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(54) **PERSONAL GAME DEVICE AND METHOD**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

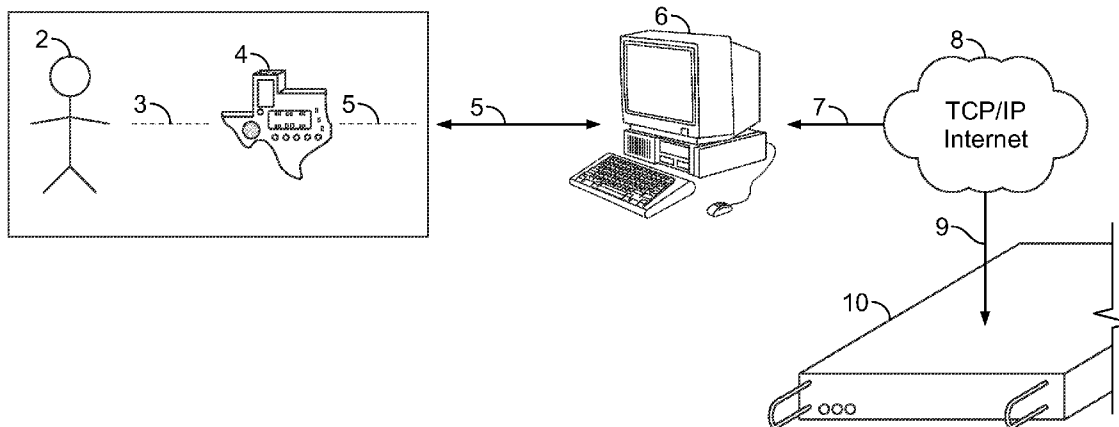
The present invention is directed to a portable electronic game device programmed for playing poker, particularly "No-Limit Texas Hold 'Em" against a plurality of virtual opponents or players that each have predefined characteristics, the device having a personal computer interface, a memory accumulator for cumulatively storing earned points, and a means of communication with a hosted website or remote server computer that tracks unique identifiers for the game device and its associated player and allows the player to compete with other players for prizes based on the total accumulated points earned by the individual player or to obtain universal rankings. The invention also relates to methods of using such a portable game device.

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Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 60/785,743, filed on Mar. 24, 2006.



