DUAL WAGERING GAME AND AMUSEMENT-STYLE GAMING UNIT AND METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR AWARDING REWARDS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[001] The present invention relates to gaming devices or machines.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[002] The wagering game industry (casinos, related gaming establishments and the manufacturers of casino-style games) continues to strive to make their gaming machines attractive to players. One dynamic is that younger people have grown up playing video amusement games (such as arcade-style games or such games presented via a home gaming console) where they are actively involved in the game and the outcome thereof. These younger players have shown less interest in playing standard slot and video poker gaming machines than older generations of players.

[003] As a result, the wagering gaming industry has experienced a push to move from chance-based gaming to skill-based gaming. Thus far, this approach has had limited success. Several companies have created skill-based video-style wagering games. These games play more like a mobile, PC, or video arcade game than a traditional slot game. The reasons for the limited success of these games are many and varied, but the fact is this approach has not been successful.

[004] A gaming device which addresses these and other problems is desired.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[005] One ~~aspect~~embodiment of the present invention is a "dual" gaming unit or machine which is configured to implement both one or more traditional casino-style wagering games (casino-style games where the outcomes of the games are determined primarily by chance and not skill) and one or more games which are traditionally not casino style games, such as amusement-type games or games having amusement-type game components, such as games where the outcome is determined substantially by skill.

[006] In one embodiment, the "dual" gaming unit or machine may comprise a housing, an amusement-type game device comprising a prize area for containing one or more prizes for winning as a result of the play of the amusement-type game device, at least one player input device for receiving input from a player to control the amusement-type game device, at least one display device visible through the prize area, a monetary-value receiving device for creating a monetary value credit balance at the gaming machine, a processor configured to

execute machine-readable code stored in memory to present at least one wagering game to the player in response to a wager placed from the monetary value credit balance, comprising presenting wagering game information on at least one of the display devices, determining an outcome of the wagering game and awarding winnings for winning outcomes of the wagering game, and activating the amusement-type game device for play by the player one or more times.

[007] ~~Additional aspects~~Further embodiments of the present invention comprise a gaming system which includes one or more prize or promotional servers and one or more gaming machines of the invention, wherein at one or more times the promotional server may award a player who is engaged in the play of wagering games at the gaming machine the opportunity to play the amusement game, such as for an additional prize.

[008] According to a first~~nother~~ aspect of the present invention, there is ~~a~~provided a rewards system for awarding a prize to a player of a gaming machine which is configured to present at least one wagering game, wherein the prize is awarded separate from any winnings awarded by the gaming machine for a winning wagering game outcome. The rewards system may comprise a prize rewards server comprising a processor, memory and machine-readable code stored in the memory and executable by the processor, the rewards server in communication with the gaming machine and an automated prize redemption unit having a housing which defines a prize storage area, a controller, a media reader and a prize dispenser which is controlled by the controller and configured to deliver a prize from the prize storage area to a dispensing area, wherein the machine-readable code of the rewards server is configured to cause the processor of the rewards server to compare activity information obtained from the gaming machine to criteria associated with one or more stored prize events and when criteria for one of the prize events has been met, to command the gaming machine to issue a media from a media dispenser of the gaming machine to the player and store information regarding the media and an awarded prize, and when the media is read by the media reader of the prize redemption unit and information regarding the media is received from the prize redemption unit, compare the information regarding the media received from the prize redemption unit against the stored information to determine if the media is valid, and if so, cause the controller of said prize redemption unit to cause the prize dispenser to dispense the awarded prize from the prize storage area to the player at the dispensing area.

