



(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

(43) Date of publication:
26.03.2003 Bulletin 2003/13

(51) Int Cl.7: **G07F 17/32**

(21) Application number: **02020544.9**

(22) Date of filing: **16.09.2002**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR
IE IT LI LU MC NL PT SE SK TR
 Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

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(30) Priority: **21.09.2001 US 960762**

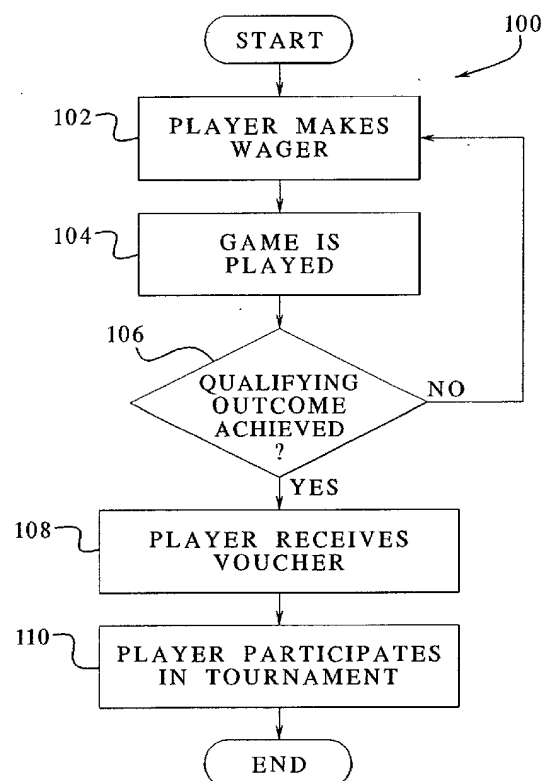
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(54) **Gaming device providing tournament entries**

(57) The present invention provides a gaming device which enables a player to enter a tournament based on a qualifying outcome achieved on the gaming device. In one embodiment, the gaming device includes a set of reels including at least one qualification symbol. If at least one qualification symbol is displayed within a display device of the gaming device, the player qualifies for a tournament to be played at a later time. The tournament is preferably a slot machine tournament. One or more prizes are awarded at the tournament, including high value items such as cars and motorcycles as well as lower valued items such as hats, T-shirts, jackets, memorabilia and other merchandise. In this regard, the tournament provides convenience to a casino as far as prize acquisition, distribution and record keeping are concerned because prizes are awarded at one specific event instead of on sporadic occasions. The payout percentages of the gaming devices providing entry into the tournament are set relative to a cost of the tournament.

FIG.3



Description

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 **[0001]** Gaming devices are well known. Most gaming devices provide monetary awards such as coins or tokens to the player. If the awards are over a certain predetermined value, or number of coins or credits, most gaming devices provide hand pays for the players. Other known gaming devices provide physical prizes. Generally, a player will qualify to win a prize by achieving a certain result on a gaming device. In one example, a number of gaming devices may be associated with a valuable award or prize such as a car or motorcycle.

10 **[0002]** Gaming establishments such as casinos favor such prizes because they can use the actual prize, such as a car or motorcycle, in a display in the casino associated with the games. The chance of winning such prizes provides additional incentives for players to play the gaming devices. However, casinos are reluctant to offer such prizes associated with certain results on the gaming devices because there are various problems and complications associated with prize acquisition, distribution and record keeping.

15 **[0003]** For example, if the casino decides to offer a prize in association with play of a gaming device, casino personnel must determine which gaming devices to associate with offering of the prize, whether slot machine, video poker, video blackjack, keno, etc. Casino personnel also have to determine what kind of prize to offer. The prizes could be large in size or value, such as a car or motorcycle. In the alternative, the prizes could be smaller in size or value, such as T-shirts, jackets, hats, key-chains, memorabilia or other merchandise. Casino personnel must determine whether the proposed prize or prizes will fit within a predetermined budget. Accordingly, casino personnel must also determine the quantity of prizes offered.

20 **[0004]** Other considerations include choosing a vendor from whom the prizes will be purchased. Once a vendor is chosen, there usually will be contractual negotiations dealing with prices and quantities purchased. This takes time and effort by casino personnel. The negotiations may have to be performed by legal counsel, which also provides an added expense. Casino personnel must also consider delivery of the prizes to the winning players. In some cases, separate negotiations with a distributor may be necessary. Casino personnel then face issues such as which distributor to choose, who is responsible if the prizes become damaged during the delivery, insurance costs for the prizes, as well as delivery due dates, returns, complaints and potential product liability, among other concerns.

25 **[0005]** Storage of the prizes is another consideration. Many casinos are part of hotels which have limited storage area for smaller-sized prizes and in most cases no storage area for larger prizes such as cars or motorcycles. Casino personnel must make arrangements with storage facilities and address issues such as time of storage, amount of storage space needed and cost of storage. Personnel must also insure that the prizes are properly delivered to the storage facility. If the prizes are stored off-site from the casino, casino personnel must also factor in the cost of having the prizes eventually delivered to the casino, whether by casino personnel, storage facility personnel, or a third party.

30 If the casino stores the prizes at the hotel, casino personnel must determine whether there is adequate space for the prizes. It must also determine the amount of time the prizes will be stored.

35 **[0006]** Wherever the prizes may be stored, casino personnel may also need to consider, whether additional security is required to prevent theft of the prizes. If the prizes are stored off-site, casino personnel may have to negotiate with the storage facility for security services. Or, casino personnel may have to hire a third party to prevent theft of the prizes. Moreover, large and small prizes, whether by size or value, may require different measures in order to be secured. Large prizes may require constant monitoring. Smaller prizes may require the purchasing of additional security devices such as safes or sensors because they are more prone to theft. As a result, casino personnel who already monitor gaming devices for hand pays, large payouts and assorted maintenance may be faced with additional security tasks which may impair their ability to attend to players' inquiries. In the alternative, the casino may have to hire additional personnel, which can be expensive for the casino.

40 **[0007]** Another concern is advertising or marketing of the offered prize or prizes. Personnel must consider where to advertise the prize offering, such as within the hotel, other hotels, on the internet, or other venues. They must also factor in the cost of the advertising. As far as marketing is concerned, casino personnel must decide if the prize will be on display in an area near the gaming devices associated with the prize. If, for example, the casino decides to offer a car as a prize and decides to display the car near the associated gaming devices, casino personnel must consider how to display the car, as well as any associated decorations. The materials for the display may have a substantial cost which the casino must consider. The allotted spacing within the casino is another consideration. If certain gaming devices must be repositioned to make room for the display, casino personnel must factor in the time as well as costs needed to perform this task. In some cases, casino personnel may need to employ a third party to assist in designing and constructing the display. Casino personnel must then consider which service provider to choose as well as the costs of such services.

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50 **[0008]** Once erected, the display must be maintained. If a platform is used to display the car, the platform must be checked occasionally for weaknesses to avoid any possible accidents involving players, personnel or casino property.

The display must also be monitored to insure that it is in a presentable condition. Casino personnel must also consider whether to employ extra security personnel to protect the display from theft or damage.

[0009] Casino personnel must address another set of issues when a player wins the prize. If, for example, the prize the player wins is a car, and the casino only has the car specifically located on the display, personnel must be prepared to remove the car from the display. This must be done without causing a distraction to other players or interfering with play of other games. If the casino will give the player a different car, the car may have to be brought from the storage facility to the casino to be presented to the player. The casino again faces delivery issues, including time constraints the player may be under.

[0010] The casino must also determine how the car will be delivered to the player if the player wants the car delivered to a location remote from the casino, such as the player's home (i.e., such as the player is on vacation). Accordingly, the casino has to consider if a third party is required to deliver the car. If a third party is used, questions arise as to who will pay the delivery costs, the casino or the player. Insurance costs for delivery of the car is another concern. Moreover, if the car is not in working order when the player receives the car, questions arise as to who is responsible.

[0011] The casino must also be prepared for a situation in which the player wins a prize but does not want to keep the prize. In the above example, if the player does not accept the car, the casino must be prepared to offer an alternate prize, such as a monetary equivalent, or another physical prize or prizes. The casino may also be concerned that the alternate physical prize or prizes have a similar monetary value.

[0012] Another issue to address is the organizing of records associated with conveying the prize to the player. For example, player information must be gathered. If the prize includes a title, the title must be transferred from the casino to the player. Inventory must also be kept on the number of prizes that have been won. Maintaining these records can be a tedious and expensive task.

[0013] There are also tax concerns which must be addressed. Federal law dictates that a player must pay a tax on any win over \$1200. If the prize is valued at \$20,000, the player may not appreciate, or may not be able to afford, to pay a tax on the value of the prize. If the player then refuses the car, the casino must consider alternative awards to give the player.

