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(54) **Game playing apparatus simulating a ball game**

(57) An apparatus for playing a game that is representative of a ball game, the apparatus comprising a counter that is representative of a playing implement used in the ball game, a counter that is representative of a ball used in the ball game and a game playing surface that simulates an environment for playing the ball game, wherein the apparatus is arranged such that squeezing the periphery of the counter representative of the ball against the playing surface by means of the counter representative of the playing implement causes the counter representative of the ball to leave the game playing surface in a manner representative of a ball hit by the playing implement during the ball game.

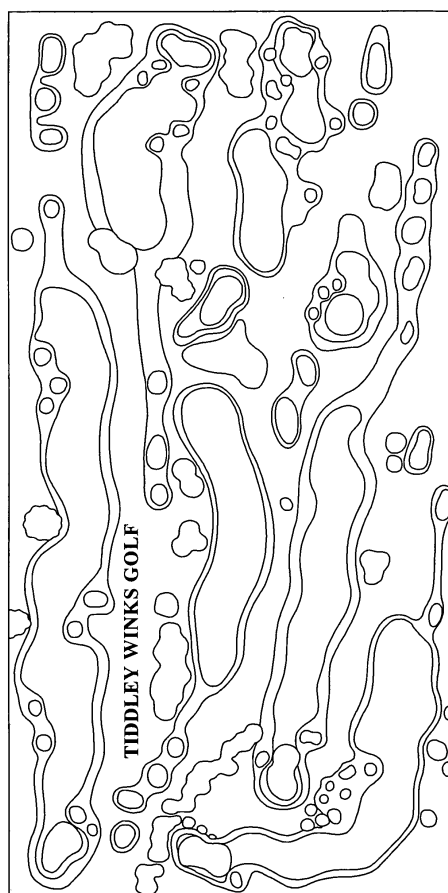


Fig. 1

Description

[0001] The invention relates to an apparatus for playing a game and particularly to an apparatus that comprises a game playing surface and one or more counters.

[0002] Games such as Subbuteo™ and table football imitate real-world ball games. However, these games mainly cause a small ball to roll around a playing surface through hitting that ball with objects representing the "players" of the real-world game. This is acceptable for games imitating football, because the real-world game mainly involves kicking the ball along the ground. However, for ball games such as golf or tennis in which the aim of the game is to propel the ball above the ground, the extent to which the smaller scale game successfully imitates the real-world game is limited.

[0003] Tiddlywinks is a known game in which one counter is pressed against the edge of a second counter, causing the second counter to be propelled into the air. The first counter is typically relatively small and is known as a "wink". The second counter is typically larger than the first counter and is known as a "squidger". The objective of the game is often to propel the winks in such a way that they land on top of an opponent's winks. Frequently the ultimate aim is to propel the winks into a pot or cup. Typically tiddlywinks is simply played on a table-top.

[0004] According to a first aspect of the invention, there is provided an apparatus for playing a game that is representative of a ball game, the apparatus comprising a counter that is representative of a playing implement used in the ball game, a counter that is representative of a ball used in the ball game and a game playing surface that simulates an environment for playing the ball game, wherein the apparatus is arranged such that squeezing the periphery of the counter representative of the ball against the playing surface by means of the counter representative of the playing implement causes the counter representative of the ball to leave the game playing surface in a manner representative of a ball hit by the playing implement during the ball game.

[0005] The game playing surface may be a sheet that has a hardness that varies across its surface such that the flight of the counter representative of the ball differs in dependence on the location at which the counter representative of the ball was squeezed against the game playing surface.

[0006] The game playing surface may be arranged such that the lower the hardness of the sheet at the location at which the counter representative of the ball was squeezed against the game playing surface the greater the maximum height of that counter's flight.

[0007] The counter representative of the playing implement may be such that the flight of the counter representative of the ball differs in dependence one or more features of the counter representative of the playing implement.

[0008] The features of the counter representative of

the playing implement may include one or more of shape, diameter, depth, circumference, material, the cross-section of the counter's periphery and hardness.

[0009] The apparatus may comprise a plurality of counters, each being representative of different type of playing implement, such that the flight of the counter representative of the ball differs in dependence on which of the plurality of counters squeezes the counter representative of the ball against the game playing surface.

[0010] The surface texture of the game playing surface may be representative of a surface material of the environment for playing the ball game. The surface texture of the game playing surface may vary across its surface such that the flight of the counter representative of the ball differs in dependence on the location at which the counter representative of the ball was squeezed against the game playing surface.

[0011] The surface texture of the game playing surface may be representative of one or more of grass, sand, gravel and water.

[0012] The ball game may be golf such that the counter representative of a playing implement is representative of a golf club, the counter representative of a ball is representative of a golf ball and the game playing surface simulates at least one hole of a golf course. The plurality of counters may each be representative of a different type of golf club. One of the plurality of counters may be representative of a driver, a putter or a wedge.

[0013] The apparatus may comprise one or more accessory components, each accessory component being representative of a physical feature of the environment for playing the ball game.

[0014] The game playing surface may comprise attachment means for attaching the one or more accessory components to the game playing surface.

[0015] One of the accessory component may be representative of a tree, a wall, a building, a hedge, a bunker, a putting green or a tee area.

[0016] Both the counter representative of a playing implement and the counter representative of a ball may be winks.

[0017] The game playing surface may simulate at least one hole of a real-life golf course.

[0018] According to a second aspect of the invention, there is provided a computer program configured to simulate an apparatus as claimed in any of claims 1 to 16.

[0019] According to a third aspect of the invention, there is provided tiddlywinks golf.

