SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PLAYING AN ELECTRONIC CARD GAME

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/939,772, filed September 13, 2004, and claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/610,262 filed on September 16, 2004, both of which are incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to electronic poker tables and more specifically to electronic poker tables with access to player accounts.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Gaming is an increasingly popular form of entertainment. Games, particularly, games of chance and skill in which one or more players play and place wagers on the outcome thereof may be played in a variety of ways, including at a casino or other venue or on the Internet. Of the various forms of games which are available for play, many are played with playing cards. Of these, poker is arguably the most popular.

[0004] Traditionally, poker is played at a table with several players wagering paper, coin money or chips on a series of playing cards dealt from a deck of fifty-two cards. This deck is comprised of four suits at thirteen cards per suit. This form of poker requires a human dealer to coordinate the game, including dealing, wagering, folding, etc. One of the problems with traditional poker is that it suffers from the possibility of human/dealer error. In "social" card games, especially poker, the players take turns acting as the dealer, but in licensed commercial gaming establishments, such as casinos, the dealer is typically a non-playing employee. Thus, another problem associated with traditional poker games in this context is the training and retention of dealers.

[0005] One alternative form of gaming, with particular reference to poker, has flourished on the Internet. Internet gaming has become quite successful in that it provides many choices for the players. In particular, Internet gaming is fast and convenient, with registration, betting and payouts available from almost any computer with Internet access and with payments typically arranged via a pay service, such as PayPayl.

[0006] Video poker or other card games may also be provided by stand-alone machines similar to slot machines.

[0007] One major drawback of Internet and stand-alone type games is the lack of the human element. Many people prefer to play poker against other players, due in part to the drama associated with "live" gaming. Undoubtedly, an elevated level of competition exists when humans compete directly against one another. In gaming establishments, experienced players are trying to hone strategy and read other players' intentions through their movements and style of play to be more competitive.

[0008] The present invention is aimed at one or more of the problems set forth above.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] In one aspect of the present invention, a system for providing an electronic card game to a plurality of players on an electronic card table is provided. The electronic card table has a table top with a playing surface and a plurality of electronic player interaction areas located around a periphery of the table top. Each electronic player interaction area provides a player interface for interaction with one of the players. A database maintains a player account for each player. Each player account includes identification information and a monetary amount. A server computer is coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas and the database for administering the electronic card game using electronic cards and electronic chips. The server computer allows each player to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas, draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account, and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount.

[0010] In a second aspect of the present invention, a method for providing an electronic card game to a plurality of players using a plurality of electronic player interaction areas and a server computer is provided. Each electronic player interaction area provides a player interface for interaction with one of the players. The server computer is coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas. The method includes the steps of providing a database for maintaining a player account for each player, allowing the players to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas, allowing the players to draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and to purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount, and administering, by the server computer, the electronic card game using electronic cards and the electronic chips.

[0011] In a third aspect of the present invention, a method provides an electronic card game to a plurality of players using a plurality of electronic player interaction areas and a

server computer. Each electronic player interaction area provides a player interface for interaction with one of the players. The server computer is coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas. The method includes the steps of allowing the players to sign up for a player account, creating a player account for each player in a database, the player account including identification information, allowing each player to fund the account with a monetary amount and associating the monetary amount with the corresponding player account, allowing the players to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas, and allowing the players to draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] Other advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

[0013] Figure 1 is a diagrammatic illustration of a system for providing an electronic poker game on one or more electronic poker tables, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0014] Figure 2 is a simplified diagram of a table top of the electronic poker tables of Figure 1, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0015] Figure 3 is a simplified diagram of a table top of the electronic poker tables of Figure 1, according to another embodiment of the present invention;

[0016] Figure 4 is a block diagram of the system of Figure 1, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0017] Figure 5 is a second block diagram of the system of Figure 1, including the element of an electronic poker table, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0018] Figure 6 is a diagrammatic illustration of an electronic poker table, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0019] Figure 7 is a top view of the electronic poker table of Figure 6;

[0020] Figure 8 is a diagrammatic illustration of a module of the electronic poker table of Figure 6, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0021] Figure 9 is a representation of a first screen shot displayed on an electronic player interaction area of the system of Figure 1, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0022] Figure 10 is a representation of a second screen shot displayed on an electronic player interaction area of the system of Figure 1, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0023] Figure 11 is a representation of an electronic player interaction area of the system of Figure 1 embodied in a hand-held device;

[0024] Figure 12 is a representation of a front side and a back side of an electronic playing card;