[0014] Smaller prizes, whether in size or value, may pose increased complications than larger prizes because they are won in greater volume. For example, T-shirts offered in conjunction with gaming device play will most likely be awarded more often than a car which is offered in conjunction with gaming device play. As such, greater volumes of smaller prizes must be purchased by the casino. Determining the quantity to purchase, delivery methods of the prizes, displaying of the prizes, delivery of the prizes to the players, security methods and recordkeeping can be more tedious for these smaller prizes than for larger prizes due to the greater volume of prizes.

[0015] Casino personnel currently have daily concerns which must be addressed, such as regulating gaming devices, monitoring employees, as well as players, and maintaining player interest. These tasks, in and of themselves, require substantial amounts of time, effort and costs. The concept of offering prizes creates a new set of concerns, such as those mentioned above, which casino personnel want to avoid in attempting to minimize cost while maximizing player interest, enjoyment, entertainment and excitement.

[0016] Accordingly, there is a need for an improved method of offering and distributing prizes to players of gaming devices.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0017] The present invention provides a gaming device which provides a player with entry into a tournament to be held at later time. The player qualifies for the tournament or receives the entry when the player obtains a predetermined qualifying game outcome on the gaming device. The tournament is held on a regular basis, such as every three months. Entries to a tournament are provided to players during a set period of time prior to the tournament. In the tournament, the player can win large value prizes such as cars, motorcycles, and smaller valued prizes such as jackets and other merchandise. The present invention therefore enables casinos to give prizes to players during regular events. This concentrates the cost and efforts of the casinos toward giving award prizes on specific days and eliminates complications associated with prize acquisition, distribution and record keeping on a daily basis.

[0018] More specifically, in one embodiment, the present invention provides a slot gaming device having a set of reels and a plurality of symbols on the reels. At least one of the symbols or a combination of symbols is a tournament qualification symbol or a tournament qualifying combination, respectively. A player spins the reels in a conventional manner. If, when the reels stop spinning, the qualification symbol or combination is displayed, and thus, the player obtains a tournament qualifying outcome on an active payline, the player receives a tournament entry.

[0019] The gaming device may alternatively provide any other primary game such as a video poker game, a video blackjack game, a keno game or any other suitable game. The qualifying outcome may comprise any winning outcome including, but not limited to, the displaying of a qualification symbol or qualifying combination of symbols where appropriate. It should also be appreciated that the tournament entries could be provided to the players in any suitable primary

or secondary (i.e., bonus) games.

[0020] In one embodiment, when the player operates the gaming device and qualifies for the tournament, the player is presented with a voucher verifying entry into the tournament. In one embodiment, this is performed manually by an attendant in a manner similar to a hand pay. When the player qualifies for the tournament, the gaming device provides notification to attendants which monitor the gaming area. The notification is in the form of a flashing light on top of the gaming device in a conventional manner. An attendant arrives at the gaming device. After the attendant verifies the qualifying outcome which qualifies for a tournament entry, the attendant records the player's information on a voucher. One copy of the voucher is presented to the player and one copy is retained by the casino for its records.

[0021] In one embodiment, the attendant verifies the win and enters the player's information in a suitable computer. The computer records the player information and directs a printer to print a voucher which is eventually given to the player. In an alternative embodiment, when the player qualifies for the tournament, the processor within the gaming device or a processor located remote from the gaming device sends a signal to the computer which in turn causes the printer to print a voucher. The player brings the voucher to the tournament to verify entry into the tournament.

[0022] The tournament can be any type of gaming tournament or other competition. In one embodiment, the tournament is a slot machine tournament. The player competes against other players who have qualified for the tournament. The tournaments are held periodically with set prizes for each tournament. While the prizes may be monetary awards, preferably the prizes are high value prizes such as cars or motorcycles. The awards may also include lesser valued prizes such as hats, T-shirts, jackets, key-chains, memorabilia and other merchandise. The prizes are awarded at the time of the tournament. This provides numerous advantages to the casino with respect to prize acquisition, distribution and record keeping because all of the prizes are given away in one day or other time period and in one event.

[0023] For example, by giving away all of the prizes at one event, the casino is certain of the time period that the prizes must be kept in storage. The casino can save on the costs of storage by having the prizes placed in storage within proximity of the date of the tournament or the prizes could be delivered to the casino on the same day as the tournament. Further, the casino saves on the costs of delivering the prizes from the storage site to the casino, because the prizes need only be delivered in one sequence. The casino also saves on the cost of delivering the prizes to the players because most prizes are awarded in person at the time of the tournament which is expected by the player. The tournament forum also enables more convenient record keeping of prizes that are given away by the casino because every contestant's information is obtained prior to, or at the time, of the tournament. The casino also saves on the cost of advertising for the tournament, because players are made aware that the prizes on display are solely for advertising and not to be won at the time of gaming device operation. Thus, the casino needs to display only a minimal amount of prizes in the gaming area, if any at all.

[0024] It is therefore an advantage of the present invention to provide a gaming device which provides a player with entry into a tournament.

[0025] It is a further advantage of the present invention to provide a gaming device and associated tournament which provide convenience in prize offering, distribution and record keeping.

[0026] Other objects, features and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following detailed disclosure, taken in conjunction with the accompanying sheets of drawings, wherein like numerals refer to like parts, elements, components, steps and processes.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0027]

Figs. 1A and 1B are perspective views of alternative embodiments of the gaming device of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a schematic block diagram of the electronic configuration of one embodiment of the gaming device of the present invention.

Fig. 3 is a flow diagram of one method of one embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 4 is a front elevation view of a display device displaying a set of reels including a set of qualification symbols on a payline.

Fig. 5 is a front elevation view of a display device displaying a set of reels including a set of qualification symbols in scattered arrangement.

Fig. 6 is a front elevation view of a display device displaying a set of cards providing a qualifying outcome.

Fig. 7 is a front elevation view of a display device displaying a set of cards including a qualification symbol in which the cards provide a winning combination.

Fig. 8 is a front elevation view of a display device displaying a set of cards including a qualification symbol.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Gaming Device and Electronics

[0028] Referring now to the drawings, and in particular to Figs. 1A and 1B, gaming device 10a and gaming device 10b illustrate two possible cabinet styles and display arrangements and are collectively referred to herein as gaming device 10. The present invention includes the game, described below, being a stand alone game or a bonus or secondary game that coordinates with a base game. When the game of the present invention is a bonus game, gaming device 10 in one base game can be a slot machine having the controls, displays and features of a conventional slot machine, or a video card game such as poker, blackjack, etc. The player can operate the gaming device while standing or sitting. Gaming device 10 also includes being a pub-style or table-top game (not shown), which a player operates while sitting.

[0029] The base games of the gaming device 10 include slot, poker, or blackjack, among others. The gaming device 10 also embodies any bonus triggering events, bonus games as well as any progressive game coordinating with these base games. The symbols and indicia used for any of the base, bonus and progressive games include mechanical, electrical or video symbols and indicia.

[0030] In a stand alone or a bonus embodiment, the gaming device 10 includes monetary input devices. Figs. 1A and 1B illustrate a coin slot 12 for coins or tokens and/or a payment acceptor 14 for cash money. The payment acceptor 14 also includes other devices for accepting payment, such as readers or validators for credit cards, debit cards or smart cards, tickets, notes, etc. When a player inserts money in gaming device 10, a number of credits corresponding to the amount deposited is shown in a credit display 16. After depositing the appropriate amount of money, a player can begin the game by pulling arm 18 or pushing play button 20. Play button 20 can be any play activator used by the player which starts any game or sequence of events in the gaming device.

[0031] As shown in Figs. 1A and 1B, gaming device 10 also includes a bet display 22 and a bet one button 24. The player places a bet by pushing the bet one button 24. The player can increase the bet by one credit each time the player pushes the bet one button 24. When the player pushes the bet one button 24, the number of credits shown in the credit display 16 decreases by one, and the number of credits shown in the bet display 22 increases by one. At any time during the game, a player may "cash out" by pushing a cash out button 26 to receive coins or tokens in the coin payout tray 28 or other forms of payment, such as an amount printed on a ticket or credited to a credit card, debit card or smart card.

[0032] Gaming device 10 also includes one or more display devices. The embodiment shown in Fig. 1A includes a central display device 30, and the alternative embodiment shown in Fig. 1B includes a central display device 30 as well as an upper display device 32. The display devices display any visual representation or exhibition, including but not limited to movement of physical objects such as mechanical reels and wheels, dynamic lighting and video images. The display device includes any viewing surface such as glass, a video monitor or screen, a liquid crystal display or any other static or dynamic display mechanism. In a video poker, blackjack or other card gaming machine embodiment, the display device includes displaying one or more cards.

