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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR TRACKING
AND REWARDING GAMBLERS BASED ON
RELATIVE WAGERING CHARACTERISTICS**

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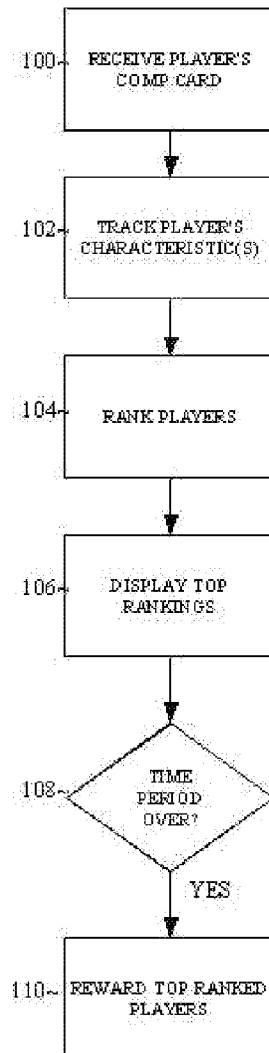
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A gambler reward system wherein gamblers in a casino can use their comp card to be ranked by play data relative to other gamblers in the casino (or connected properties). Gamblers who rank the highest can be identified and can be given rewards. A rank can be determined by many characteristics, such as the number of comp points earned or the amount won.