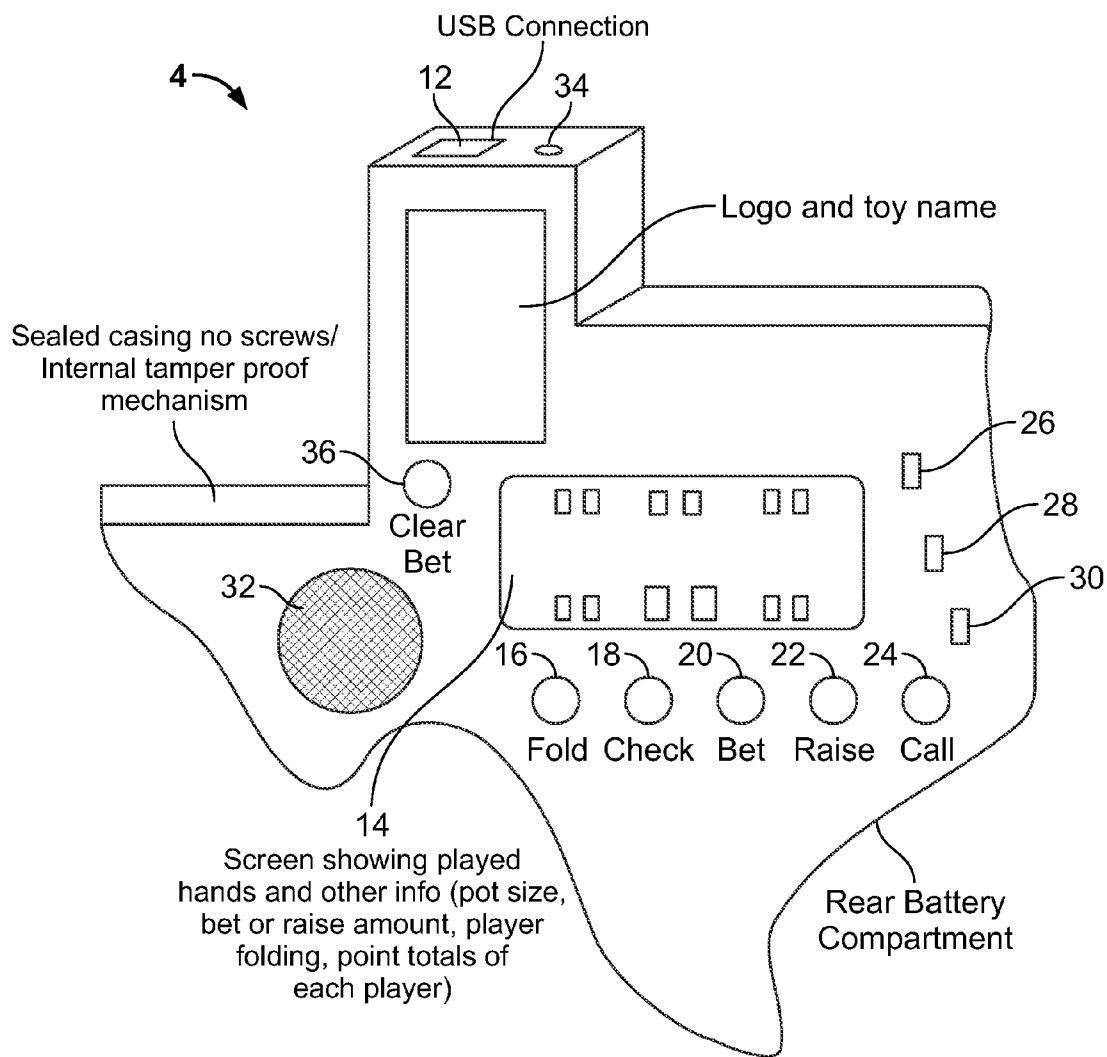


FIG. 1

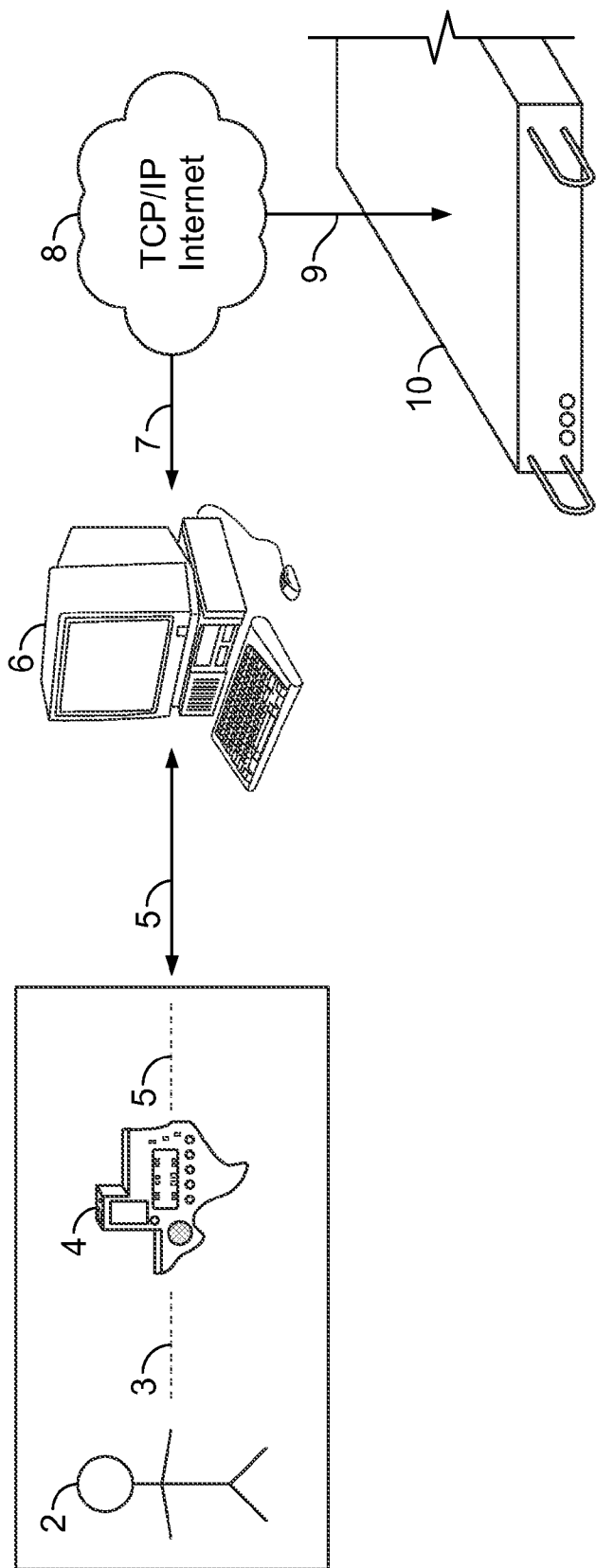


FIG. 2

PERSONAL GAME DEVICE AND METHOD

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the priority of U.S. provisional patent application No. 60/785,743, filed Mar. 24, 2006, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] In an embodiment, the present invention is directed to a portable electronic game device programmed for playing poker, particularly “No-Limit Texas Hold ‘Em” against a plurality of virtual opponents or players that each have predefined characteristics, the device having a personal computer interface, a memory accumulator for cumulatively storing earned points, and a means of communication with a hosted website or remote server computer that tracks unique identifiers for the game device and its associated player and allows the player to compete with other players for prizes based on the total accumulated points earned by the individual player or to obtain universal rankings. In another embodiment, invention also relates to methods of using such a portable game device.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Poker was invented over a century ago, but its popularity has experienced recent dramatic growth, largely due to innovations in game playing technology. Broadcasts of poker tournaments such as the World Series of Poker and the World Poker Tour have huge audiences. The invention of miniature cameras has turned the game into a spectator sport in which viewers can follow the action and drama of the game. The introduction of online poker has made the game available to anyone with access to a personal computer and an Internet connection.

[0004] Traditionally poker has been played in casinos, card rooms, clubs, and homes throughout the country. While such games are popular, there are a number of drawbacks. One problem for commercial gaming establishments is that the game is player versus player, as opposed to player versus the house. This means that the house must collect a percentage of the pot to make a profit. Because each hand can take a considerable amount of time, given the number of betting rounds and the time inherent in bluffing, attempting to read other players, and so on, the profit margin for the house is limited. In addition, many would-be customers are simply too intimidated to play against other players, especially in light of the fact that the other players may be professional card players with considerable experience. What is needed is a game that may be based on poker but that does not require a player to play directly against another human player. It is further desirable that player actions such as increasing the bet and folding the hand can be performed without time consuming bluffing and attempting to read other players, to provide acceptable turnaround time per hand. It is further desirable that the game is not intimidating to new or inexperienced players. It is further desirable that the game maintain some elements of successive betting and have a method of play and payout structure that maintains player interest.