[0033] The slot machine base game of gaming device 10 preferably displays a plurality of reels 34, preferably three to five reels 34, in mechanical or video form on one or more of the display devices. Each reel 34 displays a plurality of indicia such as bells, hearts, fruits, numbers, letters, bars or other images which preferably correspond to a theme associated with the gaming device 10. If the reels 34 are in video form, the display device displaying the video reels 34 is preferably a video monitor. Each base game, especially in the slot machine base game of the gaming device 10, includes speakers 36 for making sounds or playing music.

[0034] Referring now to Fig. 2, a general electronic configuration of the gaming device 10 for the stand alone and bonus embodiments described above preferably includes: a processor 38; a memory device 40 for storing program code or other data; a central display device 30; an upper display device 32; a sound card 42; a plurality of speakers 36; and one or more input devices 44. The processor 38 is preferably a microprocessor or microcontroller-based platform which is capable of displaying images, symbols and other indicia such as images of people, characters, places, things and faces of cards. The memory device 40 includes random access memory (RAM) 46 for storing event data or other data generated or used during a particular game. The memory device 40 also includes read only memory (ROM) 48 for storing program code, which controls the gaming device 10 so that it plays a particular game in accordance with applicable game rules and pay tables.

[0035] As illustrated in Fig. 2, the player preferably uses the input devices 44 to input signals into gaming device 10. In the slot machine base game, the input devices 44 include the pull arm 18, play button 20, the bet one button 24 and the cash out button 26. A touch screen 50 and touch screen controller 52 are connected to a video controller 54 and processor 38. The terms "computer" or "controller" are used herein to refer collectively to the processor 38, the memory device 40, the sound card 42, the touch screen controller and the video controller 54.

[0036] In certain instances, it is preferable to use a touch screen 50 and an associated touch screen controller 52

instead of a conventional video monitor display device. The touch screen enables a player to input decisions into the gaming device 10 by sending a discrete signal based on the area of the touch screen 50 that the player touches or presses. As further seen in Fig. 2, the processor 38 connects to the coin slot 12 or payment acceptor 14, whereby the processor 38 requires a player to deposit a certain amount of money in to start the game.

[0037] It should be appreciated that although a processor 38 and memory device 40 are preferable implementations of the present invention, the present invention also includes being implemented via one or more application-specific integrated circuits (ASIC's), one or more hard-wired devices, or one or more mechanical devices (collectively referred to herein as a "processor"). Furthermore, although the processor 38 and memory device 40 preferably reside in each gaming device 10 unit, the present invention includes providing some or all of their functions at a central location such as a network server for communication to a playing station such as over a local area network (LAN), wide area network (WAN), Internet connection, microwave link, and the like.

[0038] With reference to the slot machine base game of Figs. 1A and 1B, to operate the gaming device 10, the player inserts the appropriate amount of tokens or money in the coin slot 12 or the payment acceptor 14 and then pulls the arm 18 or pushes the play button 20. The reels 34 then begin to spin. Eventually, the reels 34 come to a stop. As long as the player has credits remaining, the player can spin the reels 34 again. Depending upon where the reels 34 stop, the player may or may not win additional credits.

[0039] In addition to winning base game credits, the gaming device 10, including any of the base games disclosed above, may include a bonus game that gives players the opportunity to win credits or a tournament entry as described below. The bonus game includes a program that automatically begins when the player achieves a triggering event in the base game.

[0040] In the slot machine embodiment, the triggering event includes a particular symbol or symbol combination generated on a display device. As illustrated in the five reel slot game shown in Figs. 1A and 1B, the triggering event includes the number seven appearing on three adjacent reels 34 along a payline 56. It should be appreciated that the present invention includes one or more paylines, such as payline 56, wherein the paylines can be horizontal, diagonal or any combination thereof.

[0041] In another embodiment, the triggering event includes a particular card combination in a video poker game.

Qualification For A Tournament Through Gaming Device Operation

[0042] Fig. 3 provides an overview of the method or process 100 by which a player qualifies for the tournament through operation of the gaming device of the present invention. The player makes a wager within the gaming device as indicated by block 102. The game within the gaming device, whether slot, video poker, video blackjack, video keno, or other game is then played as indicated by block 104. The processor determines if the player achieves a qualifying outcome during this sequence as indicated by diamond 106. If the player achieves a qualifying outcome, the player receives a voucher or tournament entry as indicated by block 108 as proof of entry into the tournament. The player may then participate in the tournament which is held at a later time as indicated by block 110. The player may restart the process at any time. However, depending on the implementor, a player may not be allowed to obtain multiple entries to a tournament. Thus, if the player wins another entry after restarting the process, the game may provide a cash value equivalent or provide the player an entry in a subsequent tournament. The player then has the option of participating in a subsequent tournament.

[0043] In an alternative embodiment, a player must achieve a qualifying outcome a plurality of times in order to qualify for the tournament. For example, the casino may require that a player achieve a qualifying outcome twice to qualify for the tournament. After the first qualifying outcome is obtained, the gaming device acknowledges, whether visually or audibly, that the player has achieved a first qualifying outcome. A partial voucher may alternatively be provided to the player. Further, alternatively a processor, whether located within the gaming device or remote from the gaming device may keep track of the game's qualifying outcomes. If the player achieves a second qualifying outcome (i.e., such as before a cash out), the gaming device notifies the player that the player has qualified for the tournament. In one embodiment, the qualifying information is recorded on the computer which runs the player tracking system. Thus, the player may play on a first occasion and achieve a first qualifying outcome which is recorded with the player information in a conventional manner. The player may then operate the gaming device on a second occasion, (i.e., with the player information card inserted within the gaming device). If the player achieves a second qualifying outcome, the processor within the gaming device and/or the processor located remote from the gaming device acknowledge this, and the gaming device notifies the player that the player has qualified for the tournament. This information is then recorded with the player information and the player may redeem a tournament entry or voucher. Alternatively, the game goes into a hand-pay condition or state and an attendant provides the player a tournament entry or invitation.

[0044] The game within the gaming device may be a primary or secondary game such as slot, video poker, video blackjack or other suitable game. The game includes at least one qualifying outcome and at least one non-qualifying outcome. For example, a slot game may provide two winning combinations. A first winning combination, such as 3

"BAR" symbols along a payline, may provide the player with an award but may not qualify the player for entry into the tournament. A second winning combination, determined by the implementor, may provide the player with an entry into the tournament.

[0045] In one embodiment, the game within the gaming device is a slot machine game. The gaming device includes a set of mechanical or video reels 34a, 34b and 34c having a set of symbols 68. The symbols may be of any type suitable for gaming devices. At least one of the symbols is a tournament qualification symbol 70, or, at least one of the combinations of symbols is a tournament qualifying combination, the obtaining either the symbol or the combination qualifying the player for the tournament. In one embodiment, the qualification symbol is distinguished from the rest of the symbols 68. A player makes a wager and uses the control features of the gaming device to spin the reels. The display device displays three qualification symbols along a payline 56, as illustrated in Fig. 4. This is a qualifying outcome and the player qualifies for the tournament. In another example, the qualifying outcome is a qualification symbol on each of the reels in a scattered arrangement, as shown in Fig. 5. In an alternative embodiment, the qualification symbol is not distinguished from the other symbols. The processor chooses a particular symbol or symbol combination, such as three "7" symbols along a payline, which must be displayed within the display device in order for the player to qualify for the tournament.

[0046] In one embodiment, the game within the gaming device is a video poker game. The video poker game may be any variation including draw, stud, multiple play or other type. The processor of gaming device has within its stored memory a set of cards. A player makes a wager and uses the control features of the gaming device to have a set of virtual cards dealt by the gaming device. If the cards, 72a through 72e, within the display device provide a predetermined qualifying outcome, the player qualifies for the tournament. An example is provided in Fig. 6, where the player achieves a royal flush which is a predetermined qualifying outcome that qualifies the player for the tournament. In an alternative embodiment, at least one of the cards is capable of displaying a qualification symbol 70. The processor randomly chooses to display the qualification symbol on the card. The player qualifies for the tournament by achieving a predetermined winning combination when the qualification symbol 70 is randomly displayed on one of the cards 73a through 73e. An example is provided in Fig 7. It is appreciated that in the case of any draw-type poker games, the qualification symbol may be randomly displayed on a card that was drawn after the initial hand of cards was dealt.