[0020] According to a fourth aspect of the invention, there is provided a tiddlywinks mat whose flight-causing characteristics vary across the surface of the mat such that the mat simulates an environment for playing a ball game.

[0021] The mat may comprise a plurality of layers. A first one of said plurality of layers may have a relatively high flexural rigidity and a second one of said plurality of layers may have a relatively low flexural rigidity.

[0022] A second one of said plurality of layers may

have a hardness that varies across the tiddlywinks mat such that the flight of a counter caused to leave the tiddlywinks mat by being squeezed at its periphery against the mat differs in dependence on the location at which the counter was squeezed against the mat.

[0023] A second one of said plurality of layers may be formed from a plurality of horizontal sections, at least one of said sections having a different hardness from another of said sections.

[0024] At least one of said sections may be formed from rubber. At least one of said sections may be formed from neoprene.

[0025] One of said plurality of layers may be a textured layer that forms an outer surface of the mat, the textured layer having a surface texture that is representative of a surface material of the environment for playing a ball game.

[0026] The textured layer may be such that the flight of a counter caused to leave the tiddlywinks mat by being squeezed at its periphery against the mat differs in dependence on the surface texture of the textured layer at the location at which the counter was squeezed against the mat.

[0027] The mat may be capable of being rolled such that in its rolled state the mat has a relatively compact configuration for the mat to be stored and in the unrolled state the mat has a relatively extended configuration for the mat to be used as a playing surface for tiddlywinks.

[0028] The mat may comprise three-dimensional features formed of a compressible material such that, when the mat is in the unrolled state, the three dimensional features extend out of the plane of the mat and, when the mat is in the rolled state, the three dimensional features are compressed relative to the plane of the mat.

[0029] The mat may comprise one or more surface features having an unfolded configuration in which the surface features extend out of the plane of the mat and a folded configuration in which the surface features are folded against the surface of the mat.

[0030] The surface features may be arranged such that, when the mat is in its rolled state, the surface features adopt their folded configuration and, when the mat is in its unrolled state, the surface features adopt their unfolded configuration.

[0031] The surface features may be biased to their unfolded configuration such that, when the mat is unrolled from the rolled state to the unrolled state, the surface features automatically move from their folded configuration to their unfolded configuration.

[0032] For a better understanding of the present invention, reference is made by way of example to the following drawings, in which:

Figure 1 shows a birds-eye pictorial representation of a golf course;

Figure 2 shows an apparatus incorporating a pop-out three dimensional feature;

Figures 3a and 3b show the structure of a board;

Figure 4 shows an example of a playing mat representing one hole of a golf course;

Figure 5 shows examples of playing pieces; and

Figures 6a to 6e show additional examples of playing pieces.

[0033] One embodiment of the invention relates to an apparatus that is arranged to form a game that imitates a real-world ball game but on a smaller scale and with counters taking the place of the playing implements of the real-world game. The apparatus may include one or more counters that represent the playing implements used in the ball game and a counter that is representative of the ball. The apparatus may also comprise a playing surface, which suitably simulates an environment typically employed for playing the real-world game. The apparatus may be arranged such that by squeezing an edge of a counter representing the ball against the playing surface with a counter representing a playing implement, the counter representing the ball is propelled into the air in a similar way to the ball of the real-world game when hit by the playing implement.

[0034] In this context, a ball game is considered to be any game that requires the user to hit a ball with a playing implement such as a bat or club. For example, a ball game may be any of the following:

- Golf
- Tennis
- Table tennis
- Baseball
- Softball
- Badminton
- Basketball
- Netball
- Cricket
- Hockey
- Shinty
- Hurling
- Lacrosse
- Pelota

[0035] A ball game may also be any game in which the user hits the ball with a more generalised playing implement (e.g. his foot). Therefore, a ball game may also be any of the following:

- Football/Soccer
- Rugby
- American football
- Australian rules football

[0036] The "ball" could be but need not be restricted to a rounded object, and could be e.g. a shuttlecock.

[0037] The apparatus may be particularly effective at imitating ball games played by propelling the ball above the ground because the apparatus provides for the counter representing the ball to be propelled above the playing surface in a way that is similar to the real-world game, which makes the game more fun and satisfying for the players.

[0038] The apparatus for playing the game includes a game playing surface. The game playing surface is representative of a real-world environment in which the ball game is typically played. For example, the game playing surface could be representative of any of the following:

- Golf course
- Tennis/badminton/netball/basketball court
- Football/rugby/cricket pitch

[0039] The game playing surface may offer a of the real-world game playing environment. This may be a straightforward pictorial representation of the real-world playing environment. For example, figure 1 shows a "birds-eye" representation of a golf course from above. Other playing environments that may be represented pictorially include pitches, such as rugby and football pitches, and courts, such as tennis and badminton courts.

[0040] The game playing surface may be marked with different "scoring" zones. These scoring zones may relate to the rules of the ball game that the game playing apparatus is representing.

[0041] The game playing surface may be an essentially two-dimensional surface, e.g. a board or roll-out mat that has a pictorial representation of the real-world playing environment on its upper surface. However, the game playing surface may also advantageously include three-dimensional elements to add interest and realism to the game. For example, the game playing surface could be moulded to incorporate slopes, hills, lakes or bunkers. Accessories placed on or attached to the game playing surface may also be provided, e.g. nets, goals, trees etc. The game playing surface may also combine two-dimensional and three-dimensional elements. For example, a board may include pop-out sections that can be replaced with three-dimensional elements. An example is shown in figure 2, in which part of the playing surface can be

removed and replaced with a three-dimensional representation of a hill. The board may be arranged to have multiple sections that can be "popped-out" and replaced with three-dimensional sections. All, some or none of the replaceable sections in a board may be replaced by a respective three-dimensional element. Similarly, each pop-out section may be replaced by any one of multiple different three-dimensional elements. Both of these features enable the user to construct different playing environments using one board.

