square and flat as illustrated in **FIG. 3** and **FIG. 4**. Or the gaming clock casing **305** may be rounded and the start/stop touch top **310** may have a circular shape with a curved top surface for player interface as shown in the previous embodiment. Power for the gaming clock may be provided for, by example, batteries or an AC/DC transformer connected to 120 volts AC from a standard wall outlet.

[0051] The timer readout **315** may be coupled to an electronic clock that can count up and count down time. The electronic clock may include, for example, a ring oscillator and counting circuit. These items may be included in a timer/clock processor (see example in **FIG. 6**). The start time may be set to, for example, zero minutes and zero seconds by depressing the reset button **335** or the minute/second buttons **345** and **350**. In any case, the start/stop input button **310** may be depressed to activate the clock to count up in time, count down in time, and/or to make single or multiple time stops.

[0052] An exemplary operation of the gaming clock **300** will now be described with reference to one application, use in a word game that is referred to here in as "Word Sport" . . . the fast-break word game. All players never wait their turn to make their play with placing lettered game pieces to form a word, because it is always their turn. All players are in constant play forming words with lettered game pieces until the game time runs out concluding the game. Given the requirement of a competitive game situation with from two and up to eight players, one set of lettered game pieces which may, but need not, include numeric point values and may be used with two through four players. Two sets of lettered game pieces may be used for six through eight players. There may be, for example, one hundred lettered game pieces per set. One may include optional "WILD CARDS"™ (also known as "Wild Tiles") to add a new dimension to the game by varying the method of play. Prior to starting the game, the lettered game pieces may be placed letter side down, for example, in the center of a game table. The gaming clock count up mode may be set to zero time. The count down to time out may be preset to, for example, a one minute or two minute duration. The gaming clock may be placed on the table within easy reach of all players. There is no game board. All players take seven letter game pieces each to start the game, and the game pieces remain face down. Optional Wild Cards or Wild Tiles may now be added face down mixed in amongst the other lettered game pieces in the center of the table. When the count up timer mode is activated by a player pushing down on the touch top (**110**, **310**) of the gaming clock . . . the game begins. All players turn over their seven letter tiles and start to form words, for example, in a crisscross, diagonal, and/or stand alone formation. The first player to form a word or words using all seven of the allotted game pieces (or as many or the seven as possible) shouts "Go"! At this command, all players reach and take one or more lettered game pieces from the center of the table and continue to form words. The next player who uses all their possible letters to form as many words as possible with all eight game pieces shouts "Go"! All players reach and take another game piece from the center. This

pattern of play may continue until all the lettered game pieces are distributed. In one variation, if during play there is not one player amongst all the players who can complete all his tiles so he can shout "Go", the play may be considered frozen or stuck. All players may agree and then reach to take another game piece to continue play. If a "Wild Card" is drawn, the players perform the function described by the Wild Card, as will be described in more detail below with reference to **FIGS. 7A-7F**.

[0053] When all tiles are taken, the first player who completes words using all his allotment of game pieces will push down on the touch top (**110**, **310**) of the gaming clock. This is the second activation which registers the first place wining time. Bonus points or play completion points, for example ten points, may be scored for a first place finish. The wining time is stored in memory for later recall. Simultaneously, the count down to time out may be activated (e.g. one minute warning). The count up time is still running as the remaining players continue with their tiles.

[0054] The next player who uses all his game pieces in word formation within the preset count down time will push down on the touch top of the gaming clock. This is the third activation which will register the second place finish. This time may also be stored in the memory for later recall. Bonus or completion points, for example five points, may be scored for second place. Play for the remaining players may continue while count down and count up time is still running.

[0055] In like manner, a third place finish time may also be entered within the pre set count down time. This time may also be stored in the clocks memory for later recall. Three points may be scored for third place. The remaining players continue. Count up and count down time is still running. More finish times may be entered if the touch top is activated again within the pre set count down time.

[0056] When the count down time expires, an alarm (e.g. audible sound and/or visible light) may indicate the end of play. The count up time also stops indicating the total time duration of the game. All the registered finish times stored in the clocks memory (first, second, third, etc.) may be revealed by pressing the memory recall button one or more times. The finish times will be displayed on the lower read out (**325**). Display **330** may indicate which place time is being featured.

[0057] If no one player presses the start/stop touch top of the gaming clock after the first place finisher activates the count down and time expires, the second, third etc. place players may be identified by the points accumulated from their completed cross words. Players' scores may consist of the total of any lettered numeric point values, points for type or length of words created, and/or any place finish (e.g., 1st, 2nd, and 3rd) points. Lettered game pieces not used in word formation may be counted as point deductions. Any errors in word formations and non-valid words may also be counted as point deductions. Place finishers may forfeit their some or all the place finish points to the next place finisher for errors in word formation.