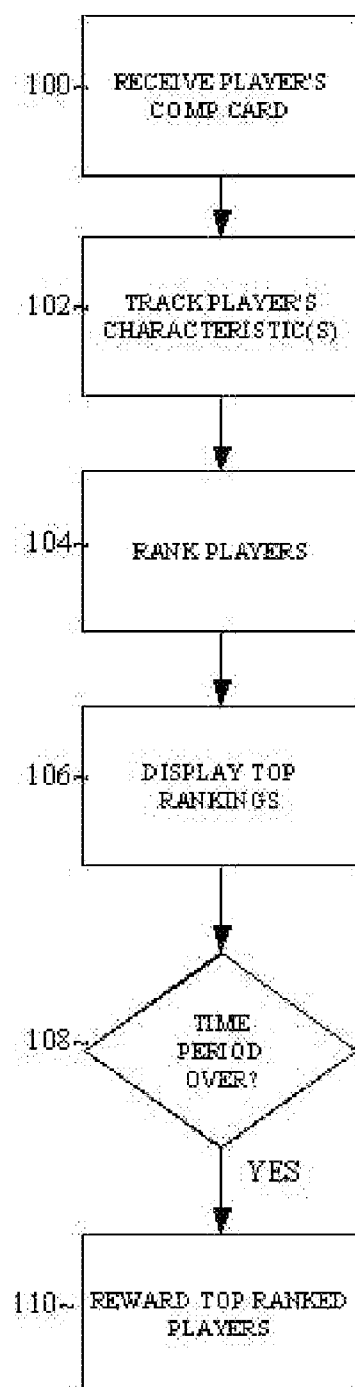


FIGURE 1

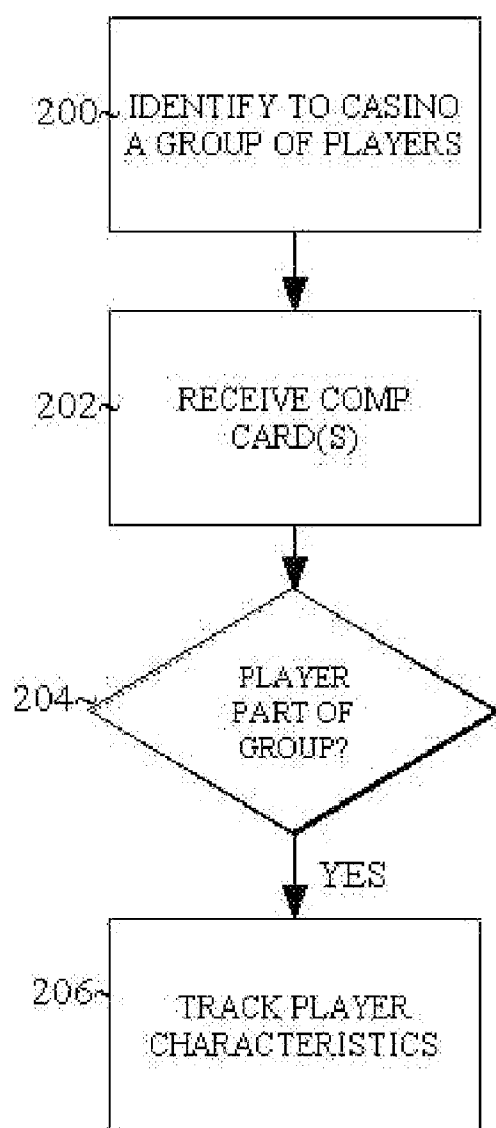


FIGURE 2A

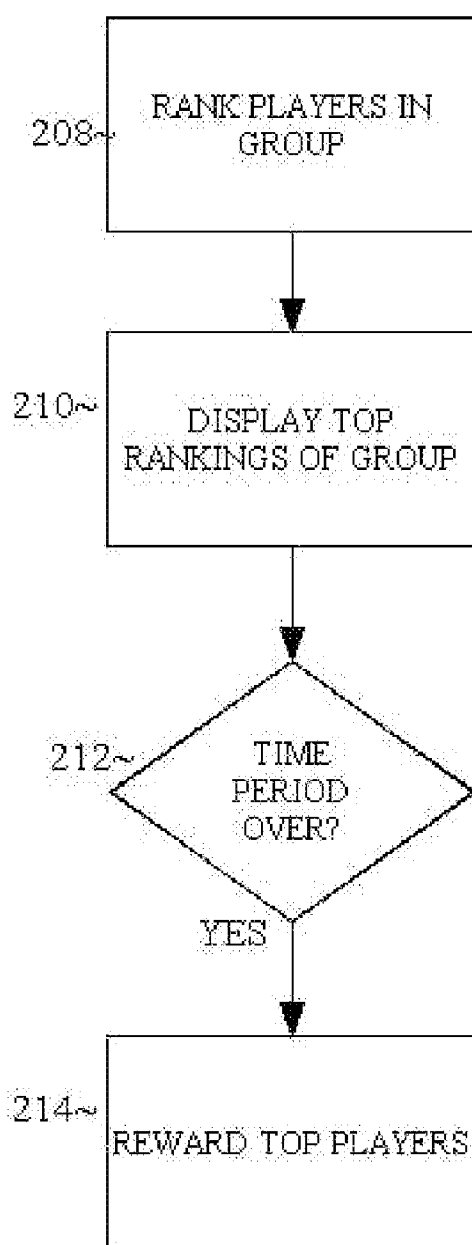


FIGURE 2B

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR TRACKING AND REWARDING GAMBLERS BASED ON RELATIVE WAGERING CHARACTERISTICS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims benefit to provisional application No. 60/713,787, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety. This application also claims benefit to provisional application No. 60/713,858, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety. This application also claims benefit to provisional application No. 60/713,947, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety. This application also claims benefit to provisional application No. 60/713,946, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] 1. Field of the Invention

[0003] The present inventive concept relates to a system, method, and computer readable storage, for rewarding gamblers based on relative wagering characteristics across a set of two or more propositions.

[0004] 2. Description of the Related Art

[0005] Casino wagering is a multi-billion dollar industry. Casinos routinely introduce new promotions and specials in the ongoing effort to bring new players to their properties. One primary method of player attraction and retention is the casino complimentary, or "comp". Players earn comps through gambling activity. In a common method, gambling activity is translated into points based on the total dollar amount wagered. These points are typically redeemable for free food, entertainment, extra room nights or room upgrades, amenities like golfing or spa treatments, or even cash back.

[0006] A player's comp points, or comp balance, increments as a result of his or her wagering activity. As such, the factors that influence the player to keep playing, or to play more, are based partly on the desire to redeem comp points for rewards. Certain casinos have special promotions where the rate of point accrual is increased when compared to normal. This has been shown to increase wagering activity and thereby casino revenues as well as overall profits in spite of the higher cost of offering additional comps.

[0007] Further, casino tournaments (for wagering games such as blackjack, slot machine, or video poker) are known in the art. Contests generally fall into two categories: those with entry fees, and those without (also known as "freerolls"). A freeroll slot tournament can be conducted as follows: a selected set of players is invited to participate in a free slot tournament which is to occur at a particular location (a bank of machines, usually separate from the main gaming area) at a particular time. The casino has designated that the total prize pool will be, for example, \$10,000. The players must show up at the starting time at the particular location. Each player then gets a designated machine, and when the tournament starts, players continually spin the reels on the machine and accumulate awards. Players may be given a large amount of virtual "credits" to play the machines, but these are not real credits as they are not redeemable for cash. Additionally, at least in slot tourna-

ments, the slot machines are typically configured to pay back well in excess of 100% of the virtual credits wagered; thus, the player's credit total is expected to increase over time. When the tournament is over (at a certain time), the player with the highest number of credits in his win meter wins the tournament. The player does not win the amount of credits in his win meter but instead wins an award (such as a cash prize of \$1,000, a free room, etc.) representing some percentage of the prize pool. Other players, with the second, third, or fourth-highest number of credits, may win second, third, or fourth prizes.