[0005] Gambling enterprises such as casinos have benefited from several recent inventions. For example, U.S.

Patent Application Publication No. 2005/0239546 (“the ‘546 Publication”) discloses a player-tracking unit that provides a display and a player-tracking controller designed or configured to provide a web browser on the display. The player-tracking unit may include input devices for receiving selections associated with the web browser. Player-tracking programs provide rewards to players that typically correspond to the player’s level of patronage, e.g., to the player’s playing frequency or total amount of games played. Rewards may be free meals, free lodging, or free entertainment. These player-tracking and accounting systems are used in most casinos. The player-tracking account server is designed to store player-tracking account information, such as information regarding a player’s previous game play, and to calculate player-tracking points based on a player’s game play that may be used as basis for providing rewards to the player. Such programs allow a casino to identify and reward customers based upon their previous game play history. The ‘546 Publication provides player-tracking units with web browsers configured to provide web content through a display on the player-tracking unit. By providing access to web content from a player-tracking unit, content providers, such as gaming establishments having a website, etc., can provide static or dynamic content efficiently at one website. If changes are made to the website, all of these users will receive the updated information without the content provider needing to update various channels of communication. The ‘546 Publication does not disclose a stand-alone game device that can accumulate game points for later uploading or an interactive website. Also, the ‘546 Publication does not disclose prize competitions based on points accumulated by playing the game.

[0006] U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2005/0208989 (“the ‘989 Publication”) discloses methods of and systems for playing tournament-style games, such as the World Series of Poker. The ‘989 Publication provides a wagering game of skill is provided wherein a game player is eligible to play the wagering game of skill through the use of an alternative method of entry (“AMOE”). The wagering game of skill may be available to be played on a communication network or by submitting an entry by mail or over the Internet. The AMOE entry may be used by a player to enter a game against the house or against other players. An entry to play against other players may include entry into a tournament where the house retains part of all paid entry fees; the retained house fees may be used to pay the entrance fee at a full or reduced rate for AMOE entries in the tournament. Components of the system include payment methods, payout methods, and game engines, all of which may be implemented by using software, hardware, and firmware, including application-specific integrated circuits (“ASICs”).