[0058] In one variation of the present invention, the game may end by one or more players completing, as far as possible, formed words with their allotted game pieces. A player may decide to finish first even though they are not able to use all their lettered game pieces so as to strategically

obtain the first place bonus points. However, any un-used lettered game piece point values will be deducted from their total score.

[0059] In another variation of the present invention, all scoring may be done by place finishes (e.g. 1st—10 points; 2nd—5 points and 3rd—3 points). In this case the letter game pieces or tiles may be, but need not be, without numeric values associated with the individual letters. In one case, a one minute count down may be started upon a first player using all of their allotted letters. If no other player can finish their allotted tiles within the one minute count-down, 2nd and 3rd place finishes may be determined by the least number of letter tiles remaining.

[0060] FIG. 5 provides an exemplary block diagram of the gaming clock illustrated in FIG. 1. Component parts may include a timer/clock processor 505, memory 510, and display 515 coupled together. In a preferred embodiment, the count up and count down timer may be included in the same electronic circuitry. The display panel 515 may be a digital display and read out both count up and count down time. The start/stop input button 520 may be coupled to the timer/clock processor 505 and located on the top of the gaming clock for ease of activation by all players. The memory 510 may be coupled to the timer/clock processor 505 and store finish times that may be entered by, for example, activating the start/stop input button 520 during a game situation. Single or multiple time data may be entered, stored and later retrieved by pressing the recall button one or more times. The reset button 525 may be coupled to the timer/clock processor 505 and may clear the count up and count down display and also clear all stored time data by pressing the reset button one or more times. The minute 535 and second 540 buttons may be coupled to the timer/clock processor 505 and may enter the preset times for any game or task situation for both count up and count down timers. An on/off button or switch 545 may be coupled to the timer/clock processor 505 and is included for ease of activation/deactivation. Of course the gaming clock may be designed to automatically turn off after a predetermined time of inactivity. Power for the gaming clock may be provided by, for example, batteries or an AC/DC transformer connected to 120 volts AC from a standard wall outlet.

[0061] FIG. 6 provides an exemplary block diagram of a second embodiment of the gaming clock as illustrated in FIG. 3. Component parts may include the timer/clock processor 605, memory 610, and display 615, and may be coupled together. In a preferred embodiment, the count up and count down functions may be included in the same electronic circuitry. The display panel 615 may be digital and coupled to the timer/clock processor 605, and display both count up time on the upper readout 620 and count down time on the lower read out 625 (or visa versa). Display indicators 630 may light to indicate one through six or more finish times that may be stored in the memory circuitry 610 (coupled to timer/clock processor 605) for later recall. These times may be displayed on either the 620 and/or 625 readouts by pressing the recall button 645 one or more times. The start/stop input button 635 may be coupled to timer/clock processor 605 and may be located on the top of the gaming clock for ease of activation by all players. When a game or task activity is concluded, all time shown on either upper 620 or lower 625 readout may be erased by pushing the reset button 640 or more times. Start/stop times stored in

the memory 610 may also be erased by pushing the same reset button 640 one or more times. The time set up button 650 may be coupled to timer/clock processor 605 and pressed to advance a preset time on either the count up or count down timer. The time set down button 655 may be coupled to timer/clock processor 605 and pressed to decrease the times on either counter. The minute and second buttons (660 for the upper counter, 665 for the lower counter) may be coupled to timer/clock processor 605 and may be used in conjunction with the time set buttons 650 and 655 to control the minute and second entry for the individual upper counter display 620 and lower counter display 625. Times on both displays may be programmed to move in either direction. An on/off button or switch 670 may be coupled to timer/clock processor 605 and may be used for ease of activation/deactivation. Power for the gaming clock may be provided by batteries and/or an AC/DC transformer connected to 120 volts AC from a standard wall outlet. When not in use in a timing game situation, this unit may contain and be used as a regular time/alarm clock which registers AM/PM time for everyday use.