[0008] In a non-freeroll table poker tournament, for example a tournament played with the game Texas Hold'Em, each player pays an entry fee into the prize pool. The entry fee typically consists of an amount to be redistributed at the end of the tournament, and an additional smaller amount to compensate the casino for running the tournament. For example, a tournament may have a \$110 entry fee, with \$100 going to the prize pool and \$10 to the casino. In that way, if 100 players enter, the prize pool will be \$10,000 and the casino will keep \$1000. The entry fee usually purchases a large quantity of "tournament chips", for example T10,000. Players play poker as normal against each other using these tournament chips until one player has all the chips, and that player wins the tournament. Typically, the tournament winner wins a significant percentage of the prize pool, while players that did not win but came in second, third, fourth, etc. would win smaller percentages of the prize pool. As in the previous slot tournament example, the players necessarily must play at the same time and same location.

[0009] A disadvantage of tournament play for the casino is that while players are playing the tournament, the gaming equipment being used for the tournament (slot machines, poker tables, etc) is unable to receive cash wagers and therefore, is not providing revenue for the casino. The tournament entry fee (\$10 in the poker tournament example above) may not be sufficient to compensate the casino for the lack of wagering revenue during the tournament period. In a freeroll tournament, the casino earns neither an entry fee nor wagering revenues.

[0010] A further disadvantage of tournament play for the casino is that a specialized staff of casino employees, including a tournament director, is required to actively manage the operation of a tournament. Equivalent active management is not necessary for normal cash wagering play.

[0011] A disadvantage of tournament play for the player is that the player must be physically present at the location and time of the tournament. If a player feels tired, or wants to play golf or eat dinner while a tournament is going on, the player will be directly and significantly hurting their chances of winning the tournament.

[0012] A further disadvantage of tournament play for the player is that if the player pays an entry fee and does not win, they have lost the entry fee since it is redistributed to other winning players.

[0013] A further disadvantage of tournament play for the player is that the player cannot win large cash awards during the tournament beyond the value of the prize pool. For example, a slot machine may have a jackpot that happens once every 100,000,000 spins (on average) and an award of

\$3,000,000. In a slot tournament as described above, with a prize pool of \$10,000, if a player happens to achieve the jackpot spin during the tournament, they cannot win three million dollars as they would have with cash wagering. Instead, they may win three million virtual credits. While this event may ensure their victory in the tournament, winning the largest share of a \$10,000 prize pool is hardly compensation for the loss of a \$3,000,000 jackpot.

[0014] The tournaments described above limit participants to particular locations, times, non-cash wagers, and limited cash awards. Thus, what is needed is an improved player ranking and reward system which allows players more flexibility and excitement.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0015] It is an aspect of the present invention to provide methods to reward players which can generate additional player interest.

[0016] The above aspects can be obtained by a method that includes (a) receiving, from a gambler, cash wagers each of which can either be instantly lost or else result in an immediate cash award; (b) ranking the gambler with other gamblers based on at least one characteristic or outcome of the player's cash wagers to produce a list of ranks; and (c) giving a reward to a top ranked gambler on the list of ranks.

[0017] The above aspects can also be obtained by a method that includes (a) communicating to a casino a group of gamblers; (b) determining that a gambler is a member of the group by using information on the gambler's comp card which is inserted in a comp card reader; (c) ranking the gambler among the group of gamblers according to respective play data; and (d) rewarding reward(s) based on the ranking.

[0018] The above aspects can also be obtained by a method that includes (a) allowing two or more gamblers to compete against each other in two or more games of bingo; (b) ranking the gamblers based on at least one characteristic of each gambler's play data to produce a list of ranks; and (c) giving a reward to a gambler on the list of ranks.

[0019] The above aspects can also be obtained by a method that includes (a) receiving, from a gambler, cash wagers on two or more wagering propositions with associated potential cash awards; (b) ranking the gambler with other gamblers based on at least one characteristic or outcome of the gambler's cash wagers to produce a list of ranks; and (c) giving a reward to a gambler on the list of ranks.

[0020] These together with other aspects and advantages which will be subsequently apparent, reside in the details of construction and operation as more fully hereinafter described and claimed, reference being had to the accompanying drawings forming a part hereof, wherein like numerals refer to like parts throughout.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0021] Further features and advantages of the present invention, as well as the structure and operation of various embodiments of the present invention, will become apparent and more readily appreciated from the following description of the preferred embodiments, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings of which:

[0022] FIG. 1 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of rewarding incentives to players, according to an embodiment;

[0023] FIG. 2A is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of tracking characteristics of a group of players, according to an embodiment;

[0024] FIG. 2B is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of ranking members in a group, according to an embodiment.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0025] Reference will now be made in detail to the presently preferred embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numerals refer to like elements throughout.

[0026] The present general inventive concept relates to a method, system, and computer readable storage which allows players to earn comps based on the relative characteristics of their wagers and wager outcomes. The term "contest" will be used herein to describe the method of ranking players who place cash wagers on propositions and rewarding them based on those rankings if they rank highly enough.