[0025] Figure 13A is a block diagram of software components of the system of the present invention;

[0026] Figure 13B is a simplified block diagram of a system for providing an electronic poker game, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0027] Figure 14 is a block diagram of a system for providing an electronic poker game on an electronic poker table and allowing access to a player account, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0028] Figure 15A is a flow diagram of a method for providing an electronic poker game on an electronic poker table, according to an embodiment of the present invention; and,

[0029] Figure 15B is a flow diagram of a method for providing an electronic poker game on an electronic poker table, according to another embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF INVENTION

[0030] With reference to the drawings and in operation, the present invention relates generally to a system 10 and method for providing, and being related to an electronic card game, such as electronic poker. With specific reference to Figure 1, the system 10 is designed to be situated in a gaming environment, such as a casino 12. Typically, such gaming environments 12 are a specialized or designated area within the casino 12, such as a poker room or poker area 14, which has been cordoned off by, for example, a railing 16. While the above refers to one possible implementation or location in which the system 10 may be used, the present invention is not limited to any such location or implementation. Other details of the system may be found in U.S. Patent Application

Serial Nos. N/A (File No. 60,667-007), N/A (File No. 60,667-008), N/A (File No. 60,667-009), N/A (File No. 60,667-010), N/A (File No. 60,667-011), N/A (File No. 60,667-012), N/A (File No. 60,667-013), N/A (File No. 60,667-014), N/A (File No. 60,667-015), N/A (File No. 60,667-016), N/A (File No. 60,667-017), N/A (File No. 60,667-018), N/A (File No. 60,667-019), N/A (File No. 60,667-020), N/A (File No. 60,667-021), N/A (File No. 60,667-022), N/A (File No. 60,667-024), N/A (File No. 60,667-025), N/A (File No. 60,667-026), N/A (File No. 60,667-027), N/A (File No. 60,667-028), N/A (File No. 60,667-029), N/A (File No. 60,667-030), N/A (File No. 60,667-031) and N/A (File No. 60,667-032), which are hereby incorporated by reference.

[0031] In the illustrated embodiment, the system 10 utilizes electronic chips and electronic playing cards to provide an automated card game for play by two or more players. In one aspect of the present invention, a human dealer is not required. The system 10 may handle all dealer functions.

[0032] The system 10 may be used to play any variation or version of any card game. However, for the purposes of discussion, the system 10 will be described as adapted for use in implementing the version of poker known as, Texas Hold'em.

[0033] In one aspect of the present invention, the system 10 may handle assigning players to a seat, providing electronic chips, accepting wagers, and assigning a pot to the winning player. The system 10 electronically shuffles a set of electronic playing cards and deals the electronic playing cards to the player and any common cards to an electronic card or poker table 18. The system 10 may also handle wagering, folding, calling by the players and may restrict such, based on whose turn it is.

[0034] In another aspect of the present invention, the card or poker tables 18 in the system 10 are networked and connected to one or more servers (see below). The server may be used to implement and facilitate, player tracking, ticket in ticket out (cashless) wagering, assigning players to a seat at a particular table, tournament play, table set-up (including turning the tables on and off and modifying table parameters), and progressive jackpots.

[0035] As shown in the illustrated embodiment, the system 10 includes a plurality of electronic poker tables 18. In the embodiment shown in Figure 1, the system 10 includes five electronic poker tables 18, although the present invention is not limited to a specific number of electronic poker tables.

[0036] A simple representative layout of a table top 20 of the poker tables 18, according to first and second embodiments of the present invention are shown in Figures 2 and 3, respectively.

[0037] In the top view of the table top 20 shown in Figure 2, the table top 20 includes a playing surface 22 and a plurality of electronic player interaction areas 24. In the illustrated embodiment, the poker tables 18 are able to seat a maximum of ten players at a time, and thus, includes ten electronic player interaction areas 24A-24J.

[0038] In the top view of the table top 20 shown in Figure 3 (in which like elements are labeled with the same reference numbers), the table top 20 includes a playing surface 22 and a plurality of electronic player interaction areas (EPIAs) 24. In the illustrated embodiment, the poker tables 18 are able to seat a maximum of ten players at a time, and thus, includes ten electronic player interaction areas 24. The table top 10 also includes a central or common display area (CDA) 26.

[0039] In one embodiment, the individual electronic player interaction areas 24 are used to convey game information directly to a player assigned to a specific electronic player interaction area 24A-24J and to implement a player user interface (see below) to effectuate interaction or input from the player. The central or common display area 26 is used to display information to all of the players.