[0047] In one embodiment, the game played within the gaming device is a video blackjack game. The processor has within its stored memory a set of cards, a plurality of which are displayed within the display device. At least one of the cards is capable of displaying a qualification symbol. The processor randomly chooses to display the qualification symbol on the card. A player makes a wager and uses the control features of the gaming device to have at least two cards 74a and 74b dealt and displayed within the display device. If one of the cards displayed includes a qualification symbol 70 as shown in Fig. 8, and the player achieves a winning combination, the player qualifies for the tournament. The qualification symbol may also be randomly displayed on cards drawn in addition to the initial hand.

[0048] It should be appreciated that the present invention is not limited to the games described above, and may include any primary or secondary games capable of providing entries into a tournament. The qualifying outcomes for any of the primary or secondary games are not limited to the examples provided herein and may comprise any predetermined outcomes chosen by the implementor. Moreover, the number of qualifying outcomes or non-qualifying outcomes is not limited to the examples provided herein and may be any number of outcomes stored within the memory device and provided by the processor of the gaming device with at least one outcome being a qualifying outcome and at least one outcome being a non-qualifying outcome.

[0049] It should thus be appreciated that in accordance with the present invention the qualifying outcome or condition can be obtained in any suitable primary game or bonus game. It should also be appreciated that the qualifying outcome or condition could be associated for example with one or more of a plurality of player selectable selections in a player selection type game or one or more offers in a player offer acceptance type game. The qualifying outcome or condition could be obtained by obtaining a combination of two or more outcomes in a primary game or bonus game.

[0050] In one embodiment, when the player qualifies for the tournament, the player is presented with a voucher verifying entry into the tournament. The voucher may be paper, plastic, or other material capable of receiving printing or writing. The voucher may contain general information, such as place, date and time of the tournament, and/or may also contain individual player information, such as name, address, contact information and a personalized confirmation number for the tournament. In one embodiment, the voucher is presented by casino personnel in a manner similar to hand pays. When a player achieves a qualifying outcome, the processor sends a signal by illuminating a light positioned on top of the gaming device. Attendants who survey the floor for service of the gaming devices and player will notice the light, arrive at the gaming device and verify the qualifying outcome. The attendant may keep a set of vouchers which have two layers for printing and copying of information. After writing player and tournament information on the voucher, the layers are separated, with one layer presented to the player and one layer retained by the casino for recordkeeping.

[0051] In one embodiment, the attendant obtains the player's information and inputs the information into a central computer located remote from the gaming device. This information is stored by the central computer for the casino's

records. The computer is connected to and in communication with a printer. The computer sends a signal to the printer containing the player's information. The printer prints a voucher containing the information and the voucher is presented to the player.

[0052] In an alternative embodiment, the voucher is presented by the gaming device through a printing device. The printing device may be of any suitable type and may be positioned within or adjacent to the cabinet of the gaming device. The printing device is connected to and is in communication with the processor of the gaming device. However, the printer may instead be in communication with a processor and/or the central computer located remote from the gaming device. When the player qualifies for the tournament, a signal is sent, by either processor, to the printer. The printer then prints a voucher. This may also be coordinated with the ticket printing systems of the gaming device such as the EZPay™ ticket printing system of the assignee and this application. The information printed on the voucher may also be stored within the processor of the gaming device or the central computer located remote from the gaming device. In one embodiment, the player brings the voucher to casino personnel for authentication after printing is completed. The casino personnel signs the voucher to provide authentication. When the player participates in the tournament, the player presents the voucher to casino personnel. The casino personnel may verify the information on the voucher with tournament information that is stored in the casino's processor.

[0053] In an alternative embodiment, during the time at which the player receives a voucher, the player may be able to choose from a plurality of tournaments in which to participate. A list of upcoming tournaments may be provided to the player with the player choosing to participate in the tournament which occurs at a date most convenient for the player to attend. The date selected is recorded by the casino, which predetermines the number of entries per tournament, and the player's entry is reserved for the specific date.

[0054] The tournament may be any tournament, such as a slot machine tournament in which the player can obtain one or more prizes. The rules of the tournament may be such that contestants must deposit money or tokens from their own expense. A plurality of gaming devices are provided. Each gaming device is capable of awarding the top prize in the tournament. Each contestant plays an individual gaming device. All of the contestants begin playing the gaming devices at the same time. The first player to achieve the winning combination corresponding to the grand prize receives the prize. The tournament may include additional prizes, whether large or smaller in value. For instance, the prizes are preferably cars, motorcycles, boats or similar items of high value. Smaller prizes, of which a greater number are awarded, may include items such as hats, T-shirts, key-chains, jackets, memorabilia and other merchandise. Smaller prizes may be awarded for lesser valued winning combinations, or merely for participating in the tournament. In addition, while larger prizes may be collected at the end of the tournament, smaller prizes may be distributed during the course of the tournament to players for winning combinations or participation.

[0055] In another example, each contestant plays on one or more gaming devices, at no expense to the player, for a predetermined period of time. The contestant accumulating the greatest amount of credits in the time period, receives the grand prize. In this tournament, the contestants do not necessarily start or stop playing at the same time. In an alternative embodiment, the contestant who received the highest payout for an outcome during the predetermined time period wins the grand prize.

[0056] In one embodiment, the tournament is in the form of a raffle in which one or more prizes are given away. The casino has a record of all confirmation numbers assigned to vouchers for the tournament. Each contestant has a confirmation number written or printed on their voucher. A random confirmation number is drawn by casino personnel. The contestant in possession of the voucher having the drawn confirmation number wins the grand prize. Other confirmation numbers may be drawn for lower-valued prizes. In another example, the contestants may receive separate raffle tickets when they arrive at the tournament.

[0057] In one embodiment, the tournament is a video poker tournament in which the player can receive one or more awards. The video poker tournament rules may be similar to those for the slot machine tournament. More specifically, there may be a specific winning hand that must be displayed to win a grand prize. All contestants begin play at the same time with each contestant operating one gaming device. The contestant achieving the specific winning combination first wins the grand prize. In another example, all contestants play for a predetermined amount of time with the contestant accumulating the most credits in that time receiving the grand prize. In another example, the contestant achieving the single highest payout in a predetermined amount of time wins the grand prize. In addition, lower-valued prizes may be awarded for other winning combinations.

[0058] It is appreciated that the tournament may be any type of competition including but not limited to the types mentioned above and any type of lottery. It is further appreciated that the tournament can have any number of contestants and can award any number of prizes. It is also appreciated that the tournament can be held once, a plurality of times, or periodically.

[0059] The tournament provides a number of advantages for casinos in terms of offering and distributing prizes to players. Smaller prizes which may be difficult to keep track of may be distributed on one occasion, namely, the tournament, rather than at individual times. This eases the tasks of delivering the prizes to the players as well as keeping an inventory of the prizes distributed. Record keeping is also made easier because player information is recorded

either prior to the tournament or during the tournament instead of at erratic intervals. In addition, the casino does not need to store the prizes for a long period of time, since the time of distribution is known. This saves both time and money associated with choosing a storage facility, determining the period of time the prizes need to be stored, and revisiting the storage facility to bring the prizes to the casino or players. Casinos also save on the cost of security for the prizes because the prizes do not have to be held by the casino for a long period of time. In addition, delivery costs are reduced because the players will be receiving those prizes at the time of the tournament.

[0060] For larger prizes, the present invention provides advantages in addition to those listed above. Items such as cars or motorcycles may be distributed at one time. The specific time could be detailed within the display to make players aware when the prize may be collected. Larger prizes within displays would not need to be replaced because those prizes would be displayed solely for advertising to players the potential win in the tournament. Thus, the casino saves the trouble of removing the prize, delivering the prize to the player, having a new prize delivered to the casino, and repositioning the new prize within the display.

Current Methods of Setting Payout Percentages

[0061] Certain known gaming devices provide monetary awards. The payout or payback percentages in most commercially available gaming devices in the United States range from 84% to 99%. The gaming devices on average pay out to the players according to the percentage. For example, if the payout percentage is set at 90%, for every \$1000 wagered, the gaming device pays out on average \$900 to the players. Of course, because the paybacks are randomly determined the actual paybacks to players may be the payback percentage or higher or lower than the payback percentage.

[0062] If a gaming device offers a physical prize (which for the purpose of this application includes a service or other accommodation such as a trip or massage) in addition to monetary awards, the value of the physical prize must be factored into the overall payout percentage. For example, a gaming device may have a payout percentage of 90%. The gaming device may offer a T-shirt for a plurality of outcomes. If the T-shirt has a value of \$10, this value must be factored into the payout percentage. For instance, the 90% payback can be divided into an 85% monetary payback and a 5% payback in T-shirts. Of course, these percentages may vary, the values of the awards can vary and the number of prizes can vary. In this example, if the players wager \$1000, on average the players will receive \$850 in the form of monetary awards and achieve, on average, \$50 in the form of five \$10 T-shirts.