[0027] Players who play table games, slot machines, or other games can be identified by their comp cards or other identifying method and their wagering characteristic(s) and wager outcomes can be recorded in their slot club (or loyalty) account. Players can be ranked according to certain of these characteristics or outcomes ("play data") over a particular temporal range (e.g. a day), and their rank may optionally be displayed publicly. The top ranked players can be rewarded with cash or non-cash rewards. The ranking of cash-wagering players according to predetermined criteria can be considered to be a "contest", to be distinguished from a tournament wherein players do not wager cash (among other distinctions discussed herein).

[0028] A player can place a cash wager at a table game or slot machine and if he or she wins, receive an immediate cash (or equivalently-valued) award (e.g. the award is paid out almost instantaneously after the wager is made and spin button is pressed). An "award" is typically defined as what a player wins after a wager or proposition is resolved in favor of the player. In contrast, a "reward" is typically defined as an incentive a casino provides to a player, not by paying out an award for winning a cash wager, but as a marketing incentive for the player to return and gamble some more (or other purpose such as to generate goodwill, or generally as recognition of the value of the player's past play). Hence if the casino wishes to give a frequent player who likes to play slots a free dinner as an enticement toward further play or as a measure of thanks for previous patronage, this can be considered a reward.

[0029] Similar to a "high score" list in video games, a casino can easily determine and display player rankings using common player-tracking methods. Some example criteria ("play data") for comparing among some or all players (and the winning condition), and optionally displaying the largest amounts, are included in Table I:

Table I

- [0030] 1) Most money wagered
- [0031] 2) Most bets wagered
- [0032] 3) Most money won
- [0033] 4) Highest jackpot won
- [0034] 5) Most comp points earned
- [0035] 6) Most time spent wagering
- [0036] 7) Most money lost
- [0037] 8) Longest winning streak
- [0038] 9) Longest losing streak
- [0039] 10) Greatest number of rolls (for a craps game)
- [0040] 11) Best hand made (for poker-like games)
- [0041] 12) Smallest number of draws before winning
Bingo
- [0042] 13) Longest-odds sportsbook wager won
- [0043] 14) Best player video poker skill

[0044] These criteria may be further subdivided by game type (i.e. blackjack vs. slot machines), game denomination (i.e. quarter slots vs. dollar slots), and time period (daily, weekly, monthly). Play data can be any data that is derived from the playing history of a player, both with regard to the player's actions and/or the outcomes (e.g. outcomes of a slot machine). Note a player's skill at video poker can be computed as described in patent application entitled, "Method, apparatus, and computer readable storage medium for improved tracking of casino players," application Ser. No. 10/460,238, publication number 2004/0254005, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety. Thus, players can be ranked by who has the best skill (best theoretical rate of return) at video poker, regardless of who wins the most.

[0045] Note that the longest winning streak can be determined by a number of consecutive pulls of a slot machine a player has won an award, or by a table game dealer or table game management system keeping track of a player's winning streak. Similarly, the longest losing streak can be determined by a number of consecutive pulls of a slot machine which have resulted in no award for the player (or a net loss for the player), or by a table game dealer or table game management system keeping track of a player's losing streak. Note that comp points can be computed in numerous ways, depending on the casino. One method that can be used to compute comp points is that one comp point= x *one dollar wagered, where x is a conversion coefficient. Thus if $x=10$, then one comp point is accrued for each ten dollars wagered. Comp points earned are maintained in each player's respective loyalty account.

[0046] Unlike video games and their high score lists, however, the present invention contemplates rewarding the player or players who are ranked as top, or in the top N , of a given category. For example, the player who won the casino's highest slot jackpot of the week may receive a complimentary for a free steak dinner. The player who wagered the most money in a given month may receive \$100 cash back. The top three blackjack players based on hours at the table in a 3-month period may be given 5, 3, and 2 nights

free stay at the hotel, respectively. The bingo player who won the greatest number of games during the year may receive a free week-long beach vacation. The craps player with the longest hand of the week may be given a day trip to the spa. Or, the biggest loser for the month may be given a suite for the weekend as a booby prize.

[0047] In general, any suitable criteria for ranking one player over another may be used to sort the players for the purposes of this invention, and any of the complimentary rewards commonly used by casinos may be used as rewards.

