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(54) **6 1/2 CARD POKER GAME**

(52) **U.S. Cl. 463/13**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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A casino wagering game is played in which hand rank or hand count is determined by the provision of symbols dealt to at least a player. A player places at least a first wager on an underlying card game in which a player hand competes with a dealer hand. X cards are dealt to a dealer to form a dealer hand. A random number of cards are dealt to a player that has placed the at least a first wager to form a player hand. The random number is selected from a defined set of numbers including at least one number less than X and X. The ranks of the dealer hand and the player hand are compared, and the at least first wager is resolved. Typically ranks of the dealer hand and the player hand are based upon poker ranks for a hand of Y cards, and Y is selected from the group consisting of 3, 4 and 5, while X is selected from 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, with $X \geq Y$.

(73) **Assignee: Shuffle Master, Inc.**

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PLAYER MAKES AT LEAST AN ANTE WAGER OF VALUE Z (at least one bonus wager may be mandatory) TO COMPETE IN AN X-CARD POKER GAME
PLAYER IS DEALT A STANDARD NUMBER OF CARDS, SUCH AS AT LEAST X CARDS, preferably X+1 cards
DEALER IS DEALT A STANDARD NUMBER OF CARDS, SUCH AS AT LEAST Y CARDS, WHERE $Y > X$, preferably $Y = X + 2$
PLAYER REVIEWS CARDS AND MAY MAKE A PLAY BET OF AT LEAST VALUE Z, WITH OPTIONS FOR THE PLAYER OF UP TO 20 Z OR MORE FOR THE PLAY BET, OR FOLD
PLAYER HANDS AND DEALER HAND ARE REVEALED, AND THE BEST X-CARD HAND IS ARRANGED
PLAYER WINS ANTE WAGER AND PLAY BET WAGER IF PLAYER HAND RANK EXCEEDS DEALER HAND RANK (ties go according to house or optional game rules)
ODDS ARE ALSO PAID IN RESOLVING PLAYER WAGERS AND BETS WHEN PREDETERMINED PLAYER HAND RANKS ARE ATTAINED (according to pay table)
OVER THE COURSE OF PLAY OF THE GAME, A RANDOM EVENT DETERMINATOR (e.g., PROCESSOR AFFECTING THE TABLE, AS IN THE SHUFFLER OR CENTRAL PROCESSOR) DETERMINES WHEN A PLAYER HAND IS TO BE DEALT WITH MORE THAN THE STANDARD NUMBER OF CARDS, OR THE DEALER IS TO BE DEALT FEWER THAN THE STANDARD NUMBER OF DEALER CARDS
ROUND IS PLAYED WITH RANDOMLY ASSIGNED VARYING NUMBER OF CARDS IN HANDS, AS DETERMINED IN THE RANDOM HAND DETERMINATOR

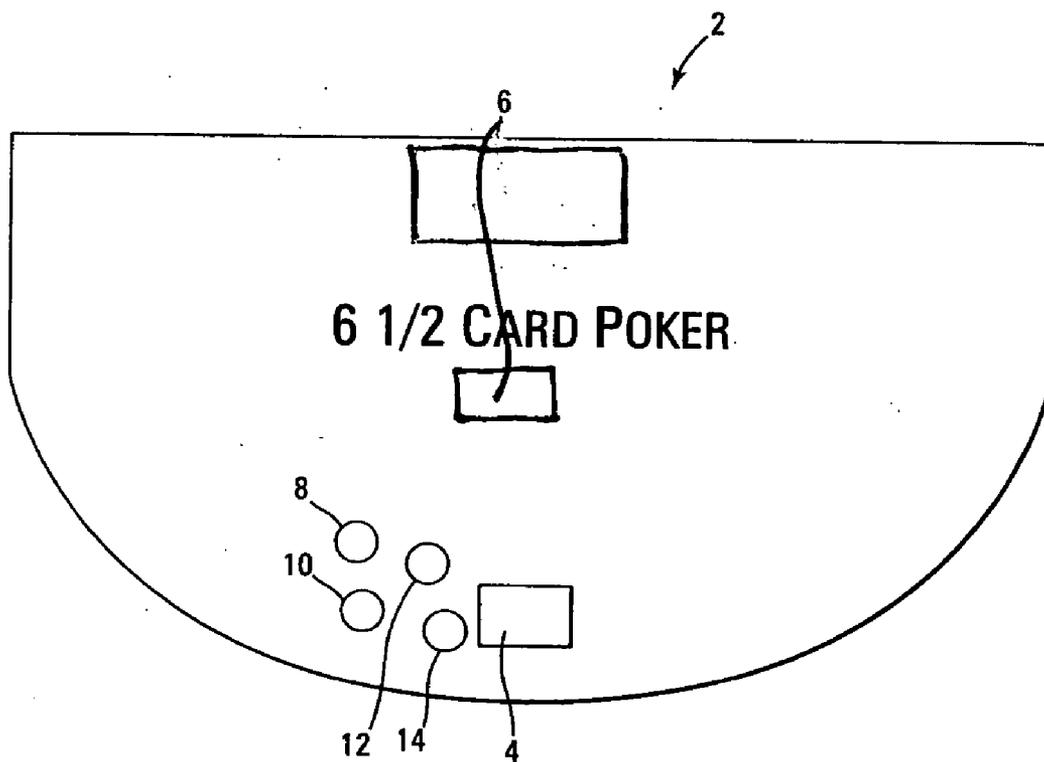


Fig. 1

FIG. 2

PLAYER MAKES AT LEAST AN ANTE WAGER OF VALUE Z (at least one bonus wager may be mandatory) TO COMPETE IN AN X-CARD POKER GAME
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6 1/2 CARD POKER GAME

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present disclosure relates to the field of casino games, particularly casino card games, and particularly casino table card games and card games played on automated platforms.

[0003] 2. Background of the Art

[0004] Many different wagering games presently exist for use in both home and casino environments. Such games should necessarily be exciting, uncomplicated and easy to learn so as to avoid frustrating the players. Card games such as poker and Twenty-One have gained widespread popularity because of their established ranking of hands and well known rules. Furthermore, each of these games usually involves continuous wagering opportunities for the players thus increasing player participation and excitement. Lastly, the games move fairly quickly to maintain action and activity. All of these factors have created games that are widely accepted and are widely known.

[0005] Variations in wagering structures can also increase the excitement and acceptance of such wagering games. U.S. Pat. No. 5,417,430 (Breeding) discloses a poker game with an altered wagering scheme thus allowing the player the opportunity to compete for an additional prize or payout.