[0062] There may be, for example, six or more different "Wild Cards" also known as "Wild Tiles." A number of possible "Wild Cards" are shown in FIGS. 7A-7F. The first Wild Card, the Great Equalizer, is shown in FIG. 7A and may operate so that when any player draws this game piece, all players scramble their game pieces and start over (with their same game pieces). The game continues as usual, time may still be running. FIG. 7B shows the second Wild Card, Crash and Bum, that operates so that when one player draws this game piece, that player must scramble his own game pieces and start over again. All other players continue with their play, and time may still running. FIG. 7C shows the third Wild Card, Musical Chair, that operates such that when any player draws this game piece, all players shift to the chair to the right (R) or the left (L). Play and time never stops as the players assume ownership of their neighbor's game pieces and continue the game. FIG. 7D shows a fourth exemplary Wild Card, Covet Your Neighbors Game Pieces. The player who draws the Covet Your Neighbors Game Pieces Wild Card looks at all the player's game pieces around the table and takes over any one of the other players' game pieces he desires by, for example, going to the player's chair and taking their game pieces. Play continues for all. Time may still be running. FIG. 7E shows the fifth Wild Card, The Game Piece Exchange Wild Card. The player who draws the Game Piece Exchange Wild Card looks to the players on his left and right and exchanges one or more game pieces from one of the neighbor's tiles for their own game pieces as indicated on the Wild Card game piece. For example, from game pieces that you and he have not used in word formation. As usual, play and time count may continue. FIG. 7F shows the sixth exemplary Wild Card, The Free Blank Game Piece. The player who draws this Wild Card gets to convert one or more lettered game pieces (likely useless otherwise) as indicated on the Wild Card; that is transforming game pieces not used in word formation to neutral blank game pieces by, for example, turning the word tiles upside down. This tile may now be used for any letter (e.g., letters A-Z) needed. These blanks don't count for points in word formation. Wild Cards may or may not be incorporated in the play of the game. Although not shown, the Wild Cards may include other tiles that alter the play of game, for example, the "Take Chair Right" and "Take Chair

Left" which allows the lucky (or not so lucky) recipient to move to another chair directly to their left or right according to the game piece indication.

[0063] Another embodiment of the invention may include a game piece dispenser as shown in **FIG. 8**. In one embodiment the lettered game pieces are physical pieces and tile in shape, for example, a square. The game piece dispenser retains one or more game pieces to be dispensed equally to each player upon demand. In the previous embodiment, prior to starting the game of "Word Sport", the lettered game pieces and optional Wild Cards may be scrambled face down in the center of a table. As the game is played, tile distribution is accomplished by the players reaching to the center of the game table and taking another game tile. Human error in game piece distribution may occur. Therefore, a more accurate method of game piece distribution may be achieved by using a mechanical, gravity feed and/or spring loaded apparatus (game piece dispenser), as illustrated in **FIG. 8** through **FIG. 13**.

[0064] Generally, the game piece dispenser may be used in the "Word Sport" game with the time clock. Although in a variation, using this game piece distribution system, the game may be played without the timer clock. The general method of play, as outlined before, remains the same. The optional Wild Cards may also be used. When all word game pieces (or tiles) are distributed, the first player to complete his words is the first place finisher and possibly the overall point winner. The first place finisher may score, for example, ten bonus points. Second, third and forth place finishes may be determined by the point totals less point deductions for unused lettered game pieces.

[0065] Referring now to **FIG. 8**, a preferred game piece dispenser **800** is formed for retaining and dispensing square lettered game pieces. The game piece dispenser **800** may include a base **805**, dispensing dishes **825**, holding magazine **820**, and plunger **810** (coupled to ejection tabs). The game piece dispenser **800** may be made of all plastic construction with a metal or plastic spring. It can support play of two through eight players and may sit in the center of the game table. The letter game tiles may be fed into the dispenser along the top of the apparatus and are inserted face down into the magazine **820**. The tiles may be ejected into each individual dish **825** of the tray by pushing down then releasing the plunger **810**. A spring **920** (see **FIG. 9**) pushes back up the plunger **810** and may also retract all the ejection tabs **915**. When the tabs are fully retracted, gravity drops all the tiles down the chambers of the magazine **820**. The dispenser is now reloaded for the next downward activation of the plunger **810**.

[0066] Assuming four players using one hundred lettered tile game pieces for the game "Word Sport", each player may take seven random tiles face down in front of him. This may leave eighteen tiles per person which are kept face down and randomly loaded in four chambers (e.g., every other chamber) of the magazine **820**. Six to eight players may use, for example, around two hundred lettered tiles. Still each player may take seven random tiles face down. Then about eighteen tiles per chamber may be loaded into the magazine **820**.

[0067] Once all the players have their seven random tiles in front of them (tiles face down) the game "Word Sport" may begin. All players turn over their seven tiles and start to

form words in a crisscross, diagonal, or separate unlinked formation orientation. For example, the first player to form words using all seven of his tiles says "Go"! He reaches over to the tile dispenser and pushes down on the plunger top **810** then releases it. This ejects a single tile in each of the players' dish (compartment) **825** in front of him on the dispenser. All players take their single tile from their dish **825** and continue play. The next person who forms words using all eight tiles or gets stuck and cannot create anymore words may likewise say "Go"! He reaches over to push down on plunger top **810** then release it. Another single tile is dispensed in each of the players' dish (compartment) **825** in front of him. All players take their single tile and continue play. This pattern continues until all tiles are distributed (for example, eighteen activations of the plunger **810**). In one variation there may be more than 18 tiles in the dispenser and a minimum number of tiles, e.g., 28 tiles, may be required (without any Wild Cards) to be distributed to each player before anyone can finish the game.