Method of Setting a Payout Percentage in the Present Invention

[0063] Similarly, the payout percentages of the gaming devices employing the present invention must take into account prizes awarded to the players in the tournament. In particular, it should be appreciated that in one embodiment of the present invention, awards in the tournament are guaranteed to be paid to the players of the tournament. Therefore, the values of those awards are factored into the paytables of the gaming device which can provide entries into the tournament.

[0064] For example, in a tournament, a set of prizes may be awarded as shown in Table 1:

Table 1:

Tournament A	Number of Awards	Value of Prizes	Total Cost
Grand Prize	1	\$20,000	\$20,000
Second Prize	10	\$5,000	\$50,000
Third Prize	200	\$100	\$20,000

[0065] Accordingly, in this example, the total cost of all the prizes guaranteed to be awarded in the tournament is \$90,000. This total is factored into the payout or payback percentage of the gaming devices which provides entries into the tournament. Table 2 provides an example for calculating the payout percentages for the gaming devices which provide entries to the tournament:

Table 2:

Number of Gaming Devices (Fixed)	200
Number of Days Between Tournaments (Fixed)	90

Table 2: (continued)

	Average Number of Games Played Per Gaming Device Per Day (Estimated Based on Statistical Data)	2500
5	Average Bet in Dollars Per Game Played (Estimated Based on Statistical Data)	\$2.00
	Average Revenue in Dollars Per Gaming Device Per Day (Estimated Based on Statistical Data)	\$5000
10	Average Number of Games Played in the Number of Days Between Tournaments (Estimated Based on Statistical Data)	45,000,000
	Average Total Amount Wagered Between Tournaments (Estimated based on Statistical Data)	\$90,000,000

[0066] In this example, if the average gaming device has 2500 games played per day, and the average wager per game is \$2.00, then the average revenue amount wagered per day is \$5,000. If there are 200 gaming devices that provide entries into the tournament, then the total amount wagered per day on average is \$1,000,000. If, as illustrated in the above table, there are 90 days between tournaments, the total amount wagered between tournaments is \$90,000,000. As mentioned above, the cost of the tournament is \$90,000. This is .1% of the total amount wagered in this example. Accordingly, .1% is reserved within the payout percentage of each gaming device to account for the value of the awards guaranteed to be provided in the tournament. In this example, the payback percentage is 90% and if players wager \$1000 on one of the gaming devices, the players, on average, will receive \$899 in monetary awards, and \$1 of return value through the tournament.

[0067] In this embodiment, when the player achieves a qualifying outcome, the player is presented with a voucher and does not receive a monetary award. In an alternative embodiment, the player also receives a monetary award for achieving the tournament qualifying outcome. The value of the tournament qualifying outcome will be factored into the payout percentage of the gaming device. For example, the gaming device could provide a monetary award with the voucher and the payable would have to be accordingly adjusted. For instance, the gaming device could provide 89.8% in monetary values and 0.2% in combined tournament entries and monetary values.

[0068] The monetary award associated with the tournament could also be accounted for in the cost of the tournament. For example, if on average there will be 1000 entries into the tournament, and each entry is provided with \$90 travel expense to the tournament, the overall cost of the tournament is \$180,000, or the cost of the prizes awarded at the tournament (\$90,000) plus the total cost of the travel expense or payouts for qualifying (\$90,000). Accordingly, in the above example, \$180,000 is then .2% of the total amount wagered on the gaming machines on average between tournaments. Therefore, .2% of the payout percentage is reserved in the gaming devices. For example, if players wager \$1000, players, on average, receive \$898 in monetary values and \$2 of return value through the tournament and the accompanied expense award.

[0069] In an alternative embodiment, the tournament is directly funded by wagers made in the gaming devices similar to a progressive award. If, in one example, 1000 gaming devices potentially provide entries into the tournament, and the average contribution per gaming device to the tournament is \$100, then the prizes awarded at the tournament may be a first prize value of \$50,000, a second prize value of \$30,000 and a third place prize value of \$20,000. These prizes total \$100,000 collected from the gaming devices. Of course, the payback percentage of the gaming devices would need to be adjusted to account for the total value of the prizes.

[0070] While the present invention is described in connection with what is presently considered to be the most practical and preferred embodiments it should be appreciated that the invention is not limited to the disclosed embodiments, and is intended to cover various modifications and equivalent arrangements included within the spirit and scope of the claims. Modifications and variations in the present invention may be made without departing from the novel aspects of the invention as defined in the claims, and this application is limited only by the scope of the claims.

Claims

1. A gaming device comprising:

a primary game;

at least one non-qualifying outcome in the primary game; and

at least one qualifying outcome in the primary game, wherein a player qualifies for a multi-player tournament to be held in the future when the player achieves the qualifying outcome.

2. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein the primary game is a slot game.
3. The gaming device of Claim 2, wherein the qualifying outcome is a qualification symbol obtained on an active
payline.
4. The gaming device of Claim 2, wherein the qualifying outcome is a plurality of qualification symbols obtained on
an active payline.
5. The gaming device of Claim 2, wherein the qualifying outcome is a plurality of qualification symbols displayed
within a display device in a scattered arrangement.
6. The gaming device of Claim 1, which includes a plurality of non-qualifying outcomes.
7. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein the primary game is a video poker game.
8. The gaming device of Claim 7, wherein the qualifying outcome is a predetermined winning combination of a plurality
of cards in said video poker game.
9. The gaming device of Claim 7, which includes a qualification symbol, and wherein the qualifying outcome is a
winning combination of a plurality of said cards in combination with said qualification symbol.
10. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein the primary game is a video blackjack game.
11. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein the primary game is a video keno game.
12. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein the tournament is selected from the group consisting of: a slot machine
tournament; a poker tournament; a blackjack tournament; a keno tournament; a raffle; and a lottery.
13. The gaming device of Claim 1, including a payout percentage, said payout percentage set relative to a cost of the
tournament.
14. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein a minimum wager in the primary game is required to qualify for the tour-
nament.
15. The gaming device of Claim 1, which includes a printer for printing a tournament entry when the qualifying outcome
is achieved by the player.
16. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein a hand-pay state is entered when the qualifying outcome is achieved by
the player.
17. The gaming device of Claim 1, which includes a plurality of qualifying outcomes, wherein the player qualifies for
the multi-player tournament when the player achieves one of the qualifying outcomes.
18. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein the qualifying outcome includes a combination of at least two predetermined
outcomes in the primary game.
19. A gaming device comprising:
 - a bonus game;
 - at least one non-qualifying outcome in the bonus game; and
 - at least one qualifying outcome in the bonus game, wherein a player qualifies for a multi-player tournament
to be held in the future when the player achieves the qualifying outcome.
20. The gaming device of Claim 19, which includes a plurality of non-qualifying outcomes.
21. The gaming device of Claim 19, wherein the bonus game is a slot game.
22. The gaming device of Claim 19, wherein the bonus game is a video poker game.

23. The gaming device of Claim 19, wherein the bonus game is a video blackjack game.

24. The gaming device of Claim 19, wherein the bonus game is a video keno game.

25. The gaming device of Claim 19, wherein the tournament is selected from the group consisting of: a slot machine tournament; a poker tournament; a blackjack tournament; a keno tournament; a raffle; and a lottery.

26. The gaming device of Claim 19, wherein a minimum wager is required to qualify for the tournament.

27. The gaming device of Claim 19, which includes a printer for printing a tournament entry when the qualifying outcome is achieved by the player.

28. The gaming device of Claim 19, wherein a hand-pay state is entered when the qualifying outcome is achieved by the player.

29. The gaming device of Claim 19, wherein the qualifying outcome includes a combination of at least two combinations of outcomes in the primary game.

30. The gaming device of Claim 19, wherein the bonus game includes a plurality of player selectable selections and wherein the qualifying outcome is associated with at least one selection.

31. The gaming device of Claim 19, wherein the bonus game includes a player offer acceptance type game and the qualifying outcome is associated with one of a plurality of offers made to the player.

32. A method for providing a tournament entry in association with play of a gaming device, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a controller;
- (b) storing at least one non-qualifying outcome within the controller;
- (c) storing at least one qualifying outcome within the controller;
- (d) randomly producing the qualifying outcome; and
- (e) providing the tournament entry to the player achieving the qualifying outcome for the tournament.

33. The method of Claim 32, which includes the step of printing the tournament entry when the player achieves the qualifying outcome.

34. The method of Claim 32, which includes the step of selecting at least one tournament to be held on a predetermined day in the future.

35. The method of Claim 32, which includes the step of providing an additional monetary award to the player when the player obtains the qualifying outcome.