[0007] U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2003/0070178 (“the ‘178 Publication”) discloses an electronic poker tournament system for providing gaming tournaments in a computer-networked environment comprising several servers and a database. The gaming system adjusts to several styles of poker. Instead of programming a single style or various styles of poker, the system reads its tournament settings from a script file and reads its poker rules from a data file. The server is a software process that perpetually runs on the system hardware. The functions of the lounge server include orchestrating and managing various tournaments and ring games including the merging of tables and

tracking participating players, spawning table servers when appropriate for tournaments, sending and receiving messages to and from the lounge client to receive player input and provide the player with updated information, and reading from and writing to the database to obtain or store necessary information on players, ring games, or tournaments. The lounge server may send messages to table servers to direct the servers to modify game parameters such as changing the type of game or the betting limits of the game. Each player who wants to participate in the system must have their own lounge client, as players do not directly interact with the lounge server. When a player is ready to participate, he loads up his lounge client. The lounge client automatically connects to the lounge server. A database tracks a player's user name and contains player specific information such as the player's real name, credit card information, a postal mailing address, the number of chips, recent usage of the system, and game specific information such as the last five hands that the player has played.

[0008] U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2005/0102047 is directed to a system and method for playing a team gaming tournament that allows players to form teams of one or more players in order to allow a team's performance in a gaming tournament to be dependent on both the performance of each individual member of the team as well as the number of players on each team. The method includes permitting a plurality of users to enter a game, forming teams, sending user input to the server, and calculating a placement finish for each team in the gaming tournament in conformity with a predetermined formula having dependence on both a number of users and a performance of each user. For example, the gaming tournament may be managed by a live or Internet casino and is a poker gaming tournament.

[0009] U.S. Pat. No. 6,935,952 discloses a remote gaming system whereby a player can gamble against a wagering establishment or lottery from a remote location on a personal computer or portable computer device where it is unnecessary to establish an on-line connection with a host computer associated with the wagering establishment. The gaming computer has associated gaming software for providing at least one wagering opportunity and enabling the player to obtain gambling credit and cash-out any resulting winnings. The host computer enables the player to purchase and redeem gambling credit at the remote location in one embodiment of the invention using cryptographic protocols such as through a series of authenticatable message exchanges between the player and the wagering establishment, the gaming computer and the host computer directly on-line. The gaming computer can also have a detachable tamper-resistant or tamper-evident credit module associated therewith or for use with a personal computer being provided to the player with preinstalled or preloaded gambling credit. The gaming system also enables participation in future events of which the outcome is uncertain such as, for example, a lottery whereby the player makes selections on a gaming computer at a remote location. Software can be provided that instructs the gaming computer to read unique magnetic characteristics of the specific data storage media on which gaming software is made available for installation, for the purpose of creating a unique authenticatable message to be read and authenticated by the wagering establishment to reveal any unauthorized duplication of, or tampering with, data on that disk or data storage media.

[0010] There lacks, however, a portable electronic game device programmed for playing poker, particularly "No-Limit Texas Hold 'Em" against a plurality of virtual opponents or players that each have predefined characteristics, the device having a personal computer interface, a memory accumulator for cumulatively storing earned points, and a means of communication with a hosted website or remote server computer that tracks unique identifiers for the game device and its associated player and allows the player to compete with other players for prizes based on the total accumulated points earned by the individual player or to obtain universal rankings.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] In an embodiment, the present invention is directed to a portable game device programmed for playing No-Limit Texas Hold 'Em, with a communications interface (e.g., a serial or USB interface), a plurality of virtual "players" having predefined characteristics, and a memory accumulator for cumulatively storing points, wherein the serial or USB port is optionally accessible to a hosted website, and wherein the website tracks unique identifiers for the game device and its associated player/subscriber, and allows the player/subscriber to compete with other subscribers for prizes based on the total accumulated points earned by the individual player/subscriber, and to obtain universal rankings. In certain aspects, the present invention does not enable the user to compete directly with other human players in a poker game, but rather provides defined virtual players that play the game against the user, in order to determine the points accumulated by the user. The present invention also provides for resetting the stakes of the various virtual players based on the accumulated points of the user. The communications interface of the game device of the present invention is used for transferring points accumulated on the game device to a server, and it is generally not used for communication with master gaming controllers or for tracking players' patronage for the purpose of determining rewards. The game device is programmed for multiple virtual players with whom the user competes to accumulate points, which may be accumulated from one session to the next. In an embodiment, accumulated points are used as a basis for setting the stakes of a new session. The invention also provides a website or server accessible over the Internet, or similar communication means, for registering player award points.