[0068] **FIG. 8** illustrates a perspective view of the game tile dispenser **800**. The base **805** may be attached to the eight compartment tray **825** which encircles the entire dispenser. When a player pushes down on the spring loaded plunger top **810**, the letter tiles **815** which are stacked face down in the chambers of the tile magazine **820** are ejected one each in all the compartments of the tray **825**. When the plunger **810** is released, the compressed spring retracts it back to the up position. Upon the full upward retraction of the plunger, gravity drops all the tiles down in position for the next down stroke activation of the plunger **810**. In a preferred embodiment, there may be eight game tile chambers around the tile magazine **820**. Individual tiles are loaded from the top and are dropped down forming a stack of tiles in each chamber.

[0069] **FIG. 9** illustrates a cross section view of the game piece dispenser **800**. This illustration is referenced by the broken line **900** depicted in **FIG. 8**. The base unit **805** may be a separate piece from the eight compartment tray **825** which may be also a separate piece from the tile magazine section **820**. The tile magazine section **820** has eight square or rectangular shaped chambers. In a variation, the chambers may be rounded for round game pieces (e.g. coin shaped tiles). Game tiles are fed through the open top of each chamber and dropped down. A round spring **920** may be located about a post **910**, and keeps the plunger top **810** in the up position till activated with a downward push by one of the players. One or more restrictor pegs **905** (e.g., screws) go through the magazine section **820** and ride in the vertical slots (see slot **1305** of **FIG. 13A**) on the sides of the plunger **810**. This restricts the downward and upward travel of the plunger so it doesn't fly out during upward retraction. The plunger **810** may be round in shape and travel down the center of the magazine section. The lower part of the plunger may be cone shaped and may have, for example, eight slots (see **FIGS. 13A and B**) which may be dove tail in design **1310**. These slots correspond to the tab ends on the tile ejector tabs **915** (also see **FIG. 12**).

[0070] **FIG. 10** illustrates the function of the game piece dispenser. When the plunger **810** is depressed by a downward activation from full up position **1005**, all the ejector tabs which contain a single game tile **815** are pushed outward. This activation may deposit a single tile in each compartment of the tray assembly **825** for which it's related chamber contains game pieces. When the plunger **810** is

released, the compressed spring **920** will push the plunger upward. Upon this same upward motion, the slotted tab of the ejector tabs are pulled back in, making for a voided space at the bottom of the game tiles loaded in the magazine. All the tiles **815** drop, reloading the chambers of the magazine and tile ejector tabs **915** for the next downward activation of the plunger **810**.

[0071] FIG. 11 show a cross section view looking down at the tile magazine **820** with the plunger top removed. This view is taken across broken line **1100** in FIG. 8. The dove tail slots of the plunger top **810** receive the tab ends of the ejector tabs **915** (also see FIG. 12). There are eight chambers **1105** for the game tiles. These chambers **1105** are illustrated as square in shape. The shape may also be rectangular or maybe rounded and is matched to the shape of the game pieces.

[0072] FIG. 13A shows a side view of the plunger top **810** which drops into the magazine body **820** of the game piece dispenser **800**. The dashed line **1315** shows the counter bore hole which receives the center post **910** (FIG. 9) that is surrounded by the spring **920**. Area **1310** of the plunger **810** is cone shaped and has eight dove tail slots running vertically. These slots correspond to the tab ends of the ejection tabs **1205** (FIG. 12). The down stroke of the plunger **810** pushes the ejection tabs **1205** outward, thereby depositing a single gaming tile in each tray compartment. An up stroke occurs automatically upon release of the spring loaded plunger **810**. It is the locking action of the tab ends of the ejector tabs **1205** with the dove tail slots **1310** of the plunger which pulls the ejector tabs in. The next tiles drop down there by reloading the tile dispenser for the next activation. FIG. 13B shows a bottom view of the plunger **810** and its cone shaped restriction pins **1310** from another perspective.

