(19) Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets

(11) EP 1 750 233 A2

(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

(43) Date of publication:
07.02.2007 Bulletin 2007/06

(51) Int Cl.:
G07F 17/32 *(2006.01)*

(21) Application number: **06254030.7**

(22) Date of filing: **01.08.2006**

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

(30) Priority: **01.08.2005 US 195558**

(71) Applicant: **Waterleaf Ltd.**
14 Athol Street
Douglas
Isle of Man IM1 1JA (GB)

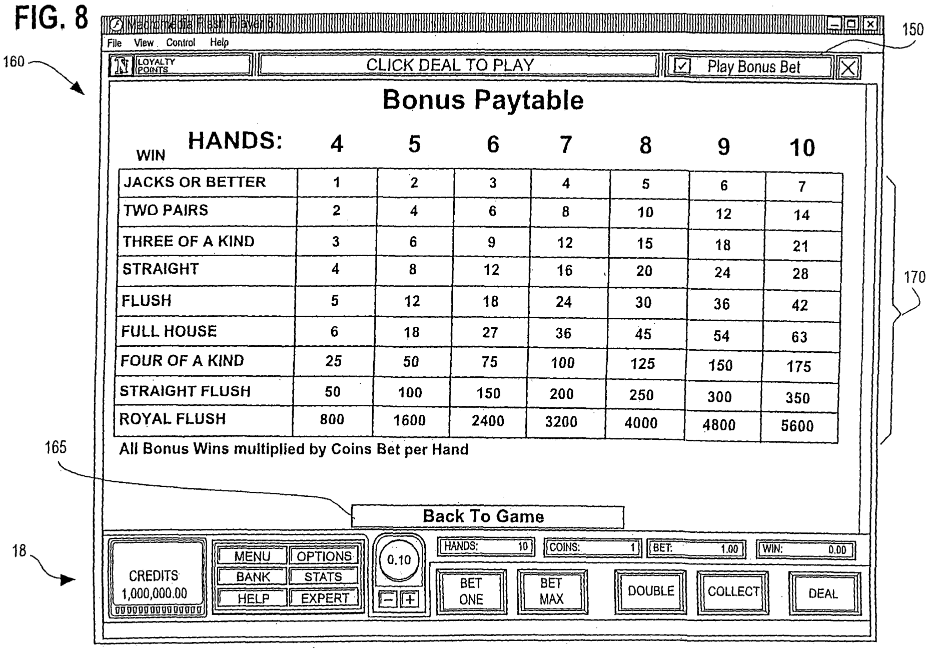
(72) Inventor: **Novellie, Michael Paul**
Ballakillowey
Isle of Man (GB)

(74) Representative: **Piésold, Alexander James**
Frank B. Dehn & Co.
St Bride's House
10 Salisbury Square
London EC4Y 8JD (GB)

(54) Multi-play poker apparatus and games with bonus feature

(57) Methods and apparatus for playing multi-play poker games are disclosed. The games include a bonus wager feature in which the player makes a wager that at least a minimum number of hands in the multi-play poker game will have a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking. For example, if ten hands are played in the multi-play poker game, the player may wager $ 1.00 that at least four of the ten hands will have a ranking of a pair of jacks or better. The pay table for the bonus wager feature may take the form of an array of rows and columns, rows representing poker hand rankings (including the minimum poker hand ranking) and columns headed by integers representing a number of hands between the minimum number of hands (M) and the total number of hands (N) in the multi-play poker game, with the entries in the array being payout multiplies that are applied to the bonus wager if the player has the number of hands with the associated poker hand ranking.

FIG. 8



Bonus Paytable

WIN HANDS:	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
JACKS OR BETTER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TWO PAIRS	2	4	6	8	10	12	14
THREE OF A KIND	3	6	9	12	15	18	21
STRAIGHT	4	8	12	16	20	24	28
FLUSH	5	12	18	24	30	36	42
FULL HOUSE	6	18	27	36	45	54	63
FOUR OF A KIND	25	50	75	100	125	150	175
STRAIGHT FLUSH	50	100	150	200	250	300	350
ROYAL FLUSH	800	1600	2400	3200	4000	4800	5600

All Bonus Wins multiplied by Coins Bet per Hand

Back To Game

CREDITS 1,000,000.00

HANDS: 10
COINS: 1
BET: 1.00
WIN: 0.00

Printed by Jouve, 75001 PARIS (FR)

Description

[0001] This invention relates to card games and, more particularly, to methods and apparatus for playing card games, such as poker, multiple times. It also relates to bonus game features for multi-play games. The methods and bonus game features can be used in electronic games such as, for example, games that are provided by a gaming website on the World Wide Web of the Internet.

Description of related art.

[0002] The well-known poker game of five-card draw involves each player receiving an initial hand of five cards. One at a time, each player makes a selection of cards they wish to hold. They then discard unwanted cards and receive a replacement of discarded cards. The players' resulting hands are then ranked in accordance with the poker hand rankings and the hand with the highest ranking wins.

[0003] U.S. Patent Numbers 5,823,873 and 6,007,066, both issued to Earnest Moody, disclose multi-hand variations of five-card draw poker, wherein multiple hands are played simultaneously in an electronic video poker format. In one representative example, a card game is played in which three rows of cards are dealt to a player. The player makes a wager for each row of cards. All three rows of cards are dealt face up with each row having the same cards by rank and suit. The player selects none, one or more of the face up cards from one of the rows as cards to be held. The cards that are held are also held in all of the other rows. Replacement cards for the non-selected cards are dealt into each row. The poker hand ranking of each five-card hand by row is determined. The player is then paid for any winning poker hands based on a pay table and the amount of the player's wager.

[0004] U.S. Patent Application No. 11/058,680, filed February 14, 2005, describes multi-play poker games that include graphical user interface features which are well suited to on-line gaming environments. The game includes a pool hand comprising five face-up cards that are displayed to a player. The pool hand is not a played hand and is not subject to wagering or poker hand ranking, but is displayed to a player only for purposes of selection of cards to be held. At the time of display of the pool hand, the played hands do not exist and, as such, are not displayed to the player. The player designates none, one or more of the cards of the pool hand as held cards. Once the task of selecting none, one or more of the cards of the pool hand as held cards is completed, the playing hands are displayed to the player in a separate area of the display. The cards that are held are reproduced into a plurality of playing hands. Each of the playing hands includes the same held cards that were designated as held cards in the pool hand. The plurality of playing hands are completed with new, randomly selected, face up cards, the additional cards that are added to complete each hand being dealt from a separate deck of cards. The ranking of each of the completed playing hands is separately determined, in accordance with standard poker hand rankings.

[0005] There is a need in the art for additional game features in multi-play poker games that are functions of the individual rankings of all the playing hands. Such additional features are desired to enhance the player experience of the game and maintain player interest. This disclosure provides a bonus feature for multi-play poker that enhances the player's experience, provides additional wager opportunities, and helps maintain player interest in the game.

SUMMARY

[0006] A bonus feature is provided for multi-play poker games. In such games, a player plays a round of multi-play poker where some number (N) of hands are played simultaneously. N may be 3, 5, 10, 50 or some other number, greater than or equal to 2. The bonus feature is a wager that pays out as a function of the rankings of all the completed playing hands. For example, the wager is that at least some minimum number of hands in the total number of hands will have a minimum poker hand ranking, e.g., a pair of Jacks, and if so, a payout occurs. Typically, if the player has more than the minimum number of hands of the minimum poker hand ranking, they also win a bonus, and the more winning hands they have the greater the payout in the bonus feature.

[0007] The minimum number of hands required to win the bonus feature (parameter referred to as M herein), can and will normally vary depending on the total number of hands (N) that are played. For example, in a ten play multi-play poker game, M can be equal to 4. This value for M could be different depending on the features and "flavor" of the game desired by the proprietor, and different values of M may likely cause the bonus pay table entries to vary. For example, for a ten hand multi-play game, one could set the minimum threshold for bonus win to 6 winning hands of a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking (e.g. pair of Jacks) (M = 6), but with higher payouts for 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10 winning hands than would be the case in the pay table if M was equal to 4. If N is equal to 2 (two hand multi-play poker), then M would typically be also equal to 2. If N is equal to 3, N could be equal to 2 or 3. If N is equal to 4, M could be equal to 2, 3 or 4. As a generalization of this concept, M is preferably an integer greater than or equal to 2 and between 2 and N, inclusive. Values of M of between 0.3 and 0.8 times the total number of hands (N) are preferred, with M rounded up or down as may be necessary, but between the values of 2 and N, inclusive. The minimum number of hands required to have a bonus payout may be the same regardless of the poker hand ranking, or conceivably could vary depending on the poker hand ranking.

[0008] Thus, in one embodiment, a method for playing a multiple-play poker game is described comprising the steps of (a) playing a round of multi-play poker wherein N hands are played, N being an integer greater than or equal to 2; (b) determining a payout for the N hands based on rankings of the N hands and a first pay table; and then determining a bonus payout in accordance with a bonus pay table, the bonus payout occurring when at least a minimum number of hands (M) in the set of N hands have a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking or better, where M is an integer and 2≤ M ≤N.

[0009] The nature and features of the multi-play poker game that occurs in conjunction with the bonus feature is not particularly important and can vary considerably. An example is described in this disclosure wherein a pool hand is provided. In this embodiment, a method is disclosed for playing a multiple-play poker game, the method comprising the steps of: displaying a pool hand comprising a plurality of face up cards, wherein the pool hand is not played; designating none, one or more of the cards of the pool hand as held cards; reproducing the held cards in a plurality of playing hands; completing the plurality of playing hands with new face up cards; determining a ranking of each of the completed playing hands; and deriving a bonus payout from a bonus pay table as a function of the rankings of all the completed playing hands.

[0010] In yet another aspect, a method of facilitating play of a multi-play poker game is provided, the method including receiving a wager associated with a plurality of hands to be played and a wager associated with a bonus feature. A first pay table is provided showing the odds associated with poker hand rankings that provide for a payout. A bonus pay table is provided to show odds as a function of the collective poker hand rankings of all the hands that are played in the multi-hand poker game. A pool hand comprising a plurality of face up cards is dealt, wherein the pool hand is not a played hand. A selection is received designating none, one or more cards of the pool hand as held cards. The held cards are reproduced in a plurality of playing hands. The playing hands are completed with new face up cards. Next, the method includes steps of determining a ranking of each of the completed playing hands; determining a payout amount based on the ranking of each of the played hands, the wager and the first pay table, and determining a bonus payout based on the collective poker hand rankings of all the completed playing hands, the wager on the bonus feature and a bonus pay table.

[0011] The methods of this invention are capable of being coded in software and executed on a gaming device, which may take the form of a general purpose computer, video game terminal, or other computing device. In another aspect, an apparatus for playing a multiple-play poker game, comprising a storage medium containing set of machine-readable instructions for controlling a display device, wherein the machine readable instructions comprise instructions for generating the following displays on the display device:

1.) a plurality of playing hands for playing a multiple-play poker game;
2.) a first pay table comprising a display of poker hand rankings and the associated payout odds for each hand in the rankings; and
3.) a bonus pay table wherein, in the bonus pay table, at least a minimum number of hands (M) in the plurality of playing hands having a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking is required to result in a bonus payout, wherein N comprises an integer representing the number of playing hands, and wherein N is greater than or equal to 2 and 2 ≤ M ≤ N.

[0012] The methods of this invention can also be played by an electronic gaming device that is coupled to a gaming server over a computer network, such as the Internet. The gaming server facilitates play of the game by a player at a remotely located gaming device, such as a computer in a home or casino environment. In another aspect, a gaming server is provided which is adapted for communication with a remote gaming device over a network. The gaming server comprises a computing platform (e.g. Windows computer operating system and central processing unit), and a game service module implemented in software executable by the computing platform. The game service module includes instructions (a) for receiving a datagram from the remote gaming device representing (1) a wager on a plurality of hands in a multi-play poker game, and (2) a wager on a bonus feature, wherein, in the bonus feature, an additional payout is determined according to a bonus pay table, the bonus payout occurring when a minimum number of hands (M) have a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking or better, where M is an integer and 2≤ M ≤N, and N is an integer representing the number of hands played in the plurality of hands. The game service module performs a function (b) of responsively generating a plurality of playing hands and a function (c) of transmitting a datagram containing data representing the playing hands to the remote gaming device, the playing hands to be displayed on the remote gaming device in a multi-play poker game, the datagram further indicating the results of the wagers (1) and (2) on the plurality of playing hands.

[0013] In still a further embodiment, a client computer is provided for playing a multi-play poker game, comprising: a general purpose computing platform, and a memory storing gaming software comprising a set of machine-readable instructions. The instructions including communications utilities for enabling the client computer to communicate with a remotely located gaming server, and a file containing logic required for the multi-play poker game, and for controlling the presentation of the game to the player. The logic includes code wherein the player may make a bonus wager that a minimum number of hands (M) will have a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking or better, where M is an integer and 2≤ M ≤N, wherein N is an integer representing the number of hands played in the multi-play poker game.

[0014] In addition to the aspects and embodiments described above, further aspects and embodiments will become apparent by reference to the drawings and by study of the following detailed descriptions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0015] A presently preferred embodiment will be described by way of example only in conjunction with the appended drawing Figures, of which:

Figure 1 is a screen shot showing a GUI display that may appear on the display of an electronic gaming device, such as a video poker terminal or display of a computer. The display of Figure 1 shows the GUI at the commencement of a multi-hand poker game.

Figure 2 is a screen shot showing the dealing of a pool hand in the bottom portion of the display.

Figure 3 is a screen shot showing the selection of cards in the pool hand as cards to be held.

Figure 4 is a screen shot showing the pool hand "grayed-out" (made less visible) and ten playing hands. Each playing hand has the held cards plus randomly selected cards to make up a hand of five cards.

Figure 5 shows a screen shot in a "double your money" side wager game, by which a player can double their winnings after playing all ten hands as shown in Figure 4. The player selects one of the face-down cards and doubles their money if the card they selected is ranked higher than the displayed card.

Figure 6 shows a screen shot in the "double your money" side wager, in which the displayed card is a King, and after the player has made a selection of one of the face down cards.

Figure 7 illustrates a graphical user interface design for an alternative embodiment of a multi-play poker game which includes a bonus feature.

Figure 8 is a screen shot of a bonus pay table of a ten hand, multi-play poker game.

Figure 9 is a screen shot showing the selection of cards in the pool hand as cards to be held in the embodiment of the multi-play poker game of Figure 7.

Figure 10 is a screen shot of the embodiment of Figure 7 showing the pool hand "grayed out" (made less visible) and ten playing hands. Each playing hand has the held cards plus randomly selected cards to make up a hand of five cards. Each playing hand has been ranked and the screen shot indicates a win from the bonus feature of the game.

Figure 11 is a network diagram showing a client computer which connects to a gaming server over an Internet Protocol network such as the World Wide Web in order to download gaming software and exchange messages with the gaming server and thereby play multi-play poker games as illustrated in Figures 1-10.

Figure 12 is a more detailed diagram of the gaming server showing the software modules included in the gaming server in a preferred embodiment.

Figure 13 is a more detailed diagram of a set of software modules which are downloaded onto the client computer in order to communicate with the gaming server and play the multi-play poker games as illustrated in Figures 1-10.

Figures 14-18 are a flow chart showing the flow of messages between the gaming server and the client computer, and processing steps performed at both the gaming server and client computer, to play the multi-play poker games as illustrated in Figures 1-10.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED AND ALTERNATIVE EMBODIMENTS

[0016] The following embodiments and aspects thereof are described and illustrated in conjunction with computer systems, user interface features, and methods which are provided by way of illustration and not limitation.

[0017] Referring to the drawings, Figure 1 is a screen shot showing a GUI display (10) that may be provided on a computer screen, video poker terminal or other game device, which is provided to facilitate playing of multi-play poker games. The display (10) of Figure 1 is presented to a player at the commencement of a multi-hand poker game. The bonus feature will be described below in conjunction with Figures 7-10. The bonus feature can be implemented in a variety of multi-play poker games, and so the example of a multi-play poker game using a pool hand described below in Figures 1-4 is just one of may possible examples of how the bonus feature may be incorporated into a multi-play poker game. For example, the bonus feature could be adapted to the multi-play poker games of the above-referenced Moody patents or variants thereof. As another example, the bonus feature could be adapted to seven card stud multi-play poker. The bonus feature can be applied in any situation where you have 2 or more hands that are played simultaneously in a multi-play poker format.

[0018] Before describing this particular multi-play poker game of Figures 1-4 in detail, some of the display (10) shown in Figure 1 will be described initially.