[0012] Other features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following more detailed description of the preferred embodiment, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, which illustrate, by way of example, the principles of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] FIG. 1 is an example game device of the invention.

[0014] FIG. 2 illustrates a scheme by which players use a game device to accumulate points and to communicate with a server.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0015] Referring to FIG. 1, an example game device 4 is shaped like a map of the State of Texas, and it is configured to allow the player to play Texas No-Limit Hold 'Em poker,

although in principle the device could be configured to allow play of any of a variety of poker games. Such poker varieties, which are within the scope of the present invention, are described in detail in Robert's Rules of Poker, which is incorporated herein by reference.

[0016] In Texas Hold 'Em, each player is dealt two hole cards face down. Five community cards are dealt face-up in the center of the table, which also may be called the board. The player who makes the best five-card poker hand with any combination of his hole cards and the five community cards wins the round. In a conventional Texas Hold 'Em game, a disc or other marker is used to indicate which player is the dealer for the round. In electronic game device **4** of the invention the dealer is similarly identified.

[0017] Before the cards are dealt, the two players to the left of the dealer post forced bets called blinds. The player immediately to the left of the dealer posts a bet called the small blind, which is usually equal to half of the minimum bet. The player to the left of the small blind posts the big blind, which is equal to the minimum bet. The hole cards are dealt to each player face down and the player to the left of the big blind starts the betting. In the first round of betting, each player has three options: call, raise or fold. To call, the player must place a bet that is equal to the last bet placed. For the first player in the round, this would be equal to the minimum bet. A player may choose to raise his bet by an additional amount, which the other players will then have to call. If a player's hole cards are not favorable, the player may simply choose to fold and sit out the round.

[0018] After all the players have finished the first round of betting, the first three community cards are dealt face up on the board. This is called the flop. The second and all subsequent betting rounds start with the first player to the dealer's left, and players now have the option to check. By checking, the player indicates interest in the pot without placing a bet. Any player may choose to place a bet, which the other players must then call. Players can still raise, if a bet has been made, or fold if their hand is not favorable. After all remaining players have bet (or folded) the flop, the fourth community card is dealt face-up. This is the turn card. The minimum bet doubles in the last two rounds of betting in Limit Texas Hold 'Em, while in No Limit Texas Hold 'Em the minimum bet is usually the amount equal to the big blind. After the turn betting round, the fifth and final community card is dealt. This is the river card. A final round of betting ensues, and each player turns their hole cards face up in the order in which they bet. Players can muck their hole cards (throw them in the used card pile) if an opponent has shown a better hand. The highest hand that can be made with any combination of the player's hole cards and the five community cards wins the pot. If two or more players have the same hand, the next highest card in the player's hand (the kicker) is used to break a tie. If there is no kicker card, then the pot is split between them. The dealer button is then passed clockwise to the next player and another round of play begins.

[0019] There are at least three kinds of Hold 'Em games. In fixed limit games, bets and raises are set at a fixed amount. A typical fixed limit game would be \$1/\$2 (\$1 minimum bet for the first two rounds, and \$2 minimum for the last two rounds.) The big blind would be equal to the minimum bet (\$1) and the small blind would be half the minimum bet (\$0.50). Raises are capped at a maximum number of bets, generally four. New players will start with low-limit games

and gradually work their way up to higher limits as their skill progresses. In No Limit Hold 'Em, the maximum bet is determined by the number of chips you have in front of you. Players can bet and raise by any amount, and at any time, a player can go "all-in" by betting all of his chips. To call, the other players at the table must match their opponent's all-in bet.