[0073] Referring now to FIGS. 14 and 15, an exemplary computerized approach to playing the Word Sport game is provided, including a couple of graphical user interfaces (GUIs) that may be used. FIG. 14 illustrates the basic concept of implementing the Word Sport game on networked computers, for example, the Internet. In this embodiment, an electronic form of the Word Sport game may be maintained on, for example, a game server **1405**. The game server may be coupled to a plurality of computers **1415** (e.g., a personal computer, laptop computer, personal digital assistant, a mobile communication device) via a network **1410**, for example, a local access network (LAN), a wireless network (WLAN), and/or the Internet. A player or user may access the Word Sport game stored on the server **1405** via well known methods such as entering a web address or clicking on an icon with a hyper-link (e.g., including the web address of the game stored on the server **1405**). In general, the manner of play with an electronic or computer based Word Sport game may follow a procedure or method of play similar to the method(s) described above for a physical or manual Word Sport game.

[0074] An exemplary GUI **1420** may be provided and may include, for example, a player participation list **1430**, a round or game indicator **1435**, a run time indicator **1440**, a count-down time display **1445**, a join the game or "sit" activator, a game command bar **1455**, a game table or play grid **1460**, a game tile display section **1465**, a word entry area **1470**, a submit activator **1475**, a word check indicator **1480**, a inter-player communication area **1485**, and/or a total

score area **1490**. Further, the GUI may also include one or more advertising areas **1425**. The player participation list **1430** may include, for example, the name of a plurality of the highest scoring active players and their present score. The scores may be updated in real time each time one or more of the players completes another word. The player names may be sorted in order of their respective points and may be updated in real time; i.e., the highest scoring player's names are moved to the top of the list. The round or game number indicator **1435** may indicate the round or game number, for example, there may be 3 rounds before a winner is selected. The run time indicator **1440** may be, for example, an up-time counter that counts up from zero to a variable amount of time such as between five and ten minutes depending on the skill of the players. This timer may automatically stop when one of the players is the first player to complete his allotment of word tiles. This is the winning time and may be stored in the server **1405** and/or one or more of the computers **1415**. The GUI may also include a count down timer **1445** that may be set to a predetermined or pre-programmed time, for example, one minute. This time may be stored in the server **1405** or one of the computers **1415** and may start at the same time or approximately when the count up timer (run time) stops. For example, the remaining players (other than the first place finisher) may have one minute to complete their remaining game tiles. The round or game may be completed when the count down time expires. The join or sit activation area **1450** may be clicked on for a person to enter the game. In one embodiment activating the join button **1450** may allow a person to join in the next game or round that has an available position and the game has available positions. For example, a game or round may be limited in the number of players, such as eight players per game and/or round. If the game or round is full, then the join or sit activation bar need not display anything or might provide an opportunity for the user to access a different word game that is waiting to start.

[0075] The game command bar **1455** may help instruct players how to direct the game. For example, activating the view command may let a player view other players screens after a round of play has concluded or a spectator view one or more players screens during a round of play. Another possible game command bar **1455** may be an "options" that may display the Word Sport game options as will be explained in more detail below with reference to FIG. 15. Further, the game command bar **1455** may include additional commands for improving or facilitating the Word Sport game.

[0076] The Word Sport GUI **1420** may also include the play grid **1460** and a game tile display **1465**. The server **1405** and/or one of the computers **1415** may randomly select various electronic lettered and/or wild card tiles and place them into the tile display. The player may then construct words in the play grid **1460** by, for example, clicking and dragging tiles in the game tile display **1465** and moving them to a desired location on the play grid **1460**. As will be explained in more detail below, the server **1405** may generate different letter tiles for each of the players or the same letter on tiles as determined by the game option illustrated in FIG. 15 (e.g., **1530**, **1535**). In one embodiment, players may not see each others game plays until the game has ended. In one variation, the GUI **1420** may include the word type area **1470** in which the player may type and enter a word into the grid. The word may then be entered into the grid using the

submit command **1475** or activating the enter key. The word may be entered at a random location and may then be highlighted and moved on the grid to a desired location by the player. This method may prove more time efficient for some players so as to help them speed up the play of their game. The word charting or checking feature **1480** may automatically check the words formed on the player grid **1460**. This may be achieved using an electronic dictionary stored in the server **1405** and/or one of the computers **1415**. Another manner may be to access a separate dictionary web site such as dictionary.com. If the word is not correct, the submitted word may be highlighted or disallowed and the player may receive no points or negative points for using the words.

[**0077**] The communications area **1485** is a location where the players may enter messages which can be read by all players. Multiple lines of messages may be displayed in area **1485A** and may be scrolled using the scroll bar **1485B** to reveal more messages entered during the game. Further, the total score display **1490** may be provided to display cumulative running score during the game to show the game or match winner(s) on a real time basis. This may be arranged in a manner so that the players with the highest scorers on top. The total score display **1490** may be scrolled using, for example, a scroll bar **1490A**.