[0040] For example in one embodiment, the system 10 is used to play the version of poker known as Texas Hold'em. In Texas Hold'em, each player is dealt a number of cards, e.g., two cards, face down. These are known as a player's "hole" cards 28. A number of cards, e.g., three or five, are dealt face-up and displayed in the common display area 26. These are known as the common cards 30. A player's hand, thus, comprises the player's hole cards 28 and the common cards 30. At the end of each hand, of the remaining players, whichever player's hand makes the highest poker hand is the winner of that round or hand of poker.

[0041] In one aspect of the present invention, the hole cards 28 are displayed face-down on the respective electronic player interaction area 24 and the common cards are displayed in the central display area 26. The hole cards 28 are displayed at a first predetermined ratio and the common cards 30 are displayed at a second predetermined ratio. The first and second predetermined ratios may be expressed as a ratio of a standard size playing card or a predetermined default size. In one embodiment, the first and second ratios are the same. In another embodiment, the first and second ratios are

different. For example, the first and second ratios may be defined such that the common cards 30 are displayed larger than the hole cards 28.

[0042] With reference to Figures 6, 7, and 8 in one embodiment, the electronic player interaction areas 24 are implemented using separate display devices, such as touchscreen displays 32. Each display 32 may be housed in a removable module 34.

[0043] The module 34 may incorporate a fully-functional computer. The computer includes a processor capable of running an operating system, such as Windows XP or Windows CE, both available from Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Washington. In one embodiment, the module 34 includes a card reader 36 for reading a player ID card (not shown).

[0044] In the illustrated embodiment, the modules 34 are mounted into the table top 20, such that the touchscreen display 32 is parallel to the table top 20. However, the touchscreen display 32 may be mounted at an angle with respect to the table top 20. Alternatively, the modules 34 may be adjustable to provide an adjustable viewing angle of the touchscreen display 32.

[0045] In one embodiment, the central display area 26 is implemented in a separate display, such as a LCD or plasma monitor or similar device.

[0046] The remainder of the table top may be covered in a material such as felt, or more specifically, green, blue, or red felt. Logos, game information, or other information may be printed on the material.

[0047] In an alternative embodiment, the electronic player interaction areas 24 and the central display area 26 may be implemented in a single display which covers a large portion of the table top. The electronic player interaction areas 24 and the central display area 26 may be set apart from the rest of the table top 20 by virtual borders. The areas of the display around the electronic player interaction areas 24 and the central display area 26 may be used to simulate the table top of a standard poker table, e.g., an image of material, such as green felt, may be displayed. Furthermore, logos, game information, other information, advertisements, announcements, pictures, videos, or other information may be displayed, rotated, cycled, or displayed for a limited period of time on the table top 20 and/or the electronic player interaction areas 24.

[0048] As discussed below, the system 10 and poker tables 18, although electronic, are designed to convey and retain the overall sense and ambience of a standard poker room with non-electrical poker tables. Each electronic poker table 18 is surrounded by a

number of poker chairs 40. The number of poker chairs 40 being equal to the number of electronic player interaction areas 24 on the electronic poker table 18.

[0049] With particular reference to Figures 6 and 7, in the illustrated embodiment the poker tables 18 have an oval shape and may seat a maximum number of players. For example, the poker tables 18 may be sized to seat a maximum of 7, 8, 9, 10, or 11 players, although the present invention is not limited to any particular sized poker table. As stated above the table top is covered, in between the electronic player interaction area 24, and the central or common display area 26 if provided, by material, such as green felt, or simulation thereof. The poker table includes one or more bases 42 to which one or more legs 44 are connected. The legs 44 support the table top. A rail or bumper 46 encircles the outer circumference of the table top 20.

[0050] With specific reference to Figures 4 and 5, as discussed above the system 10 may include one or more electronic poker tables 18. In one aspect of the present invention, the poker tables 18 are networked together using, e.g., an Ethernet network 48. One or more servers 50 may be used to provide functionality for the system 10. For example, the server 50 may be used to implement various functions, including, but not limited to:

- starting and stopping the tables 18 on a game,
- data and player tracking,
- cashless wagering,
- defining and modifying table parameters, including, turning the tables 18 on and off, setting the poker game being played at the table 18, setting wager parameters, etc.,
- defining and managing jackpots, including the a house percentage, i.e., the rake,
- defining and managing progressive jackpots,
- establishing and managing a queue for players and assigning players to seats and/or specific tables from the queue, and
- establishing and managing tournament play, including assigning player seats, collapsing tables, etc.