36. The method of Claim 32, which includes the step of setting a payout percentage for the gaming device based on a cost of the tournament.

37. The method of Claim 32, wherein the qualifying outcome is adapted to be produced in a primary game.

38. The method of Claim 32, wherein the qualifying outcome is adapted to be produced in a bonus game.

39. A tournament comprising: a plurality of tournament gaming devices adapted to be played by a plurality of contestants, said contestants qualifying to participate in said tournament by achieving a qualifying outcome on one of a plurality of qualifying gaming devices, each said qualifying gaming devices capable of producing said qualifying outcome and a plurality of non-qualifying outcomes; and at least one prize awarded to one of the contestants which play the tournament gaming devices.

40. The tournament of Claim 39, wherein the tournament gaming devices are slot machines.

41. The tournament of Claim 39, wherein the tournament gaming devices are video poker gaming machines.

42. The tournament of Claim 39, wherein a theme of the tournament is related to the theme of the qualifying gaming devices.

43. A gaming device comprising:

a display device;
a plurality of reels;
a plurality of symbols on the plurality of reels including at least one qualification symbol on at least one of the reels;
at least one non-qualifying outcome involving the plurality of symbols; and
and at least one qualifying outcome involving the plurality of symbols, wherein a player qualifies for a tournament when the player achieves the qualifying outcome.

44. The gaming device of Claim 43, wherein the qualifying outcome is at least one qualifying symbol displayed on an active payline.

45. The gaming device of Claim 43, wherein the qualifying outcome is a plurality of qualification symbols displayed on an active payline.

46. The gaming device of Claim 43, wherein the qualifying outcome is a plurality of qualification symbols displayed within a display device in a scattered arrangement.

47. The gaming device of Claim 43, wherein the tournament is selected from the group consisting of: a slot machine tournament; a poker tournament; a blackjack tournament; a keno tournament; a raffle; and a lottery.