[0048] Additionally, any suitable wagering proposition may be used as the basis for determining the player rankings thereon. This invention contemplates that the casino may hold a contest for all loyalty club players, or only all slot machine players, or only all blackjack players. The casino may also hold a contest for all bingo players, or sportsbook players, or poker players. Note that a poker contest, as contest is defined herein, is distinct from a poker tournament, as the tournament would involve an optional up-front entry fee, requirements to play at the same time and in the same location as everyone else, a tournament management staff, non-cash wagering and non-cash awards from each individual poker outcome (poker hand), and a pari-mutuel distribution of the prize pool. In contrast, a "poker contest" would instead track poker players as they play in their normal cash games (at any time or location), rank them based on a relative characteristic of their wagers or wagering outcomes (e.g. longest winning streak, biggest pot won, highest-ranked poker hand, etc.) and reward the highest-ranked players complimentary rewards based on a set of rewards determined by the casino, not based on a pari-mutuel distribution of a prize pool.

[0049] It is noted that individual Bingo games, poker tournaments, horse races and other pari-mutuel propositions ultimately involve making an individual cash wager which is repaid based on the player's rank relative to other players at the end of the game or tournament. However, this invention contemplates a patentably distinct ranking of players, not within an individual wager or tournament or to divide a pari-mutuel prize pool, but across multiple wagering propositions and to achieve a predetermined reward. To illustrate, consider that a bingo game itself is a pari-mutuel game wherein bingo players are ranked by the speed with which they achieve bingo; that is, the fastest player to bingo wins the bingo game and the associated award. However, a "bingo contest" would be a contest, as defined herein, which ranks bingo players across multiple bingo games based on relative characteristics of their bingo wagers or outcomes. For example, a bingo contest may rank players by the overall fastest number of draws to achieve bingo, or alternately by the largest number of bingo wins achieved. If the contest runs for a day, the player who achieved the single fastest bingo across all games will earn a complimentary reward, and the player who achieved the most overall games won will earn a different complimentary reward. As with the poker contest example above, the rewards are not drawn from a pari-mutuel prize pool funded by players, are not necessarily cash, and provide an incentive to play the underlying cash bingo game rather than playing a tournament with virtual credits.

[0050] Additionally, the present invention contemplates that even tournaments themselves may be used as the

wagering proposition used to rank players. For example, poker players may play in regular weekly tournaments in the same casino. The casino could run a poker “tournament contest” wherein the poker player with the longest tournament top-five finishing streak over the course of a year will receive a reward. Alternately, since in tournament poker play continues until one player has won all the tournament chips, it is possible to track the number of times one player knocks another player out of the tournament. It is contemplated that the “total number of knock-outs” can form a ranking criteria for a poker tournament contest, where the total number of knock-outs is accumulated over the course of the contest (from multiple poker tournaments) and that the player with the largest number of knock-outs can earn a reward.

[0051] Furthermore, it is contemplated that information about the current player ranking may be made available to players using one or more of the following methods (either alone or in any combination). For example, current rankings can be displayed on the comp card reader (displayed on a machine (slot machine or comp station machine) associated with a comp card reader). This information can be similar to the typical greeting a player receives via electronic display when they insert their player card, and it will inform them of their standing in any relevant categories, as well as the prizes to be won.

[0052] Another method that current rankings can be displayed is on display in a visible location with names, or to protect patron privacy, initials or some other identification, and the current standings and prizes. For example, a publicly displayed LCD or other display means can display the rankings (using any method described herein). Table Ia and IIb illustrate two sample outputs (lists of ranks) on such an LCD display, which use the most comp points earned in a given day or the longest craps hand of the month (by number of rolls) to identify the potential reward winners.

TABLE IIa

<u>Today, Jun. 1, 2006, biggest comp point earners:</u>		
Name	ID#	today's comp points
Bill S.	3423	25,043
Sally M.	3424	23,243
Joan Z.	2122	21,203
Mike F.	1920	20,221
Billy Y.	4223	14,332

[0053] Top 5 point earners today (before midnight) earn free meals at Funny Bone Steak House.

TABLE IIb

<u>June, 2006, longest craps hands:</u>		
Name	ID#	number of rolls
Tony Q.	3882	84
Mark N.	3921	66
Brian M.	9949	65
Gina T.	8482	52
Sally M.	3424	45

Top 5 longest hands for June win a motorized foot massager.

[0054] Such as display as exemplified in Tables Ia or IIb can be applied to any play data, for example the day's (or

any other time period) top net winners can be ranked in order of biggest winner to smallest and displayed.

[0055] On video slot machines, an on-screen display can display some of the rankings and prizes (either upon insertion of a player's comp card or else using a comp card may not be required to trigger the display). This can display a table such as illustrated in Table Ia or IIb.

[0056] Such information can drive higher revenues as players compete to win prizes above and beyond the normal range of complimentary rewards. Since only one or a small number of players will win these rewards relative to the total customer base, the casino can make the prizes significant, especially over longer periods. A casino would likely be able to profitably offer a top monthly prize of \$1000, and such a prize would certainly attract more players.

[0057] FIG. 1 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of rewarding incentives to players, according to an embodiment.

[0058] The method can begin with operation 100, which receives a player's comp card in a comp reader associated with a gaming device. This can be done as known in the art. A comp card can also be received by a human operator, such as pit boss, who can process the player's gaming activity manually.