[0019] The display (10) of Figure 1 includes a variety of features that are designed to facilitate ease of use. The first feature is the display of a pool hand (12). The pool hand. (12) in this embodiment consists of five cards, which are shown face down indicating that the game has not yet commenced. The pool hand (12) is a hand that is used for selection of cards to be held in a draw-type poker hand. The held cards are later presented in each of a plurality of playing hands, as will be described in further detail below in conjunction with Figures 2-4. The pool hand (12) is not ranked and is also not played or subject to any wagering. It merely exists as a convenient vehicle for selection of cards to be held and presented in the playing hands. The number of cards in the pool hand (12) will preferably be the same number of cards in the completed playing hands, described below. For example, where the game is five-card draw, the pool hand has five cards and each completed playing hand has five cards. It is possible to have a greater or lesser number of cards in the pool hand as compared to the playing hands.

[0020] The display includes a region (14) that is devoted to a later display of the playing hands. The region (14) includes placeholders (16), each of which delineate an area where a playing hand is later displayed. In Figure 1, there are ten placeholders (16), indicating to the player that this particular hand is a ten-hand poker game.

[0021] The display of Figure 1 further includes a plurality of boxes (22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36 and 38) that, collectively, form a first pay table for the game. Each box (or entry in the pay table) consists of a poker hand ranking (e.g. "Three of a Kind", "Straight", etc.) and a corresponding number indicating the payout associated with the particular poker hand. A minimum ranking (pair of Jacks or better in the game of Figure 1) is needed for a payout.

[0022] The game of Figure 1 - 4 is played with ten played hands (see Figure 2) having an equal amount wagered on each playing hand. Each of the playing hands is individually ranked and the amount wagered on that playing hand is paid in accordance with the pay table. For example, a single played hand with a pair of Jacks will pay out the amount wagered on that particular hand (indicated by the "1" in box (22). A single playing hand with a Flush poker ranking (five cards in the same suit) will pay out six times the amount wagered on that playing hand. Similarly, a Royal Flush hand will pay out 250 times the amount wagered on that playing hand. The total payout for playing all ten playing hands is equal to the sum of the poker hand rankings for each hand, in accordance with the pay table. In other words, a player obtaining ten hands with a pair of Jacks or better will break even, whereas a player obtaining five hands with a Flush ranking will obtain a payout of three times the amount wagered for all ten hands.

[0023] The display further includes a control section (18), where a set of icons are presented which allow the player to exercise control over the wagering of money and the execution of play of the game. The icons in the control section (18) include a DEAL icon (20) which, when activated (e.g. by mouse click), causes the game to commence and the five cards in the pool hand (12) to be turned face up, as shown in Figure 2. It will be appreciated that the pool hand (12) shown in Figure 1 could simply consist of a graphical representation of five cards, in which case the dealing of five random cards from a standard deck of playing cards to form the pool hand (12) does not occur until the deal icon (20) is activated.

[0024] The icons in the control section (18) include the leftmost icon (40), which is a credit meter that reflects a running balance of a player's credit account. The balance on the credit account will vary according to the ebb and flow of the game. The credit meter thus allows the user to track how much money they have won or lost, and helps the player to decide whether to quit the game or to continue playing.

[0025] The control section (18) includes a group of icons (42), which include MENU, BANK, HELP, OPTIONS, STATS and EXPERT icons. The MENU icon, when activated, takes the player to a "games lobby" display, which presents the player with a menu of games available for play. The BANK icon takes the player to a banking application where the player may purchase credit to top up their credit account, or may cash out all or a portion of the credit in their credit account. The HELP icon displays help text describing the rules of the game to the player. The OPTIONS icon allows the player to configure certain game parameters such as, for example, speed of play, sound effects, autohold feature, etc. The STATS icon is used for display of parameters relating to the player's current session of play in this particular game such as, for example, number of hands played to date, duration of current playing session, hands played per hour, a ranking of player's highest wins, etc. The EXPERT icon toggles between two modes, EXPERT and REGULAR. These will be described subsequently.

[0026] The control section (18) includes a "Coin Size" set of icons (44), which display the current "coin size" used for the wager on each of the playing hands. The coin size is $ 0.10 in Figure 1, denominated in units of credit. There are a number of selectable standard coin sizes, such as $ 1, $ 0.50, $ 0.10, or other value. The "-" icon decrements the current coin size to the next smaller standard size, while the "+" icon increments the current coin size to the next larger standard size. The current value of the coin size indicates the amount wagered on each of the ten played hands. For example, if the coin size unit is $ 0.10, this amount is wagered on each playing hand and a total of $ 1 is wagered on all ten playing hands.

[0027] The DEAL icon (20) toggles between two modes, a DEAL mode and a DRAW mode. In the DEAL mode, the activation of the icon initiates a turn of the game by dealing cards in the pool hand face up, whereupon the icon switches to the DRAW mode. In the DRAW mode, the player selects which cards to hold in the pool hand. When the player has finished the selection, he activates the icon (20). The activation initiates a phase of the game in which the held cards are replicated in each playing hand and any additional cards are dealt in each playing hand to complete the playing hands. The playing hands are then ranked, as shown in Figure 4.

[0028] The display includes the BET ONE and BET MAX icons (46) and (48). The manner of use of these icons changes depending on whether the player is in EXPERT mode or in REGULAR mode (the state of toggling the EXPERT icon in the group of icons (42)). Each activation of the BET ONE icon, in the REGULAR mode, causes the number of coins (or units) of the current standard coin size that are wagered on each playing hand to be incremented by 1. There is a minimum value of 1 coin or unit per playing hand and a maximum of 5 coins or units per playing hand. The BET MAX icon (48) wagers five coins of the current standard coin size per playing hand. When the BET MAX icon is activated, play commences automatically by dealing the cards in the pool hand (12) (i.e. turning the cards face up).

[0029] A DOUBLE icon (50) initiates a side game in which the player is offered a chance to double his winnings (if any) on the current turn of the game. The side game is explained further below in conjunction with Figures 5 and 6.

[0030] When the player is in EXPERT mode, several additional icons appear (not shown). An ANALYZE icon appears, which displays to the player the probabilities of obtaining a winning poker hand as a function of the cards held in the pool hand. A SHOW HINTS icon displays a warning message to the player each time the player's selection of held cards in the pool hand differs from optimal play by more than a quantifiable threshold. A DEAL 10X icon appears which, when activated, plays 10 consecutive turns of the game automatically without further intervention by the player. A DEAL 5X icon occurs that, when activated, plays 5 consecutive turns of the game automatically without further intervention by the player. An AUTOPLAY icon appears that plays a selectable number of consecutive turns of the game automatically without further intervention by the player. The player is able to configure stopping rules and a doubling strategy.

[0031] When the player has any winnings in a turn of the game, he can elect to either play a double side wager, using icon (50), or to collect the winnings. The COLLECT icon (52) allows the player to receive his winnings and the player's credit account balance is updated to reflect these winnings. If the player clicks on the DEAL icon (20) to initiate a new turn of the game, without first having clicked on the COLLECT icon (52) to collect the previous winnings, this action causes a COLLECT operation to occur anyway behind the scenes.

[0032] The explanation of play of multi-hand poker in accordance with the illustrated embodiment will now be made with reference to Figures 1 - 4. When the user activates the DEAL icon (20) in Figure 1, the player is dealt a pool hand (12) of five randomly selected cards face up. See Figure 2. Note that the DEAL icon (20) of Figure 1 has toggled to a DRAW icon in Figure 2. No other hands appear on the screen. The screen displays ten placeholders bounded by borders (16) indicating the locations where the ten playing hands will subsequently be dealt. In this example, the pool hand consists of the Queen of Spades, Five of Clubs, Ten of Spades, Jack of Clubs and Ten of Clubs. The cards of the pool hand (12) are randomly selected from a standard deck of playing cards. The use of Jokers (or other wild cards) in the pool hand is optional.

[0033] The next step in the process is the designation of cards to be held for replication into each of the playing hands. Figure 3 is a screen shot showing the selection of cards in the pool hand as cards to be held. The player selects none, one or more cards from the pool hand as cards to be "held", that is, cards that will be present in the ten new hands. To make a designation, the player moves the mouse or cursor (60) over a card in the pool hand (12) he wishes to hold and clicks the mouse. The selection of a held card is indicated by the "Held" legend superimposed on the card in the pool hand. In the example of Figure 3, the player has elected to hold the Queen of Spades, the Jack of Clubs and the Ten of Clubs, each card having the "Held" legend.

[0034] After completion of the process of designation of none, one or more held cards, the player activates the DRAW icon (20).

[0035] Referring to Figure 4, after the DRAW icon (20) has been activated in Figure 3, a number of changes occur on the screen. The pool hand (12) is "greyed out", that is, partially darkened. The cards in the pool hand (12) that were designated as held cards remain in a face up orientation and the cards that were not designated are turned face down, to further emphasize the cards designated as held cards. There is no replacement of unheld cards in the pool hand. The held card or cards from the pool hand (if any) are presented in each of ten new playing hands (70) that are displayed in the central and upper portion of the display. The playing hands (70) are then completed with additional cards, face up, that are dealt at random to complete a hand of five cards. As can be seen, the Queen of Spades, Jack of Clubs and Ten of Clubs are present in each of the ten played hands (70), in the same position that they occupied in the pool hand (12). Each of the ten played hands includes new cards dealt at random from a standard deck of playing cards. The held cards are removed from the decks used to deal the additional cards to complete the playing hands (70) to avoid the possibility of any single playing hand having two cards that are exactly the same.

[0036] A ranking of the ten playing hands (70) then occurs. The ranking can be done in accordance with standard poker hand rankings. No ranking of the pool hand occurs, as it is not used for playing and remains greyed out. The ten playing hands in the example of Figure 4 include three hands with a pair of Jacks or better and one hand with a Straight. A ranking of a pair of Jacks or better is needed for any hand to pay out in accordance with the first pay table. To facilitate the player's appreciation of the rankings, boxes (22) and (28) flash to highlight for the player that they had at least one hand of these rankings (pair of Jacks and Straight).

[0037] Additionally, a ranking indicium in the form of an icon with the rank of the hand is superimposed on each played hand having a minimum poker hand ranking (pair of Jacks or better). Thus hand (72) has a Jacks or better indicium (74) superimposed over the hand and hand (76) has a Straight indicium superimposed over the hand. The indicia (74) and (78) also indicate the payout for the hand. Jacks or better has a payout of 0.10, which is the payout for Jacks or better, namely 1, multiplied by the coin value of 0.10 units and 1 coin wagered per hand.

A Straight has a payout of 0.4, which is the payout for one Straight, namely 4, multiplied by the coin value of 0.01 and 1 coin wagered per hand. Thus the size of the wager on each hand is the coin size multiplied by the number of coins. The total wager on each turn of the game in a ten-hand game is ten times the wager on each playing hand. The total payout on each turn of the game is equal to the sum, for each playing hand, of the coin size multiplied by the pay table multiplier for the ranking of that hand, multiplied by the number of coins wagered.

[0038] In the example of Figure 4, the total payout is 0.70 units (or 70 cents on a dollar wager for all ten hands), since the play resulted in three hands with Jacks or better and one hand with a Straight [(3 x 0.10 x 1 coin wagered per hand) + (4 x 0.10 x 1 coin wagered per hand)]. The total payout, 0.70 units, is shown in box (90) in Figure 4.

[0039] The multi-play poker game described above includes a bonus feature that is based on a bonus pay table and which will be explained further in conjunction with Figures 7 - 10. Figure 7 represents an alternative GUI design for a ten-play multi-hand poker game. The display of Figure 7 includes a region (14) for later display of ten playing hands with a border or placeholder (16) showing the future location for each of the playing hands. A control section (18) is provided for game playing control icons as described above. The number of playing hands (10 in this example) can of course vary, e.g., 4, 10 or 50.

[0040] The display of Figure 7 further includes a bonus feature check box (150) that allows the player to enable or to disable the bonus feature of the game. The display includes a further icon (155) labeled "View Bonus Paytable" that, when activated, causes the display of Figure 8 to appear. The display of Figure 8 represents a bonus pay table (160) and an icon (165) labeled "Back to Game" that, when activated by the player, causes the display to revert back to that of Figure 7.

[0041] The bonus pay table (160) is displayed as a two-dimensional array (170) with nine rows and seven columns. Each row corresponds to a different poker hand ranking, namely "Jacks or better", "Two Pairs", "Three of a Kind", "Straight", "Flush", "Full House", "Four of a Kind", "Straight Flush" and "Royal Flush". Jacks or Better is the minimum poker hand ranking needed for a payout, and need not necessarily be the same as the minimum poker hand ranking to win in the pay table of Figure 1 (boxes (22) - (38)). The columns of the bonus pay table are labeled "4” to "10", respectively. The number "4" represents the minimum number of hands (M) a player must have in any one round of play of the displayed poker hand rankings in order to receive a payout. Bonus payouts are made in which the number of winning hands is between M (four in this example) and N, the total number of played hands in the multi-play poker game, N = 10 in the present example. Thus, the columns are numbered between M and N (4 and 10). The pay table could be arranged with the rankings in the columns and the number of hands in the rows, of course. Furthermore, the value of M need not necessarily be the same for each ranking in the bonus pay table. (E.g., six hands of Jacks or Better are needed to have a bonus payout, but for a Royal Flush, only 3 hands are needed).

[0042] Each entry in the two-dimensional array (170) of the bonus pay table (160) represents a multiplier associated with a bonus feature win, which is determined as a function of the respective poker hand rankings of all of the ten playing hands. For example, if five played hands have a ranking of Jacks or better, the bonus game will have a multiplier of 2, while if seven played hands have a ranking of Full House, the bonus game multiplier will be 36. When the player has checked the bonus feature check box (150), an amount equal to the wager on a single playing hand is wagered on the bonus feature. The payout arising out of the bonus feature is the amount wagered on the bonus feature multiplied by the multiplier derived from the bonus pay table (160). The amount wagered on the bonus feature is the number of coins wagered per playing hand multiplied by the selected standard coin size. It will be appreciated that any payout from the bonus feature is additional to any winnings achieved by the player in the multi-play poker game as described above. It will be further appreciated that payouts arising from the bonus feature itself are cumulative. For example, a turn of the game in which six playing hands have a ranking of Two Pairs and the remaining four playing hands have a ranking of Full House results in a bonus feature multiplier of 12 (6 + 6).

[0043] An example of use of the bonus feature will be described in conjunction with Figures 9 and 10. Referring now to Figure 9, a pool hand (12) is dealt. The first and fourth cards from the left in the pool hand (12) are Jacks and are held. The player clicks the DRAW icon (20) and the display changes to that shown in Figure 10. The pool hand (12) is greyed out and the non-designated cards are placed face down. The two held cards (Jacks) are reproduced in the playing hands (70) and additional face up cards are dealt at random into each of the ten playing hands to complete each playing hand. Each hand is dealt from a separate deck with the held cards removed. The ten playing hands are ranked in accordance with a poker hand ranking. The play resulted in nine Jacks or better and one Three of a Kind. The playing hands with a minimum poker hand ranking (Jacks or better) have ranking indicia (100) superimposed over the hands, as indicated in Figure 10. The bet icon (125) shows that the player wagered 1 unit and won 1.8 units from the multi-play game, or a net gain of 0.8 units. The "View Bonus Paytable" icon (155) is replaced by a notice indicating that the player has won an additional 0.6 units from the bonus feature according to the bonus pay table (160), from a 0.1 unit bonus feature wager, to yield a total gain of 1.3 units on the turn of the multi-play poker game.

[0044] The bonus win of 0.60 is calculated as follows from the pay table of Figure 8: in the Jacks or Better row, one goes to the column under the heading "9" since nine played hands have a Jacks or better ranking. The value of 6, for this location in the pay table array, is multiplied by the 0.10 coin size wagered on the bonus feature, for a total of 0.60 units. At least four hands meeting one of the poker hand rankings in the pay table is needed to win in accordance with the bonus pay table. For example, if the player had three winning hands of a Flush or Royal Flush, they would win the wager in the regular game using the pay table of Figures 1-4, but would not win the bonus feature.