[0042] Three-dimensional elements may also be incorporated into a game that has a roll-out mat as a playing surface. For example, three-dimensional features may simply be placed at suitable points on the mat. Such three-dimensional features could also form the playing surface independent of any other component such as a mat or board. These features can be laid out around the user's home in any suitable configuration or arrangement, including placing the features at different heights e.g. by placing some features on chairs or tables.

[0043] In one embodiment, a roll out mat may have three-dimensional features integrated into its surface. The mat may be constructed of a collapsible material such as a foam so that the three-dimensional features of the mat "pop-out" when the mat is unrolled but can be collapsed or squashed by the applying pressure to the upper surface of the mat, e.g. when the mat is rolled up, enabling it to be conveniently stored. Alternatively, the game playing surface may be provided by an inflatable so that the three-dimensional features of the surface are obtained by "blowing-up" the inflatable.

[0044] The inflatable may form the whole of the surface or only the parts of the surface that form the three dimensional features. Again, this form of surface has the advantage that it can be easily and conveniently stored by deflating the three-dimensional features and rolling the surface up. Also, because the materials used to construct the inflatable features can be easily made waterproof, this way of forming the three-dimensional features of the game can be an advantage when it is desired to introduce water into the game playing environment for added realism (e.g. for representing water features on a golf course).

[0045] The mat may also incorporate surface features that are foldable such that they extend out of the plane of the mat when it is unrolled and fold against the surface of the mat when it is rolled up. Such features may be formed of a rigid material and could represent e.g. trees, walls, goals, nets etc. The surface features may be biased towards their unfolded configuration such that they automatically pop-up from the mat when it is unrolled. Suitable biasing means may be provided for this purpose e.g. a coiled or leaf spring.

[0046] The hardness of the game playing surface may vary across its surface so that the "ball" counter achieves a different level of height above the playing surface depending on where on that surface it was originally "flipped" from. This enables the game apparatus to mimic

attributes of the real-world game playing environment. The maximum height achieved by the "ball" counter typically affects the distance along the game playing surface that the "ball" counter will move after being "flipped" by the "club" counter.

[0047] The game playing surface may be textured to represent materials used in the real world environment. For example, textures to represent grass, concrete, sand, water etc may be used. The textured surfaces may affect the height achieved by the "ball" counter. The textured surfaces may represent features of the game environment that are particularly easy/difficult to negotiate in the real world so that the textured surfaces correspond to an area of particular hardness/softness in the game playing surface. For example, the area of a game playing surface for a golf game that represents a bunker may be provided with a textured surface that represents sand and a relatively hard surface so as to mimic the real-world difficulty of exiting a bunker.

[0048] The texture of the game playing surface may affect the typical flight-characteristics of the counter representing the ball. For example, the length of "grass" (e.g. Astroturf or similar) on a playing surface representing a golf course may vary across the playing surface to imitate the effect of real-world fairways, roughs and putting greens. The typical height achieved by the counter representing the ball will be affected by the length of the imitation grass at the location at which the counter is flipped.

[0049] The playing surface may be formed of multiple layers. For example, figure 3a shows a cross-section of a playing surface that is formed from three different layers. The bottom layer 301 may be relatively rigid to provide support for the layers above and to ensure that the playing surface is sufficiently stiff for players to be able to apply enough pressure to a counter representing the ball for it to be propelled into the air. The bottom layer may also be consistent across the playing surface. The bottom layer could be cardboard, wood, plywood etc. The middle layer 302 may be less rigid than the bottom layer. In particular, the middle layer may be softer than the bottom layer so that it deforms slightly when a counter is pressed against the playing surface. The hardness of the middle layer may vary across the playing surface. For example, figure 3b shows a plan view of a playing surface that has three different hardnesses in zones 304, 305 and 306. This varying hardness may be straightforwardly achieved by forming the middle layer from horizontal sections of different materials but the same thickness, which can then be glued or otherwise attached to the base material. The different materials could be e.g. different foams or rubbers. One suitable material is neoprene, which is used for making wetsuits. The upper layer 303 may provide texture to the playing surface. The texture may be chosen to imitate the real-world environment in which the ball-game is played. For example, the upper layer might be felt or astroturf to imitate grass, sandpaper to imitate sand or gravel, or cellophane or water to rep-

resent water features.

[0050] In addition to a playing surface, the game playing apparatus may also include at least two counters. One counter is representative of a playing implement used by a player of the ball game. The other counter is representative of the ball. The playing implement is typically an object used by a player of the game to hit the ball and could be any of the following:

- Club
- Bat
- Racket
- Stick
- Player's hand
- Player's leg/foot

[0051] The game playing surface may be arranged such that when the "ball" counter is placed on the game playing surface and the player presses that "ball" counter at its edge with the "club" counter, the "ball" counter flips into the air. This action is similar to that used in tiddly-winks.

[0052] Similarly, different types of "club" counter may be provided to mimic the effect of different playing implements in the real-world ball game. The maximum height above the playing surface achieved by the "ball" counter is dependent on which type of "club" counter is used to "flip" the "ball" counter. Again, typically the distance travelled by the "ball" counter along the game playing surface is dependent on the maximum height achieved by the "ball" counter.