[0006] Other variations can be made to standard games to allow more player opportunity and involvement. U.S. Pat. No. 5,098,107 (Boylan) discloses a game wherein additional symbols are added to increase wagering opportunities. This allows the player the opportunity to place several wagers on different portions of the game while the game is being played.

[0007] There are numerous variants of poker that are played in casinos throughout the world. Among the more well-known and successful commercial games are Let It Rides® Stud Poker (represented by U.S. Pat. No. 2,881,081, Breeding), Four Card Poker™ game (represented by published U.S. Patent Application 20020195775, Webb), Three-Card Poker® game (represented by U.S. Pat. No. 5,685,774); and Caribbean Stud® Poker game (represented by U.S. Pat. No. 4,836,533). Each of these games has its own set of rules, and consistent numbers of cards are uniformly dealt to players' hands and dealer hands, even though in the Four Card Poker™ game the dealer consistently receives more cards than does the player. The play of Four-Card Poker (Published U.S. Patent Application Nos. 2002/0195775; and 2004/0217548) shows differential numbers of cards being provided to players and dealers, but never randomly. That is, the dealer gets one fixed number of cards and the players get another fixed number of cards.

[0008] Many variations in the play of poker-type games have also been introduced to increase the excitement and interest in the play of both table and video versions of poker. For example, in a video version of draw poker, U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,356,140 and 5,531,440 (Dabrowski) teach that after an initial wager, two distinct hands may be dealt, and the player may select between the two hands for continued play of the game. Only a single hand may be played.

[0009] U.S. Published Application 20040033825 describes a wagering game for one or more players comprising (a) a random result generator for generating a specific random result, and (b) a playing surface (100) including a first betting zone (20) for placement of first wagers corresponding to a plurality of likely random results; and a second betting zone (30) for placement of second wagers corresponding to a first or second outcome wherein the likely random result is compared to the specific random result for a match and the first or second outcomes are determined by a comparison of the specific random result with either a predetermined specific random result or a successive specific random result.

[0010] U.S. Pat. No. 6,663,487 (Ladner) describes an electronic gaming device and method which provides for dynamically selected pay tables. For each hand or series of hands, the device selects a prevailing pay table or a prevailing pay for one or more outcomes. The prevailing pay table can be randomly selected from a plurality of pay tables, pseudo-randomly selected or can be selected based upon the player's strategy of play. An electronic device is described for playing a wagering game of the type where a player makes a wager, game play indicia are selected by a data processor to result in either a winning or a losing outcome combination of indicia and, if the player obtains a winning outcome, the player is issued an award according to the winning outcome combination obtained and a pay table which defines the award to be paid.

[0011] The device comprises: a processor to control the play of the game; a display to display the game play indicia, said display controlled by the processor; means for the player to input a wager and prompt play of the game; a data structure storing data corresponding to a plurality of pay tables, each pay table presenting a differing award schedule for at least some game-winning outcomes; the processor configured to randomly select from the first data structure a pay table for the game and to control the display to display the selected pay table; the processor configured to, upon prompting of play of the game, select and display an outcome for the game and compare the outcome to the selected pay table award schedule and if a game winning outcome has been selected, for issuing the reward corresponding to said selected pay table schedule.

[0012] U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,665,684; 6,651,982; 6,651,981 (Grauzer et al.) and related cases show the formation of hands with random cards therein, but with specified, fixed numbers of cards in each hand according to fixed rules of the games played. The apparatus and method are for moving playing cards from a first group of cards into plural hands of cards, wherein each of the hands contains a random arrangement of cards. The apparatus comprises a card receiver for receiving the first group of cards, a single stack of card-receiving compartments generally adjacent to the card receiver, the stack generally vertically movable, an elevator for moving the stack, a card-moving mechanism between the card receiver and the stack, and a microprocessor that controls the card-moving mechanism and the elevator so that an individual card is moved into an identified compartment. The number of compartments receiving cards and the number of cards moved to each compartment may be selected. An apparatus is described for feeding cards, comprising a surface for supporting a stack of cards, a feed roller with a frictional outer surface, a drive mechanism for causing

rotation of the feed roller, a pair of speed-up rollers to advance the cards out of the feed roller, and a clutch mechanism for disengaging the feed roller from the drive mechanism as the card comes into contact with the speed up rollers.

[0013] U.S. Pat. No. 6,569,014 (Walker et al.) describes an electronic gaming device and method for operating the same is disclosed. According to one aspect of the invention, the device is a video poker machine that displays an initial hand of cards to a player. The player considers the initial hand and executes a game strategy by selecting certain cards to hold and others to discard, if any. A player's selection of cards causes a signal to be received by the device. The signal indicates which of the cards in the initial hand are to be held and which are to be discarded. Based on the signal, the device determines a number of cards to be drawn. For each discard card, the device displays an additional draw card in place thereof and determines a payout based on a ranking of the final hand and the number of cards drawn. Differing pay tables may be provided depending upon the number of cards replaced.

[0014] U.S. Pat. No. 6,257,979 (Walker) describes a method for operating a video poker machine which includes the steps of populating a primary poker hand with a plurality of playing cards, identifying discard cards to be discarded from the populated primary poker hand, populating a secondary poker hand with the discard cards, populating the primary poker hand to replace the discard cards discarded therefrom, thereby forming a final primary poker hand, and determining a payout based at least upon the playing cards in the final primary poker hand. There is a computer control system driving the video poker machine.

[0015] U.S. Pat. No. 6,179,271 (Vancura) describes what is primarily a video type game as a method of playing a game comprising the steps of: (a) a player making a wager; (b) dealing a random event to a player and a dealer, said random event having an associated value; (c) said player standing or hitting; (d) if the player stands, establishing player's score based on the number of events dealt to said player; (e) if the player hits, dealing a new random event to said player, said hit being deemed successful or unsuccessful based on a comparison of the associated value of said new random event to the associated value of said player's immediately preceding event; (e1) should said hit be successful, repeating step (c); (e2) should said hit be unsuccessful, establishing player's score as the null value, (f) said dealer standing or hitting; (g) if the dealer stands, establishing dealer's score based on the number of events dealt to said dealer; (h) if the dealer hits, dealing a new random event to said dealer, said hit being deemed successful or unsuccessful based on a comparison of the associated value of said new random event to the associated value of said dealer's immediately preceding event; (h1) should said hit be successful, repeating step (f); (h2) should said hit be unsuccessful, establishing dealer's score as the null value, (i) resolving said player's wager. The Vancura patent describes that the game could be played with cards, for example, with a dealt card serving as a random event and its rank comprising the associated value. Such was the case with the former television game show Card Sharks, in which contestants, in part, conjectured upon the relative rank of cards as compared to those previous.