[**0078**] FIG. 15 illustrates a second exemplary GUI for a Word Sport options page that may be activated by, for example, clicking on the options area of the game command bar **1455**. Using the options screen GUI **1500**, a player may customize the game prior to the start of play. Many of the options may be limited to selection by the first player to enter the game, i.e., the game host. In any case, the options GUI **1500** may include a title block **1505** including, for example the name "Word Sport" and/or a title block **1515** indicating the purpose of the screen, for example "Customize Your Game." Entry box **1520** allows a player to activate the count up timer and to set a maximum count up time in box **1520A**. Entry box **1525** allows the count down timer and to set a maximum count down time in box **1525A**. Further, there may be an All Tiles Same **1530** and All Tiles Random **1535** selection boxes that allows the player to select the computer to dispense all the same letter and/or wild card tiles to all the players at the same time or dispense tile types to the various players randomly and likely each player will have lettered and/or wild card tiles different from each other. There may also be a Wild Tiles Options box **1540** that the player may select to activate the server **1405** or computers **1415** to include wild card tiles in the tiles sent to the various players. Checking this box by clicking on the box allows the enabling of a multitude of wild card tile types to be selected by the player. For example, wild card selection boxes **1545** may include the Great Equalizer, Cash and Burn, Musical Chairs, Covet Your Neighbors Tiles, Tile Exchange, Free Blank, etc. The options may include a manner of selecting the number of selected wild card types to be included in the game. For example, the Tile Exchange and Free Blank may include a box to place a number that specifies the number of such wild cards to be included in the game.

[**0079**] The game options GUI **1500** may also include a selection block **1550** that allows the players to replace players after the game starts. If players drop out during a game, this function may activate the join or "SIT" button to join the game so as to let the spectators know that there is

a vacancy for them. Further, an option **1555** for limiting the type of player that may join or be included in the game having such alternatives **1560** as Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced, Expert, and Word Master. Also, the options may include a function selection blocks **1565** that allows the game to be open to all spectators and **1570** that enables the game (or table) to be limited to only the players of a private group of people. Specific people or groups may be specified in area **1572**. Finally, the GUI **1500** may include a cancel button that cancels all option selection blocks and a play button that starts the game with the options selected.

[**0080**] In another embodiment, the word game, for example "Word Sport"™, may be played in a competitive tournament where recognition, prizes and other incentives are awarded to the winners (first place finisher) runners up (second and third place) and other top performers. The tournament can be facilitated at various skill levels and/or ages, for example, grade school, high school, college and adult. In one variation, up to eight players may be seated around, for example, a five foot diameter round tables in, for example, a hall, gymnasium or any large room or rooms containing one or more gaming tables. Ideally there would be as many tables as necessary to accommodate all those players and teams interested in competing in the tournament. Players may play in teams of, for example, four players (e.g., two teams of four players per table) or four teams of two players per table (e.g., doubles) or eight individual players per table (i.e., singles). The tournament may be played periodically (annually or semi-annually etc.) at, for example a school location or a rented hall.

[**0081**] In one variation, the tournament competition may be formatted in a pattern or process of elimination similar to the annual N.C.A.A. Basketball Tournament. Teams of fours, doubles or single contestants can be assembled in one location for organized play till the top sixty four or thirty two or sixteen teams of foursomes, doubles and singles are determined. Then a final playoff tournament may begin.

[**0082**] All games in the tournament may be played in a common game format, for example "Word Sport"™, using the-count-up, count-down timer method. A game may consist of, for example, three rounds of play. The winners (e.g., first place) and runners up (e.g., second, third, etc. place) may be determined based on the accumulation of all points scored in the three rounds. Place finishers may also score bonus points, e.g., ten points for first place, five points for second place, three points for third, etc.

[**0083**] An exemplary tournament scenario in a format similar to the N.C.A.A. Basketball elimination format is to determine a field of, for example, the top sixty four teams from various grade schools or high schools in a geographic area. One school may serve as a host school to provide a tournament location. In one variation, sixty four schools would send one team each. A team may include, for example, five players per team, four playing and one extra player as a substitute. The extra player may also assist in administering the game and serve as, for example, a referee to monitor the oppositions play and keep score. Or, the team may consist of only four, three, or two players having one extra player, rotating in for game play, serving as referee, keeping score, etc. Some schools may send more than one team to the tournament. A nominal entry fee (e.g. one hundred dollars per team) or other amount (e.g. twenty five

dollars for individuals) may be established for participation. This fee may cover registration, prizes and on-site lunches and refreshments for the participants. Prizes and incentives may be intellectual in nature (computer related items, academic articles, books etc.). Major prizes may include scholarship (money) prizes stipulated for further educational needs. Further, prizes may be solicited as donations from various companies in the area.