[0053] The game playing apparatus is preferably supplied with a set of rules that define how the game is to be played. The rules may be such that the playing of the game in some way imitates the way in which the real-world ball game is played. Typically, the rules will require the player of the game to navigate the game playing surface by "flipping" the "ball" counter across the surface. The "ball" counter may be "flipped" multiple times, with the counter normally being flipped from the location at which it previously landed. The rules may provide that the game commences from a particular area of the game playing surface. Typically, the aim of the game may be to reach some kind of target area representing a goal, hole, basket or similar. Exceptions to these general rules may of course be provided.

[0054] The rules of playing the game may also specify when a particular type of "club" counter may be used by a player. For example, a user may be restricted to particular types of "club" counter for a particular "turn" in the game or when the "ball" counter previously landed in a particular area of the game playing surface.

[0055] For the purpose of example, further features of

the game playing apparatus will now be described with reference to a particular example in which the ball game is golf. This is for the purposes of example only and it should be understood that the game playing apparatus is not limited being representative of any specific ball game.

[0056] Tiddlywinks Golf is a game in which the playing surface represents a golf course and the "ball" counter and "club" counter represent a golf ball and golf club respectively. The basic version of the game apparatus can be added to as a player's dexterity increases. For example, by adding to an existing "course", creating and developing new courses with various intricacies, or by recreating "real" golf courses that are already in existence. Accessories may be provided to build up the "golf course" provided by the playing surface. The playing surface may have a hardness that varies across its surface, may have textured surfaces that are representative of real world materials and counters representative of real-world clubs. All of these features add further interest to the game.

[0057] The game playing apparatus may comprise a simple board having a pictorial bird's eye view of the course or hole on its upper surface. This image of the course may be printed on the upper surface of the board or may be formed by textured materials attached to the board's upper surface. The apparatus may also comprise accessories that can be placed on or attached to the board's upper surface. The accessories may be plug-in accessories. Textured areas and/or further accessories may be placed on the board, e.g. in marked areas. The game playing surface may be provided with attachment means for attaching accessories to the playing surface. For example, the cardboard base may be printed with areas representing bunkers, greens etc, which can then be "popped out" so that the appropriate accessories can be fitted into the resulting hole. The board may be placed on a suitable surface such as a table or floor.

[0058] The game playing apparatus may comprise a roll out surface to provide the game playing surface. For example, the "rough" may first be laid out on a suitable surface. The "rough" marks the designated area for the game upon which all areas of the course will be set. The "fairway" may be placed at the centre of the "rough" with the "tee" at one end and the "green" at the other. Bunkers and other features can be arranged accordingly. The player may take a note of distances between the features of the constructed hole so that it can be reconstructed later if desired.

[0059] The game playing surface may be designed to represent a particular golf course. A different game playing surface may be provided to represent each hole of the course. Alternatively a large playing surface could be provided that represents the entire course. The game playing surface may be limited to particularly famous, difficult or popular holes of the golf course in question.

[0060] Additional accessories such as trees, bunkers etc may be sold separately from the main game and can

then be placed on, or attached to, the game playing surface where appropriate. Such accessories might include trees, walls, buildings, hedges, tee areas, greens and bunkers. Accessories may themselves form the game playing surface and be arranged as desired by the user. For example, moulded components representing tee areas, bunkers and greens may be arranged around a room and may even be arranged at different heights by being arranged on floors, chairs, tables etc.

[0061] Any of the game playing apparatus described above may be designed for being played outdoors, in which case they are suitably constructed of suitably robust, waterproof materials.

[0062] The game playing apparatus also comprises a counter representative of the ball and one or more counters representative of golf clubs. The counters provided to represent the golf clubs may differ in size, shape and material. For example, a suitable set of "clubs" included with the apparatus might include a "driver" (40mm x 2mm circular counter with thumb indent), a "putter" (40mm x 4mm D-shaped counter with thumb indent) and a "ball" (16mm x 1 mm standard wink). These dimensions are given for the purposes of example only. The playing implements may be any counters of suitable size and shape. The game apparatus may also include a "club" representative of a wedge, e.g. which a player uses after entering a bunker.

[0063] Typically, different types of "club" cause the "ball" to travel different average distances along the playing surface. The "clubs" may therefore be used to mimic a real-world golf game, with the "driver" sending the "ball" on average further than the "putter".

[0064] The rules may specify that certain ones of the counters may only be used in designated areas of the playing surface. For example, it may be that the "putter" can only be used on the area of the playing surface that represents the green and that the "driver" can be used in all other areas. In general, the softer the playing surface, the higher the wink may travel when "flipped" by a particular "club".

[0065] Two examples of sets of rules for playing tiddlywinks golf are given below.

Rule set one

[0066] The aim of the game is to get the wink in the hole in as few shots as possible and thus to be the first to win the hole (i.e. get the wink in the hole). If playing for more than one hole, the winner will have gained all holes in the least number of shots. Each player takes it in turns to shoot. Most standard golf rules can be applied to the game, provided that these agreed by all players.

[0067] Each player chooses their colour and selects the matching driver, putter, and wink (or just driver and wink, depending upon game type and availability) that will be theirs for the remainder of the game. The putter can only be used on the green. The driver is to be used in all other areas. Generally, the softer the game playing

surface, the higher the wink will potentially travel with the relevant club.

[0068] Should the wink go out of bounds or into the water from the tee shot, the player returns to the tee to play his third shot on his next turn (stroke and distance). A player cannot shoot for the green from the tee unless the hole is designated as par 3. On holes other than a par 3, if a player reaches the green from the tee, the same rules apply as though the wink had travelled out of bounds.