[0016] U.S. Pat. No. 6,110,040 (Sanduski et al.) describes a video poker gaming machine where, after initially dealing five cards to a player, the machine displays a sixth card to replace a discarded card by the player. In one embodiment, the sixth card automatically replaces the leftmost discarded card. In another embodiment, the sixth card can replace any of the discarded cards.

[0017] U.S. Pat. No. 5,971,849 (Faciglia) provides background information specific to the use of random number generators for providing random signals. A computer-based system and method allow at least one player to play a poker-like game using a computer. A processor processes inputs through a Graphic User Interface (GUI). A display displays the GUI, including: a five column by five row display matrix, in which each column and row combination includes a matrix display region defining a block of the display matrix; five selectable display regions, each selectable display region corresponding to each column of the display matrix; and a plurality of user-actuable icons, including an actuation icon. A selectable symbol generator responds to the user inputs by randomly generating selectable symbols corresponding to poker playing cards for display. The processor causes a selected symbol to be displayed in a selected matrix display region of the display matrix, and determines whether the display matrix displays a combination of symbols corresponding to a poker hand condition. The processor generates a score for each user. The poker-playing device may be adapted for playing a poker-style game among a plurality of users, with respective scores determined and displayed, and for providing a chat room feature for interactive text transactions between players before, during, and after play.

[0018] In separate patent application authorizations and filings, Shuffle Master, Inc. has proposed a game in which there is a generic disclosure of dealing random hands (PA1088.ap.US, titled PLAYING CARD SHUFFLER WITH DIFFERENTIAL HAND CAPABILITY).

[0019] There are poker table games with indeterminate numbers of cards dealt, but not random numbers of cards dealt to players. For example, with apologies to Political Correctness, there are variations of games called Pitch and Bitch Low Ball and Bounty in which complete hands are dealt (e.g., 5 cards) and the player has exclusive control over whether or not an additional card will be provided for play of the game, with or without discarding a card, and with or without making a pot contribution to purchase the card.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0020] A casino wagering card game is described that combines a unique series of steps and events to provide a game with an enhanced sense of relative advantage between a player and the dealer. The game provides greater player control over wagers, while at the same time offering instances where dealer advantages, which are the result of greater numbers of cards for the dealer from which to form a hand than the number of cards that players are given). In some instances, the inherent dealer advantage is leveled (e.g., by providing players with the same number of cards as the dealer, on a regular or random basis). A base game comprises a player placing at least one of a Play Wager or a wager against a pay table in the play of a Y-Card poker hand. The dealer ordinarily receives an X-Card initial hand

from which to select the final Y-Card hand, wherein $X > Y$. The player is ordinarily dealt an initial hand of at least Y-Cards and randomly receives a hand comprising any integer of Y through X. After a player views the initial hand dealt to the player, a decision is made as to whether to continue play of the game (if the initial Ante Wager was made) by making a Play Bet, or to fold the hand. Player hands win when a player 5-Card hand ties the dealer 5-Card hand. A wider range of Play Bets are allowed than normal, such as a range of from $1 \times$ to $2 \times$ the Play Ante. Additional side bets are also available in the play of the game, the side bets being placed before the player reviews the player initial hand.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0021] FIG. 1 shows a playing surface for the $6\frac{1}{2}$ Card Poker™ game.

[0022] FIG. 2 is a flow diagram for play of an exemplary embodiment of $6\frac{1}{2}$ Card Poker™ game.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0023] The following descriptions provide disclosure of generic concepts of the play of a game. In practice, various steps may be omitted, additional steps added, and the sequence of steps varied, with the play of the resulting game still remaining within the scope of the present disclosure.

[0024] A general description of the game follows. A method of playing a casino wagering game uses hand rank or hand count determined by the provision of symbols dealt to at least a player and a dealer. A player places at least a first wager on an underlying card game in which a player hand competes with a dealer hand. X cards are dealt to a dealer to form a dealer hand and to the player(s) that has placed the at least a first Ante Wager are dealt a random number of cards to form a player hand. The random number is selected from a defined set of numbers including at least one number less than X and X. The player(s) review their hand and determine whether to stay in the game (usually by having to make an additional Play Bet wager to back up the Ante Wager) or folding. For player(s) remaining in the game, the ranks of the dealer hand and the player hand are compared according to poker rules or other game rules. The at least first Ante Wager and any other wagers are then resolved.

[0025] For purposes of disclosure, ranks of the dealer hand and the player hand are typically based upon poker ranks for a hand of Y cards. Y may be selected from the group consisting of 3, 4 and 5. Y preferably is 5. X may be selected from the group consisting of 5, 6 and 7 (when Y is 5), and comparable numbers for hands where X is 3 or 4. Preferably X is 6 or 7 when Y is 5. The defined set of numbers may be preferably selected from the group consisting of 6 and 7 when Y is 5. The player typically views the random number of cards dealt to the player and either folds (losing the Ante Wager) or makes a second wager, the Play Bet wager. The player may also place at least one separate side bet against a pay table in addition to the Ante (and any subsequent Play Bet wager) and the side bet is resolved after disclosure of both player and dealer hands. The second wager (Play Bet wager) may be selected by the player from within a range of multiples for the Ante wager. For example, the range may be between 1 times and 50 times the Ante, between $1 \times$ to $40 \times$ the Ante wager, or between 1 and $20 \times$ the Ante wager, or any other range that is designed or appropriate to the casino.

[0026] The game may also be described as a wagering game in which a player card hand competes against a dealer hand according to the rules of rank of 5-Card Poker. A player(s) places at least an ante wager, and the player and the dealer are provided with separate at least 5-Card hands. Typically the player receives a 5- or 6-Card hand and the dealer receives a 6- or 7-card hand, evidencing an advantage against the player. After viewing the player card hand, a player must select an amount of a second wager to remain in the game or fold. The player has a choice of the amount of the second wager between a range of values, with a choice possibly available between at least three values for the amount of the second Play Wager or Bet Wager. The range may be, for example, between $1 \times$ and $50 \times$ the ante wager. The player may be required or allowed to make an additional side bet against a pay table before the player and dealer hands are revealed. The rules of comparing hand ranks may exclude consideration of kickers along with hand ranks consisting of a pair, two pair, three-of-a-kind and four-of-a-kind and the player wins all ties in the hand ranks. It is to be understood that the particular poker hand ranking system depends upon the number of cards in the final hand, because the frequency of certain hands is different depending upon whether the game is a 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7 Card game.