[0045] The minimum number of hands required to win the bonus feature (M), is 4 in the paytable. This value could be different depending on the features and "flavor" of the game desired by the proprietor, and different values of M may likely cause the pay table entries to vary. For example, for a ten hand multi-play game, one could set the minimum threshold for bonus win to 6 winning hands (M = 6), but with higher payouts. If N is equal to 2 (two hand multi-play poker), then M would typically be also equal to 2. If N is equal to 3, N could be equal to 2 or 3. If N is equal to 4, M could be equal to 2, 3 or 4. As a generalization of this concept, M is preferably an integer greater than or equal to 2 and between 2 and N, inclusive. In the example of Figures 7-10, N is 10 and M is 4. Values of M of between 0.3 and 0.8 times the total number of hands (N) is one possible embodiment, with M rounded up or down as may be necessary but between the values of 2 and N, inclusive

[0046] To summarize then, a method for playing a multiple-play poker game has been described comprising the steps of (a) playing a round of multi-play poker wherein N hands are played, N being an integer greater than or equal to 2; and (b) determining a bonus payout in accordance with a bonus pay table, the bonus feature pays out as a function of the rankings of all the completed playing hands. For example, the bonus feature pays out when at least a minimum number of hands (M) in the set of N hands have a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking or better, where M is an integer and 2≤ M ≤N.

[0047] From the foregoing, it will also be appreciated that a method for facilitating.play of a multiple-hand poker game with a bonus feature has been described. The method includes a step of displaying a pool hand (12) comprising a plurality of face up cards (Figures 2, 9), wherein the pool hand is not played. The method continues with a step of receiving a selection from a player designating none, one or more of the cards of the pool hand as held cards (Figures 3, 9). The method continues with a step of retaining the held cards in a face up orientation and turning face down any cards of the pool hand not designated as a held card (Figure 4, lower portion of the display, Figure 10). The method continues by reproducing the held cards in a plurality of playing hands (Figures 4, 10, playing hands (70)). The method continues with a step of completing the plurality of playing hands (70) with new face up cards (Figures 4, 10). For example, in Figure 4, three hands have rankings of a pair of Jacks or better and one hand has a ranking of a Straight. The method continues with a step of deriving a bonus payout from a bonus pay table (160) as a function of the rankings of all the completed playing hands (Figure 7 and Figure 10, lower portion of the display).

[0048] In still another aspect; a method is provided for facilitating play of a multiple-hand poker game with a bonus feature. The method comprises a step of receiving a wager associated with a plurality of hands to be played and a wager associated with a bonus feature. For example, the player may wager a given amount (say, $ 10 or some number of units of wager) that the poker hand ranking of each of N hands will be equal to or greater than a certain score. The player may wager an additional amount (say $ 1) on the bonus feature that the collective poker hand rankings of all N hands will be equal to or greater than a certain score. The wager size is indicated in the coin size icon (48) of Figure 1. A first pay table (set of boxes (23) - (28) in Figure 1, set of boxes (115) in Figure 7) may be provided on the screen display to show the odds associated with.poker hand rankings that provide for a payback. Here N is the number of hands that are played in the multi-hand poker game. N could be any integer of 2 or more, such as four, ten, fifty or even more. A bonus pay table (Figure 8) may also be provided to show odds as a function of the collective poker hand rankings of all the N hands that are played in the multi-hand poker game. The method continues with the steps of dealing a pool hand (12) comprising a plurality of face up cards, wherein the pool hand is not a played hand (see Figures 2, 7). The method continues with the steps of receiving a selection designating none, one or more cards of the pool hand as held cards, retaining the held cards in a face up orientation and turning face down any cards of the pool hand.not designated as one of the held cards (Figures 3, 9), reproducing the held cards in a plurality of playing hands, completing the plurality of playing hands with new face up cards, and determining a ranking of each of the completed playing hands (Figures 4, 10). The method continues with the step of determining a payout amount based on the ranking of each of the played hands, the wager and a first pay table, and determining a bonus payout based on the collective poker hand rankings of all the completed playing hands, the wager on the bonus feature and a bonus pay table. The payouts and the bonus payout can be determined as explained above.

[0049] In still another aspect, an apparatus is provided for playing a multiple-hand poker game. The apparatus comprises a storage medium containing set of machine-readable instructions for controlling a display device, such as a video poker machine or terminal, computer display, or display of any other gaming device. The set of instructions can be downloaded as an executable file from a web site, for example in an on-line gaming situation, or stored locally on the game device, as in the case of a video poker terminal. The machine-readable instructions comprise instructions for generating the following displays on the display device:

1.) a plurality of playing hands for playing a multiple-play poker game;

2.) a first pay table comprising a display of poker hand rankings and the associated payout odds for each hand in the rankings (e.g., boxes (22) - (38) of Figure 1); and

3.) a bonus pay table (example of which is shown in Figure 8) comprising a display in the form of an array of poker hand rankings and integers M ... N, wherein, in the bonus pay table, a minimum number of hands (M) in the plurality of playing hands having a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking is required to result in a bonus payout, the bonus payout set forth in the array, wherein N comprises an integer representing the number of playing hands, and wherein N is greater than or equal to 2 and 2≤M≤N.

[0050] The format for display of the first pay table (boxes (22)-(38) of Figure 1) can vary widely and is not particularly important. Further examples are illustrated in U.S. application serial no. 11/058,680 filed February 14, 2005.

[0051] In one specific embodiment, the displays include the following displays: 1.) a pool hand (12); 2.) a plurality of playing hands (70) for playing a multiple-hand poker game; 3.) a first pay table (boxes (22) - (38), (115)) comprising a display of poker hand rankings and the associated payout odds for each hand in the rankings; 4.) a control section (18), the control section comprising at least one of wagering controls (e.g., icons (44), (46), (48)), a deal icon and a draw icon (which can be combined as shown in the Figures); 5.) ranking indicia (74), (76) for illustrating the poker hand ranking of at least one of the playing hands; 6.) a bonus pay table comprising a display of composite poker hand rankings and the associated payout odds for each composite poker hand ranking; and 7.) a bonus payout indicium (155). The ranking indicia can be superimposed over the played hand, as shown in Figures 4 and 10. For example, if a hand has a poker hand ranking of a Flush, the ranking indicia "Flush" can appear superimposed over the hand. The ranking indicia may also display the payout for that hand, as shown in indicia (74) and (76) in Figure 3. The bonus payout indicium may indicate a payout based on the collective hand rankings of all the playing hands. The total payout for all the playing hands is determined by summing the individual payouts for each hand and the bonus payout as explained above.

[0052] At the completion of the multi-hand poker game, the player can optionally play a side game to double their money. The player activates the double icon (50). The screen of Figure 5 then appears. The side game consists of showing one card randomly selected as a face up card (80) (here the Four of Hearts), and four face down cards (82) dealt from the same deck. The player selects one of the face down cards, and then all four cards (80) are turned over and the card they selected is highlighted. If the selected card has a higher value than the face up card, the player doubles their money. If the selected face down card is of an equal or lower value, they lose the money they won in the multi-hand game.

[0053] In the example of Figure 5, the player was fortunate in being dealt the Four of Hearts (80), as the chances are good that a card they select from the four cards (82) will be a five or better. However, as shown in Figure 6, the player could be dealt a high card, such as a King, as the face up (card (80)), and none of the four cards in the pool (82) are an Ace. Thus, the player will lose their wager regardless of which card they select. In this example, the player selected the third card over (84) (which turned out to be the Three of Hearts) and loses the "Double" side wager.

[0054] The disclosed embodiments meet a need in the art for an improved multi-play poker game that offers a player a more exciting playing experience. The bonus feature of the multi-play poker game serves to magnify the payout associated with completed playing hands that are uniformly successful. For example, as described above, a player playing a ten-hand poker game that obtains ten hands with a ranking of pair of Jacks or better will break even when the bonus feature is not present, but will achieve a net gain of 70% of his original wager when the bonus feature is enabled. As a further example, a player obtaining five hands with a Flush ranking will obtain a net gain of twice the amount wagered on all ten hands without the bonus feature versus 3.2 times the amount wagered on all ten hands when the bonus feature is present. It is expected that the bonus feature will render the multi-play poker game more attractive to players, thereby helping to prolong player interest in the game and reducing the likelihood of player attrition from the game.

Web-Based Gaming Embodiment

[0055] As noted previously, the games of Figures 1-10 can be played on a computer that has a connection to the World Wide Web. This section of the disclosure will describe the apparatus, processing, and message flow for playing multi-play poker games with a bonus feature in a Web-based gaming environment.

[0056] Figure 11 is a network diagram showing a client computer (200) that connects to a gaming server (202) via an Internet Service Provider (204) and Internet Protocol network (206) such as the Internet. The client computer (200) downloads gaming software from the gaming server (202) and exchanges messages with the gaming server (202) as described below to play multi-play poker games with a bonus feature as illustrated in Figures 1-10.

[0057] At the hardware level, the client computer (200) may take the form of any general purpose computing device such as a personal computer running a Windows 2000, Windows XP, Windows ME and the like operating system, or an alternative such as a Linux operating system. Only one such computer (200) is shown, but in practice any number of client computers may be connected simultaneously with the gaming server (202) and play the games. The gaming server (202) takes the form of a general purpose computing platform and may operate, for example, under a Windows Server 2003 operating system or other state of the art system. The gaming server (202) may include other functions, such as an HTML web page server. In a representative embodiment, the gaming server is managed by a entity offering Internet casino gaming services via a presence on the World Wide Web.

[0058] Figure 12 is a more detailed diagram of the gaming server (202) showing the software modules included in the gaming server (202) in a preferred embodiment. The modules include a router module (210), a game service module (212), a casino database module (214), and an ancillary services module (216).

[0059] The router (210) provides one point of contact for all download clients (200) communicating with the gaming server (202). A download client (200) establishes a connection to the router (210) when a player using the download client (200) wishes to play a game. The router (210) receives a message from the download client and passes the message to the game service (212) for processing.

[0060] In the illustrated embodiment, the game service module (212) is written as one or more Windows Server 2003 services. The game service (212) generates an outcome for the game, determines the results of any wagers and transmits the outcome and the result of the wager back to the download client. The processing logic executed by the game service module (212) is explained in more detail in the flow chart of Figures 14 - 18.

[0061] The casino database (214) is used to log the state of a player's session with the casino. The game service (212) on the gaming server (202) writes the outcome of the game and the result of the wager to the casino database (214), before the outcome and the result of the wager are transmitted back to the download client (200). The casino database (214) uses a state engine such that if the download client (200) disconnects from the gaming server (202) for whatever reason (say, communication failure or session termination by the player), the player will, upon subsequent reconnection with the gaming server (202), be presented with an identical screen display and game state as when disconnection occurred.

[0062] The server (202) also includes an ancillary services module (216) that performs ancillary functions related to operation of the gaming site, such as banking, player login, player registration, and the like.

[0063] The client computer (200) executes client software that is either downloaded from a remote download server and subsequently installed on the client computer, or is installed directly from a storage medium such as a compact disc. In the illustrated embodiment, the software is downloaded directly from the gaming server (202).

[0064] Figure 13 is a more detailed diagram of a set of software modules (220) which are downloaded onto the client computer (200) and stored locally in memory in the computer (200) in order to communicate with the gaming server (202) and play the multi-play poker games with a bonus feature as illustrated in Figures 1-10. These modules include a graphics engine (222) which renders graphics on the screen of the client computer (200), a sound engine (224) which plays sound effects occurring during play, a script engine (226) which renders text on the screen, communications utilities (228) which enable the client computer (200) to communicate with the gaming server (202), a set of graphics objects (230) such as, for example the cards of a deck of cards, buttons and text objects, a game-specific Dynamic Link Library (DLL) file (232) that contains all the logic required for the game, and which controls the presentation of the game to the player, an encrypted text file (2)34 that tells the game where to position the graphics, the buttons, what graphics to load, etc., and an encryption engine (236) that provides 128-bit encryption of data communication between the download client (200) and the gaming server (202).

[0065] Figures 14 - 18 are a flow chart showing the flow of messages (300) between the gaming server (202) and the client computer (200), and processing steps performed at both the gaming server (202) and client computer (200), to play the multi-play poker games with a bonus feature as illustrated in Figures 1 - 10. The flow of messages (300) is for one turn of the game and the flow may repeat any number of times as the player plays the game repeatedly. The message flow (300) assumes that client computer (200) has initially accessed the web site hosted by the gaming server (202) and registered to play games at the online casino, and in the process has downloaded the software modules of Figure 13. The DLL file has been loaded for processing by the host processor (not shown) in the client computer (200) and the display of Figure 1 has been presented to the user on the client computer (200). Reference should be made to Figures 7 - 10. and 11 - 13 in the following discussion, in which it is assumed that the player has enabled the bonus feature by checking the bonus feature check box (150).

[0066] Starting with Figure 14, the process starts at step (302) with the activation of the DEAL icon (20) in Figure 1.

[0067] At step (304), the client software determines the coin size (0.10 in Figure 1, see icons (44)).

[0068] At step (306), the client software determines the number of coins played (depending on the state of activation of the BET ONE and BET MAX icons (46) and (48) in Figure 1).

[0069] At step (308), the client software determines the number of played hands. For example, in a ten-hand game such as shown in Figures 1 - 4 the number is 10.

[0070] At step (310), the client software computes the total wager as the product of number of coins multiplied by the coin size multiplied by the number of played hands, plus the bonus feature wager.

[0071] At step (312), the client software determines if the account balance is greater than or equal to the total wager. If the answer is no, then processing proceeds to step (314) and display of an error message and the processing stops (316).

[0072] If the answer is yes, at step (318) the client software constructs a datagram containing the coin size, number of coins and number of hands played and a flag that the player has enabled the bonus feature.

[0073] At step (320), the encryption engine (236) in the client software encrypts the datagram and the communication utilities module (228) transmits the datagram generated at step (318) to the gaming server over the Internet (206). The processing (300) proceeds with the flow chart shown in Figure 15.

[0074] At step (322), the datagram generated at step (318) is received at the router module (210) in the gaming server (202) and passed to the game service (212).

[0075] At step (324), the game service (212) computes the total wager.

[0076] At step (326), the game server debits the player account balance by the total wager amount.

[0077] At step (328), the game server "deals" five cards of a pool hand (12). In practice, this step may take the form of random selection of five cards from a standard deck of playing cards (i.e., the digital equivalent of this action) and storage of data indicating the selection of cards in memory.

[0078] At step (330), the game service (212) constructs a datagram containing the updated account balance and the five cards dealt in the pool hand (12).

[0079] At step (332), the datagram generated in step (330) is sent to the router module (210) and_ transmitted over the Internet (206) to the client computer (200). The processing flow (300) continues with Figure 16.

[0080] At step (334), the datagram generated at step (330) is received at the client computer (200).

[0081] At step (336), the display of the cards in the pool hand (12) face up occurs (see Figure 2). The deal icon toggles to DRAW as shown in Figure 2.

[0082] At step (338) the client software enables the user to select cards to be held and the player uses the mouse to click on the displayed pool hand card to select it.

[0083] At step (340), the processing determines whether the selection is completed. If not, the selection process at step (338) continues.

[0084] At step (342), the selection is completed and the user activates the DRAW icon (20).

[0085] At step (344), the client software constructs a datagram containing data signifying the held cards in the pool hand (12), the number of playing hands (10 in the example of Figure 2), and the position of the held cards in the pool hand (12).

[0086] At step (346), the datagram is transmitted to the gaming server (202). The processing flow (300) continues with Figure 17.

[0087] At step (348), the router (210) receives the datagram constructed at step (344) and forwards it to the service module (212).

[0088] At step (350), the service module (212) determines the held cards from the datagram.

[0089] At step (352), the service module (212) creates a first playing hand by adding to the held cards additional cards selected at random from a deck of playing cards, with the held cards removed, to make up a complete poker hand.

[0090] At step (354), the poker hand "dealt" at step (352) is ranked.

[0091] At step (356) the ranking is analyzed to determine whether it is a "winning hand", i.e., has a minimum poker hand ranking (Jacks or better in the game of Figures 1 and 7).

[0092] If the hand is a winning hand, the processing proceeds to step (358) and the service module (212) determines the payout and updates the player balance at step (360).

[0093] If the hand is not a winning hand (and after step (360) is performed), the processing proceeds to step (362), where a check is made to determine whether the hand just processed in steps (352) - (360) is the last hand.

[0094] If not, a count is incremented at step (364) and the processing loops back to step (352). Steps (352) - (362) repeat until all the hands in the game are created and processed.

[0095] At step (366), after the last hand has been created and processed, the service module (212) determines the total win for all played hands by summing up the payouts calculated at step (358).

[0096] At step (380), the rankings of all the playing hands are collated and compared to the bonus pay table (160) to determine whether conditions for a bonus win are present.

[0097] If a bonus win has occurred, the processing proceeds to step (382) and the service module (212) determines the size of the bonus win and updates the player balance at step (384).

[0098] At step (368), the service module (212) constructs a datagram containing the updated account balance, the cards in each played hand, the rank of each played hand, the payout of each played hand, the total win or payout for all the played hands, and the bonus win.