[0069] Should the wink go out of bounds or into the water when shot from anywhere other than the tee, the next shot must be played from anywhere behind the trajectory line which the wink took over the out of bounds line.

[0070] The hole itself has three bands, with the centre being a perfect shot, the middle being classed as two shots and the outer being classed as three. The number of shots taken to get to the green will determine how accurate a player needs to be on aiming for the hole itself.

Rule set two

[0071] The aim of the game is to get the wink in the hole in as few shots as possible and thus be the first to win the hole. If playing for more than one hole, the winner will have gained all holes in the least number of shots.

[0072] Each player chooses their colour and selects a matching driver and wink that will be theirs for the remainder of the game.

[0073] The first shot must be for the fairway unless the hole is specified as a par 3. Any shot thereafter can be for the hole. The nominated player one takes the first shot off the tee in an attempt to land on the fairway. Should the wink land outside the fairway area the player "loses" a shot. Shots are taken in turns so that all will have had their first shot before a player takes the second. After shot one, the aim is to get to the green and get the 'winks ball' into the hole in as few shots as possible.

[0074] Scores are counted as one point per shot.

[0075] Should the board be missed entirely, the player must miss a turn and then do a 'drop shot'. This involves dropping the winks ball onto the edge of the board nearest to the winks trajectory point of exit.

[0076] Figure 4 shows an example of a playing mat 1 for use in the game described above. The mat comprises a number of zones 2-7. The zones differ in their playing characteristics with the effect that a wink played in a similar manner off each zone will fly differently. In this example the mat simulates a hole of a golf course. Preferably the mat simulates a real-life golf course, the zones being arranged in a similar way to the playing areas of the real-life course. In this example the zones include a tee area 2, a green area 3, bunker areas 4, rough areas 5, a fairway area 6 and a water area 7. A hole 8 is located in the green area 3. The density, resilience, hardness, roughness or other characteristics of each area are selected so that a wink will fly off the area in the desired way. For

example, the green area could allow a wink that is played off it to fly relatively far, whereas the bunker area could hinder flight of a wink played off it. The hole 8 could be a recess or hole in the mat. The areas could, for example, be formed by applying surface coatings to a substrate 9, or by treatment of a substrate in different ways.

[0077] Figure 5 shows examples of playing pieces in plan and cross-section. Piece 10 is a piece that represents a golf ball. It has dimples or dimple-like markings to simulate the appearance of a golf ball. Pieces 11 and 12 are pieces that represent golf clubs. Piece 11 represents a wood and piece 12 represents an iron. Piece 11 could be made of wood, and piece 12 could be made of metal. The pieces 11 and 12 could have different properties, for example different hardnesses, degrees of flexibility or peripheral cross-sections (as illustrated at 13) to give them different properties for propelling the wink 10.

[0078] Additional examples of playing pieces are shown in figures 6a to 6e. Figures 6a to 6c show playing pieces that are counters, each with a slightly different profile. Figures 6d and 6e show playing pieces that have been adapted to more closely represent a golf club by having a handle section 13 protruding from the base. The player holds the handle section of the playing piece and presses down on it in order to flip the piece representing the golf ball. The base of the playing piece may also incorporate a head 14 that represents a famous golf player, as shown in figure 6e.

[0079] It should be understood that any of the features above described in relation to tiddlywinks golf may be applied to a game playing apparatus representing any other type of ball game.

[0080] The tiddlywinks golf game might be implemented electronically. For example, the electronic game may be implemented by means of a computer program arranged to cause a display to display a 2D or 3D pictorial bird's eye view of the designed course, including trees, water features, bunkers etc. The electronic game may mimic the feel and reactions of the standard, textured course. The game may be operated using a standard joystick-type of user control or may require a specially designed control. The operation of the control may mimic the action of a player's fingers pushing on the "wink", with the angle of the hand and the pressure applied to the wink determining the subsequent trajectory or flight of the "wink".

[0081] The computer program for implementing an electronic version of the game may be run on a specially designed electronic gaming apparatus or on a generic gaming apparatus such as a PC or console. The computer program may suitably be run across a network so as to permit multiple participants and/or online gaming.

[0082] The applicant hereby discloses in isolation each individual feature described herein and any combination of two or more such features, to the extent that such features or combinations are capable of being carried out based on the present specification as a whole in light of the common general knowledge of a person skilled in

the art, irrespective of whether such features or combinations of features solve any problems disclosed herein, and without limitation to the scope of the claims. The applicant indicates that aspects of the present invention may consist of any such feature or combination of features. In view of the foregoing description it will be evident to a person skilled in the art that various modifications may be made within the scope of the invention.

Claims

1. An apparatus for playing a game that is representative of a ball game, the apparatus comprising:

a counter that is representative of a playing implement used in the ball game;
 a counter that is representative of a ball used in the ball game; and
 a game playing surface that simulates an environment for playing the ball game;
 wherein the apparatus is arranged such that squeezing the periphery of the counter representative of the ball against the playing surface by means of the counter representative of the playing implement causes the counter representative of the ball to leave the game playing surface in a manner representative of a ball hit by the playing implement during the ball game.

2. An apparatus as claimed in claim 2, wherein the game playing surface is a sheet that has a hardness that varies across its surface such that the flight of the counter representative of the ball differs in dependence on the location at which the counter representative of the ball was squeezed against the game playing surface.
3. An apparatus as claimed in claim 2, wherein game playing surface is arranged such that the lower the hardness of the sheet at the location at which the counter representative of the ball was squeezed against the game playing surface the greater the maximum height of that counter's flight.
4. An apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the counter representative of the playing implement is such that the flight of the counter representative of the ball differs in dependence one or more features of the counter representative of the playing implement.
5. An apparatus as claimed in claim 4, wherein the features of the counter representative of the playing implement include one or more of shape, diameter, depth, circumference, material, the cross-section of the counter's periphery and hardness.