48. The gaming device of Claim 43, which includes a payout percentage which accounts for a cost of the tournament.

FIG.1A

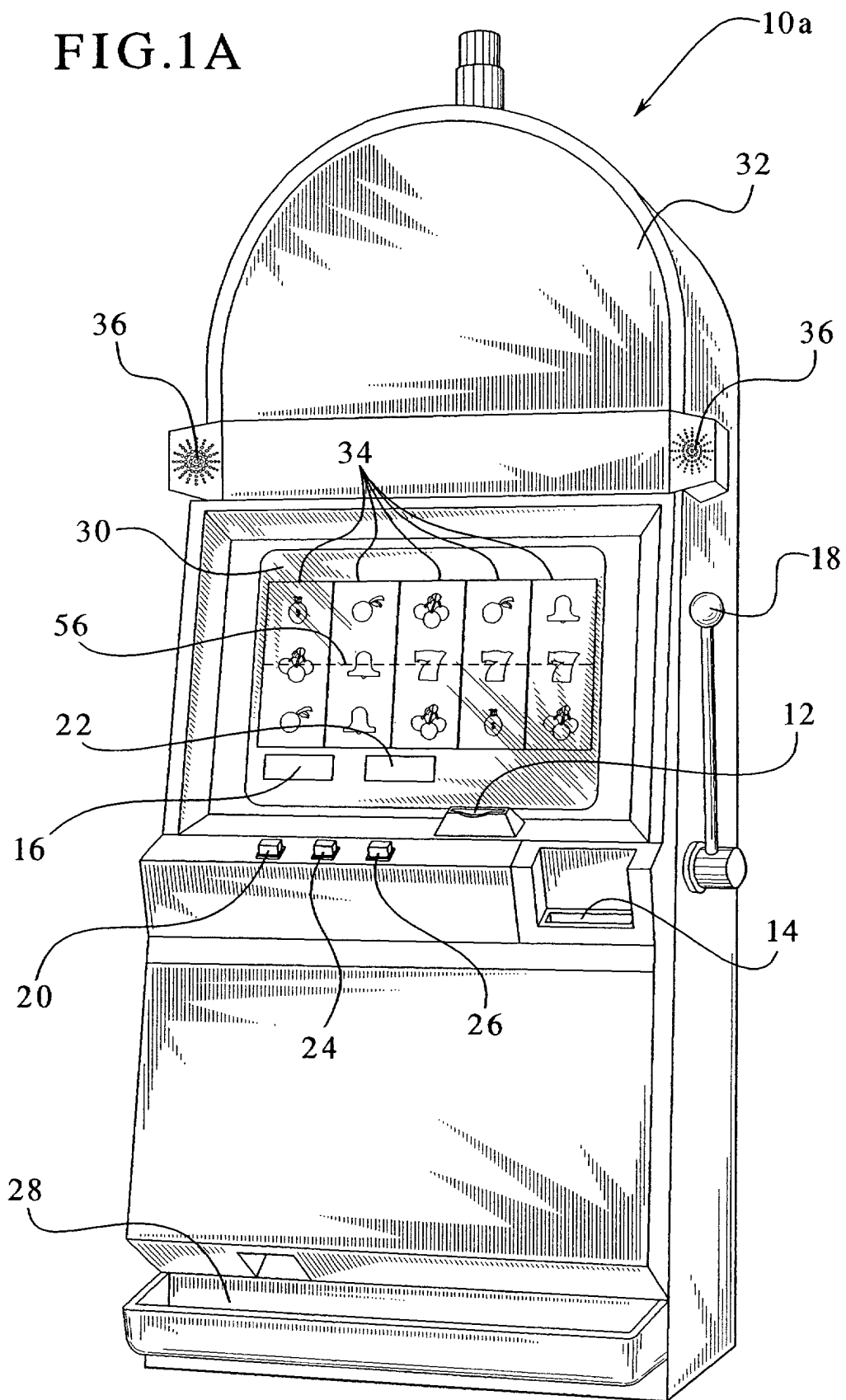


FIG.1B

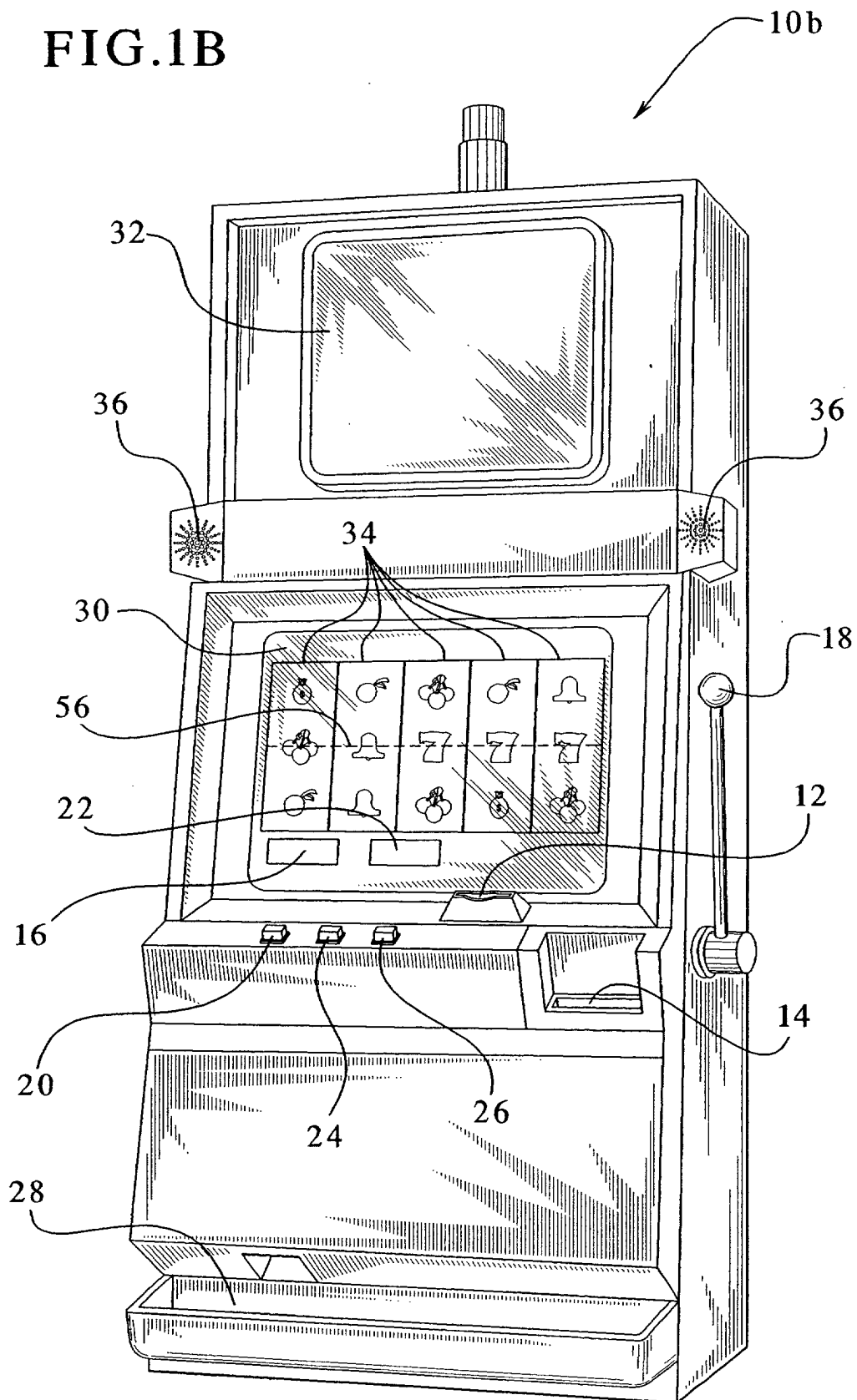


FIG.2

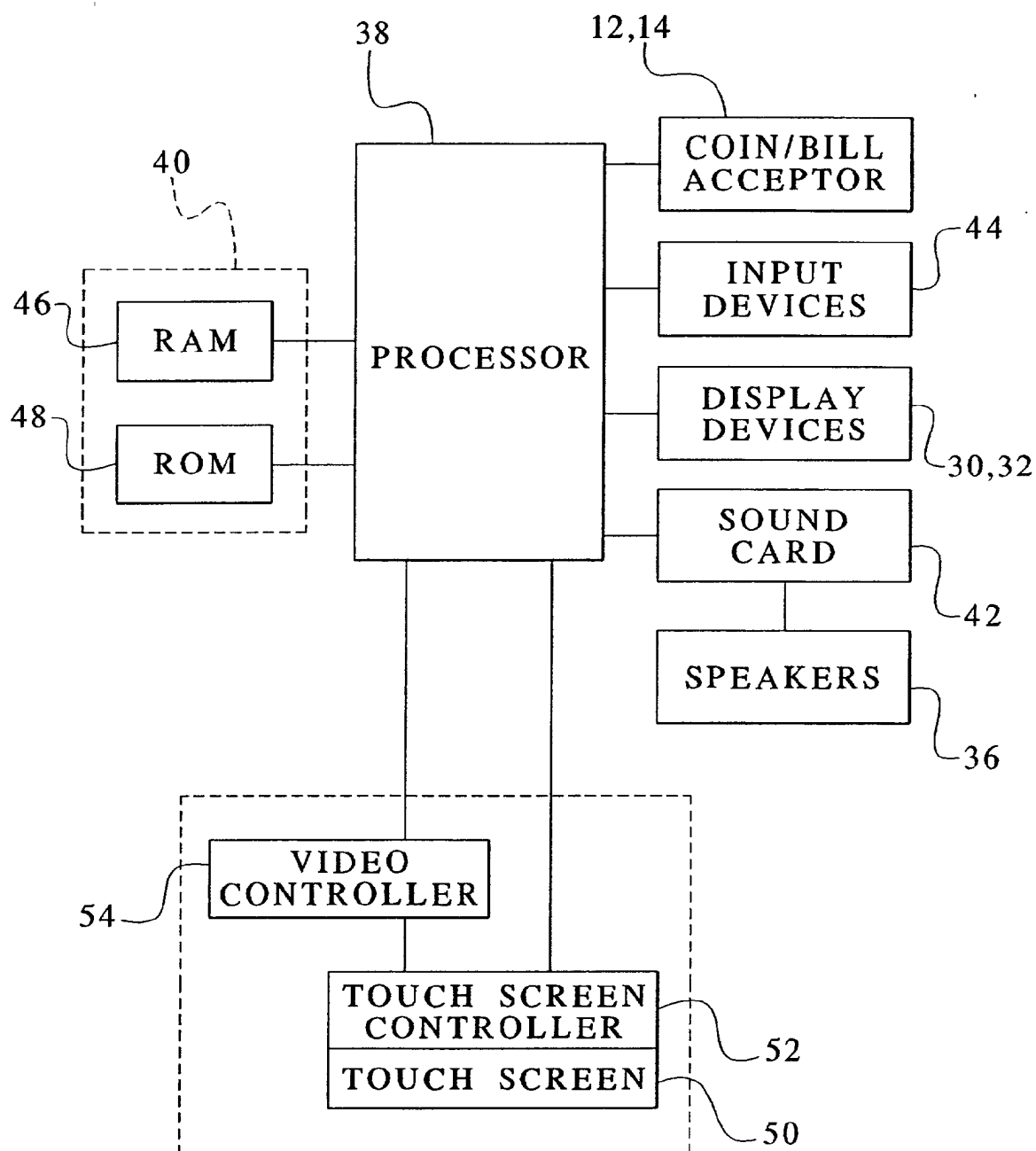