[008a] According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a rewards system for awarding a prize to a player of a gaming machine which is configured to present at

least one wagering game, wherein said prize is awarded separate from any winnings awarded by said gaming machine for a winning wagering game outcome, comprising:

a prize rewards server, said rewards server comprising a processor, memory and machine-readable code stored in said memory and executable by said processor, said rewards server in communication with said gaming machine; and

an amusement-type prize-play device comprising:

a housing defining a prize area for containing one or more prizes for winning as a result of the play of the amusement-type game device;

a moveable prize play mechanism;

a controller;

at least one player input device, said at least one player input device comprising a device for receiving input from a player to control movable prize play mechanism; and

a media reader;

said machine-readable code of said rewards server configured to cause said processor of said rewards server to:

compare activity information obtained from said gaming machine to criteria associated with one or more stored prize events;

when criteria for one of said prize events has been met, to command said gaming machine to issue a media from a media dispenser of said gaming machine to said player and store information regarding said media;

when said media is read by said media reader of said amusement-type prize play device and information regarding said media is received therefrom, compare said information regarding said media received from said amusement-type prize play device against said stored information to determine if said media is valid; and

when said media is validated, to cause said controller of said amusement-type prize play device to permit said player to play said amusement-type prize play device in an attempt to win a prize from said prize area thereof by providing input to said at least one player input device to move said moveable prize play mechanism.

[009] According to a third aspect ~~Yet another embodiment~~ of the present invention, there is provided ~~comprises~~ a casino player tracking system configured to ~~re~~award awards to a player, comprising a plurality of gaming machines configured to present wager-based games to a

player having a player tracking account, a player tracking server configured to track game play by the player at the plurality of gaming machines and, at one or more times, award a free amusement style game play to the player and associate the award with the player's player tracking account, an amusement-type prize-play device

comprising a housing defining a prize area for containing one or more prizes for winning as a result of the play of the amusement-type game device, a moveable prize play mechanism, a controller, at least one player input device comprising a device for receiving input from a player to control movable prize play mechanism, and a media reader, the controller configured to read a presented player tracking card and communicate with the player tracking server to obtain information regarding the award and permit the player to play the amusement-type prize-play device, wherein if the outcome of the play is a winning outcome, the controller is configured to award a prize to the player.

[009a] According to a fourth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a gaming machine comprising:

a housing;

an amusement-type game device comprising a prize area for containing one or more prizes for winning as a result of the play of the amusement-type game device;

at least one player input device, said at least one player input device comprising a device for receiving input from a player to control the amusement-type game device;

at least one display device visible through said prize area;

a monetary-value receiving device for creating a monetary value credit balance at the gaming machine;

a processor, said processor configured to execute machine-readable code stored in memory to:

present at least one wagering game to said player in response to a wager placed from said monetary value credit balance, comprising presenting wagering game information on at least one of the display devices;

determine an outcome of said wagering game and award winnings for winning outcomes of said wagering game; and

activate said amusement-type game device for play by said player one or more times.

[0010] Further objects, features, and advantages of the present invention over the prior art will become apparent from the detailed description of the drawings which follows, when considered with the attached figures.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] FIGURES 1A and 1B illustrate embodiments of a gaming machine of the invention;

[0012] FIGURES 1C, 1D and 1E illustrate variations of configurations of video displays of the gaming machines illustrated in Figures 1A and 1B;

[0013] FIGURE 1F illustrates a variation of the gaming machines illustrated in Figures 1A and 1B as including a touch screen;

[0014] FIGURE 1G illustrates a variation of the gaming machine illustrated in Figure 1A as including a front panel configured as a game display;

[0015] FIGURE 2 is a block diagram of a configuration of features of a gaming machine of the invention;

[0016] FIGURES 3 and 4 illustrate aspects of embodiments of a gaming machine of the invention;

[0017] FIGURE 5 illustrates one embodiment of a gaming system in accordance with the present invention;

[0018] FIGURE 6 illustrates one example prize award and redemption flow in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

[0019] FIGURE 7 illustrates another example prize award and redemption flow in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