[0099] At step (370), the datagram generated at step (368) is sent from the router (210) to the client computer (200) over the Internet (206). The processing continues with the flow chart shown in Figure 18.

[0100] At step (372), the datagram generated at step (368) is received at the client computer (200).

[0101] At step (374), the display of Figure 10 is generated, and in particular the display on the computer includes the display of the played hands (70), the ranking indicia (100) including the payout for each played hand, the total win (item (90) in Figure 10), and the bonus payout (155) of Figure 10. The deal icon toggles to DEAL as shown in the lower right of Figure 10.

[0102] If the player then activates the DEAL icon the process (300) of Figures 14 - 18 repeats. If the player activates the DOUBLE icon (50) (Figure 4, Figure 10), the double side wager is played as explained previously in conjunction with Figures 5 and 6 and the client computer (200) and gaming server (202) conduct additional processing and exchange messages to play the side wager, as indicated at (378). These details of this processing are omitted from the present discussion but can be readily developed by persons skilled in the art.

[0103] The processing of Figures 14 - 18 is performed in parallel for a multitude of remotely located gaming clients (computers) connected to the gaming server.

[0104] From the foregoing, it will be appreciated that we have described a gaming server (202) adapted for communication with a remote gaming device (100) over a network (206). The network (206) could be a local area network in an embodiment where the remote gaming device (100) and the gaming server (202) are in the same building (e.g., in a casino environment). The gaming server (202) comprises a computing platform (e.g., Windows Server 2003) and a game service module 212 implemented in software executable by the computing platform. The .gaming server module includes instructions (a) for receiving a datagram from the remote gaming device representing (1) a wager on a plurality of hands in a multi-play poker game, and (2) a wager on a bonus feature, wherein, in the bonus feature, an additional payout is determined according to a bonus pay table, the bonus payout occurring when a minimum number of hands (M) have a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking or better, where M is an integer and 2≤ M ≤N, and N is an integer representing the number of hands played in the plurality of hands;

(b) responsively generating a plurality of playing hands, and

(c) transmitting a datagram containing data representing the playing hands to the remote gaming device, the playing hands to be displayed on the remote gaming device in a multi-play poker game, the datagram further indicating the results of the wagers (1) and (2) on the plurality of playing hands.

[0105] From the foregoing it will also be appreciated that we have described a client computer 200 for playing a multi-play poker game with a pool hand 12 and bonus feature, comprising a general purpose computing platform (e.g., PC with Windows operating system), and a memory storing gaming software comprising a set of machine-readable instructions. The instructions include communications utilities 228 (Figure 13) for enabling the client computer to communicate with a remotely located gaming server and a file (232, Figure 13) containing logic required for the multi-play poker game, and for controlling the presentation of the game to the player, and wherein the logic includes code wherein the player may make a bonus wager that a minimum number of hands (M) will have a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking or better, where M is an integer and 2≤ M ≤N, wherein N is an integer representing the number of hands played in the multi-play poker game.

[0106] While presently preferred embodiments have been described in some detail, persons skilled in the art will appreciate that variation can be made from the specifics of the disclosed embodiments without departure from the scope of the invention. For example, the bonus feature wager may be made mandatory and not discretionary as described in these embodiments. This variation can be achieved by eliminating the previously described bonus feature check box (150) with an automatic bonus feature wager on each turn of the game without requiring an explicit action by the player. Further, the multi-hand game may not require the player to make, either explicitly or implicitly, an additional wager on the bonus feature of the game. In other words, the bonus feature involving the second pay table may apply unconditionally requiring the player to only make the wager on the multiple playing hands, thus making the bonus feature a "free bet".

[0107] Still further, while the bonus feature has been described in conjunction with one specific embodiment of multi-play poker with a pool hand, the concept of the bonus feature of Figures 7-10 is generally applicable to multi-play poker games.

[0108] Still further, the detailed processing shown in Figures 14-18 is offered by way of example and not limitation as to particular processing sequence and communication flow between the client and server. Other processing steps or message flow sequence can occur. Yet further, the multi-play poker game may not involve a separate pool hand (12) that is not played and is not completed as described above. The invention is directly applicable to a multi-play poker game where a player selects none, one or more cards to be held from one of the playing hands, which is a played hand and which is completed by removing and replacing the card therein that are not designated as held cards. All questions regarding the scope of the invention are to be determined by reference to the appended claims.

Claims

1. A method for playing a multiple-play poker game, the method comprising the steps of:

    playing a round of multi-play poker wherein N hands are played, N being an integer greater than or equal to 2;
    determining a bonus payout in accordance with a bonus pay table, the bonus payout being a function of the rankings of all the completed N playing hands.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein each played hand has one or more cards common to each hand.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the common cards were selected from a pool hand.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein in the bonus pay table, at least a minimum number of hands (M) in the plurality of N playing hands having a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking is required to

result in a bonus payout, where 2 ≤ M ≤ N.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein, in the bonus paytable, M is the same for all poker hand rankings listed in the paytable.

6. The method of claim 4, wherein M is an integer having a value of between 0.3 and 0.8 X N, rounded either up or down to the nearest integer, if necessary depending on the value of N.

7. The method of claim 4, wherein the bonus paytable takes the form of an array arranged in rows and columns, with the rows comprising poker hand rankings and the columns comprising integers M ... N.

8. The method of claim 4, wherein the second paytable takes the form of an array arranged in rows and columns, with the columns comprising poker hand rankings and the rows comprising integers M ... N.

9. A method for playing a multiple-play poker game, the method comprising the steps of:

displaying a pool hand comprising a plurality of face up cards, wherein the pool hand is not played;
designating none, one or more of the cards of the pool hand as held cards;
reproducing the held cards in a plurality of playing hands;
completing the plurality of playing hands with new face up cards; and
determining a ranking of each of the completed playing hands; and
deriving a bonus payout from a bonus pay table as a function of the rankings of all the completed playing hands.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the plurality of playing hands comprise four or more hands.

11. The method of claim 9, wherein, in the bonus pay table, at least a minimum number of hands (M) in the plurality of playing hands having a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking is required to result in a bonus payout.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein M is an integer having a value of between 0.3 and 0.8 X N, rounded either up or down to the nearest integer, if necessary depending on the value of N, and wherein N comprises the number of hands played in the plurality of playing hands.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the bonus pay table takes the form of an array arranged in rows and columns, with the rows comprising poker hand rankings and the columns comprising integers M ... N.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein the bonus pay table takes the form of an array arranged in rows and columns, with the columns comprising poker hand rankings and the rows comprising integers M ... N.

15. A method of facilitating play of a multi-play poker game, the method comprises the steps of:

receiving a wager associated with a plurality of hands to be played and a wager associated with a bonus feature;
providing a first pay table showing the odds associated with poker hand rankings that provide for a payback;
providing a bonus pay table to show odds as a function of the collective poker hand rankings of all the hands that are played in the multi-hand poker game;
dealing a pool hand comprising a plurality of face up cards, wherein the pool hand is not a played hand;
receiving a selection designating none, one or more cards of the pool hand as held cards,
reproducing the held cards in a plurality of playing hands,
completing the plurality of playing hands with new face up cards,
determining a ranking of each of the completed playing hands;
determining a payout amount based on the ranking of each of the played hands, the wager and the first pay table, and
determining a bonus payout based on the collective poker hand rankings of all the completed playing hands, the wager on the bonus feature and a bonus pay table.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the plurality of playing hands comprise four or more hands.

17. The method of claim 15, wherein, in the bonus pay table, at least a minimum number of hands (M) in the plurality of playing hands having a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking is required to result in a bonus payout.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein M is an integer having a value of between 0.3 and 0.8 X N, rounded either up or down to the nearest integer, if necessary depending on the value of N, and wherein N comprises the number of hands played in the plurality of playing hands.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein the bonus pay table takes the form of an array arranged in rows and columns, with the rows comprising poker hand rankings and the columns comprising integers M ... N.

20. The method of claim 17, wherein the bonus pay table takes the form of an array arranged in rows and columns, with the columns comprising poker hand rankings and the rows comprising integers M ... N.

21. An apparatus for playing a multiple-play poker game, comprising a storage medium containing set of machine-readable instructions for controlling a display device, wherein the machine readable instructions comprise instructions for generating the following displays on the display device:

1.) a plurality of playing hands for playing a multiple-play poker game;
2.) a first pay table comprising a display of poker hand rankings and the associated payout odds for each hand in the rankings; and
3.) a bonus pay table, wherein, in the bonus pay table, at least a minimum number of hands (M) in the plurality of playing hands having a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking is required to result in a bonus payout, wherein N comprises an integer representing the number of playing hands, and wherein N is greater than or equal to 2 and $2<M < N$.

22. The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the bonus pay table takes the form of an array arranged in rows and columns, with the rows comprising poker hand rankings and the columns comprising integers M ... N.

23. The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the bonus pay table takes the form of an array arranged in rows and columns, with the columns comprising poker hand rankings and the rows comprising integers M ... N.

24. The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the instructions are obtained from a gaming web site.

25. The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the display device comprises a display of a general purpose computer.

26. The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the display device comprises a display of a video poker terminal.

27. A gaming server adapted for communication with a remote gaming device over a network, the gaming server comprising:

a computing platform; and
a game service module implemented in software executable by the computing platform, the game service module including instructions

(a) for receiving a datagram from the remote gaming device representing a wager on a bonus feature, wherein, in the bonus feature, a bonus payout is determined according to a bonus pay table, the bonus payout occurring when at least a minimum number of hands (M) have a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking or better, where M is an integer and $2 \leq M \leq N$, and N is an integer representing the number of hands played in the plurality of hands;
(b) generating a plurality of N playing hands, and
(c) transmitting a datagram containing data representing the playing hands to the remote gaming device, the playing hands to be displayed on the remote gaming device in a multi-play poker game, the datagram further indicating the results of the wager on the bonus feature.

28. The gaming server of claim 27, wherein the remote gaming device comprises a general purpose client computer, and wherein a download server transmits a set of software modules to the client computer to enable the client computer to interact with the gaming server.

29. The gaming server of claim 27, wherein the gaming server includes a router module allowing the game service module to communicate simultaneously with a plurality of remote client computers and receive and transmit datagrams according to (a) and (c) in claim 27.

30. A client computer for playing a multi-play poker game, comprising:

a general purpose computing platform;
a memory storing gaming software comprising a set of machine-readable instructions;
the instructions including communications utilities for enabling the client computer to communicate with a remotely located gaming server;
a file containing logic required for the multi-play poker game, and for controlling the presentation of the game to the player, and wherein the logic includes code wherein the player may make a bonus wager that at least a minimum number of hands (M) will have a predetermined minimum poker hand ranking or better, where M is an integer and $2 \leq M \leq N$, wherein N is an integer representing the number of hands played in the multi-play poker game.

31. The client computer of claim 30, wherein the client computer connects to the gaming server via a network.

32. The client computer of claim 31, wherein the network comprises the Internet.

33. The client computer of claim 30, wherein the client computer downloads the logic file from the gaming server.

34. The client computer of claim 30, wherein the logic includes code wherein a pool hand is displayed and the player selects cards to be held from the pool hand and such held cards are replicated into the N playing hands.

35. The client computer of claim 30, wherein the logic includes code displaying a bonus wager pay table, and wherein, in order to pay out in the bonus wager, M is the same for all poker hand rankings in the bonus wager pay table.

36. The client computer of claim 30, wherein the logic includes code displaying a bonus wager pay table, and wherein, in order to pay out in the bonus wager, M is not the same for all poker hand rankings in a bonus wager pay table.

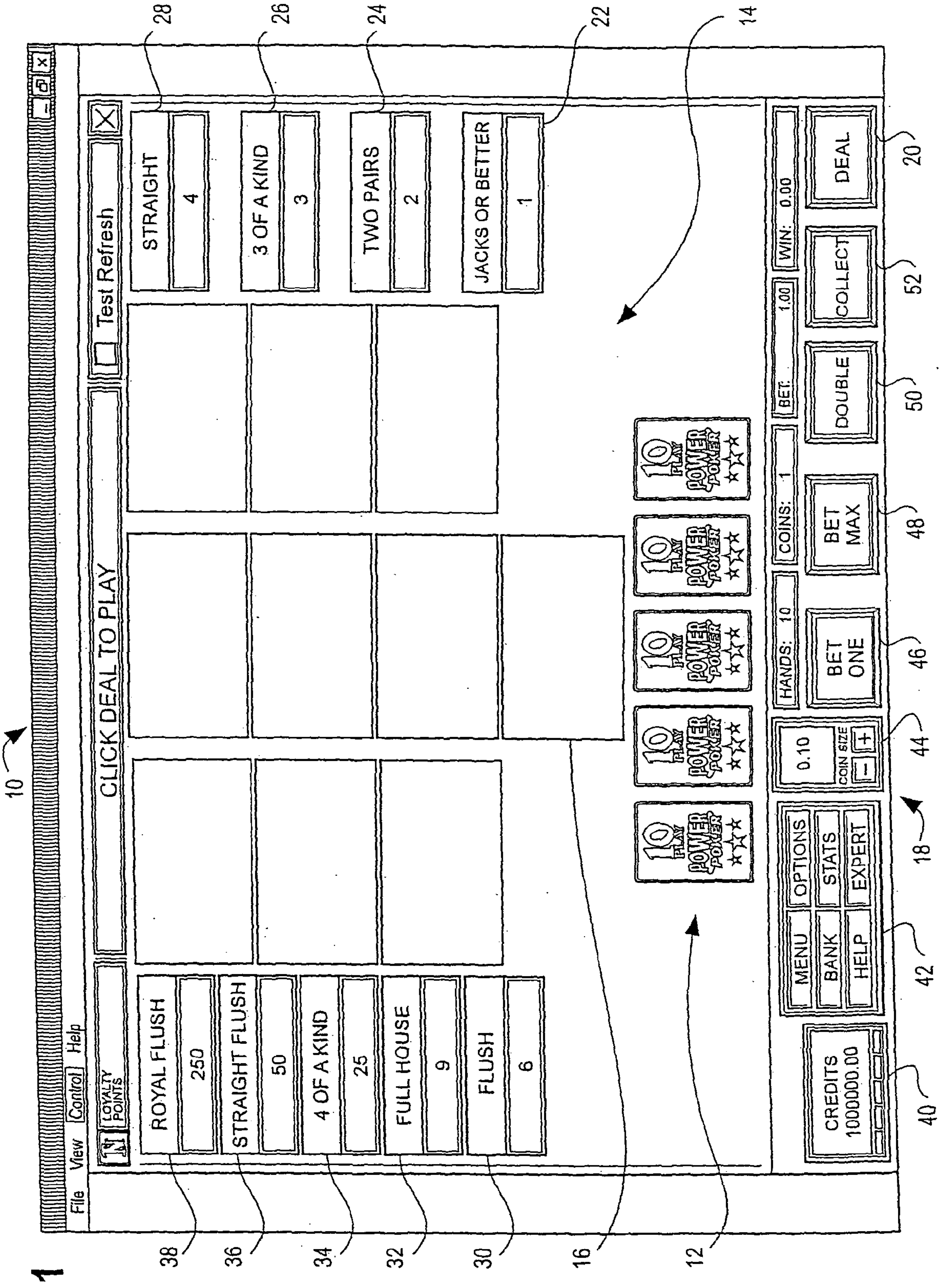
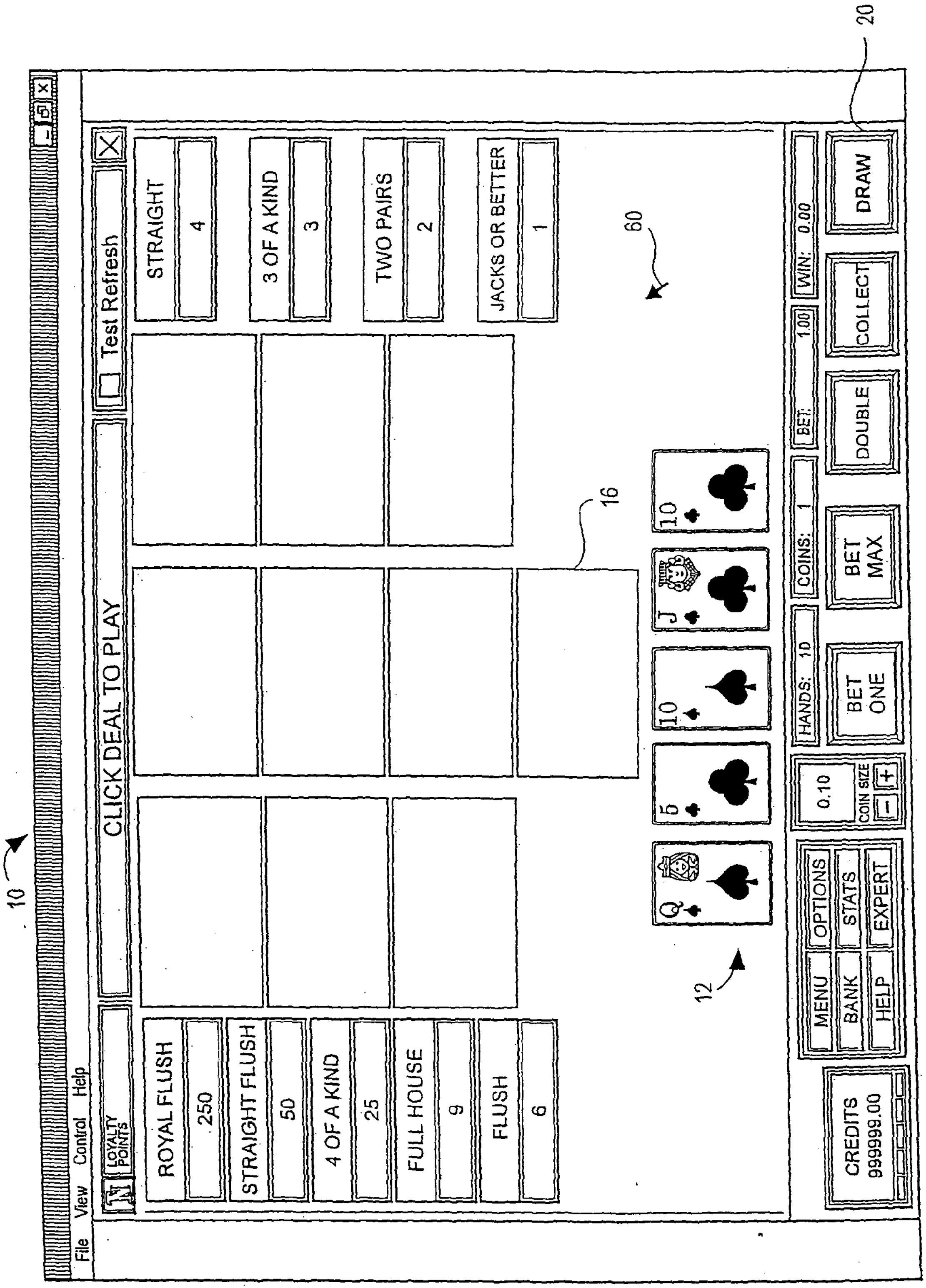