[0027] The game may be further described as a method of playing a card game with a required ante in which a player hand competes against a dealer hand consisting of a first number of cards, the card game based upon poker rank of hands. The player randomly receiving a second number of cards selected from the following: a first number of cards dealt to a dealer, one card fewer than the first number of cards and one card more than the first number of cards. After receiving the second number of cards, the player may select between a) wagering a Bet Wager amount that is a whole number multiple of the Ante between $1 \times$ and $50 \times$ or b) forfeiting the Ante Wager and folding. The determination of randomly receiving a second number of cards is determined by a shuffler having random card count per hand capability selected from the group consisting of hardware, software, and hardware and software.

[0028] A game will typically begin with at least one player initiating a game at least in part in opposition to a hand played by the house (e.g., typically a dealer hand, whether real or virtual). There must be at least one wager made by a player to enter play of the game. The required wager against the house is called the Ante Wager, in one example of a game according to the present teachings. At a table or machine, there is usually a maximum amount and a minimum amount allowed for an Ante or Play Wager, for example at least \$1.00 and a maximum of \$500.00. There are also side bets that may be placed at this time (before a player can see the player's initial hand), and these will be discussed in greater detail below.

[0029] After placing the required wager (referred to generally as the Ante), the at least one player is dealt an initial hand, and the dealer is dealt an initial hand. The final competition between hands held by players and the dealer will be with hands of an equal number of cards, for example, with final hands of 3, 4, or 5 cards. One exception is when the player is dealt fewer than the number of cards in the final dealer hand—i.e., where the player is dealt four cards and the dealer is dealt five cards in a 4-Card Poker™ game. The initial hands dealt to the players in the game will typically be a number of cards at least equal to the number of cards used in the final hand. For purposes of ease of explanation, a final hand of 5-Cards will be discussed, remembering that

the actual number of cards in the player hand and the dealer hand in the competition may be varied according to house rules, local rules, and game rules. For example, in one variant, the player initial hand could be fewer than the final hand card count, and the player would receive an additional card (with or without a discard) after viewing the initial hand. If the initial hand card count equals the final hand card count, then a discard and replacement option may be available. The player may also be randomly dealt fewer than the number of cards in the final dealer hand and be forced to play with fewer than all cards.

[0030] The initial player card count hand will comprise the actual number of cards used to form the final hand count. For example, if the final hand count in competition is a 5-Card poker hand, the player would be dealt at least five cards, and in a preferred embodiment of the invention, exactly six cards in the base play of the game. However, in a randomly determined event (which may be determined by a random event determination by a card shuffler, a processor identifying playing positions, or some other random determination procedure), a hand with a larger card count (e.g., if 5 cards are usually dealt, 6 or 7 cards are dealt to at least one player on random hands to random players; if 6 cards are generally dealt to players, then 7 or 8 cards are dealt to at least one player on random hands to random players). The total number of cards in the players hand before rendering a decision on a continuing wager is referred to as the player hand total card count. After the player reviews the cards in the player hand total card count, the player must decide how to continue play of the hand. The player at this point has an option of folding, and forfeiting all wagers; possibly making no additional wagers (calling), and remaining in the game; of making a Play Bet to supplement the Play Wager in the competition of hands against the dealer hand.

[0031] The amount of the Play Wager may be chosen by the player in some embodiments of the game. In a preferred embodiment of the present game, the player may elect to make a Play Bet of 1x, 2x, 3x, 4x, 5x, 6x, 7x or more in comparison to the Ante Wager. Fractional wagers are also possible, but that might be more difficult for a dealer to regulate. After the player makes a decision on how to proceed with the game, such as making the Play Wager, the cards may then be revealed. It is possible at this point to offer a discard and replacement (a discard/draw event) to the player (and/or to the dealer), with the draw event being either free to the player, or requiring a payment or additional wager.

[0032] After all intermediate events (the Play Wager, draw event, additional wager, etc.) have been completed, the player(s) and the dealer reveal their entire final hand counts and the best 5-Card hand is created out of the respective (dealer and individual player) final hand total card counts. The hands are compared, and a dealer hand higher in poker rank than the player's hand wins the Ante and the Play Wager of the player, a player hand that is higher in poker rank than the dealer hand wins (including any odds) on the Ante Wager (the Ante) and the Play Wager; and a tie in hand poker rank between the player and the dealer may result in either a house win (dealer win), tie (a push), or a player win, depending upon the house rules. In a preferred embodiment, ties result in at least a player win on the Ante Wager, the Play Wager, and/or the Ante Wager and Play Wager.

[0033] In the sequential play of hands at a gaming table, an additional element of play that is clearly favorable for the player may be introduced. Rather than a player and dealer

always receiving a specific number of cards, a random event may occur where either the dealer receives fewer cards than is normal (i.e., the 7 cards identified in this example) or the player receives additional cards (7 rather than 6 cards, or 6 rather than 5 cards) than is normal. The event should be random (rather than every 100 hands, specifically) to avoid having players count hands, exit play or play multiple hands, or otherwise attempting to assure that they will receive the hand with the extra card(s) and placing a significantly larger wager. The random event may be performed by a processor or program in a shuffling device, a program or processor that identifies specific player positions and hands where an extra card will be given (or a time when a dealer receives fewer cards), and the like. Where cards are being manually dealt (rather than automatically provided from a dealing shoe or shuffler), the dealer may provide any extra cards to the player in sequence from the deck (e.g., giving a player six or seven consecutive cards) or providing the extra card(s) from remainder cards. Lights may be provided on the table, or a position indicator (as used in Pai Gow poker, as shown in U.S. Pat. No. 5,275,411 (Breeding)) may be provided to identify a player that is to receive additional cards in this manner, similar to the lights or position numbers that randomly identifies the position of the deal in Pai Gow poker, here also randomly indicating the occurrence of the event (the extra card). This system could also be used to identify the occurrence of an extra card or fewer cards to a dealer, if incorporated into the game.

[0034] The game technology may be alternatively summarized for a particular format of play (a 5-Card poker hand competition, with 6- or 7-Card initial hands to a player and 7-Card initial hands to a dealer) as including at least some of the game elements listed as follows for providing the randomness to the delivery of player cards (or dealer cards):

[0035] 1. The player places a wager (the Ante) to compete against a dealer (and optionally against a payable) in a best 5-Card hand poker game.

[0036] 2. The dealer always receives a seven-card hand from which a Best 5-Card hand is prepared.

[0037] 3. The player is randomly dealt either a 6-Card initial hand or 7-Card initial hand from which the Best 5-Card hand is prepared.