[0020] FIGURE 8 illustrates another example prize award and redemption flow in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A rewards system for awarding a prize to a player of a gaming machine which is configured to present at least one wagering game, wherein said prize is awarded separate from any winnings awarded by said gaming machine for a winning wagering game outcome, comprising:

a prize rewards server, said rewards server comprising a processor, memory and machine-readable code stored in said memory and executable by said processor, said rewards server in communication with said gaming machine; and

an automated prize redemption unit, said prize redemption unit having a housing which defines a prize storage area, a controller, a media reader and a prize dispenser which is controlled by said controller and configured to deliver a prize from said prize storage area to a dispensing area;

said machine-readable code of said rewards server configured to cause said processor of said rewards server to:

compare activity information obtained from said gaming machine to criteria associated with one or more stored prize events;

when criteria for one of said prize events has been met, to command said gaming machine to issue a media from a media dispenser of said gaming machine to said player and store information regarding said media and an awarded prize;

when said media is read by said media reader of said prize redemption unit and information regarding said media is received from said prize redemption unit, compare said information regarding said media received from said prize redemption unit against said stored information to determine if said media is valid; and

when said media is validated, to cause said controller of said prize redemption unit to cause said prize dispenser to dispense the awarded prize from said prize storage area to said player at said dispensing area.

2. A rewards system for awarding a prize to a player of a gaming machine which is configured to present at least one wagering game, wherein said prize is awarded separate from any winnings awarded by said gaming machine for a winning wagering game outcome, comprising:

a prize rewards server, said rewards server comprising a processor, memory and machine-readable code stored in said memory and executable by said processor, said rewards server in communication with said gaming machine; and

an amusement-type prize-play device comprising:

a housing defining a prize area for containing one or more prizes for winning as a result of the play of the amusement-type game device;

a moveable prize play mechanism;

a controller;

at least one player input device, said at least one player input device comprising a device for receiving input from a player to control movable prize play mechanism; and

a media reader;

said machine-readable code of said rewards server configured to cause said processor of said rewards server to:

compare activity information obtained from said gaming machine to criteria associated with one or more stored prize events;

when criteria for one of said prize events has been met, to command said gaming machine to issue a media from a media dispenser of said gaming machine to said player and store information regarding said media;

when said media is read by said media reader of said amusement-type prize play device and information regarding said media is received therefrom, compare said information regarding said media received from said amusement-type prize play device against said stored information to determine if said media is valid; and

when said media is validated, to cause said controller of said amusement-type prize play device to permit said player to play said amusement-type prize play device in an attempt to win a prize from said prize area thereof by providing input to said at least one player input device to move said moveable prize play mechanism.

3. The rewards system in accordance with claim 2, wherein said criteria comprise one or more of: a) an amount lost by said player during game play at said gaming machine; b) an amount wagered by said player at said gaming machine; c) an amount of theoretical loss by said player at said gaming machine; d) an amount won by said player at said gaming machine;

e) a number of games played by said player at said gaming machine; and f) a number of games played by said player at said gaming machine without a winning outcome.

4. The rewards system in accordance with claim 2, wherein said controller of said amusement-type prize-play device is configured to receive information from said rewards server regarding a prize which is awardable to said player via play thereof, and further comprising machine-readable code which is configured to cause said controller to control said moveable prize play mechanism to prevent the award of a prize from said prize area which is not said awardable prize.

5. The rewards system in accordance with claim 4, wherein said movable prize play mechanism comprises a claw and wherein said controller causes said claw to drop a prize grabbed thereby if said prize is not said awardable prize.

6. A casino player tracking system configured to award awards to a player comprising:

a plurality of gaming machines configured to present wager-based games to a player having a player tracking account;

a player tracking server, said player tracking server configured to track game play by said player at said plurality of gaming machines and, at one or more times, award a free amusement style game play to said player and associate said award with said player's player tracking account;

an amusement-type prize-play device comprising:

a housing defining a prize area for containing one or more prizes for winning as a result of the play of the amusement-type game device;

a moveable prize play mechanism;

a controller;

at least one player input device, said at least one player input device comprising a device for receiving input from a player to control movable prize play mechanism; and

a media reader;

said controller configured to read a presented player tracking card and communicate with said player tracking server, to obtain information regarding said award, and to permit said player to play said amusement-type prize-play device, wherein if said outcome of said play is a winning outcome, said controller is configured to award a prize to said player.