[0051] With particular reference to Figure 5, in one embodiment each table 18 includes ten electronic player interaction areas 24 which are implemented in the computer based modules 34. Each module 34 is connected to the server 50 through the network 48. As shown, another computer 52, such as a personal computer running on Windows XP, may

also be connected to the server 50 through the network 48. The primary function of the PC 52 may be to control and drive the central display area 26.

[0052] In one embodiment, the server 50 runs the poker games on each of the tables 18. The primary function of the modules 34 is to run the electronic player interaction areas 24, to display and run a user interface.

[0053] In another embodiment, the poker game or portions of the poker game may be executed or run by the modules 34 and/or the computer 52.

[0054] In another aspect of the present invention, the system 10 will implement a player-account based cash in/cash out system. The system 10 will create a user account for each player. Once an account is established for the player, the player is issued a Player Card having an associated personal identification number or PIN. Once the player has been issued a Player Card, their account may be funded. The Player Card is used to identify the player at the tables 18. The player may fund their account by bringing cash to a cage, where the cash is accepted and credited to the player's account. Printed receipts are given to the player and maintained by the casino 12. To bring electronic chips to the table 18, the player sits down at a seat, swipes their Player Card and enters their PIN. The system 10 informs the player of their account balance and allows them to convert all or a portion of the account balance to electronic chips to bring to the game.

[0055] With particular reference to Figure 13A, from a software perspective the system 10 may be implemented using six program groups: a game engine 82, a table server 84, a table client 86, a player client 88, a table manager 90, and a cage manager 92. The table server 84 implements the network communication, control and authentication as well as inter-table functions (seat reservations, multi-table tournaments). The game engine 82 administers the electronic poker game and is responsible for all game functions, e.g., electronic playing card deck generation, dealing, betting, determining winners and awarding pots. The table client 86 is the graphical control for the central display area 26. The player client 90 implements the user interface for the electronic player interaction areas 24 and the logic for capturing player input and communication from the player input to the table client server. The table manager 88 contains the user interface for setting user, network, and game parameters, for starting, pausing, and stopping games, and for monitoring game activity and responding to system or user generated alerts. The cage manager 92 provides the ability to create and fund player accounts and to create the Player Cards.

[0056] With reference to Figures 9 and 10, each electronic player interaction area 24 implements a player interface 54. The player interfaces 54 may be implemented on the table top 20 (see above), or in the module 34. In another embodiment, the player interface 54 may be implemented on a hand-held device 58, such as a personal data assistant (PDA).

[0057] The player interface 54 may be graphical in nature (as shown in Figures 9 and 10), or may take other forms, such as a simple textual format. In one embodiment the electronic player interaction areas 24 provide the player with the option of choosing between several player interfaces 54, such as a graphical representation of an electronic poker table 56 or the text interface.

[0058] Returning to Figures 9 and 10, in one embodiment the player interface 54 includes a graphical representation of a poker table 56. Each player in the poker game may be represented by a user graphic or icon 62, which may list their names as well as their chip totals. The pot of the current hand may be represented in the center of the poker table 56 by stack(s) of chips 64 and/or a number 66 representing the value of the current pot. Each player's contribution to the pot may be represented by stack(s) of chips 68 and/or a number 70 adjacent their user graphic 62.

[0059] The player interface 54 may also include a series of player option buttons 72 and a series of game buttons 74. The player option buttons 72 may include, for example, a sit in button 72A, a leave table button 72B, and an options button 72C. Generally, only one of the sit in button 72A and the leave table button 72B would be active at any time. The options button 72C allows the player to access an option menu or screen (not shown) which allow the player to modify certain parameters of the player interface 54, such as, for example, to choose between different formats of the player interface 54. The series of game buttons 74 allow the player to signal their game play decisions to the system 10 during the play of the game. The game buttons 74 may include a fold button 74A, a call button 74B and a raise button 74C. These typically would only be active when it is a player's turn in the poker game. In one embodiment, the buttons 72 are implemented on the touch screen display devices 32. In an alternative embodiment, the buttons 72 are embodied in electro-mechanical switches or buttons (not shown).

[0060] In one embodiment, the player interface 54 may also include the community cards 30. Other information which may be displayed on the player interface includes, but is not limited to indicator of the player whose turn it is, a total of chips for each player,

any cards of the other players which are face-up, and/or messages to the player, such as advertising.