10
File
View
Control
Help
LOYALTY POINTS
CLICK DEAL TO PLAY
Test Refresh
ROYAL FLUSH
250
STRAIGHT FLUSH
50
4 OF A KIND
25
FULL HOUSE
9
FLUSH
6
STRAIGHT
4
3 OF A KIND
3
TWO PAIRS
2
JACKS OR BETTER
1
10 PLAY POWER POKER
CREDITS 1000000.00
MENU
OPTIONS
BANK
STATS
HELP
EXPERT
0.10
COIN SIZE
HANDS: 10
COINS: 1
BET: 1.00
WIN: 0.00
BET ONE
BET MAX
DOUBLE
COLLECT
DEAL
38
36
34
32
30
16
12
40
42
18
44
46
48
50
52
20
14
22
24
26
28

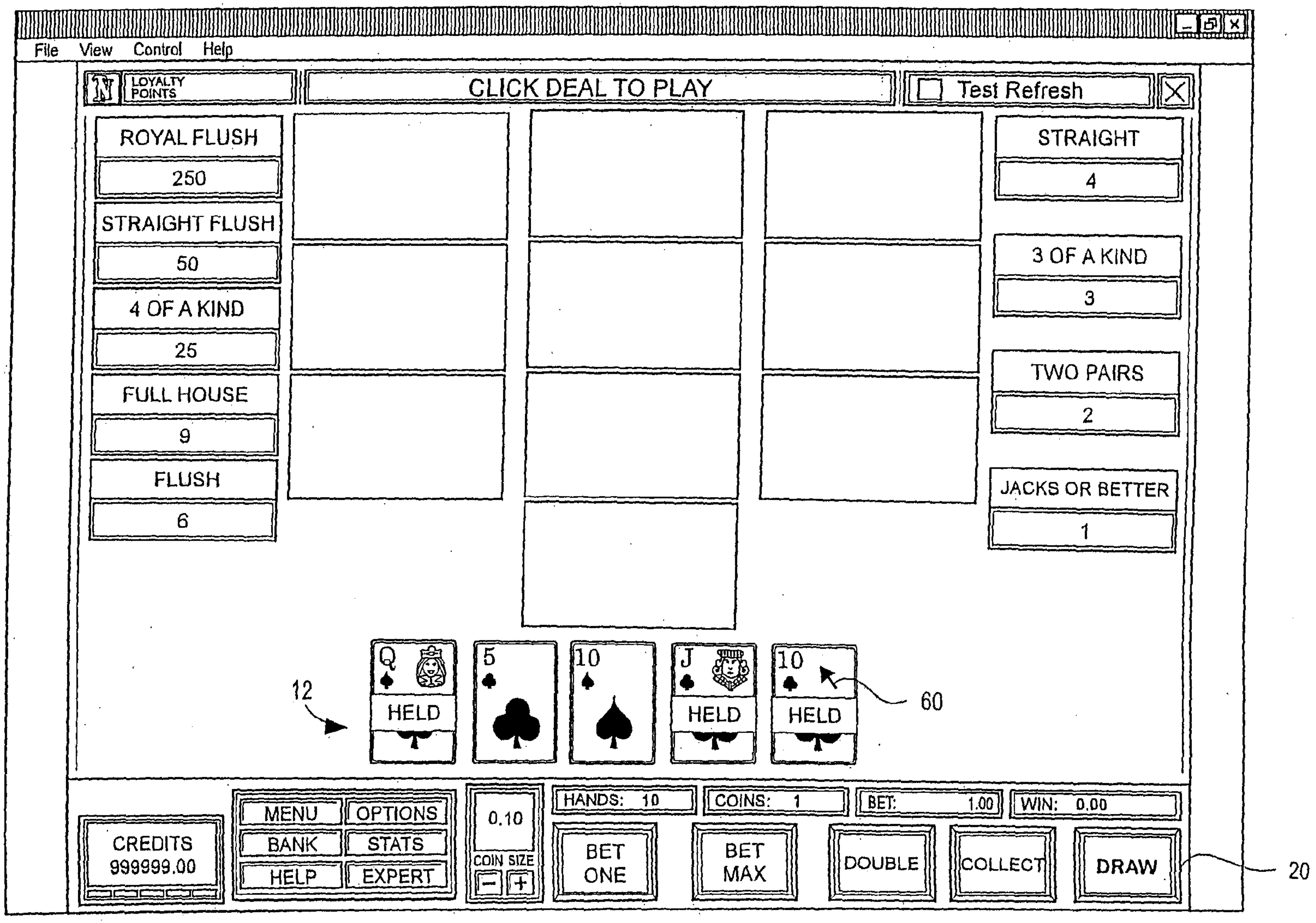
FIG. 1

FIG. 2


10
File View Control Help
LOYALTY POINTS
CLICK DEAL TO PLAY
☐ Test Refresh
12
16
60
Q
5
10
J
10
MENU
OPTIONS
BANK
STATS
HELP
EXPERT
CREDITS 999999.00
0.10
COIN SIZE
−
+
HANDS: 10
COINS: 1
BET: 1.00
WIN: 0.00
BET ONE
BET MAX
DOUBLE
COLLECT
DRAW
20

ROYAL FLUSH	250
STRAIGHT FLUSH	50
4 OF A KIND	25
FULL HOUSE	9
FLUSH	6
STRAIGHT	4
3 OF A KIND	3
TWO PAIRS	2
JACKS OR BETTER	1

FIG. 3


File
View
Control
Help
LOYALTY POINTS
☐ Test Refresh
12
60
20
HELD
HELD
HELD
MENU
OPTIONS
BANK
STATS
HELP
EXPERT
COIN SIZE
BET ONE
BET MAX
DOUBLE
COLLECT
DRAW

CLICK DEAL TO PLAY

ROYAL FLUSH	250
STRAIGHT FLUSH	50
4 OF A KIND	25
FULL HOUSE	9
FLUSH	6
STRAIGHT	4
3 OF A KIND	3
TWO PAIRS	2
JACKS OR BETTER	1

CREDITS 999999.00

0.10

HANDS: 10

COINS: 1

BET: 1.00

WIN: 0.00

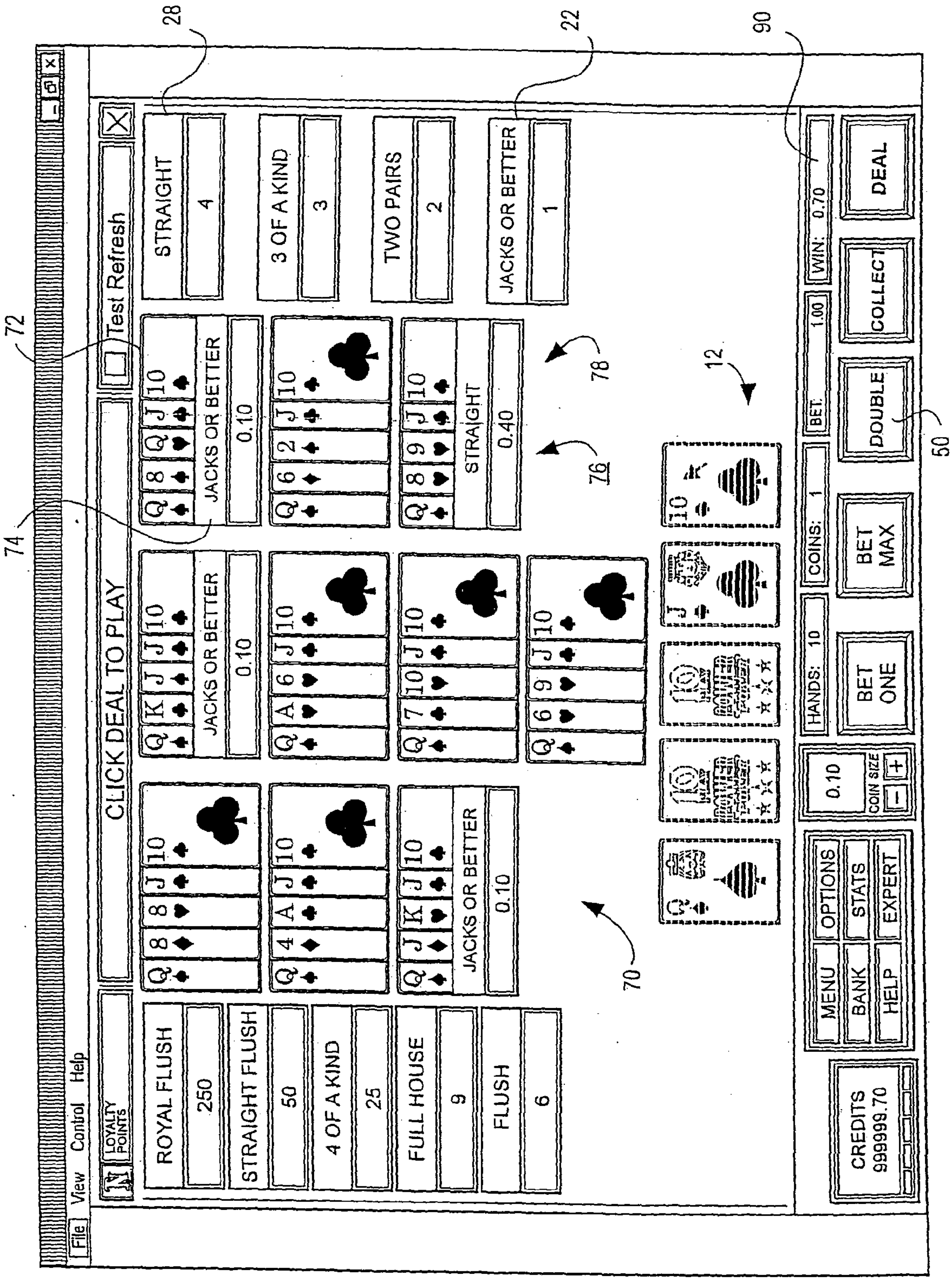
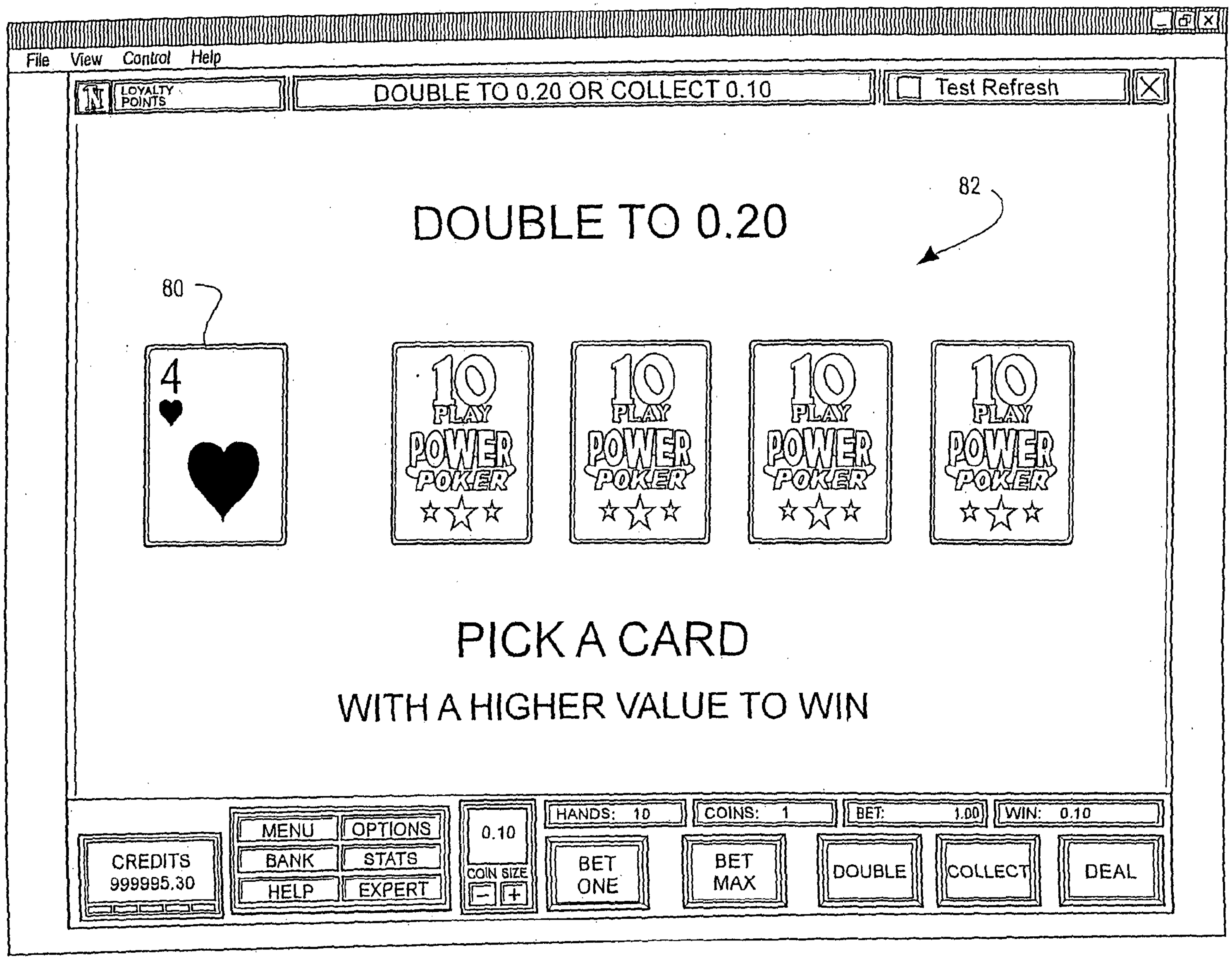