6. An apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the apparatus comprises a plurality of counters, each being representative of different type of playing implement, such that the flight of the counter representative of the ball differs in dependence on which of the plurality of counters squeezes the counter representative of the ball against the game playing surface.
7. An apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the surface texture of the game playing surface varies across its surface such that the flight of the counter representative of the ball differs in dependence on the location at which the counter representative of the ball was squeezed against the game playing surface.
8. An apparatus as claimed in any of preceding claim, wherein the ball game is golf such that the counter representative of a playing implement is representative of a golf club, the counter representative of a ball is representative of a golf ball and the game playing surface simulates at least one hole of a golf course.
9. An apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the game playing surface comprises attachment means for attaching one or more accessory components to the game playing surface.
10. A tiddlywinks mat whose flight-causing characteristics vary across the surface of the mat such that the mat simulates an environment for playing a ball game.
11. A tiddlywinks mat as claimed in claim 10, wherein the mat comprises a plurality of layers, a first one of said plurality of layers having a relatively high flexural rigidity and a second one of said plurality of layers having a relatively low flexural rigidity.
12. A tiddlywinks mat as claimed in claims 10 or 11, wherein a second one of said plurality of layers has a hardness that varies across the tiddlywinks mat such that the flight of a counter caused to leave the tiddlywinks mat by being squeezed at its periphery against the mat differs in dependence on the location at which the counter was squeezed against the mat.
13. A tiddlywinks mat as claimed in any of claims 10 to 12, wherein one of said plurality of layers is a textured layer that forms an outer surface of the mat, the textured layer having a surface texture that is representative of a surface material of the environment for playing a ball game and wherein the textured layer is such that the flight of a counter caused to leave the tiddlywinks mat by being squeezed at its periphery against the mat differs in dependence on the sur-

face texture of the textured layer at the location at which the counter was squeezed against the mat.

14. A tiddlywinks mat as claimed in any of claims 10 to 13, wherein the mat is capable of being rolled such that in its rolled state the mat has a relatively compact configuration for the mat to be stored and in the unrolled state the mat has a relatively extended configuration for the mat to be used as a playing surface for tiddlywinks.

15. A tiddlywinks mat as claimed in claim 14, wherein the mat comprises three-dimensional features formed of a compressible material such that, when the mat is the unrolled state, the three dimensional features extend out of the plane of the mat and, when the mat is in the rolled state, the three dimensional features are compressed relative to the plane of the mat.