[0084] Players (teams) may be ranked in advance using, for example, their grade point average (GPA) to determine a seed rating similar to the way the N.C.A.A. arranges their basketball tournament. In this way, in the opening round, the number one seeds would face the number sixteen seeds; the number two seeds plays the number fifteen seeds and so on. This assumes a sixty four team tournament field. The same principle holds true for a doubles and singles tournament. All teams may play, for example, three rounds per game elimination. Game play may use the timer method (count-up/count-down) for expedient tournament play and/or play until a certain number of game pieces have been distributed.

[0085] In another embodiment, the game pieces or letter tiles may be designed to have designations for sorting one full set into two half sets and/or having unique designs so that two commingled sets may be divided into their respective sets or four separately identifiable half sets. This is particularly advantageous when physical tile pieces are used and randomly mixed together in a holding container or bag. For example, assuming each set of game pieces or tiles has a particular number of tiles, say 100 tiles, with a particular number of lettered tiles provided per player, say 25, the tile sets may be designed to enable easy sorting of, for example, a single set of game pieces or tiles intended to be used for four players (e.g., 100 tiles), into two separate sets (e.g., 50 tiles) that may each be used for word-sport play between only two players. Further, if two complete sets (e.g., 200 tiles) intended for use by eight players are mixed together in a holding container, a convenient way of sorting the tiles to allow two, four, or six players to use some of the tiles to play a game of word-sport is also helpful. In this case, each of the two full sets may have unique designators or designs to allow quick sorting into separate full sets and/or half-sets.

[0086] Below in Table A is an exemplary list of the number of and letter designation on the lettered tile that may be included in a full and half-set. Note that the Wild Cards that may be included are not shown for simplicity.

| TABLE A | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Full set distribution (100 total) | Half-set distribution (50 total) (having dot notation in lower left corner) |
| 12 E | 6 E |
| 9 A,I | 5 A |
| 8 O | 4 I,O |
| 6 N,R,T | 3 N,R,T |
| 4 D,S,L,U | 2 D,L,S,U,G, |
| 3 G | 1 B,C,F,H,M,P,V,W,Y,+1 Blank |
| 2 B,C,F,H,M,P,V,W, Y,+2Blanks | 1 J,K |
| 1 J,K,Q,X,Z | No Q,X,Z (no dot notation on these letters) |

[0087] Referring now to FIG. 16, an exemplary design is provided for a first set of lettered tiles, according to one embodiment of the present invention. In this case a few representative lettered tile are provide to explain one exemplary design for providing a quick and easy method of

sorting a full set of word tile including, for example, one hundred tiles for use by, for example, four players. In this example six of the one hundred tiles are shown. For quick sorting, a dot is provided on some of the tiles such as letter A tile 1601, B tile 1603, and C tile 1605. This signifies some of the tile that would be sorted to be included in a half-set tile distribution, while the tile without the dots, letter A tile 1602, B tile 1604, and C tile 1606, are included in the other half-set. Thus, using this quick to distinguish characteristic, dot vs. no dot, if you want to play with two players and keep the distribution at twenty-five tiles per player, it is easy to extract a half-set of fifty letter tiles by just removing the letter tiles which have, for example, the dots. These fifty tiles may be used for a game of word-sport between two players. Of course the use of a dot is only one method of using a distinguishing design to sort a full set of tiles into two half-sets. Other designs such a star, square, etc., or even using a different letter font, are some of the possible ways to distinguish the half-sets.

[0088] Referring now to FIG. 17, an exemplary design is provided for a second set of lettered tiles that may compliment the first set of lettered tiles shown in FIG. 16, according to one embodiment of the present invention. If Word-Sport is to be played with, for example, six to eight players, it may be necessary to include another full set of letter tiles (purchased separately). However, this second set may have a distinguishing design for half-set designation that is different from the first set (or have the second set plain with no distinguishing design at all). One method would be to design the second set to not only have the dot for half-set distribution, but it may also have, for example, a Roman numeral II (signifies second set.). As shown, one half of the exemplary lettered tiles in FIG. 17, letter A 1701, letter B 1703, and letter C, 1705, include both a II and a dot. The other half of the exemplary letters, letter A 1702, letter B 1704, and letter C, 1706, include only an II. This way, when two full sets are mixed containing a total of, for example, two hundred tiles (for eight players), the two sets may be easily separate into two sets of one hundred tiles when needed or when a game is finished. Further, if there are to be six players, a half-set may be extracted from either the second set (the tiles with only the II) and mixed with the entire first set. In this case one hundred fifty tiles for six players (twenty five tiles per player) may be quickly provided or sorted from a two full set collection of tiles. Again, it is easy to restore your sets by using the notations on the tiles.