28
22
90
72
74
76
78
70
12
50
File
View
Control
Help
LOYALTY POINTS
CLICK DEAL TO PLAY
Test Refresh
ROYAL FLUSH
250
STRAIGHT FLUSH
50
4 OF A KIND
25
FULL HOUSE
9
FLUSH
6
STRAIGHT
4
3 OF A KIND
3
TWO PAIRS
2
JACKS OR BETTER
1
JACKS OR BETTER
0.10
STRAIGHT
0.40
MENU
OPTIONS
BANK
STATS
HELP
EXPERT
CREDITS
99999.70
0.10
COIN SIZE
HANDS: 10
COINS: 1
BET: 1.00
WIN: 0.70
BET ONE
BET MAX
DOUBLE
COLLECT
DEAL

FIG. 4

FIG. 5



DOUBLE TO 0.20 OR COLLECT 0.10

DOUBLE TO 0.20

PICK A CARD

WITH A HIGHER VALUE TO WIN

CREDITS 999995.30

0.10

HANDS: 10

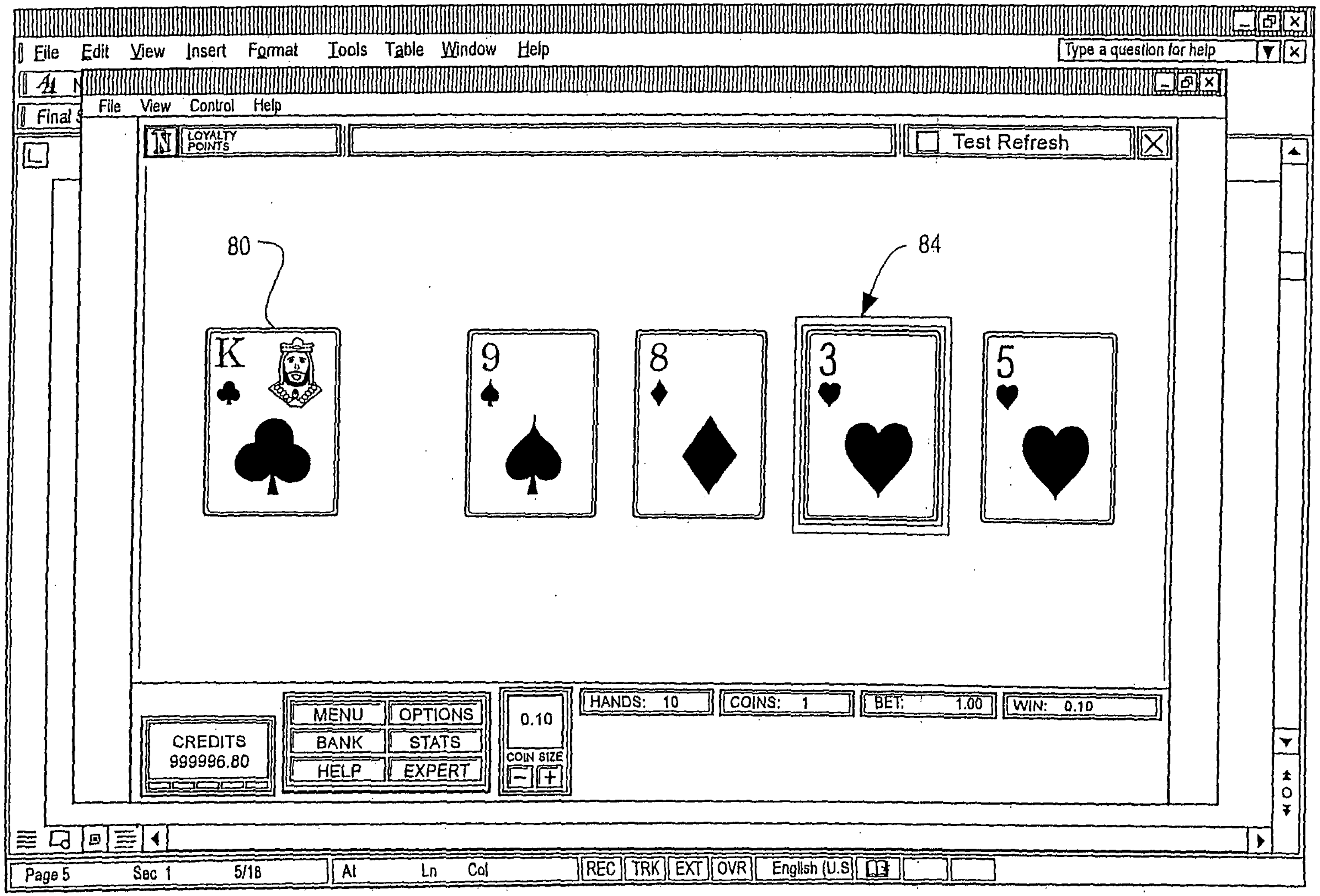
COINS: 1

BET: 1.00

WIN: 0.10

File
View
Control
Help
LOYALTY POINTS
☐ Test Refresh
82
80
4
10 PLAY POWER POKER
10 PLAY POWER POKER
10 PLAY POWER POKER
10 PLAY POWER POKER
MENU
OPTIONS
BANK
STATS
HELP
EXPERT
COIN SIZE
–
+
BET ONE
BET MAX
DOUBLE
COLLECT
DEAL

FIG. 6



Type a question for help

☐ Test Refresh

CREDITS 999996.80

0.10 COIN SIZE

HANDS: 10

COINS: 1

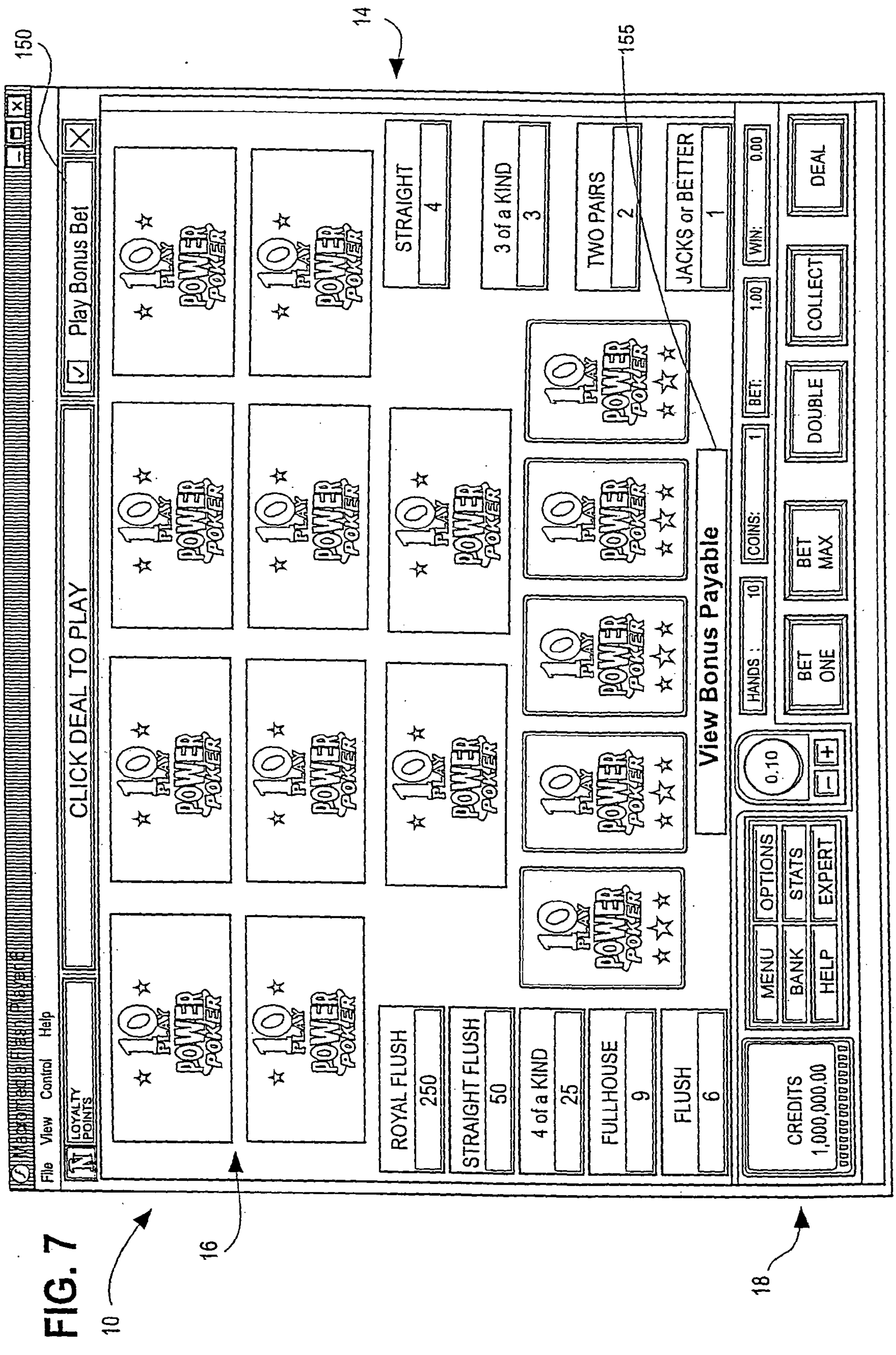
BET: 1.00

WIN: 0.10

Page 5 Sec 1 5/18 At Ln Col

File
Edit
View
Insert
Format
Tools
Table
Window
Help
Final
File
View
Control
Help
LOYALTY POINTS
80
84
K
9
8
3
5
MENU
OPTIONS
BANK
STATS
HELP
EXPERT
−
+
REC
TRK
EXT
OVR
English (U.S

FIG. 7


Macromedia Flash Player 6
File View Control Help
LOYALTY POINTS
CLICK DEAL TO PLAY
☑ Play Bonus Bet
10 PLAY POWER POKER
View Bonus Payable
0.10
-
+
MENU
OPTIONS
BANK
STATS
HELP
EXPERT
BET ONE
BET MAX
DOUBLE
COLLECT
DEAL
10
14
16
18
150
155

ROYAL FLUSH	250
STRAIGHT FLUSH	50
4 of a KIND	25
FULLHOUSE	9
FLUSH	6
STRAIGHT	4
3 of a KIND	3
TWO PAIRS	2
JACKS or BETTER	1

CREDITS 1,000,000.00

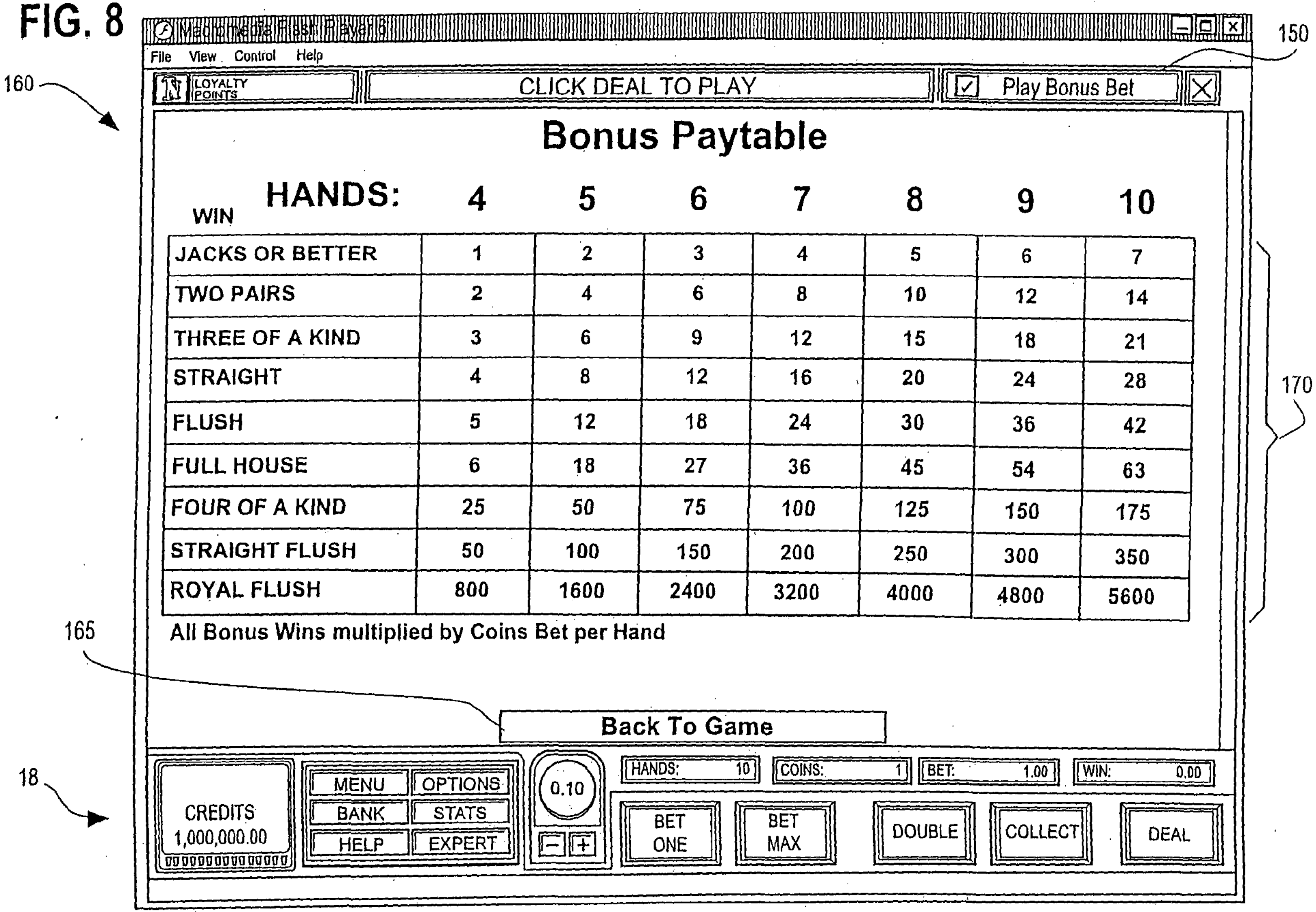
HANDS : 10

COINS: 1

BET: 1.00

WIN: 0.00

FIG. 8


Macromedia Flash Player 6
File View Control Help
LOYALTY POINTS
CLICK DEAL TO PLAY
☑ Play Bonus Bet
Back To Game
CREDITS 1,000,000.00
MENU
OPTIONS
BANK
STATS
HELP
EXPERT
0.10
HANDS: 10
COINS: 1
BET: 1.00
WIN: 0.00
BET ONE
BET MAX
DOUBLE
COLLECT
DEAL
150
160
165
170
18

Bonus Paytable

WIN / HANDS:	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
JACKS OR BETTER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TWO PAIRS	2	4	6	8	10	12	14
THREE OF A KIND	3	6	9	12	15	18	21
STRAIGHT	4	8	12	16	20	24	28
FLUSH	5	12	18	24	30	36	42
FULL HOUSE	6	18	27	36	45	54	63
FOUR OF A KIND	25	50	75	100	125	150	175
STRAIGHT FLUSH	50	100	150	200	250	300	350
ROYAL FLUSH	800	1600	2400	3200	4000	4800	5600