[0061] In another aspect of the present invention, the player interface 54 includes a graphical representation of one or more of electronic playing cards 76 (see Figure 12). Each electronic playing card 76 has a front side 76A and a back side 76B. The back side 76B of each card has an identical pattern or image such that the cards cannot be told apart when viewing the back side 76B. The electronic playing card 76 is typically one of a set or deck of standard playing cards. The deck may be a standard deck of 52 cards, each card having a value. The value being two components: the first component being one of a two through ACE and the second component being one of four suits (hearts, diamonds, clubs, spades). The value of each card is indicated on the front side 76A of each playing card 76.

[0062] The image displayed on the back side 76B of the playing cards may be a logo, a random image (chosen from a set of predetermined images), or may be advertising directed at the player. The image may include a video. In one embodiment, the image displayed on the back side 76B of the playing cards may be cycled through a set of predetermined images. The image may be selectable by a user, who may be the player or an employee of the casino.

[0063] In one embodiment, the electronic playing card or cards 76 are a player's hole card(s) in an electronic poker game. However, the electronic playing cards 76 may be used in any sort of electronic card game in which it is desirable to controllably display/hide the player's cards. Thus, while the present invention may be described below in the context of an electronic poker game (and more specifically, with respect to a player's hole cards in a Hold'em style poker game), the present invention is not limited to such a card game.

[0064] In a playing card game with physical cards, in which the player's cards are dealt "face-down" and not revealed to any other player, the player may look at their cards, while attempting to keep the cards secret from the other players in several ways. For example, the player may lift the cards close to their bodies, spread them out, and shield them with their hands, so only the player can see the front side of their cards. Or the player may leave the cards face down on the table and lift one side or corner revealing at least a portion of the front side, while shielding the cards with their hands.

[0065] A controller, which is either, the module 34, the personal computer 52, the hand-held device 58, the server 50 or a combination thereof, controls the player interface 54, i.e., controls the information components of the player interface 54 displayed on the electronic player interaction areas 24, detects touches on the touch screen display devices 32 (when utilized) and interprets the touches as trigger or touch events (see below). As discussed below, the controller 24, 52, 58, 50 may control the display or obscuring (hiding) of the player's hole electronic playing card(s) such that the player may controllably display and view the cards, while maintaining them secret from the other players. As if the player was playing with physical playing cards, the player, thus, has the opportunity to shield their cards with their hand or hands prior to them being revealed.

[0066] A system and method for controllably displaying/obscuring the player's hole electronic playing card(s) is disclosed in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/939,772, filed September 13, 2004, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

[0067] In one aspect of the present invention, each electronic player interaction area 24 is assigned to a player. Once the player is assigned to a particular seat at a table 18, the associated EPIA 24 may set as inactive or locked and may indicate the assigned player's name. Once the EPIA 24 is locked, the assigned player must login to the EPIA 24 (see below).

[0068] Once the player logs-in, the EPIA 24 becomes active and the player interface 54 is displayed. Also, since the EPIA 24 is active, the player may enter or sit-in on the game being played at the table 12 or adjust/modify any available options by actuating the options button 72C.

[0069] In one embodiment as discussed above, the EPIAs 24 may be implemented using a separate or modular computer 34. In one embodiment, the modular computer 34 includes a display 32 which may be a touch-screen display 32. The touch-screen display 32 displays information (text and/or graphics) regarding the play of the game and implements buttons or selectable areas on the EPIA 24 for user input.

[0070] A player may log-in to the system 10 or table 18 through the EPIA 24. In one embodiment, the player may log-in to the system 10 using a player tracking card. The player inserts or swipes their player tracking card through the card reader 36. The EPIA 24 may also require entry of a PIN into an attached keypad or keypad implemented on the touch-screen display device 32. Alternatively or in addition, the player may log-in

using a biometric parameter, such as a fingerprint, sensed by a sensor and a RFID card or chip.

[0071] In one aspect of the present invention, the EPIA 24 includes a sound generation device which is used to generate sounds audible to the player assigned to the EPIA 24. The sound generation device may be implemented as an earpiece or headphones or one or more speakers. Generated sounds may be categorized as system sound or player sounds. System sounds include sounds which are intended or suitable to be heard by everyone, including other players and non-players. Player sounds include sounds which are intended to be heard, but not necessarily only, by the player. Example, system sounds may include sounds imitating the shuffling of cards, the dealing of cards, chips thrown into the pot, or sounds related to the winning of the jackpot. Player sounds may include a reminder or indication of a player's turn or if the game is timed, an indication of the time remaining or that time is running out. Player exclusive sounds are sounds that can or should only be heard by the player and may indicate an audible signal indicating the player's hole cards or the highest hand of the player or a winning percentage associated with the player's hand.