[0059] The method can proceed to operation 102, which tracks the player's play characteristics while the player is playing. Currently, certain characteristics are already tracked, such as a player's individual wagers (on a slot machine). Characteristics that can be tracker for purposes of the present inventive concept can be any quality or quantity relating to a player's play, including (but not limited to) those in table I. Tracked characteristics are stored in the player's loyalty account so that if a player removes his player card and reinserts it later (at a same or different machine), all prior player activity is accumulated and tracked.

[0060] It is noted that the player can place real cash wagers and win real cash awards as typically done at slot machines, video poker machines, gaming tables, etc. The player is also not limited to a particular bank of machines but can have his play tracked at any machine in the casino (and even related casino properties). It is common that different casinos are owned by the same group and thus the casino databases are linked together. Thus, it is even possible for two different players to compete and be ranked against each other while playing at two different casinos, as long as both casinos are linked together for purposes of implementing methods described herein. A single player can also play at two different related casinos, and have his aggregate play tracked and thus ranked, without any relevance that the player has played at two different casinos.

[0061] In addition to the player(s) placing real wagers and receiving potential real cash awards, the player's play is also tracked and made available for purposes of ranking, and potentially earning rewards, as described herein. Thus, a player can gamble normally and also be eligible for further reward prizes based on his ranking(s).

[0062] From operation 102, the method can proceed to operation 104, which ranks players according to predetermined characteristics (for example any of those illustrated in

Table I, but of course not merely limited to these). For example, a predetermined characteristic can be a number of comp points earned. Thus, the top (e.g. top 5 or top 10, etc.) comp point earners can be identified. This can be done by comparing the records for all players in the database (or just those players that have played during the timeframe in question) and sorting the top N (5, 10, etc.) comp point earners (or other characteristic being used for the ranking) players using any known sorting technique (e.g. numerically descending) or algorithm (e.g. insertion sort, etc.)

[0063] From operation 104, the method can proceed to operation 106, which can display the top ranking players as a list of ranks (e.g. the top 10 largest comp point earners). The display can be performed using any method described herein, such as on a LCD on the casino floor. The display can be updated in real time, and thus rankings can change quickly. Of course, once a time period has expired for a particular contest, then the list of ranks would remain permanent.

[0064] From operation 106, the method can proceed to operation 108, which determines if the time period is over. For example, if the top five comp point earners in a given day are to be given an incentive, then on midnight of that day, the comp points earned in that day (or other characteristic being used for the rankings) will then be finalized (e.g., further play by the players will not affect that day's point totals) and top players will be ranked. Also, operation 104 may be optionally executed again (so that all play (even those in the last second of the day) on a given day will be ensured to be included the rankings). Thus, once a current time has passed a predetermined time (e.g., midnight of that night), then the time period is over. Otherwise, the method can continue and any of the prior operations continue to be implemented (in any order).

[0065] If the determination in operation 108 determines that the time period is over, then the method proceeds to operation 110, which gives the top ranked players their rewards (incentives). For example, the top 5 comp point earners in a week can all receive a \$100 credit towards room, food, or beverage (RFB). Further, the rewards do not need to be equal. For example, the top earner can win a \$1,000 RFB credit, while the second ranked earner can earn a \$500 RFB credit, while the third through tenth earners can all earn free meals at a casino restaurant.

[0066] In a further embodiment, operation 106 can be optional and the top players need not be displayed (publicized). Yet, the top earning players after the time period has expired will nevertheless earn their special incentives.

[0067] The method illustrated in FIG. 1 can implement a contest available to all players in a casino, or a contest can be limited to a subset of players.

[0068] In a further embodiment, a group of players (or subset of players) can be eligible for special comps, bonuses, or contests. For example, a special conference (or private party such as a wedding, etc.) can identify to a casino (or casino group) the identities of participants. This group can then compete among each other for prizes using any table games or machines (not limited to a particular bank) and at any time (only limited by a temporal range specified by the conference). Thus, for example, Joe can be having a bachelor party in Las Vegas and he instructs the casino (by filling

out a physical or online form which is automatically or manually processed by the casino or casino group) that he wishes all his friends to have a contest for Dec. 1, 2006 through Dec. 8, 2006. Joe would also identify all of his friends, either by name (and optionally address), or comp account number, or other identifying information. All of Joe's friends can now compete to see who wins the most playing slots, craps, blackjack, roulette, or any other game. At the end of the week, the biggest winner can win a prize (funded by Joe, or the casino). The casino may offer multiple such contests for groups of players, as well as one or more contests open to players generally, and a given player's play may serve to earn points or ranking in multiple contests simultaneously.

[0069] FIG. 2A is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of tracking characteristics of a group of players, according to an embodiment.