All Bonus Wins multiplied by Coins Bet per Hand

FIG. 9

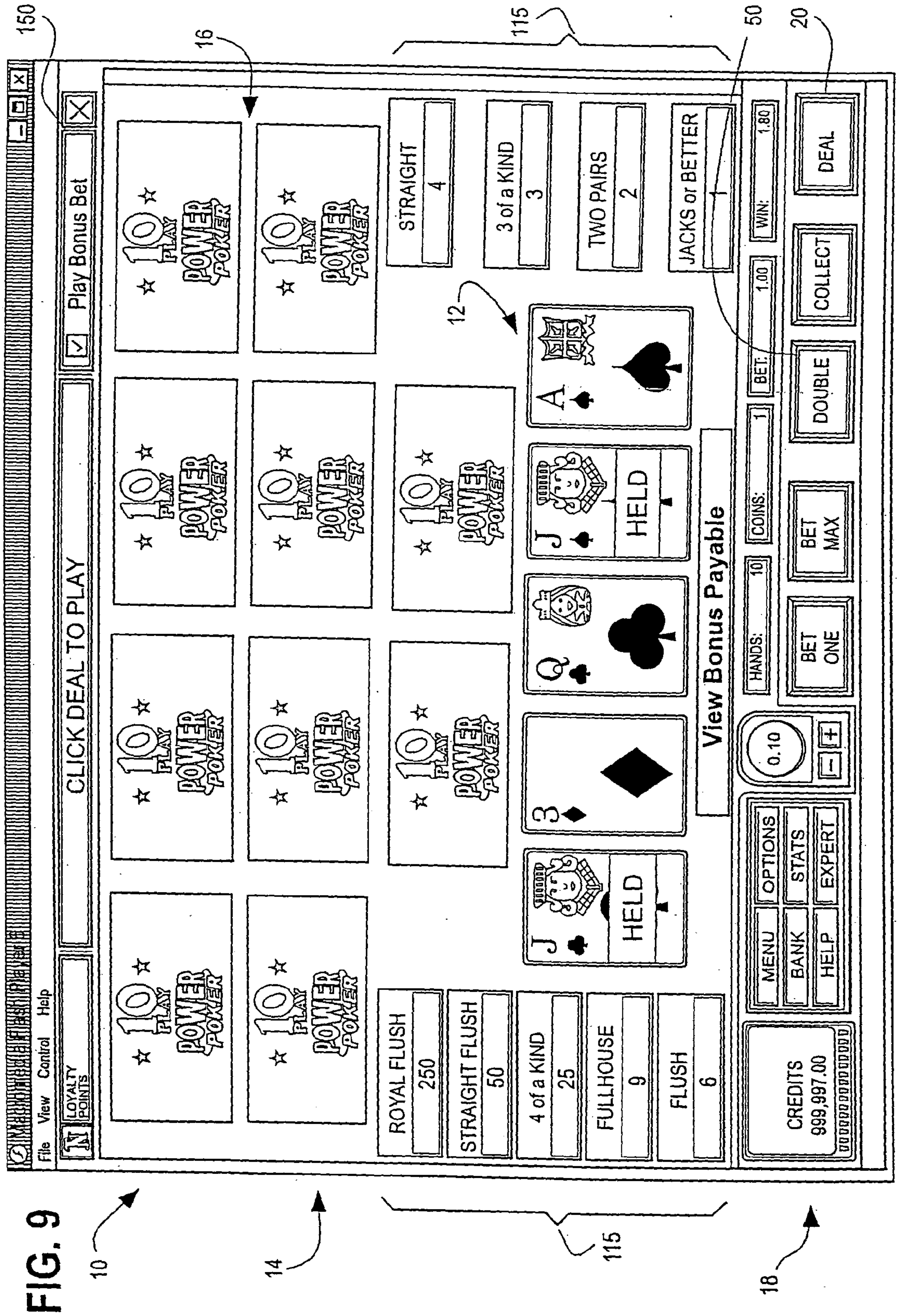
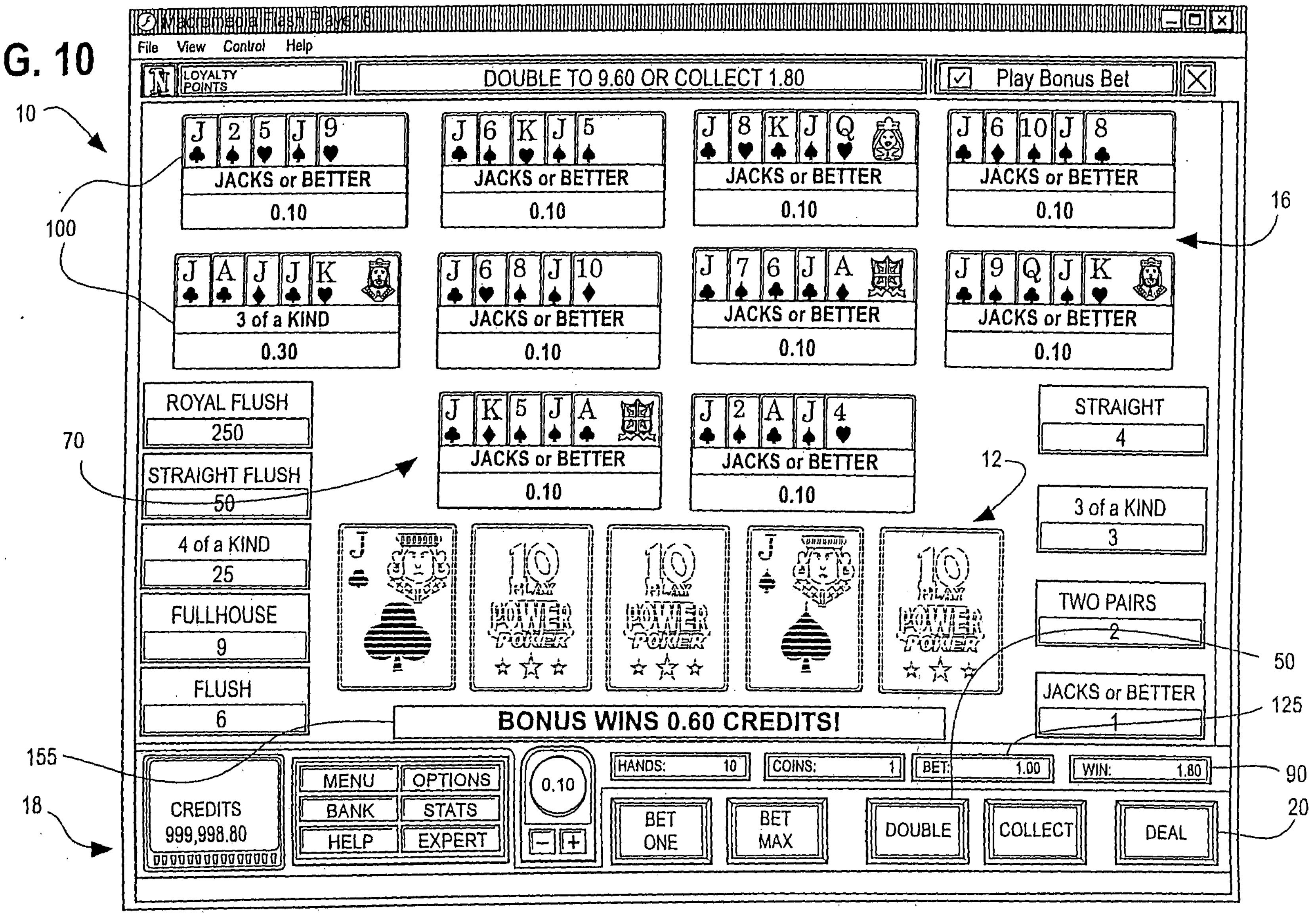

Macromedia Flash Player 6
File View Control Help
LOYALTY POINTS
CLICK DEAL TO PLAY
Play Bonus Bet
10 PLAY POWER POKER
ROYAL FLUSH 250
STRAIGHT FLUSH 50
4 of a KIND 25
FULLHOUSE 9
FLUSH 6
STRAIGHT 4
3 of a KIND 3
TWO PAIRS 2
JACKS or BETTER 1
HELD
HELD
View Bonus Payable
HANDS: 10
COINS: 1
BET: 1.00
WIN: 1.80
0.10
BET ONE
BET MAX
DOUBLE
COLLECT
DEAL
MENU
OPTIONS
BANK
STATS
HELP
EXPERT
CREDITS 999,997.00
10
14
115
18
150
16
115
12
50
20

FIG. 10



DOUBLE TO 9.60 OR COLLECT 1.80

☑ Play Bonus Bet

BONUS WINS 0.60 CREDITS!

CREDITS 999,998.80

HANDS: 10

COINS: 1

BET: 1.00

WIN: 1.80

Macromedia Flash Player 6
File
View
Control
Help
LOYALTY POINTS
J 2 5 J 9
JACKS or BETTER
0.10
J 6 K J 5
JACKS or BETTER
0.10
J 8 K J Q
JACKS or BETTER
0.10
J 6 10 J 8
JACKS or BETTER
0.10
J A J J K
3 of a KIND
0.30
J 6 8 J 10
JACKS or BETTER
0.10
J 7 6 J A
JACKS or BETTER
0.10
J 9 Q J K
JACKS or BETTER
0.10
J K 5 J A
JACKS or BETTER
0.10
J 2 A J 4
JACKS or BETTER
0.10
ROYAL FLUSH
250
STRAIGHT FLUSH
50
4 of a KIND
25
FULLHOUSE
9
FLUSH
6
STRAIGHT
4
3 of a KIND
3
TWO PAIRS
2
JACKS or BETTER
1
J
10 PLAY POWER POKER
10 PLAY POWER POKER
J
10 PLAY POWER POKER
MENU
OPTIONS
BANK
STATS
HELP
EXPERT
0.10
−
+
BET ONE
BET MAX
DOUBLE
COLLECT
DEAL
10
100
70
155
18
16
12
50
125
90
20

FIG. 11

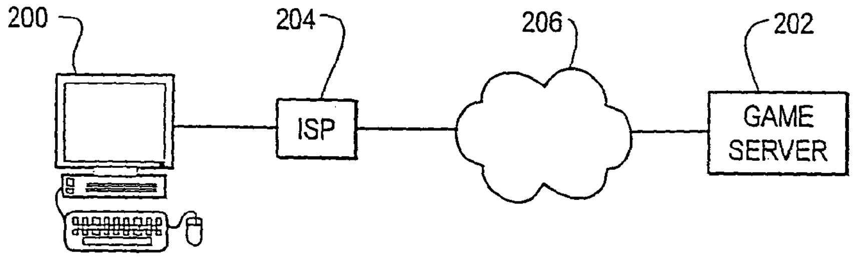

200
204
206
202
ISP
GAME SERVER

FIG. 13

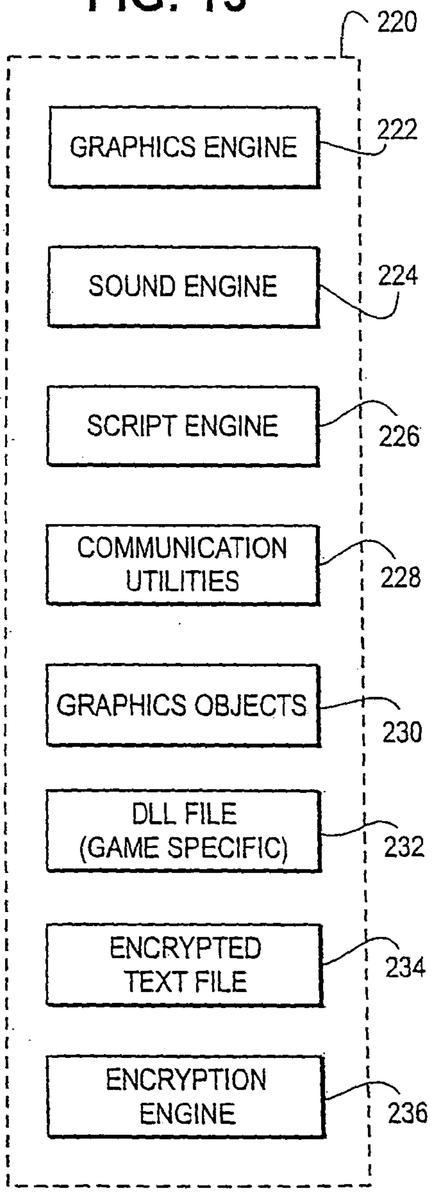

220
GRAPHICS ENGINE
222
SOUND ENGINE
224
SCRIPT ENGINE
226
COMMUNICATION UTILITIES
228
GRAPHICS OBJECTS
230
DLL FILE (GAME SPECIFIC)
232
ENCRYPTED TEXT FILE
234
ENCRYPTION ENGINE
236

FIG. 12

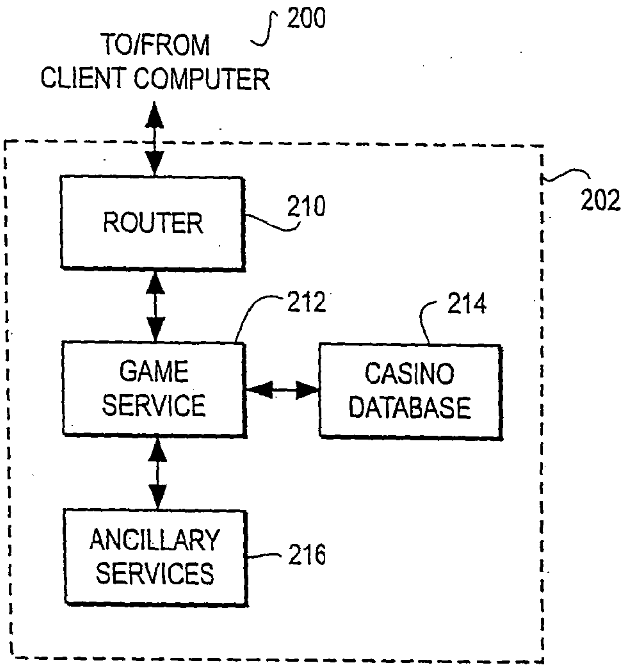

200
TO/FROM CLIENT COMPUTER
202
ROUTER
210
212
214
GAME SERVICE
CASINO DATABASE
ANCILLARY SERVICES
216

FIG. 14

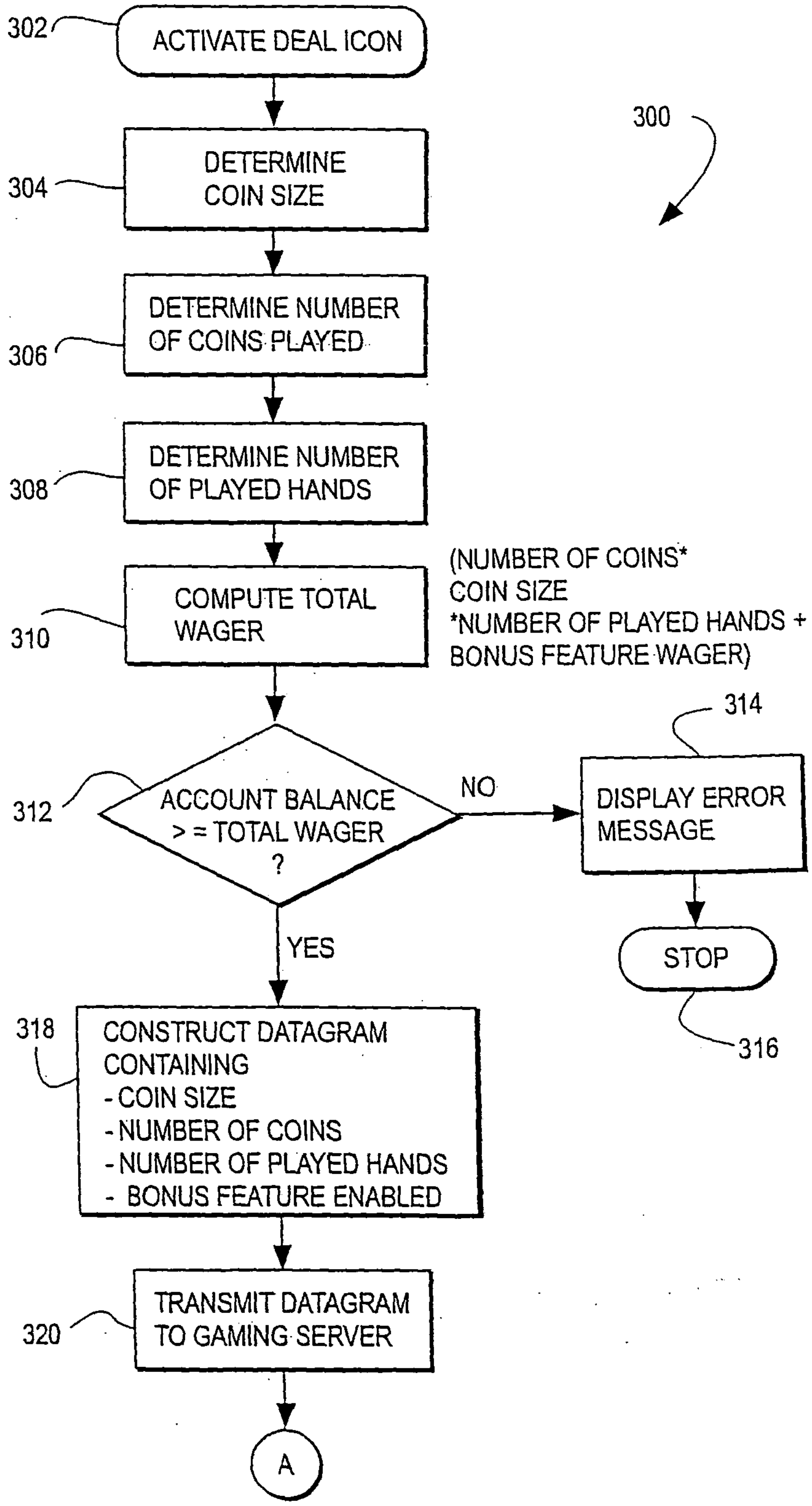

302
ACTIVATE DEAL ICON
300
304
DETERMINE COIN SIZE
306
DETERMINE NUMBER OF COINS PLAYED
308
DETERMINE NUMBER OF PLAYED HANDS
310
COMPUTE TOTAL WAGER
(NUMBER OF COINS* COIN SIZE *NUMBER OF PLAYED HANDS + BONUS FEATURE WAGER)
312
ACCOUNT BALANCE > = TOTAL WAGER ?
NO
314
DISPLAY ERROR MESSAGE
STOP
316
YES
318
CONSTRUCT DATAGRAM CONTAINING
- COIN SIZE
- NUMBER OF COINS
- NUMBER OF PLAYED HANDS
- BONUS FEATURE ENABLED
320
TRANSMIT DATAGRAM TO GAMING SERVER
A