[0038] 4. There is one required initial wager (the Ante) and one required wager to continue play of the game (The Play Wager).

[0039] 5. There are two optional wagers, the optional Bonus Bet and the Super Bonus Bet (further described herein) which must be placed, if placed at all, prior to the player viewing the player hand.

[0040] 6. A wide range of wagers may be played as the Play Bet (e.g., from 1x to 20x the Ante) to continue play of the game, after the player has viewed the player cards.

[0041] 7. "Kickers" do not count in determining hand rank, creating more ties.

[0042] 8. Players win ties.

[0043] An optional element in the play of the game is to have one or more of the side bets required bets in the play of the game. The Bonus Bet and the Super Bonus Bet offer higher payout odds for high ranked hands, as shown in the table below.

TABLE 1

RANK	PLAY WAGER X*	BONUS BET X	SUPER BONUS X
Royal Flush	20X	50 TO 1	200 TO 1
Straight Flush	10X	40 TO 1	100 TO 1
Four-of-a-Kind	7X	15 TO 1	10 TO 1
Full House	6X	6 TO 1	4 TO 1
Flush	5X	5 TO 1	3 TO 1
Straight	4X	4 TO 1	3 TO 2
Three-of-a-Kind	3X	3 TO 1	1 TO 1
Two Pair	2X	1 TO 1	—
Pair or Less	1X	—	—

—*Player must win the hand to win on the Play Bet, while payouts may be available independent of a winning outcome for the player on the Bonus and Super Bonus wagers.

[0044] A few exemplary hands indicating the format of play under these rules will be shown.

EXAMPLES

[0045] Three players are present at the exemplary gaming table, and a live dealer is present. The hands (including dealer hand) will be shown even though the dealer hand is not actually revealed until the players' activity is concluded.

Example 1

[0046]

ACTION-First Deal				
DEALER	PLAYER 1	PLAYER 2	PLAYER 3	COMMENT
Monitors wagers	Places only \$10 Ante	Places \$10 Ante and \$5 Bonus Bet	Places \$10 Ante, \$10, Bonus Bet and \$5.00 Super Bonus	Game begins, hands are dealt
5♣, 5♦, 5♥, 10♣, J♣, K♦ A♦	3♣, 4♣, 6♦, 7♣, 10♥, K♣	4♣, 4♦, 4♥, 6♥ 8♥, Q♦	2♥, 9♣, 9♦, 9♥, 10♥, 10♦	
Dealer Awaits Player Activity	Player 1 folds, forfeiting Ante	Player 2 makes a Play Bet of \$20 (2x Ante)	Player 3 makes a Play Bet of \$50 (5X Ante)	

[0047] The dealer then reveals the dealer hand, arranges all player cards, and forms both Player and Dealer best 5-Card hands, as follows, with Player 1 having folded.

DEALER	1 ST PLAYER	2 ND PLAYER	3 RD PLAYER
Three-of-a-kind (5s)	Folded	Three-of-a-kind (4s)	Full House

The award/bet resolution to each player would be as follows:

[0048] Player 1 loses \$10 Ante.

[0049] Player 2 loses \$10 Ante and \$20 Play Wager to higher dealer hand, but wins \$15 (3x\$5) on the Bonus Bet, for a net loss of \$15.00.

[0050] Player 3 wins \$10 on the Ante, \$250 on the Play Wager (5x\$50), \$60 on the Bonus Bet (6x\$10), and \$20 (4x\$5) on the Super Bonus wager, for a net win of \$380 on a total wager of \$75.

Example 2

[0051] This example will show the same hands as Example 1, except that after a random number of hands, the shuffler has provided an additional card to Player 1, altering the rank of the hand.

ACTION-First Deal				
DEALER	PLAYER 1	PLAYER 2	PLAYER 3	COMMENT
Monitors wagers	Places only \$10 Ante	Places \$10 Ante and \$5 Bonus Bet	Places \$10 Ante, \$10, Bonus Bet and \$5.00 Super Bonus	Game begins, hands are dealt
5♣, 5♦, 5♥, 10♣, J♣, K♦ A♦	3♣, 4♣, 6♦, 7♣, 10♥, K♣, 5♣	4♣, 4♦, 4♥, 6♥ 8♥, Q♦	2♥, 9♣, 9♦, 9♥, 10♥, 10♦	
Dealer Awaits Player Activity	Player makes a \$40 Play Wager	Player 2 makes a Play Wager of \$20	Player 3 makes a Play Wager of \$50	

[0052] The dealer then reveals the dealer hand, arranges all player cards, and forms both Player and Dealer best 5-Card hands, as follows, with Player 1 having folded.

DEALER	1 ST PLAYER	2 ND PLAYER	3 RD PLAYER
Three-of-a-kind (5s)	Straight	Three-of-a-kind (4s)	Full House

The award/bet resolution to each player would be as follows:

[0053] Player 1 wins \$10 Ante and \$160 on the Play Wager (4x\$40) for a total win of \$170.

[0054] Player 2 loses \$10 Ante and \$20 Play Wager to higher dealer hand, but wins \$15 (3x\$5) on the Bonus Bet, for a net loss of \$15.00.

[0055] Player 3 wins \$10 on the Ante, \$250 on the Play Wager (5x\$50), \$60 on the Bonus Bet (6x\$10), and \$20 (4x\$5) on the Super Bonus wager, for a net win of \$380 on a total wager of \$75.

Example 3

[0056] In this example, the Dealer is randomly dealt fewer than the standard number of 7-Cards, in fact being dealt 6 cards in the initial dealer hand.

DEALER	PLAYER 1	PLAYER 2	PLAYER 3	COMMENT
Monitors wagers	Places only \$10 Ante	Places \$10 Ante and \$5 Bonus Bet	Places \$10 Ante, \$10 Bonus Bet and \$5.00 Super Bonus	Game begins, hands are dealt
5♣, 5♦, 10♣, J♣, K♦, A♦	3♣, 4♣, 6♦, 7♣, 10♥, K♣	4♣, 4♦, 4♥, 6♥, 8♥, Q♦	2♥, 9♣, 9♠, 10♥, 10♦	
Dealer Awaits Player Activity	Player 1 folds, forfeiting Ante	Player 2 makes a Play Wager of \$20	Player 3 makes a Play Wager of \$50	

[0057] The dealer then reveals the dealer hand, arranges all player cards, and forms both Player and Dealer best 5-Card hands, as follows, with Player 1 having folded.

DEALER	1 ST PLAYER	2 ND PLAYER	3 RD PLAYER
Three-of-a-kind (5s)	Folded	Three-of-a-kind (4s)	Full House

The award/bet resolution to each player would be as follows:

[0058] Player 1 loses \$10 Ante.