[0070] The method can begin with operation 200, which identifies to a casino (or casino group) all members in a group of players. This can be done in numerous ways. For example, the party doing the identifying can be considered the group administrator. He can present a list (on paper or entered online) of members and/or their comp account numbers. Alternatively, members can go to a slot host (or register online) to identify themselves as members in the contest (their names can optionally be verified with the list provided by the group administrator). Once a member of the group is identified as a member, then his member status can be notated in his player loyalty account record along with an identifier identifying the group.

[0071] From operation 200, the method can proceed to operation 202, which receives a player's comp card. This can be done as known in the art.

[0072] From operation 202, the method can proceed to operation 204, which determines if the player is part of the group. This can be accomplished by checking the player's loyalty account record to see which, if any, group the player is associated with. If the player is not a member of a group, then player tracking can continue as normal (not pictured).

[0073] If the determination in operation 204 determines that the player who inserted his comp card is a member of a particular group, then the method can proceed to operation 206, which tracks player characteristics required for the group. For example, if a group is having a contest who wins the biggest jackpot, then each time the player wins an award it will be tracked (or alternatively only a jackpot bigger than that player's highest to date jackpot), which can be stored in the player's loyalty account record. Thus, whatever characteristics that the group's contest is based on will now be tracked whenever the player plays a machine game (or optionally a table game or other game as well).

[0074] It is noted that some casinos may track all possible information by default, whether or not the player is a member of a group. If this is the case, then operations 204 and 206 may not be necessary, as all information for all players is being tracked anyway. It is also noted that members of a group that play in a contest can typically play from any machine in the casino (or associated property), without the need for a special bank of machines to be cordoned off.

[0075] Once the casino player database has all of the play data relating to every member of the group, this data can be used to rank the members.

[0076] FIG. 2B is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of ranking members in a group, according to an embodiment.

[0077] The method can start with operation 208, which ranks players in the group. T

[0078] This can be done by identifying a particular characteristic that the group's contest is based on (by checking a database record for the group), e.g., biggest jackpot, longest play, biggest winner, biggest loser, etc.

[0079] From operation 208, the method can proceed to operation 210, which displays the top rankings of the group. For example, the top five winners of the group can be displayed, either on a television monitor in the casino, on a slot machine display, on a special page on the world wide web, etc. Alternatively, no display of the top rankings of the group is required.

[0080] From operation 210, the method can proceed to operation 212, which determines if the time period is over. Each group has a record associated with it in the casino's database which contains rules, such as the contest/ranking criteria (or criterion), time duration, members, etc. If the time period is not over, then the method can continue to operation 208, which continues to rank players in the group. Note that the operations illustrated in FIG. 2A can also be occurring simultaneously while some or all of the operations in FIG. 2B are being implemented as well.

[0081] If the time period for the group's contest is determined in operation 212 to be over, then the method can proceed to operation 214 which rewards the top (winning) players. The top players may also be displayed to the group as well (using any method described herein or known in the art). The rewards can be provided by the group (e.g. the group administrator will pay the casino \$100 to ultimately pay the winner of the contest), or through arrangement with the casino, the rewards can also (in full or part) be paid by the house as well.

[0082] As a further example of the methods illustrated in FIGS. 2A-2B, consider a video poker contest. Members of the group are invited to play (for example by a standard mailing in the regular mail). A date (or time) range is also specified (e.g., Friday night Aug. 25, 2006 starting 8 pm through Sunday Aug. 27, 2006 ending at 1:00 pm). The members can be informed that the contest will rank (and reward) the biggest net money winner earned from play during this time range. Thus, money won before this range (or after) will not count towards each members group rankings. Players would typically have to fund their own play (and play normally) during the contest. The rankings of the top 5 (or any number) money winners during the contest can be displayed (or it may not be). Once the contest is over (i.e. on Aug. 27, 2006 at 1:00 pm), all of the members are ranked and rewards can be distributed. For example, the biggest money winner may win a cash prize of \$1,000. The second through tenth money winners may win a free meal at a hotel restaurant. This is in addition to any money won/lost during standard video poker play.

[0083] In a further embodiment, a player's participation in a contest may not be limited by actual time, but alternatively

by a number of spins (or number of hands if playing video poker, or number of other individual wagering propositions). For example, a video poker contest can be implemented wherein each participant must present his or her comp card in a reader associated with a video poker machine in order to identify himself/herself and have their play recorded so that they can be ranked in the contest. The contest may last for a finite number of hands (e.g. 100), after which the player's participation in the contest is over even though the contest may not close for several days or weeks. The winner of the contest (and hence the order or rankings) can be based on the overall win. Thus, the player who has won the most over the 100 hands would be ranked first, and the next highest winner will be ranked second, etc. In this manner, instead of setting aside a particular bank of machines for a slot or video poker contest, and a particular time as well, players can play at their own leisure. A player can even play half of the contest in one setting (e.g. 50 hands) and finish the remaining 50 hands at another session (assuming of course the time for completing the contest has not expired).