[0020] The game device **4** of the present invention is programmable and has an on-board microprocessor or chip. The processor or chip is programmed to allow the device user to play poker according to a predetermined set of rules, e.g., No-Limit Texas Hold 'Em. The device **4** is enabled with a computer communications interface **12** (e.g., USB port or other serial or parallel communication link or wireless communications protocol as well known in the art), to permit the device **4** to communicate with a host website via a local computer (not shown) to which the device **4** is connected. Each device carries a unique identifier or serial number. An example game device **4** is depicted in FIG. 1, in which the game device **4** housing is a sealed housing shaped like the state of Texas, and includes a screen **14** shaped like a Texas Hold 'Em table. In this example embodiment, the housing includes a plurality of selector buttons for inputting user selections in response to game-generated conditions. Of course, other geometries, shapes and configurations will be readily appreciated by one of skill in the art.

[0021] Selector buttons **16-24** are provided for the following functions: fold **16**, check **18**, bet **20**, raise **22**, call **24**, and clear bet **36**. Also, the selector buttons **16-24** may be numbered to permit the user to enter a unique, assigned pass code for the game user to secure the device from unauthorized users. Other features of the game device are switches **26-30** for on/off **26**, sound **28**, and speed of play **30**. A speaker **32** (or other sound reproduction means) provides audio features, such as dealer instructions and preprogrammed audible comments from virtual players and audience, an AC/DC power port **34** for plugging a power adapter into a wall socket, an internal tamperproof mechanism (not shown) and a battery compartment and battery power supply (not shown). Additional selector buttons, which provide additional functionality, may be provided.

[0022] The embedded program, logic or algorithms of the device are configured to store point totals for the current game and cumulatively over a predetermined period of time, e.g., one month, one year, or other period. The program also provides virtual competitors from a random draw of multiple player types. In an embodiment, there are seven virtual players and one live player at the beginning of game play. If a virtual player is eliminated there will be one less player and so on. If and when there is only the live player left, the table will reset with new virtual players. If the live player can eliminate all virtual players, then the player may be awarded bonus points.

[0023] Each of the virtual players is defined by a style pool of various poker-playing styles including, for example, "fast" (aggressive with lot of betting and raising, also plays many hands but also will fold a sub-par hand if player at the table plays back at him aggressively), "tight" (selective in hands played), "solid" (selective hands played and good emotional control and sound play), "erratic" (plays tight, but will get bored and play fast if player doesn't catch cards for a while), "aggressive" (plays solid hands aggressively), "call station" (will call bets with mediocre cards), "Fort Knox" (will only play the premium hands), "loose" (plays many

hands to at least the flop), “good” (plays good hands, raises if weakness is sensed), “fisherman” (if player catches a draw on the flop, players will call high bets to possibly catch players draw), “bluffer” (loves to win by bluffing opponents out of the hand), “mood changer” (plays different during play, may change from a tight player to a call station, for example), and “slow” (will play a very good hand slow, not betting high or checking). Other player styles may be included. The various styles may be preprogrammed to cause the virtual players responses to follow a predetermined algorithm or profile of game conditions.

[0024] The program may also include a bias towards competitors of certain styles for players who have recently lost several consecutive hands. In the art, this may be referred to as “tilt,” which is a change in a player’s style for a time period. This change may be caused by other players, not receiving suitable hands from the dealer, not winning hands, and the like. Tilt may vary for different players and last different amounts of time. Some players actually play fewer hands and better cards while others may play any hand and bet aggressively. More experienced better players do not go on tilt or minimize the amount of time they go on tilt.

[0025] The game device onboard memory records the number of hands played, the dates on which the hands were played, accumulated points, and the like. Points may be dollars or any other currency, real or fictitious, or any other valuation system. When the game is turned off, the accumulated points remain stored. In an embodiment of the invention, when the user turns on the game again, the other virtual players of the game are provided with an initial points stake equal to the game users accumulated points. The blind betting structure (or the opening bet) for the game is predetermined and may be based on the highest stake of any player in the current hand, for example: for a \$1000 to \$2000 stake, a \$10 to \$20 blind bet is required; \$2001-\$4000, \$20-\$40 blind bet; \$4001-\$7000, \$40-\$80 blind bet; \$7001-\$10000, \$80-\$160 blind bet; \$10001-\$15000, \$150-\$300 blind bet; \$15001-\$30000, \$500-\$1000 blind bet; etc.