[0072] In another aspect of the present invention, the EPIAs 24 may be implemented via a touchscreen display device 32. The devices 32 may be integrated with a computer in a module. Alternatively, the touchscreen devices 32 may be separate devices controlled by separate computers or the computer 52 at the table 18 or the server 50.

[0073] In many gaming environments 12, such as a poker room at a casino, a portion or percentage of each pot goes to the house for running the poker game. This portion of the pot is known as the rake. In one embodiment, the amount of the rake corresponding to the current pot is displayed on each EPIA 24. The rake may be shown as an amount in dollars and may include a graphical representation of electronic chips.

[0074] In one aspect of the present invention, the system 10 utilizes both electronic chips and electronic playing cards. In one embodiment, the EPIA 24 may include a graphical representation of the chips and/or a dollar amount indicative of the amount of chips each player at the table has remaining. Additionally, the EPIA 24 may include a graphical representation of the chips and/or a dollar amount indicative of the amount of the current pot. The pot may be shown in the middle of a graphical representation of the poker table.

[0075] In one embodiment, each EPIA 24 may also include a graphical representation of the community cards in the middle of the graphical representation of the poker table. Graphical representations of the other player's cards may also be shown (face-down during the current hand and face-up at the end of the hand).

[0076] As discussed above, the system 10 may require that the player logs-in to the EPIAs 24 which is open or to which they have been assigned. The log-in may be accomplished in a variety of ways (see above). Once a player's identity has been established, however, the player can access a player account, purchase chips using an account balance. Additionally, information regarding the player's play at the table may be tracked and recorded to the player's account.

[0077] The EPIAs 24 may be provided with an ear-phone or head-phone to provide the sounds (see above) or other signals to the player.

[0078] In one aspect of the present invention, the sounds provided by the EPIA 24 (see above), are provided using a simulated voice.

[0079] In one aspect of the present invention, the system may utilize a cashless system, such as Ticket-In Ticket-Out or "TITO" (see below)

[0080] In one embodiment, the system 10 requires that each player has a player account. The player account may have an associated balance which contains a dollar amount based on an amount of money deposited by the player and/or any winnings that they have collected, either through poker or some other game. Once a player has been identified by the EPIA 24, the player may download a dollar amount and purchase chips to play.

[0081] Alternatively, a ticket (with for example a barcode), magnetic card, RFID card, or some other media (jointly referred to as a TICKET) may be inserted in the EPIA 24, the table 18, or at a kiosk. The TICKET may have an associated value which is either printed and/or encoded thereon or which is associated with the TICKET in the system 10.

[0082] Additionally, once the player decides to leave the table 18, any remaining chips they have, may be instantly converted back into dollars and stored in their player account and/or a new Ticket may be generated.

[0083] In another aspect of the present invention, each EPIA 24 may provide an indication of whose turn it is to act. If it is the player's turn who is assigned to an EPIA 24, then the EPIA 24 may provide an appropriate signal, such as an icon, either next to their name or anywhere on the EPIA 24, a sound such as a beep or musical tones, and/or

a voice message. If it is another player's turn, the EPIA 24 may indicate whose turn it is by an icon and/or flashing text, e.g., adjacent the player's name.

[0084] As discussed above, the EPIA 24 includes a set of player option buttons 72 which allow the player to take an appropriate action, such as bet, fold, or call, during their turn. In one embodiment, the EPIA 24 only activates those buttons 72 which are appropriate, given the rules of the game being played, during the current turn. For example, if the maximum number of raises for a particular game have already been made, then the wager or raise button would be inactive. Additionally, all of the buttons 72 will be inactive when it is not the player's turn.

[0085] As discussed above, each seat or EPIA 24 is assigned to a particular player. The player may be assigned to a seat off an electronic waiting list using a queuing system or may be assigned by an employee of the casino using the system 10. However, under certain situations, the player may desire to change seats or move to another table. For example, if another player or players have left the table leaving fewer players at the table and the player does not like to play at a table with that few of players, the player may request through the EPIA 24 another seat assignment.

[0086] The present invention includes methods for displaying and/or obscuring a player's hole cards (see above). Additionally or separately, the EPIA 24 may be adapted to provide an indication of the winning percentage based on the player's current hand and the community cards. The winning percentage may be shown textually, e.g., 55%, and/or graphically, e.g., a pie-chart or bar chart. The winning percentage may be triggered and shown using the same trigger event associated with the hole cards. Alternatively, a separate trigger event, such as a touch-event on another location on the EPIA 24 may be used to show the winning percentage.