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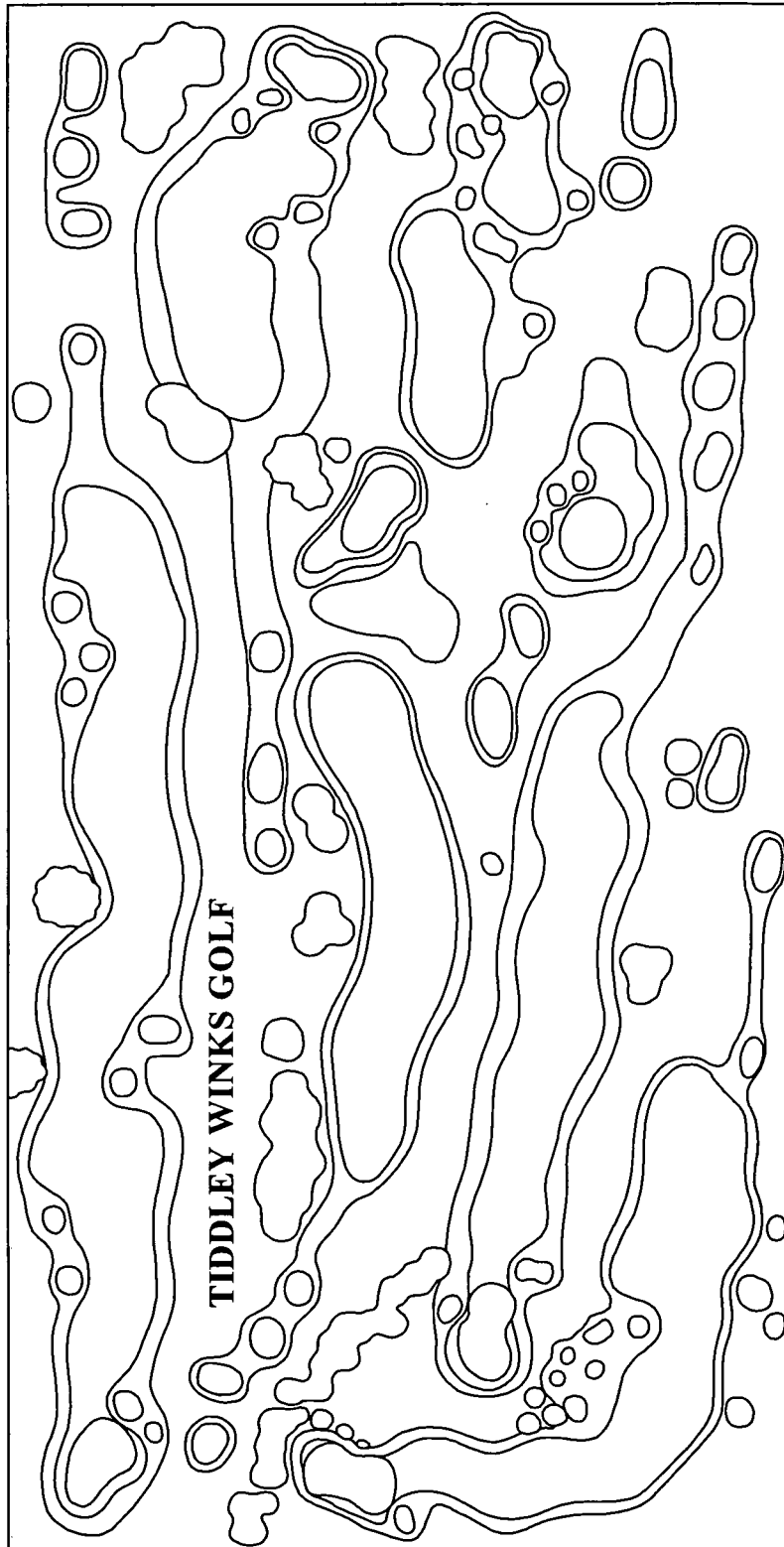
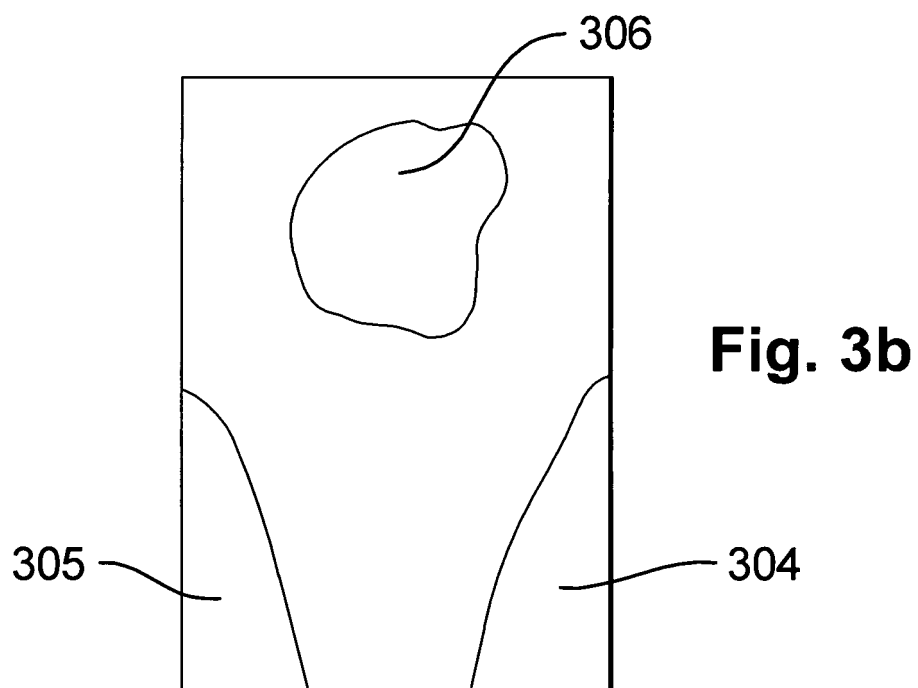
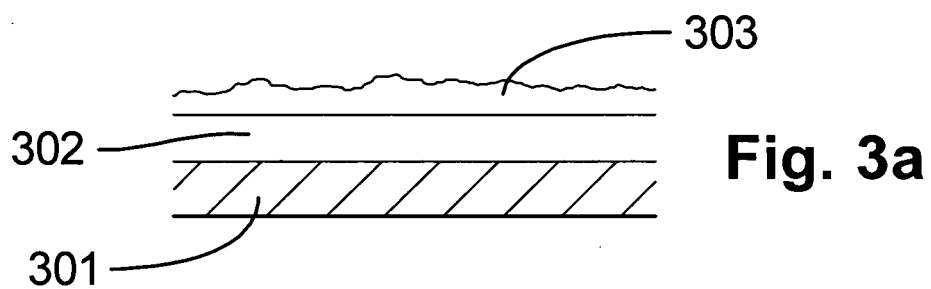
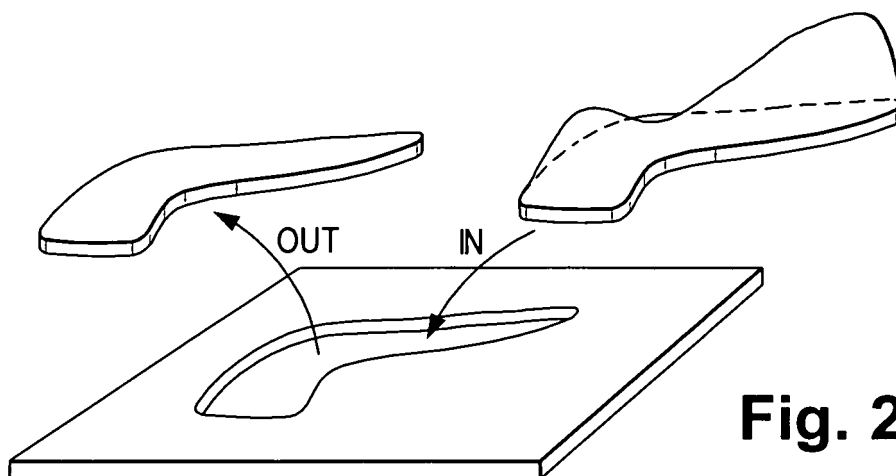