[0089] Further, although there are no numeric values to the letter tiles shown in FIGS. 16 and 17, they may also contain numeric values for scoring. However, in one variation of Word-Sport, if the tiles do not contain any numeric values, then all scoring may be done by place finishes (e.g. 1st place scores ten points, 2ND place scores five points, 3RD place scores three points).

[0090] Although particular embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described, it will be understood that it is not intended to limit the invention to the preferred embodiments and it will be obvious to those skilled in the art that various changes and modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Thus, the invention is intended to cover alternatives, modifications, and equivalents, which may be included within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the claims.

[0091] For example, Word Sport may even be included in an electronic game system. A player or players might even

compete against a computer. Further, the lettered game pieces may contain letters or symbols from any language known to man. Word Sport may also be played in the following manner using a one minute timer. To set up, you place letter tiles face down in center of the table and mix them thoroughly. Each player then takes seven tiles (still face down) in front of him or her. After all players take their seven tiles, one may now add in (face down) the optional "Wild Tiles." Wind timer to one-minute countdown. Set on table within easy reach of all players. Then to begin play, all Players turn over their tiles and begin to form words. The first player to form words with their seven tiles says, "GO"! All players reach and take another letter tile. Play continues till another player uses all (now eight) of their letter tiles. That player then says, "Go"! All players again reach to get another letter tile from the center. This pattern continues till all the tiles are taken. If none of the players can complete his puzzle (to say go!) during play, the game is considered "frozen". All players then reach for another tile and then resume play. The first player to complete all twenty-five of his letter tiles in words declares he's finished, reaches over and presses down on the timer activation button. He is the Pacesetter, wins the round and scores ten points. All other players have one minute to finish forming their words. The second player to finish his word tiles within one-minute scores five points. Countdown time is still running. If a third player can finish within the one-minute countdown down he score three points for third place. When time expires, the round is over. Players that cannot complete words within the one-minute countdown, second and third place finishes are determined by the least number of letter tiles remaining. Top score after three rounds played wins the game.

What is claimed is:

1. A word game system, comprising:
 - a count up and count down timer for establishing multiple finish times.
2. The word game system according to claim 1, wherein the word game system is directed to a word formation game and further comprises one or more wild cards that change the method of play in the word formation game.
3. The word game system according to claim 2, further comprising:
 - at first full set of game pieces including a first unique indicator on half of the first full set of game pieces so that the first full set may be quickly and easily sorted into two half sets.
4. The word game system according to claim 3, further comprising:
 - a second full set of game pieces including a second unique indicator so that the second full set of game pieces may be quickly and easily sorted from the first full set of game pieces if the first full set of game pieces and second full set of game pieces are mixed together.
5. The word game system according to claim 4, wherein the second full set of game pieces further includes a third unique indicator on half of the second full set of game pieces so that the second full set may be quickly and easily sorted into two half sets.

6. The word game system according to claim 5, wherein the third unique indicator on half of the second full set of game pieces is of the same design as the first unique indicator.

7. The word game system according to claim 6, wherein the game pieces are tile pieces and further include letters of an alphabet that may be combined to form words.

8. The word system of claim 1, wherein the count up and count down timer is a gaming clock including a touch top start and stop switch.

9. The word game system of claim 8, wherein the gaming clock is electronic and includes a memory for storing the multiple finish times.

10. The word game system of claim 9, wherein the gaming clock contains multiple digital displays for displaying time.

11. The word game system of claim 1, further comprising: a game piece dispenser that may be manually activated by any player to dispense an equal number of game pieces to all players simultaneously in response to an action of one player.

12. A word game system, comprising:

one or more wild cards that change the method of play in a word formation game.

13. The word game system of claim 12, wherein the word game system is implemented using a computer or computer system.

14. A word game system, comprising:

a game piece dispenser that may be manually activated by any player to dispense an equal number of game pieces to all players simultaneously in response to an action of one player.

15. The word game system of claim 14, wherein the game piece dispenser includes a game piece magazine for holding at least some of the game pieces, a dispensing dish for receiving a game piece when the game piece dispenser is manually activated, and a plunger.

16. A method of playing a word formation game, comprising the steps of:

determining multiple place finishes of players according to the amount of time or extent of use of game pieces in word formation; and

allocating points for each of the respective multiple place finishes.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of:

timing player's completion times to establish a sequence of the multiple place finishes so as to determine the place of finish of various players and allocate points accordingly.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the word formation game is played in a tournament manner.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein points may be obtained by use of particular letters or formation of particular words.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the word formation game is implemented using a computer or computer system.

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