[0059] Player 2 wins \$10 Ante and \$60 (3x\$20 Play Wager) to lower dealer hand, and wins \$15 (3x\$5) on the Bonus Bet, for a net win of \$85.00.

[0060] Player 3 wins \$10 on the Ante, \$250 on the Play Wager (5x\$50), \$60 on the Bonus Bet (6x\$10), and \$20 (4x\$5) on the Super Bonus wager, for a net win of \$380 on a total wager of \$75.

[0061] In this example, the reduction of rank in the dealer hand by receiving fewer cards, affected the outcome of only Player 2's hand and bet resolution.

[0062] As can be seen from these examples, the game may be played with essentially three different pay tables potentially active in the play of the game, with the Ante wager being typically paid at a standard rate for a win of 1:1. The Play Wager has a distinct pay table, the Bonus Bet has a distinct pay table, and the Super Bonus Bet has a distinct pay table. The game may be played with only one, two or three pay tables, with one of the Bonus Bet and the Super Bonus Bet eliminated from player options.

[0063] In one described embodiment of the provision of random numbers of cards to at least one hand at a gaming table on a random basis, an apparatus provides for moving playing cards from a first group of unshuffled cards into shuffled hands of cards, wherein at least one and usually all of the hands contains a random arrangement or random selection of a preselected number of cards. The number of cards in at least one hand can be predetermined or randomly determined by operation of software and/or hardware in the shuffler or associated with the shuffler. The apparatus comprises a card receiver for receiving the first group of cards, a shuffling mechanism that randomizes the first group of cards into a single batch of randomized cards or into smaller groups of randomized cards (e.g., at least some smaller groups comprise two or more cards, but less than all the cards in the first group of cards), a hand delivery system that delivers groups of at least two cards as hands or partial hands to a delivery tray, and a processor that randomly determines

that at least one hand or partial hand has a number of cards that differ from a number of cards provided to other hands or partial hands in one round of a single game.

[0064] A feature of the present disclosure is that the process can be provided by a programmable card handling machine with a display and appropriate inputs for adjusting the machine to any of a number of games wherein the inputs include a number of cards per hand selector, a card game selector, a number of hands delivered selector and a troubleshooting input. Additionally, there can be random input for a number of extra cards or fewer cards to be dealt. Additionally, there may be an elevator speed adjustment and sensor to accommodate or monitor the position of the elevator position as cards wear or become bowed or warped. These features also provide for interchangeability of the apparatus, meaning the same apparatus can be used for many different games, for many types of cards or decks and in different locations thereby reducing the number of back-up machines or units required at a casino. The display may include a game mode or game selected display, and use a cycle rate and/or hand count monitor and display for determining or monitoring the usage of the machine.

[0065] Another feature of the presently described technology is that it provides an electromechanical playing card handling apparatus for more rapidly generating multiple random hands of playing cards as compared to some other devices, and to provide the random hands in more diverse formats and counts than are contemplated by other devices. The preferred device completes a cycle in approximately 30 seconds, which is double the speed of the Breeding single deck shuffler disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,807,884 and 5,275,411, which has itself achieved significant commercial success. Although some of the groups of playing cards (including player and dealer hands and discarded or unused cards) arranged by the apparatus in accordance with the method of the present invention may contain the same number of cards, the cards within any one group or hand are randomized, as by being randomly selected and placed therein or by being selected from a randomized reordered set of playing cards and fed as hands or fed to compartments where further randomized sets of cards, including hands, may be formed. Other features of the presently described technology include a reduction of set up time, increased reliability, lower maintenance and repair costs, and a reduction or elimination of problems such as card counting, possible dealer manipulation and card tracking. These features increase the integrity of a game and enhance casino security.

[0066] Yet another feature of the card handling apparatus of the present invention is that it converts a single deck or multiple decks of unshuffled cards into a plurality of hands ready for use in playing a game, including games where differential numbers of cards can be or are required to be provided to different players' or a dealer's hand, and even where that different number of cards may be provided randomly to players' or dealer's hands. The hands converted from the initial deck or decks of cards are substantially completely random, i.e., the cards comprising each hand are randomly selected or provided to be placed into that hand. To accomplish this random distribution, a preferred embodiment of the apparatus includes a number of vertically stacked, horizontally disposed card-receiving compartments one above another into which cards are inserted, one at a time, until an entire group of cards is distributed. In this preferred embodiment, each card-receiving compartment is filled (filled to the assigned number of cards for a hand, and with the residue of cards being fed into one or more discard compartments, for example), regardless of the number of players participating in a particular game. For example, when the card handling apparatus is being used for a seven-player game, seven player compartments, a dealer compartment and at least one compartment for cards not used in forming the random hands to be used in the seven-player game are filled. After the last card from the unshuffled group is delivered, the hands are ready to be removed from the compartments and put into play, either manually, automatically, or with a combined automatic feed and hand removal.

[0067] A desirable element in this practice of the described technology is assurance of randomness and the lack or predictability in the event of providing and assigning hands of different numbers of cards to players and/or to dealers. This is why some random determination (as with a random number generator, including both hardware and/or software, internal to the shuffler or provided from an external source) of the frequency and position, and even number of cards is desirable. For example, it would be undesirable, but possible, especially where there was a full table (and possibly only where there is a full table) to provide (on average) a

player hand with a different number of cards every 10 hands at a table, or on average every twenty hands (or any other specific number). If players know that every tenth hand would have more cards (at a table or for a player), betting strategy would be greatly altered, usually to the disadvantage of the casino. Therefore, randomness may or should be applied to how frequently a different number of cards is to be provided, the number difference that will be available (e.g., in a 5-Card game, whether 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 of cards, or less or more cards is to be provided to different number of cards hands), whether a player or whether a particular player or the dealer, or only among players is to receive the different number of cards hand. Once these concepts are have been developed and considered as in this patent, the application of random number generation to these features by software and/or hardware can be performed by the skilled artisan.