7. The casino player tracking system in accordance with claim 6, wherein said amusement-type prize play device is part of one of said gaming machines.

8~~1~~. A gaming machine comprising:

a housing;

an amusement-type game device comprising a prize area for containing one or more prizes for winning as a result of the play of the amusement-type game device;

at least one player input device, said at least one player input device comprising a device for receiving input from a player to control the amusement-type game device;

at least one display device visible through said prize area;

a monetary-value receiving device for creating a monetary value credit balance at the gaming machine;

a processor, said processor configured to execute machine-readable code stored in memory to:

present at least one wagering game to said player in response to a wager placed from said monetary value credit balance, comprising presenting wagering game information on at least one of the display devices;

determine an outcome of said wagering game and award winnings for winning outcomes of said wagering game; and

activate said amusement-type game device for play by said player one or more times.

9~~2~~. The gaming machine in accordance with c~~C~~laim 8~~1~~ wherein said processor is configured to activate said amusement-type game device in response to a signal from an external rewards server.

103. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim 8~~1~~, wherein said prize area is generally enclosed and has a front and a back, wherein said at least one display device is located at said back and wherein an interior of said prize area and said at least one display device is visible through said front.

11.4 The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim 8~~1~~, wherein said amusement-type game device has a player skill component that at least partially determines the outcome of the amusement-type game.

125. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim 114, wherein said amusement-type game device comprises a crane device.

136. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim ~~5~~12, wherein said at least one player input device comprises a joystick for changing a position of said crane device.

147. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim ~~4~~11, wherein said amusement-type game device comprises a coin-pusher device.

~~8~~15. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim 8~~1~~, wherein said prize area is defined by one or more sides.

~~9~~16. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim ~~8~~15, wherein at least a portion of one or more of said sides is transparent at one or more times, allowing said player to see therethrough into said prize area, and is generally opaque at one or more times.

~~10~~17. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim ~~8~~15, wherein at least a portion of one or more of said sides is configured to display information.

18~~1~~. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim 17~~0~~, further comprising a projector configured to project said information onto said side.

192. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim 170, wherein said information comprises advertising.

~~13~~20. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim 170, further comprising a touch screen associated with a least a portion of said side.

~~14~~21. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim ~~1~~8, wherein said prize area has a front, a pair of opposing sides, and a rear, wherein said at least one display device is located in said prize area at said rear, at least a portion of said front being transparent, allowing said player to see said at least one display therethrough.

~~15~~22. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim 8~~1~~, further comprising a prize dispenser configured to dispense a prize from said prize area to said player.

~~16~~23. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim 22~~15~~, wherein said controller is configured to receive information regarding a prize which is awardable to said player via play of said amusement-type game, and further comprising machine-readable code which is configured to cause said controller to control said prize dispenser to prevent the award of a prize from said prize area which is not said awardable prize.

~~17~~24. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim 23~~16~~, wherein said amusement-type device comprises a claw which can be manipulated by said player and wherein said controller causes said claw to drop a prize grabbed thereby if said prize is not said awardable prize.

~~18~~25. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim ~~15~~22, wherein said prize has an RFID tag associated therewith which identifies an award which may be obtained at a location separate from said gaming machine.

~~19~~26. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim ~~16~~23, wherein said prize comprises an egg.

~~20~~27. The gaming machine in accordance with ~~C~~claim ~~17~~24, further comprising a reader configured to read the RFID tag associated with a prize awarded to said player to determine the award associated therewith.