[0087] The present invention includes methods for displaying and/or obscuring a player's hole cards (see above). Additionally or separately, the EPIA 24 may be adapted to provide an indication of the player's current highest hand based on the player's current hand and the community cards. The highest hand may be shown textually, e.g., two-pairs, and/or graphically, pictures of the five cards which make the highest hand. The highest hand may be triggered and shown using the same trigger event associated with the hole cards. Alternatively, a separate trigger event, such as a touch-event on another location on the EPIA 24 may be used to show the highest hand.

[0088] As discussed above, a poker table 18 may include one or more EPIAs 24. For example, each poker table may have 11 seats and accommodate up to 11 players. Each EPIA 24 may have one or more of the features described in IV.

[0089] In one embodiment as discussed above, the EPIAs may be implemented using a separate or modular computer 34. In one embodiment, the modular computer 34 includes a display 32 which may be a touch-screen display 32. The touch-screen display 32 displays information (text and/or graphics) regarding the play of the game and implements buttons or selectable areas on the EPIA 24 for user input.

[0090] In one aspect of the present invention, the table 18 includes a table sound generation device which is used to generate sounds audible to the players. The table sound generation device may be implemented on one or more speakers mounted to or integral with the table 18. Alternatively, the table sound generation device may include one or more speakers adjacent to or integral with each EPIA 24. Generally, the sound generation device plays system sounds or player sounds which are suitable for every player to hear.

[0091] For example, system sounds may include sounds imitating the shuffling of cards, the dealing of cards, chips thrown into the pot, sounds related to the winning of the jackpot. Player sounds may include a reminder or indication of a player's turn or if the game is timed, an indication of the time remaining or that time is running out. Generally, player exclusive sounds will not be played through the player sound generation device.

[0092] Typically displays, such as LCD or Plasma monitors are rectangular in form. As shown in Figures 6 and 7, the overlay may be integral with the table top 20 and may include a cut out. The overlay covers the outer edge of the display. Only the portion of the display inside the cut-out is visible. In the illustrated embodiment, the cut out has a shape, such as an oval shape, which is similar to the shape of the table.

[0093] As discussed above, the rake is defined as a portion or percentage of each pot that goes to the house for running the poker game. This portion of the pot is known as the rake. In one embodiment, the amount of the rake corresponding to the current pot is displayed on the central display area 26. The rake may be shown as an amount in dollars and may include a graphical representation of electronic chips.

[0094] In another aspect of the present invention, the central display area 26 may provide an indication of whose turn it is to act. In one embodiment, the central display area 26 may provide an appropriate signal, such an icon, e.g., an arrow or other symbol, a

sound such as a beep or musical tones, and/or a voice message. This indication of a player's turn may be in addition to the indication on the EPIA 24.

[0095] During a poker hand, even at a standard poker table with a human dealer, one of the players is designated as the "dealer", for the purposes of the order in which the playing cards are dealt and in which wagers are made. In one aspect of the present invention, the central display area 26 may provide an indication of which player is designated the "dealer" for the current hand. In one embodiment, the central display area 26 may provide an appropriate signal, such as an icon, e.g., an arrow or other symbol. This indication of a player's turn may be in addition to the indication on the EPIA 24.

[0096] As discussed above, the hole cards 28 are displayed face-down on the respective electronic player interaction area 24 and the common cards are displayed in the central display area 26. In one aspect, the common cards 30 are displayed at a larger size than the hole cards 28.

[0097] In one aspect of the present invention, the table 18 provides a poker game, such as Texas Hold'em for the players. In one embodiment, the provided poker game is a timed game, i.e., the player's have a predetermined time period in which to complete each turn. For example, the player's have a set period of one minute to complete each turn. Alternatively, the period of time may vary based, e.g., the first turn may have a period of completion of one minute, while the second turn may have a shorter or longer period of completion. Alternatively, each player may have a bank of time. The time used to complete each turn may be deducted from their time bank.

[0098] In another aspect of the present invention, the central display 38 may be used to display advertising messages. The advertising messages may be from the casino or third parties and may comprise graphics, pictures, animations, video and/or audio. The advertising may be presented at specific location on the central display 38 and may be varied, based on time, i.e., cycled through a set of advertising messages.