[0068] A method is provided for randomly mixing cards in a shuffling device comprising:

[0069] a) providing at least one deck of playing cards;

[0070] b) removing cards one-at-a-time from the at least one deck of cards;

[0071] c) randomly inserting each card removed one-at-a-time into one of a number of distinct storage areas, each storage area defining a distinct subset of cards; and

[0072] d) randomly determining a number of cards to form at least one distinct subset of cards such that at least one of the storage areas receives at least two randomly inserted cards one-at-a-time to form a random, distinct subset of at least two cards, and the total number of cards within the random, distinct subset of at least two cards was randomly selected from within a range of numbers of cards or parameters. The terminology "range of parameters" indicates that the selection is not, and cannot be, between 0 and infinity in a card game. The uppermost end of the range cannot exceed the total number of cards in the at least one deck, and cannot exceed a number of cards that would prevent other players and a dealer, where present, from receiving a necessary number of cards to play in the underlying card game. For example, with seven players and a dealer in a 5-Card Stud poker game, each player and a dealer may receive 5 cards, using a total of 40 cards out of the 52 cards in a standard 52 card poker deck. There are still 12 cards available, above the absolutely necessary 40 cards with seven players and a dealer, so the limits on possible numbers of cards within which the number may be randomly chosen are theoretically between 0 (cannot deal fewer than 0 cards) and 17 cards (the five original cards basic to the game and the 12 remaining cards). It is possible that if more than one hand may be randomly selected within a round of play and fewer than 5 cards may be dealt, that the range could exceed 17 cards, but the concept of the limits of the range is still clear.

[0073] A method is provided for randomly mixing cards comprising:

[0074] a) providing at least one deck of playing cards;

[0075] b) removing cards one-at-a-time from the at least one deck of cards;

[0076] c) randomly inserting each card removed one-at-a-time into one of a number of distinct storage areas, each storage area defining a distinct subset of cards;

[0077] d) at least one of the storage areas receives at least two randomly inserted cards one-at-a-time to form

a random, distinct subset of at least two cards, the distinct subset of at least two cards is provided to players or a dealer, and the number of cards in the subset is randomly chosen from within a range of a number of cards.

[0078] Cards in random, distinct subsets may be removed from at least one of the distinct storage areas. The cards removed from at least one of the distinct storage areas may define a subset of cards that is delivered to a player as a hand. One set of the cards removed from at least one of the distinct storage areas may also define a subset of cards that is delivered to a dealer as a hand. Distinct subsets of cards may be removed from at least one distinct storage area and be delivered into a receiving area. Each distinct subset of cards may be removed from the storage area and delivered to a position on a gaming table that is distinct from a position where another removed subset is delivered. All removed subsets may be delivered to the storage area without removal of previous subsets being removed from the receiving area. At least two received subsets each may become hands of cards for use in a game of cards.

[0079] A method of playing a casino wagering game comprising:

[0080] a) a player placing at least one first wager to participate in at least one game selected from the group consisting of a game against a dealer hand and a game against a pay table;

[0081] b) dealing a random number of cards to at least one player, forming an initial hand;

[0082] c) discarding excess cards, if any, to form a hand of X cards; and

[0083] d) resolving the at least one wager.

[0084] The method of claim 28, and further comprising the player placing a second wager to participate in a game against a pay table.

[0085] The method of claim 28, wherein X is selected from the group consisting of 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 cards.

[0086] The method of claim 28, and further comprising dealing the dealer more than X cards.

[0087] The method of claim 28, and when the randomly determined number of cards is fewer than X, the player plays with that number of determined cards.

[0088] The game may be played on automated formats, such as video machines or the Multi-Player Platform described in U.S. patent application Ser. Nos. 10/764,827; 10/764,994; and 10/764,995, all filed on Jan. 26, 2004. The method of play described above would be implemented on an automated wagering gaming event system comprising:

[0089] a) at least two distinct video displays, a first dealer display for showing a foreground image of a dealer in a card game, and at least a second display showing playing cards to multiple players;

[0090] b) at least one processor for enabling play of the wagering gaming event;

[0091] c) multiple player positions to enable multiple players to play the game;

[0092] wherein at least one of the processors can feed at least three different sets of video image data and merge the at least three multiple video images to form a composite image of a dealer against a back-

ground, the processor feeding at least one set as a mask layer and at least one set as an auxiliary dynamic background image, the system implementing play of a game according to the rules of the game.

[0093] The auxiliary image may be presented as a picture-in-picture image may also be positioned into at least one of the dealer display or the second image display. A picture-in-picture image may also be positioned into at least one of the dealer display or the second image display. There may be a multiple number of dynamic background images for the dealer foreground image stored in the system and are available for feed into the first dealer display. At least one background image is a dynamic background image. The automated gaming system may execute the rules of the game described above and comprise a gaming table and an upright video display panel comprising:

[0094] a) a table having an upper surface, the upper surface having a video display surface that provides a continuous field of video display for at least two different player positions; and

[0095] b) at least one main game processor in information communication with the upright video display panel and the video display surface, the processor directing video display on both the upright video display panel and the video display surface, and providing game rules for the play of at least one casino table card game without the use of physical cards on the table, the system enabling play of a casino table poker-type card game according to the rules.

[0096] Any of the known or future developed cards shuffling systems may be used to provide the random number of cards per hand. The hands (both random and standard) may be formed inside the machine, with an entire hand delivered to a delivery tray, groups of cards (subsets of cards) formed in the shuffler may be delivered to a tray to form a random card count, partial hand or normal hand, cards may be delivered one at a time to the delivery tray to form the hands there. The mechanism by which the cards are provided are not an element of the play of the game itself, as long as the desired degree of randomness is achieved in the delivery of random card count hands.

[0097] FIG. 1 shows a casino table layout 2 for one position of play for one example of a 6½ Card Poker™ game. There is a position 4 for player cards to be dealt, and a position 6 for dealer cards to be dealt. At the player position, there are possible betting positions for four distinct wagers, the Ante Wager position 8, the Play Wager position 10, the Bonus Wager side bet position 12, and the Super Bonus side bet position 14. Those locations are used to place wagers according to the rules of the game and the decisions by the players as described above.