[0026] Referring next to FIG. 2, the game device 4 may be used solely as a stand-alone poker game. A game device 4 is also interactive with a website hosted by the game sponsor through a general-purpose computer server or other web-accessible device 10. The website provides the game user 2 with an automatic way to track points, track serial number, save player information, associate serial number with player information, etc. The website allows the user 2 to compete with other players for prizes based on total accumulated game points. The prizes are offered over predetermined award periods, and are based on player rankings among the total group of game players. Also included on the website may be important dates; banners; marketing; sale of merchandise; user agreement or other legal information; chat room; contact information such as phone, e-mail (for technical support); general information; and downloadable programs to be installed on the game user’s local computer 6 for interfacing the computer with the game device 4. From the game device 4, the website also obtains information such as the game device’s serial number, accumulated points, hands played, number of times the user went bust, and the overall winning percentage of the game user 2. The website also has the ability to clear points from a game user’s device 4, for example, after the close of a prize award time period. Also,

the website can provide updates for device sound, commentary, etc. and game revisions such as a release new style of player, etc.

[0027] In an example embodiment, the device 4 is a No Limit Texas Hold ’Em game, including an eight-player table with one real player, i.e., the game user 2, and seven computer generated virtual players, which are randomly drawn from a group of player styles. The game starts with all players having a set number of points, e.g., 1000 points. Every time machine is turned off or player wins all points at the table the machine resets. Upon reset, the randomly generated virtual players are provided with the same number of points that the live player has. Betting may be in multiples of the big blind, until all-in. For example, if the big blind is 20 points and a player has 250 points left to play with, then the player must bet in multiples of 20 (the big blind). If the player wishes to go “all in” as he or she presses the raise button it will raise the desired bet by 20 every time until no points are left to bet. In this case the final time the player presses the raise button, he or she will be adding 10 points to the bet and not 20. The player may also hold the raise button down to speed up the process, which will accumulate bets faster. When the player reaches the desired bet, he or she presses the bet button.

[0028] To bet, the raise button 22 is used to indicate the desired amount, and then hit the bet button 20. If a user mistakenly presses the raise button 22 too many times, a clear button 36 may be pressed to clear the bet. At a designated time, a user may transfer accumulated points to a host website for chances to win prizes.

[0029] Access to the website server may be restricted and require authentication with a password or other security protocol or device such as a digital certificate. The website is secure and tracks all players information such as points, number of hands played, etc. The first time a user logs on to the website with a device attached to, e.g., a USB port, a client program on the user’s personal computer 6, which may be downloaded from the server 10, will recognize the serial number (or other unique identification means) of the game device 4. The client program may facilitate communication between the computer and the server via TCP/IP over the Internet. The website may request information for any unique serial number, such as the user’s full name, a user name, address, phone number, age, birthday, consent to agree or disagree to a legal disclaimer, and the like. The website may also display prize schedules and important dates, advertisements, or other marketing tools, e.g., hot links (URLs), etc. Cash and prizes may be random and not guaranteed, but the odds of winning cash and prizes increase as more points are accumulated. At specified dates players may log points onto the website server, which may then be publicly available. The website has the ability to clear machine points remotely and reset the points on a machine at 1000. The website also is able to update virtual player characteristics and sound effects, including new player characteristics to replace one or more of the original virtual players.

[0030] In a typical embodiment, a consumer purchases a game device of the invention. Referring to FIG. 2, the user 2 may simply just play the game 4 by manually manipulating 3 the device 4, or the user 2 may connect 5 the device 4 to a personal computer 6, for example, by a USB or serial port, a wireless communications protocol, an ethernet connection, or the like. Once connected, the user 2 logs onto the Internet

8, and connects 7 to a server 10 hosting a website. The hosted website has downloadable programs enabling the device 4 to communicate 7, 9 with the server 10 via the Internet 8. Available on the website are hot links, banners, poker tips, and advertisements. The user 2 would also have a choice to register the handheld machine 4. In order to qualify for prizes in each contest period, an individual user must register the device 4 with the server 10, preferably through an automatic process over the Internet 8. When registering the device 4, the user 2 may be asked a series of questions in order to provide information to the host website server 10, such as the user's name, address, user name, password, and the like, which will bind the device 4 uniquely to a specific user 2. This information will be linked with the serial number of device 4 being registered, each device has an individual, unique serial number. Also, the user 2 must agree to a legal disclaimer on the host website server 10 to receive permission to participate.