FIG.3

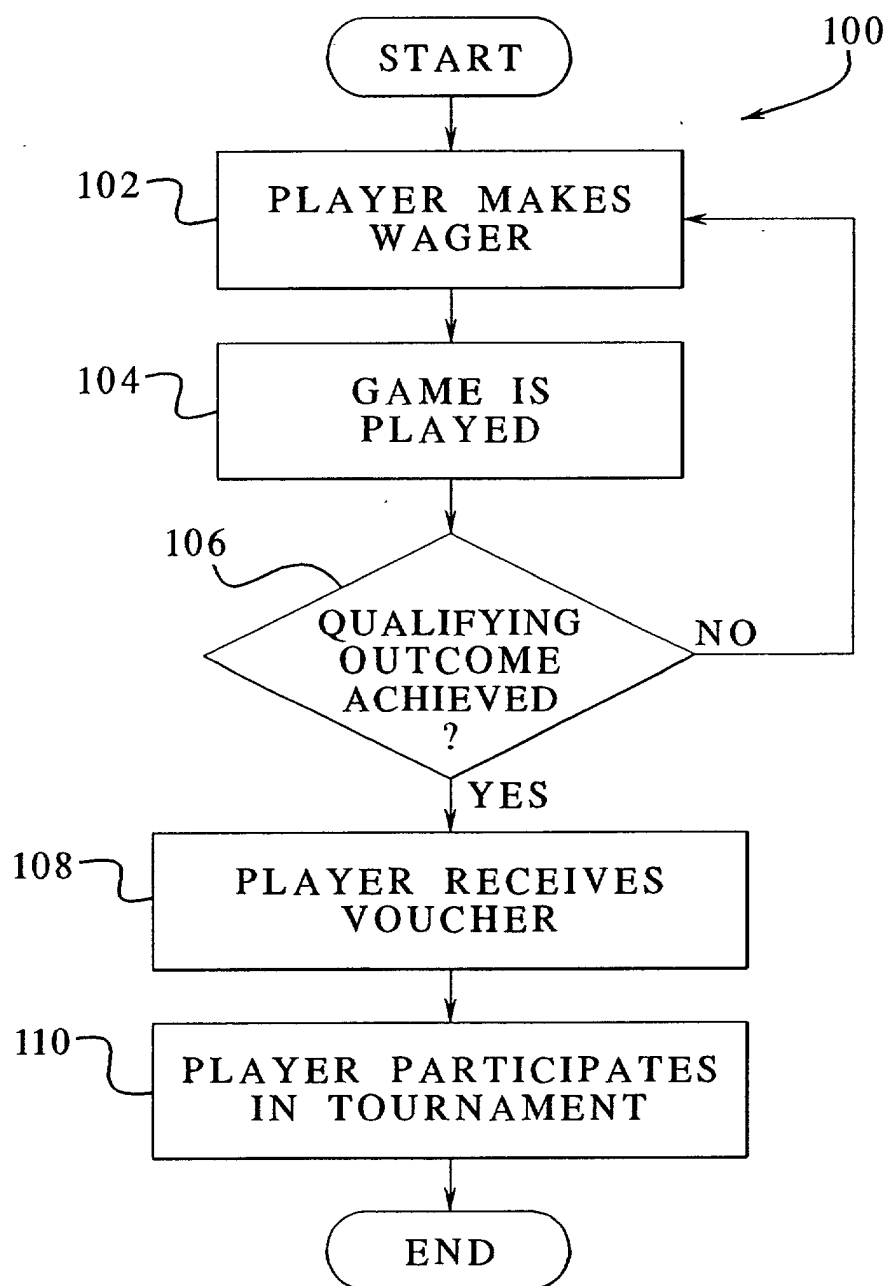


FIG. 4

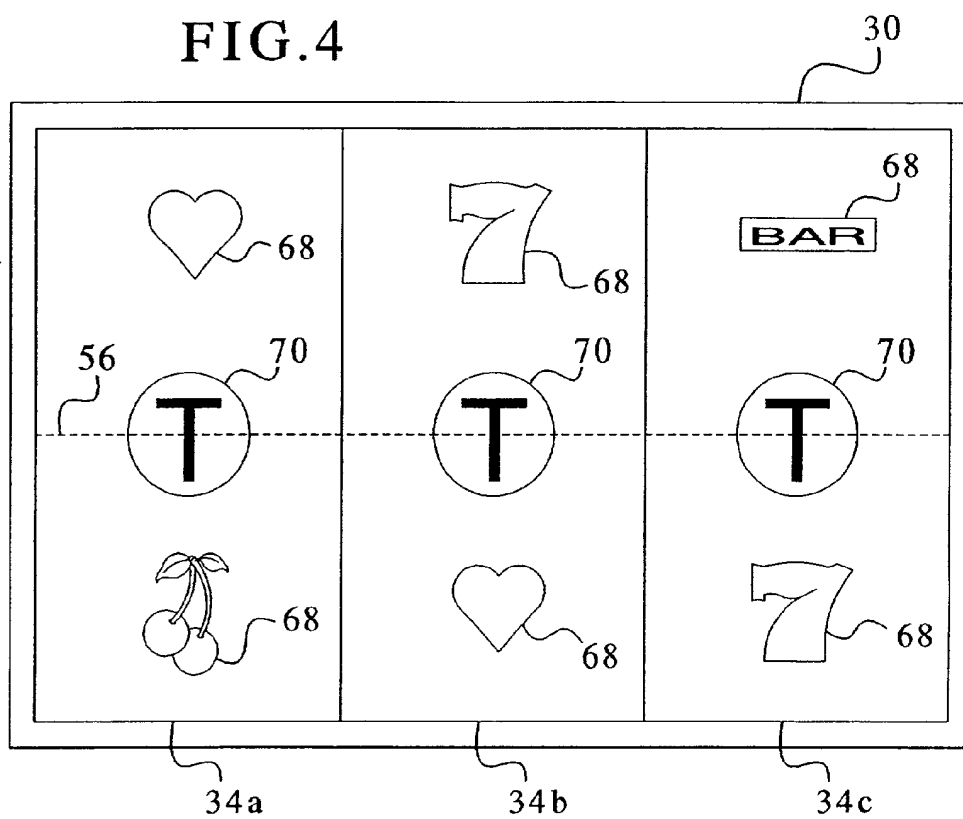


FIG. 5

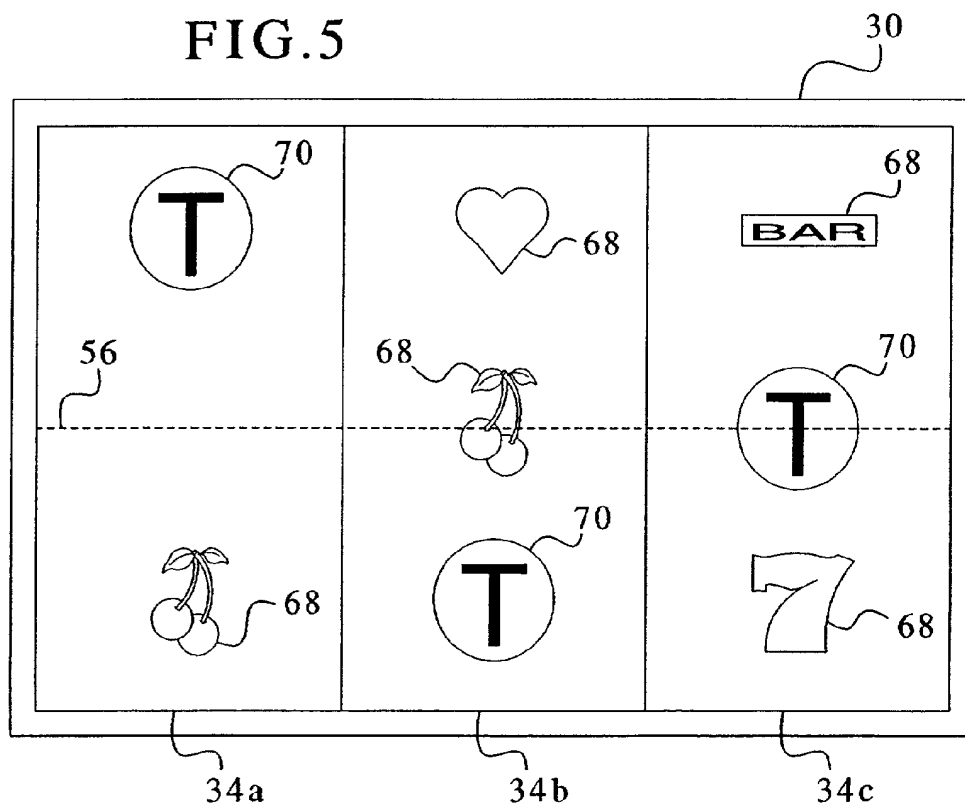


FIG.6

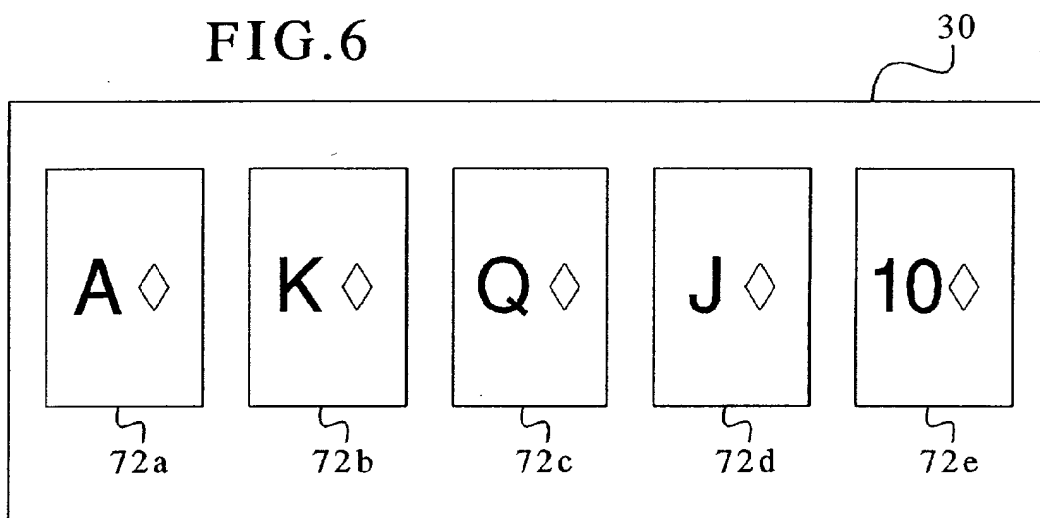


FIG.7

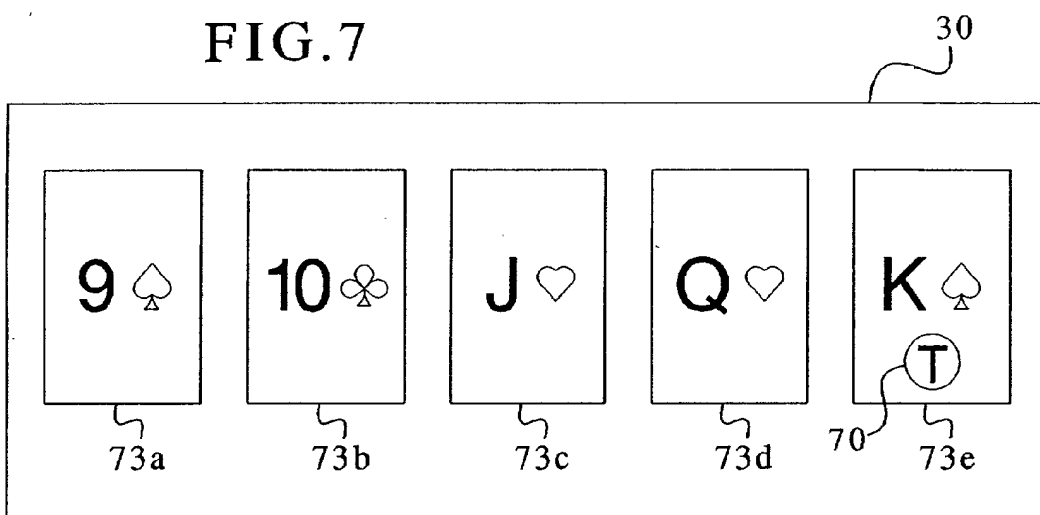


FIG.8