[0098] FIG. 2 shows a flow chart that displays one format of play of a game according to the present generic description. According to each step shown in the flow chart,

[0099] 1) A PLAYER MAKES AT LEAST AN ANTE WAGER OF VALUE Z (at least one bonus wager may be mandatory) TO COMPETE IN AN X-CARD POKER GAME;

[0100] 2) The PLAYER IS DEALT A STANDARD NUMBER OF CARDS, SUCH AS AT LEAST X CARDS, preferably X+1 cards;

[0101] 3) The DEALER IS DEALT A STANDARD NUMBER OF CARDS, SUCH AS AT LEAST Y CARDS, WHERE Y>X, preferably Y=X+2;

[0102] 4) The PLAYER REVIEWS CARDS AND MAY MAKE A PLAY BET OF AT LEAST VALUE Z, WITH OPTIONS FOR THE PLAYER OF UP TO 20 Z OR MORE FOR THE PLAY BET, OR FOLD;

[0103] 5) The PLAYER HANDS AND DEALER HAND ARE REVEALED, AND THE BEST X-CARD HAND IS ARRANGED

[0104] 6) PLAYER WINS ANTE WAGER AND PLAY BET WAGER IF PLAYER HAND RANK EXCEEDS DEALER HAND RANK (ties go according to house or optional game rules);

[0105] 7) The ODDS ARE ALSO PAID IN RESOLVING PLAYER WAGERS AND BETS WHEN PRE-DETERMINED PLAYER HAND RANKS ARE ATTAINED (according to pay table);

[0106] 8) OVER THE COURSE OF PLAY OF THE GAME, A RANDOM EVENT DETERMINATOR (e.g., PROCESSOR AFFECTING THE TABLE, AS IN THE SHUFFLER OR CENTRAL PROCESSOR) DETERMINES WHEN A PLAYER HAND IS TO BE DEALT WITH MORE THAN THE STANDARD NUMBER OF CARDS, OR THE DEALER IS TO BE DEALT FEWER THAN THE STANDARD NUMBER OF DEALER CARDS; and

[0107] 9) The ROUND IS PLAYED WITH RANDOMLY ASSIGNED VARYING NUMBER OF CARDS IN HANDS, AS DETERMINED IN THE RANDOM HAND DETERMINATOR.

What is claimed:

1. A method of playing a casino wagering game in which hand rank or hand count is determined by the provision of symbols dealt to at least a player comprising:

a player placing at least a first wager on an underlying card game in which a player hand competes with a dealer hand;

dealing X cards to a dealer to form a dealer hand;

dealing a random number of cards to a player that has placed the at least a first wager to form a player hand, the random number being selected from a defined set of numbers including at least one number less than X and X;

comparing ranks of the dealer hand and the player hand; and

resolving the at least first wager.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein ranks of the dealer hand and the player hand are based upon poker ranks for a hand of Y cards.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein Y is selected from the group consisting of 3, 4 and 5.

4. The method of claim 2 wherein Y is 5.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein X is selected from the group consisting of 6 and 7.

6. The method of claim 2 wherein X is selected from the group consisting of 6 and 7.

7. The method of claim 4 wherein X is selected from the group consisting of 6 and 7.

8. The method of claim 3 wherein Y is 5 and X is 7.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein the defined set of numbers is selected from the group consisting of 6 and 7.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein the player views the random number of cards dealt to the player and either folds or makes a second wager.

11. The method of claim 5 wherein the player views the random number of cards dealt to the player and either folds or makes a second wager.

12. The method of claim 7 wherein the player views the random number of cards dealt to the player and either folds or makes a second wager.

13. The method of claim 9 wherein the player views the random number of cards dealt to the player and either folds or makes a second wager.

14. The method of claim 1 wherein the player places a separate side bet against a pay table in addition to the Ante and the side bet is resolved after disclosure of both player and dealer hands.

15. The method of claim 5 wherein the player places a separate side bet against a pay table in addition to the Ante and the side bet is resolved after disclosure of both player and dealer hands.

16. The method of claim 12 wherein the player places a separate side bet against a pay table in addition to the Ante and the side bet is resolved after disclosure of both player and dealer hands.

17. The method of claim 13 wherein the player places a separate side bet against a pay table in addition to the Ante and the side bet is resolved after disclosure of both player and dealer hands.

18. The method of claim 12 wherein the second wager is between 1 times and 50 times the Ante.

19. The method of claim 13 wherein the second wager is between 1 times and 50 times the Ante.

20. The method of claim 17 wherein the second wager is between 1 times and 50 times the Ante.

21. A wagering game in which a player card hand competes against a dealer hand according to the rules of rank of 5-Card Poker in which a player places an ante wager, the player and the dealer are provided with separate at least 5-Card hands, and after viewing the player card hand, a player must select an amount of a second wager to remain in the game, and the player has a choice of the amount of said second wager between 1x and 50x the ante wager.

22. The wagering game of claim 21 wherein the player must also make a side bet against a pay table before the player and dealer hands are revealed.

23. The wagering game of claim 21 wherein rules of comparing hand ranks exclude consideration of kickers along with hand ranks consisting of a pair, two pair, three-of-a-kind and four-of-a-kind and the player wins all ties in the hand ranks.

24. A method of playing a card game with a required ante in which a player hand competes against a dealer hand consisting of a first number of cards, the card game based upon poker rank of hands, the player randomly receiving a second number of cards selected from a number of cards dealt to a dealer, one card fewer than the first number of cards and one card more than the first number of cards, and after receiving the second number of cards, the player may select between a) wagering an amount that is a whole number multiple of the ante between 1x and 50x or b) forfeiting the ante and folding.

25. The method of claim 24 wherein determination of randomly receiving a second number of cards is determined

by a shuffler having randomizing capability selected from the group consisting of hardware, software, and hardware and software.

26. An automated wagering gaming event system comprising:

at least two distinct video displays, a first dealer display for showing a foreground image of a dealer in a card game, and at least a second display showing playing cards to multiple players;

at least one processor for enabling play of the wagering gaming event;

multiple player positions to enable multiple players to play the game;

wherein at least one of the processors can feed at least three different sets of video image data and merge the at least three multiple video images to form a composite image of a dealer against a background, the processor feeding at least one set as a mask layer and at least one set as an auxiliary dynamic background image, the system implementing play of a game according to the rules:

playing a wagering game comprising the method of claim 1.

27. An automated gaming system comprising a gaming table and an upright video display panel comprising:

a table having an upper surface, the upper surface having a video display surface that provides a continuous field of video display for at least two different player positions; and

at least one main game processor in information communication with the upright video display panel and the

video display surface, the processor directing video display on both the upright video display panel and the video display surface, and providing game rules for the play of at least one casino table card game without the use of physical cards on the table, the system enabling play of a casino table poker-type card game according to the rules:

playing a wagering game comprising the method of claim 1.

28. A method of playing a casino wagering game comprising:

a player placing at least one first wager to participate in at least one game selected from the group consisting of a game against a dealer hand and a game against a pay table;

dealing a random number of cards to at least one player, forming an initial hand;

discarding excess cards, if any, to form a hand of X cards; and

resolving the at least one wager.

29. The method of claim 28, and further comprising the player placing a second wager to participate in a game against a pay table.

30. The method of claim 28, wherein X is selected from the group consisting of 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 cards.

31. The method of claim 28, and further comprising dealing the dealer more than X cards.

32. The method of claim 28, and when the randomly determined number of cards is fewer than X, the player plays with that number of determined cards.

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