[0084] As an example of the methods described herein, consider the following. John, Shawn, Clint, and Stacy are all slot players in the Sunshine Casino (and in fact on a particular day they are the only slot players in the whole casino). They all play normally on the day using their respective comp cards. John wins \$10, Shawn wins \$25, Clint wins \$1, and Stacy loses \$10. Note that the players play at different times of the day and using different machines, yet as long as they use their comp card the casino tracking system will track all of their respective play (and any data described herein) including their net win. At this point in the day, a video monitor displays a ranking, "TODAYS TOP WINNERS—#1 Shawn #242, #2 John #982, #3 Clint #122." The numbers can be the last three digits of each player's player number (alternatively the entire number can be used, or any other identifying information so player's can identify if they themselves are on the rankings). At the end of the day (midnight), the day's contest is over and (assuming the four players haven't played any more), then Shawn is determined to be the winner (the winning conditions in this case is the player with the day's biggest net win). Shawn then receives a letter in the mail congratulating him on being the day's top winner and also receives a reward of a coupon for two for the casino steakhouse. John then receives a coupon for \$5 in free play (for coming in second place). Clint does not receive any reward for coming in third place.

[0085] As a further example, suppose John, Shawn, Clint, and Stacy are all guests in town for John's private party. John notifies the casino about the four group members and these group members then can have the contest among each other (even though the casino can have other slot players not participating in this particular contest).

[0086] Further, the order of any of the operations described herein can be performed in any order and wagers can be placed/resolved in any order. Any embodiments herein can also be stored in electronic form and programs and/or data for such can be stored on any type of computer readable storage medium (e.g. CD-ROM, DVD, disk, etc.)

[0087] The many features and advantages of the invention are apparent from the detailed specification and, thus, it is intended by the appended claims to cover all such features

and advantages of the invention that fall within the true spirit and scope of the invention. Further, since numerous modifications and changes will readily occur to those skilled in the art, it is not desired to limit the invention to the exact construction and operation illustrated and described, and accordingly all suitable modifications and equivalents may be resorted to, falling within the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for rewarding gamblers, the method comprising:

receiving, from a gambler, cash wagers each of which can either be instantly lost or else result in an immediate cash award;

ranking the gambler with other gamblers based on at least one characteristic or outcome of the gambler's cash wagers to produce a list of ranks; and

giving a reward to a top ranked gambler on the list of ranks.

2. The method recited in claim 1, further comprising identifying a gambler to a casino system by receiving the gambler's comp card in a comp card reader associated with a slot machine, prior to receiving the cash wagers.

3. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the characteristic comprises comp points the gambler has earned.

4. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the characteristic comprises a biggest jackpot the gambler has won.

5. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the characteristic comprises a total net win for the gambler.

6. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the characteristic comprises a total wager amount wagered by the gambler.

7. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising displaying a result of the ranking on an output device in a casino.

8. The method as recited in claim 7, wherein the displaying is updated in real time.

9. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:

associating the gambler with a group of competitors,

wherein the ranking is limited to be among other gamblers of the group.

10. A method for rewarding gamblers, the method comprising:

communicating to a casino a group of gamblers;

determining that a gambler is a member of the group by using information on the gambler's comp card which is inserted in a comp card reader;

ranking the gambler among the group of gamblers according to respective play data; and

rewarding reward(s) based on the ranking.

11. The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising:

displaying a result of the ranking on an output device on a casino floor.

12. The method as recited in claim 10, wherein the play data used for the ranking comprises each gambler's net win.

13. A method for rewarding gamblers, the method comprising:

allowing two or more gamblers to compete against each other in two or more games of bingo;

ranking the gamblers based on at least one characteristic of each gambler's play data to produce a list of ranks; and

giving a reward to a gambler on the list of ranks.

14. The method as recited in claim 13, further comprising displaying the list of ranks.

15. The method as recited in claim 13, wherein the characteristic is each gambler's total winnings.

16. The method as recited in claim 13, wherein the characteristic is each gambler's smallest number of drawn balls to make bingo.

17. A method for rewarding gamblers, the method comprising:

receiving, from a gambler, cash wagers on two or more wagering propositions with associated potential cash awards;

ranking the gambler with other gamblers based on at least one characteristic or outcome of the gambler's cash wagers to produce a list of ranks; and

giving a reward to a gambler on the list of ranks.

18. The method recited in claim 17, wherein the at least one characteristic comprises comp points the gambler has earned.

19. The method recited in claim 17, wherein the at least one characteristic comprises a total net win the gambler has won.

20. The method recited in claim 17, wherein the at least one characteristic comprises a biggest jackpot the gambler has won.

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