[0031] Once registered, all points accumulated on the device 4 are automatically reset to zero and the player's cumulative total for the current contest period are posted on website. The consumer would now be eligible for any current contests available on the host website server 10. Starting at a predetermined date, the device 4 will enable the user 2 to accumulate points to be transferred to the host website server 10 to qualify for prizes. Contest periods are typically for predetermined time periods. The more points accumulated the better the players chances are of winning a prize. Prizes are random but more chances are given to players that rank higher or accumulate more points in a given game period.

[0032] Players are ranked by the total accumulation of points over all of the past contest periods. The top group may be regarded as "pros", the second group may be "experts", the third group may be "intermediate", and so on. If points are not registered by cut-off date in a contest period, a user 2 may not be eligible until a next contest period. Each individual must register/clear points for each contest by a certain cut-off date to be eligible for each contest period. If a user 2 misses a cut-off date the player must log on to have points cleared to be eligible for next contest period. Those points cleared after the cut-off dates are not credited toward player rankings. Each contest winner is subject to verification of his or her machine to ensure that the machine has not been tampered with in any way. Contest winners, schedules, prizes, and cut-off dates will be posted and updated accordingly on the website. Users 2 who register their handheld device are also be able to download updates for their machines. Updates may include, but not be limited to commentary, sounds, and player styles. At the end of a predetermined contest series (multiple contests) a new game device 4 or a renewed membership on an existing game device 4 will be required to participate in the next series.

[0033] While the invention has been described with reference to a preferred embodiment, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted for elements thereof without departing from the scope of the invention. In addition, many modifications may be made to adapt a particular situation or material to the teachings of the invention without departing

from the essential scope thereof. Therefore, it is intended that the invention not be limited to the particular embodiment disclosed as the best mode contemplated for carrying out this invention, but that the invention will include all embodiments falling within the scope of the appended claims.

1. A portable electronic game device programmed for playing a poker game comprising a computer communications interface; a plurality of programmed virtual players having predefined characteristics; and a memory accumulator for cumulatively storing points; wherein said interface is accessible to a hosted website server, and wherein said server tracks unique identifiers for said device and its associated user and allows said user to compete with others based on the total accumulated points earned by said user or to obtain universal rankings.

2. The device of claim 1, wherein said poker game is No-Limit Texas Hold 'Em.

3. The device of claim 1, wherein said interface is a serial or parallel communication link or wireless communications protocol.

4. The device of claim 3, wherein said serial communications link is a USB interface that is accessible to a hosted website.

5. The device of claim 1, wherein said programmed virtual players having predefined characteristics are selected from the group consisting of fast, tight, solid, erratic, aggressive, call station, Fort Knox, loose, good, fisherman, bluffer, mood changer, and slow players.

6. The device of claim 1, wherein said device is capable of being programmed with additional programmed virtual players having predefined characteristics.

7. The device of claim 1, wherein said device comprises selector buttons for the following functions: fold, check, bet, raise, call, and clear bet.

8. The device of claim 1, wherein said device comprises an internal tamperproof mechanism.

9. The device of claim 1, wherein said device comprises a battery power supply.

10. The device of claim 1, wherein said device has a unique serial number or other unique identification means.

11. The device of claim 1 further comprising a computer program executable on a client computer that communicates with said device and said server.

12. The device of claim 1, wherein said client computer and said server communicate via TCP/IP.

13. The device of claim 1 further comprising a speaker that provides audio features.

14. The device of claim 13, wherein said audio features include dealer instructions or preprogrammed audible comments from virtual players and audience.

15. The device of claim 13, wherein said device is capable of being programmed with additional audio features.

16. A method of conducting a poker tournament comprising the steps of accumulating points for each participating user during a predetermined time period using a device of claim 1; transferring accumulated from said device to a hosted website server while resetting accumulated points on said device, all points being either transferred to said server prior to the conclusion of said time period or being forfeited;

and comparing the total points for all of said users transferred to said server at the conclusion of said time period.

17. The method of claim **16**, wherein said website tracks unique identifiers for the game device and its associated user, and allows said user to compete with other subscribers for prizes based on the total accumulated points earned by the user, and to obtain universal rankings.

18. The method of claim **16**, wherein said interface is used for transferring points accumulated on the game device to said server.

19. The method of claim **16**, wherein accumulated points are used as a basis for setting the stakes of a new session.

20. The method of claim **16**, further comprising a step of awarding prizes based on the number of accumulated points that have been transferred to said server during said predetermined time period.

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