Fig. 1



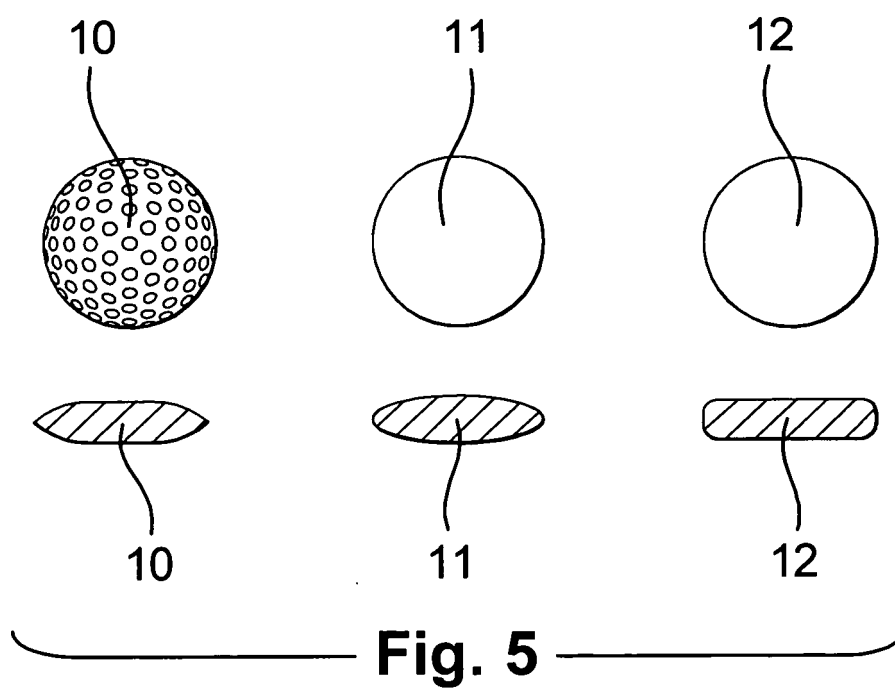
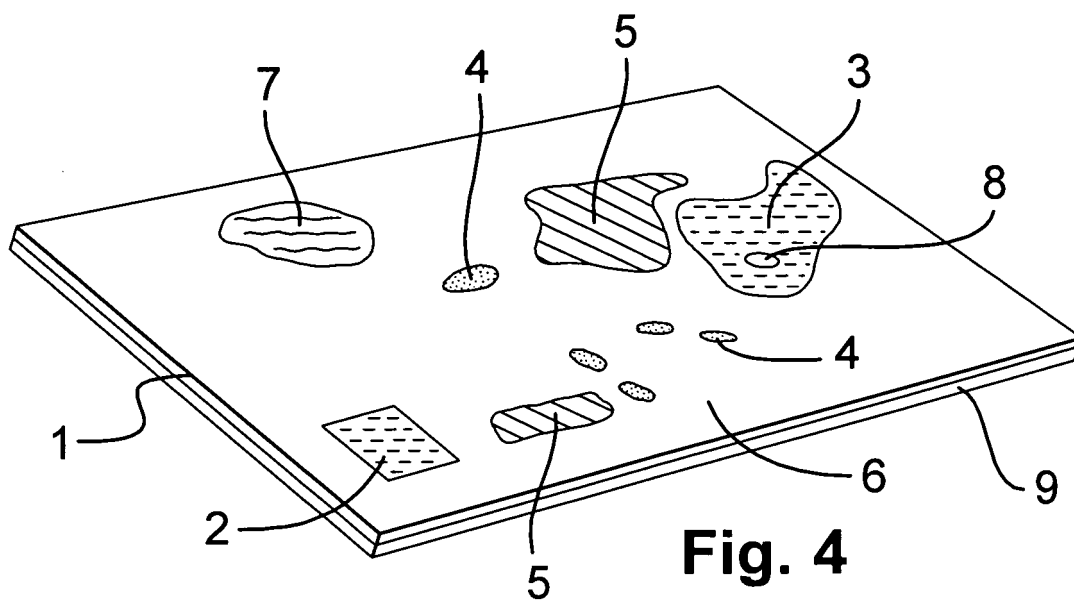




Fig. 6a



Fig. 6b

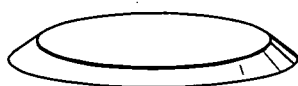


Fig. 6c

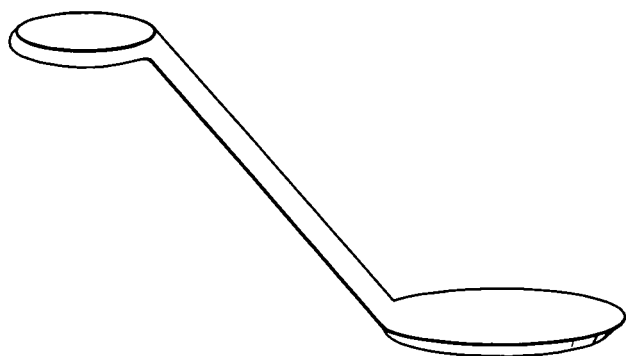


Fig. 6d

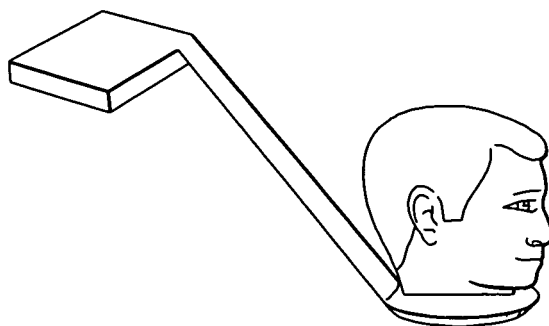


Fig. 6e