~~21. A rewards system for awarding a prize to a player of a gaming machine which is configured to present at least one wagering game, wherein said prize is awarded separate from any winnings awarded by said gaming machine for a winning wagering game outcome, comprising:~~

~~a prize rewards server, said rewards server comprising a processor, memory and machine readable code stored in said memory and executable by said processor, said rewards server in communication with said gaming machine; and~~

~~an automated prize redemption unit, said prize redemption unit having a housing which defines a prize storage area, a controller, a media reader and a prize dispenser which is controlled by said controller and configured to deliver a prize from said prize storage area to a dispensing area;~~

~~said machine-readable code of said rewards server configured to cause said processor of said rewards server to:~~

~~compare activity information obtained from said gaming machine to criteria associated with one or more stored prize events;~~

~~when criteria for one of said prize events has been met, to command said gaming machine to issue a media from a media dispenser of said gaming machine to said player and store information regarding said media and an awarded prize;~~

~~when said media is read by said media reader of said prize redemption unit and information regarding said media is received from said prize redemption unit, compare said information regarding said media received from said prize redemption unit against said stored information to determine if said media is valid; and~~

~~when said media is validated, to cause said controller of said prize redemption unit to cause said prize dispenser to dispense the awarded prize from said prize storage area to said player at said dispensing area.~~

~~22. A rewards system for awarding a prize to a player of a gaming machine which is configured to present at least one wagering game, wherein said prize is awarded separate~~

from any winnings awarded by said gaming machine for a winning wagering game outcome, comprising:

a prize rewards server, said rewards server comprising a processor, memory and machine readable code stored in said memory and executable by said processor, said rewards server in communication with said gaming machine; and

an amusement type prize play device comprising:

a housing defining a prize area for containing one or more prizes for winning as a result of the play of the amusement-type game device;

a moveable prize play mechanism;

a controller;

at least one player input device, said at least one player input device comprising a device for receiving input from a player to control movable prize play mechanism; and

a media reader;

said machine readable code of said rewards server configured to cause said processor of said rewards server to:

compare activity information obtained from said gaming machine to criteria associated with one or more stored prize events;

when criteria for one of said prize events has been met, to command said gaming machine to issue a media from a media dispenser of said gaming machine to said player and store information regarding said media;

when said media is read by said media reader of said amusement type prize play device and information regarding said media is received therefrom, compare said information regarding said media received from said amusement type prize play device against said stored information to determine if said media is valid; and

when said media is validated, to cause said controller of said amusement type prize play device to permit said player to play said amusement-type prize play device in an attempt to win a prize from said prize area thereof by providing input to said at least one player input device to move said moveable prize play mechanism.

23. The rewards system in accordance with Claim 22, wherein said criteria comprise one or more of: a) an amount lost by said player during game play at said gaming machine; b) an amount wagered by said player at said gaming machine; c) an amount of

theoretical loss by said player at said gaming machine; d) an amount won by said player at said gaming machine; e) a number of games played by said player at said gaming machine; and f) a number of games played by said player at said gaming machine without a winning outcome.

24. The rewards system in accordance with Claim 22, wherein said controller of said amusement type prize play device is configured to receive information from said rewards server regarding a prize which is awardable to said player via play thereof, and further comprising machine readable code which is configured to cause said controller to control said moveable prize play mechanism to prevent the award of a prize from said prize area which is not said awardable prize.

25. The rewards system in accordance with Claim 24, wherein said movable prize play mechanism comprises a claw and wherein said controller causes said claw to drop a prize grabbed thereby if said prize is not said awardable prize.

26. A casino player tracking system configured to award awards to a player comprising:

a plurality of gaming machines configured to present wager-based games to a player having a player tracking account;

a player tracking server, said player tracking server configured to track game play by said player at said plurality of gaming machines and, at one or more times, award a free amusement style game play to said player and associate said award with said player's player tracking account;

an amusement type prize play device comprising:

a housing defining a prize area for containing one or more prizes for winning as a result of the play of the amusement type game device;

a moveable prize play mechanism;

a controller;

at least one player input device, said at least one player input device comprising a device for receiving input from a player to control movable prize play mechanism; and

a media reader;

said controller configured to read a presented player tracking card and communicate with said player tracking server, to obtain information regarding said award, and to permit said

~~player to play said amusement type prize play device, wherein if said outcome of said play is a winning outcome, said controller is configured to award a prize to said player.~~

~~27. The casino player tracking system in accordance with Claim 26, wherein said amusement type prize play device is part of one of said gaming machines.~~