FIG. 15

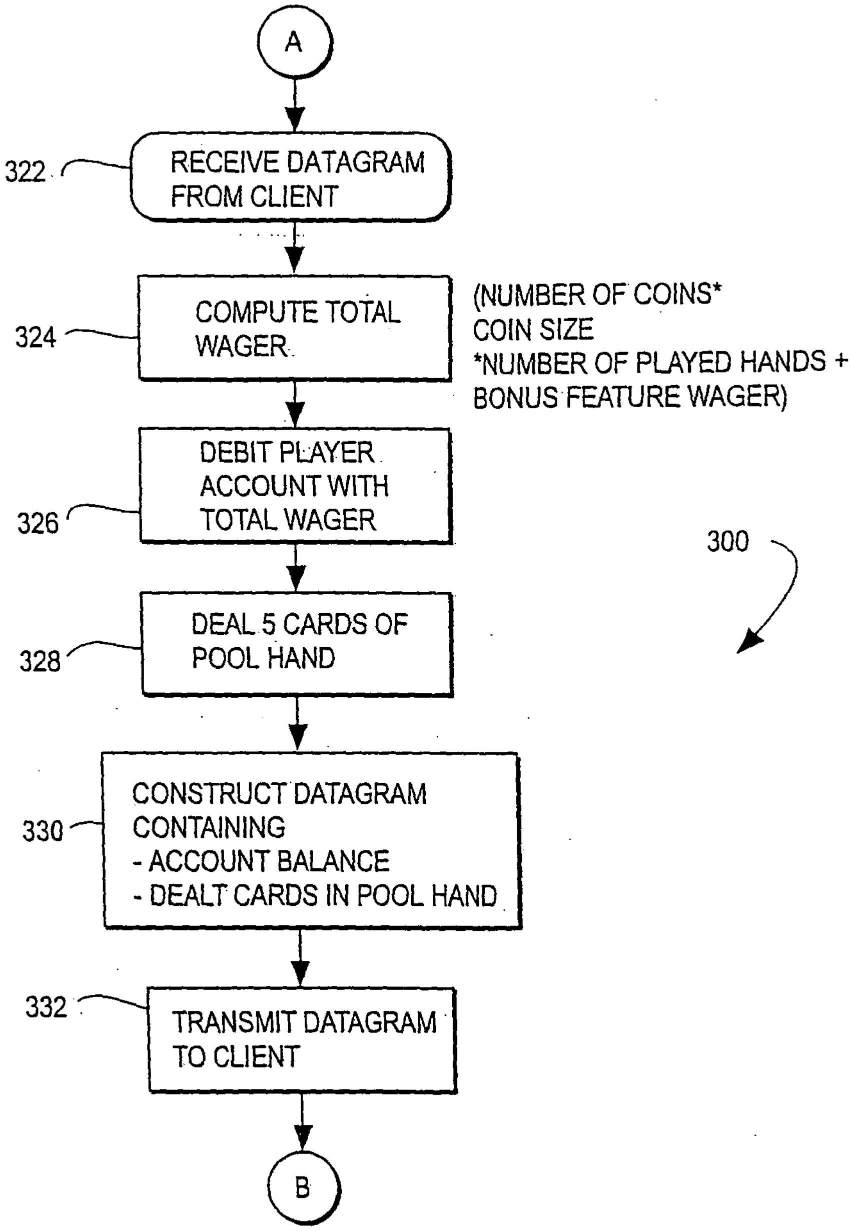

A
RECEIVE DATAGRAM FROM CLIENT
322
COMPUTE TOTAL WAGER
324
(NUMBER OF COINS* COIN SIZE *NUMBER OF PLAYED HANDS + BONUS FEATURE WAGER)
DEBIT PLAYER ACCOUNT WITH TOTAL WAGER
326
300
DEAL 5 CARDS OF POOL HAND
328
CONSTRUCT DATAGRAM CONTAINING
- ACCOUNT BALANCE
- DEALT CARDS IN POOL HAND
330
TRANSMIT DATAGRAM TO CLIENT
332
B

FIG. 16

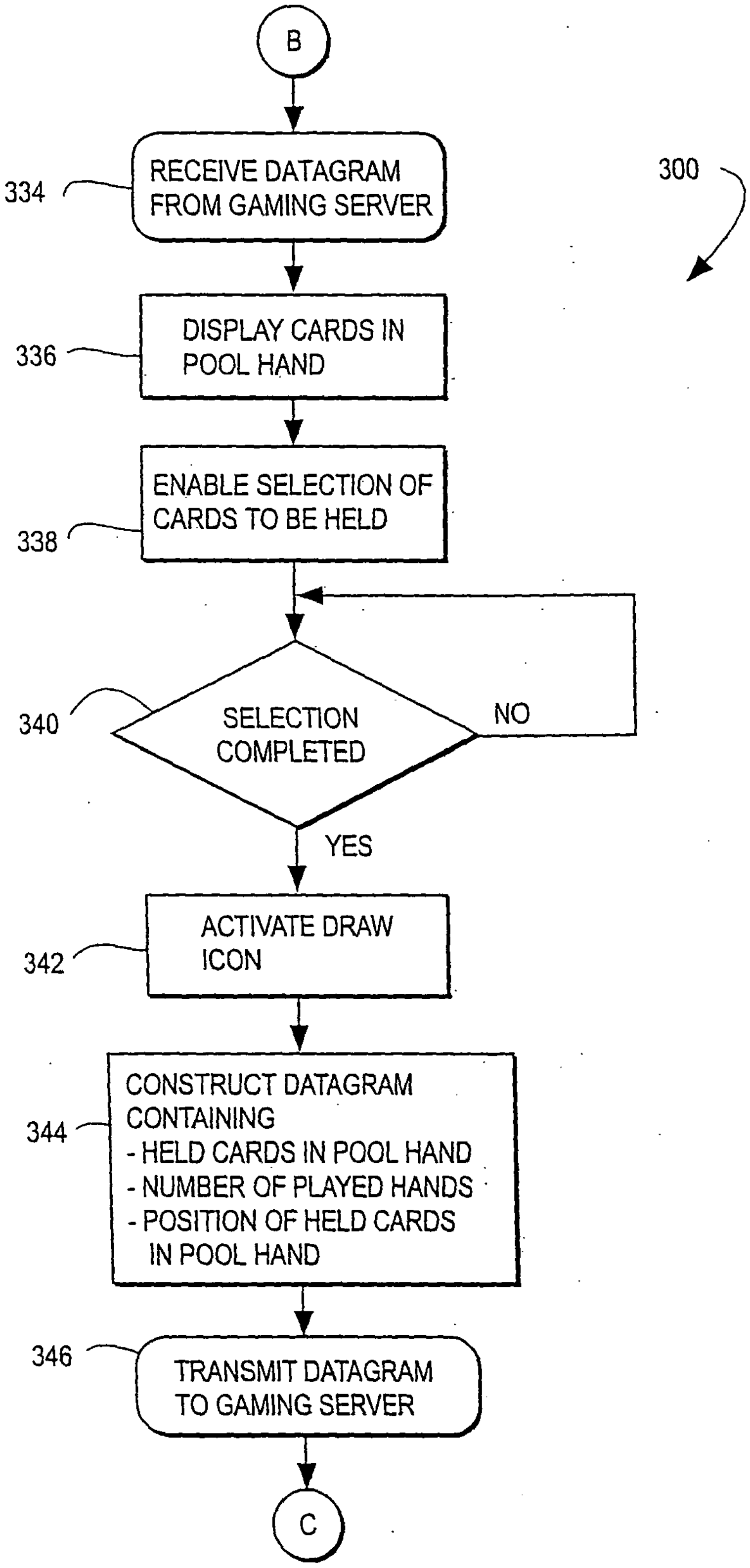

B
RECEIVE DATAGRAM FROM GAMING SERVER
334
300
DISPLAY CARDS IN POOL HAND
336
ENABLE SELECTION OF CARDS TO BE HELD
338
SELECTION COMPLETED
340
NO
YES
ACTIVATE DRAW ICON
342
CONSTRUCT DATAGRAM CONTAINING
- HELD CARDS IN POOL HAND
- NUMBER OF PLAYED HANDS
- POSITION OF HELD CARDS IN POOL HAND
344
TRANSMIT DATAGRAM TO GAMING SERVER
346
C

FIG. 17

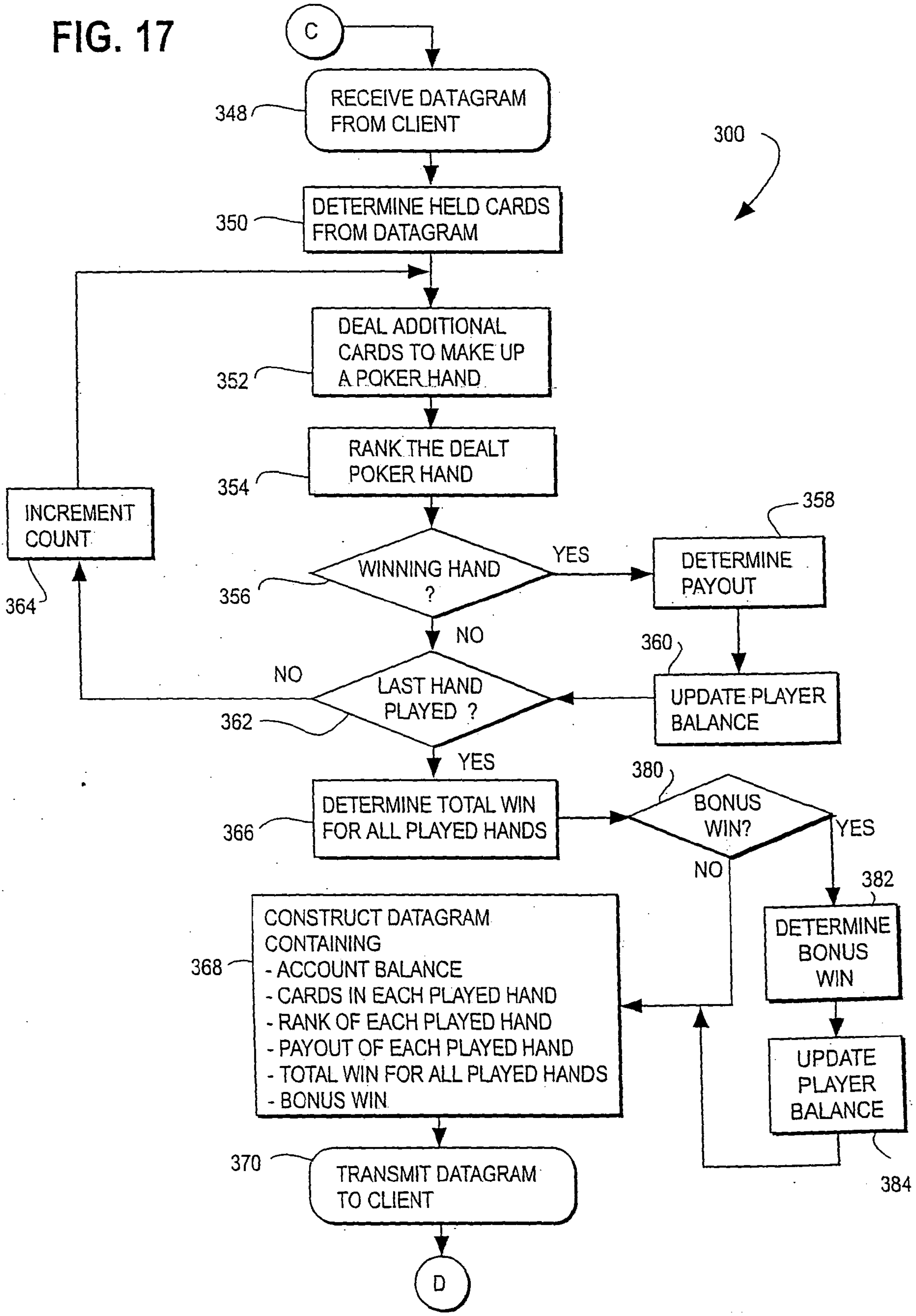
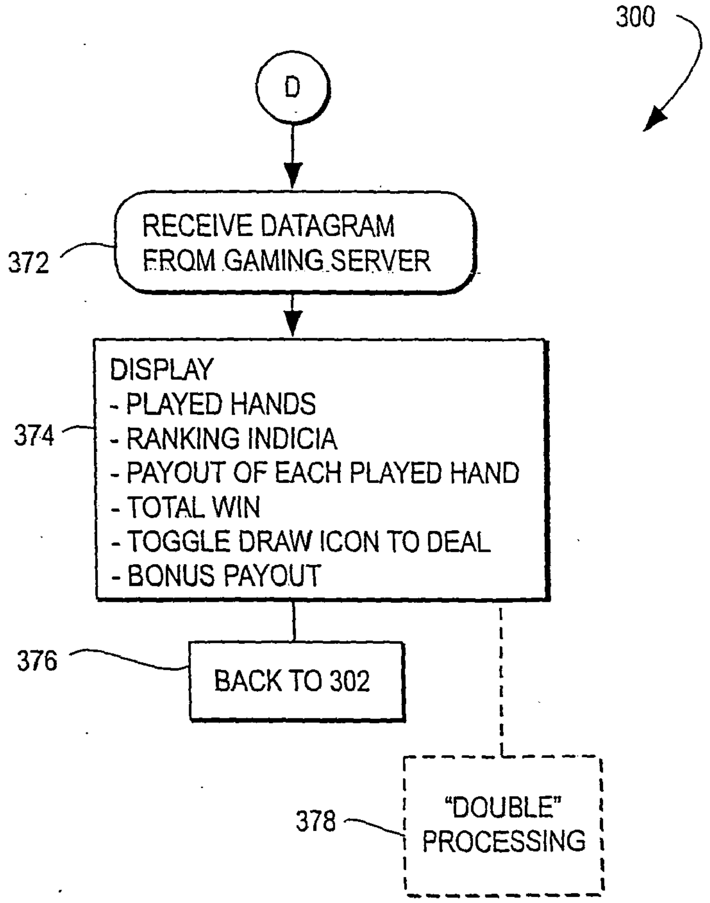

C
RECEIVE DATAGRAM FROM CLIENT
348
300
DETERMINE HELD CARDS FROM DATAGRAM
350
DEAL ADDITIONAL CARDS TO MAKE UP A POKER HAND
352
RANK THE DEALT POKER HAND
354
INCREMENT COUNT
364
358
WINNING HAND ?
356
YES
DETERMINE PAYOUT
NO
360
NO
LAST HAND PLAYED ?
362
UPDATE PLAYER BALANCE
YES
380
DETERMINE TOTAL WIN FOR ALL PLAYED HANDS
366
BONUS WIN?
YES
NO
382
CONSTRUCT DATAGRAM CONTAINING
- ACCOUNT BALANCE
- CARDS IN EACH PLAYED HAND
- RANK OF EACH PLAYED HAND
- PAYOUT OF EACH PLAYED HAND
- TOTAL WIN FOR ALL PLAYED HANDS
- BONUS WIN
368
DETERMINE BONUS WIN
UPDATE PLAYER BALANCE
384
370
TRANSMIT DATAGRAM TO CLIENT
D

FIG. 18


300
D
RECEIVE DATAGRAM FROM GAMING SERVER
372
DISPLAY
- PLAYED HANDS
- RANKING INDICIA
- PAYOUT OF EACH PLAYED HAND
- TOTAL WIN
- TOGGLE DRAW ICON TO DEAL
- BONUS PAYOUT
374
BACK TO 302
376
"DOUBLE" PROCESSING
378

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

This list of references cited by the applicant is for the reader's convenience only. It does not form part of the European patent document. Even though great care has been taken in compiling the references, errors or omissions cannot be excluded and the EPO disclaims all liability in this regard.

Patent documents cited in the description

- US 5823873 A **[0003]**
- US 6007066 A **[0003]**
- US 05868005 A **[0004] [0050]**