[0099] With particular reference to Figure 13B, in one embodiment the game engine 82 is implemented or run on a game computer 94. If the electronic poker table 18 is a stand-alone table 18, then the electronic poker table 18 may include its own game computer 94. Alternatively, the game computer 94 may be the server 50, which may be networked to multiple electronic poker tables 18.

[00100] In one embodiment, the game engine 82 includes a random number generator or RNG (not shown). At the beginning of each hand of the electronic poker game, the RNG

is used to shuffle a deck of 52 electronic cards and to determine the deck order. One of the players is designated as the dealer.

[00101] If the poker table 18 is playing Texas Hold'em, the player on the dealer's left (typically designated by the dealer button) is known as the "Little Blind" and the player on the left of the Little Blind is known as the "Big Blind". At the beginning of the hand, the player known as the Big Blind must post into the pot a predetermined amount, e.g., $1, $5, or $10. This amount is also known as the Big Blind. Prior to that, the player known as the Little Blind must also post into the pot a predetermined amount, typically ½ of the Big Blind. This amount is also known as the Little Blind. Typically, the game engine 82 will automatically deduct the Big Blind and the Little Blind from the respective player's stacks and add them to the pot.

[00102] After the blinds have been posted, the game engine 82 will deal two cards, i.e., the players' hole cards, face down to each player. These cards are displayed face down on each player's electronic player interaction area 24. As described above, each player may controllably view their hole cards.

[00103] After the hole cards are dealt, the game engine 82 administers a betting round. The first betting round starts with the player on the left of the Big Blind. Generally, each player is given an appropriate set of selections in the form of the game buttons 74. In one embodiment, the game buttons 74 are displayed only during the player's turn. Furthermore, only the game buttons 74 which, according to the rules of the poker game being played, are appropriate are displayed.

[00104] After the first betting round, three community cards, i.e., the "flop" are dealt face up by the game engine 82 and displayed. In one embodiment, the community cards are displayed in each electronic player interaction area 24, as shown. If a central display area 26 is used, then the community cards may alternatively or in addition be displayed thereon.

[00105] This is followed by a second betting round. After the second betting round, a fourth community card, i.e. the "turn" is dealt by the game engine 82, followed by a third betting round.

[00106] After the third betting round, the fifth and final community card, i.e., the "river" is dealt face up. This is followed by the fourth and final betting round. If more than one player remains after the final betting round, the player with the highest hand is determined as the winner of the hand.

[00107] If after any of the first through third betting rounds, only one player remains, then the remaining player is automatically determined as the winner. Since one or more of the community cards have not been dealt, the rabbit button 72D on each electronic player interaction area 24 becomes active or is displayed, as described above.

[00108] In one aspect of the present invention, the poker tables 18 in the system 10 are networked and connected to one or more servers 50. The server 50 may be used to implement and facilitate, player tracking, ticket in ticket out (cashless) wagering, assigning player's to a seat at a particular table, tournament play, table set-up (including turning the tables on and off and modifying table parameters), and progressive jackpots. Each table 18 may have one or more EPIAs 24. The poker tables 18 and the EPIAs may have one or more of the features described below.

[00109] In addition, other devices may be connected to the server 50 for providing additional features and/or functions. For example, a queuing system may be provided (see below). This system may be implemented using a separate computer which implements this function. The separate computer may also implement other features or functions of the system. It should be noted, however, that in some systems, these additional features or function could be provided, at least in part, by the server(s) 50.

[00110] In one aspect of the present invention, the server 50 runs the games. In other words, the server 50 electronically "shuffles" the playing cards, deals the cards, controls the players' turns, receives the player's inputs and acts accordingly, tracks, manages, and awards the pot, tracks the rake, etc. Game data is stored in a database. Each input, wager, play, etc. is stored in the database.

[00111] In one aspect of the present invention, a queueing system assigning player's to seats at a poker table 18 is provided. The queueing system may also implement an electronic waiting list if there are no seats available. In one embodiment, one or more devices, such as a personal, notebook, or tablet computer, handheld computer, or PDA, is accessible by one or more employees of the casino. The device(s) allow the employee(s) to enter a customer's name or player ID or to swipe the player's ID Card. If there is a seat at a table 18 available, the player may be assigned to the seat.

[00112] If there is more than one seat available, in one embodiment the employee, may select one of the seats (with or without input from the player). Alternatively, the device may select the seat using a predetermined set of rules.

[00113] If there are no seats available, the player is placed in a queue, until a seat opens up. In one embodiment, players are taken off of the queue and assigned a seat on a first come, first served basis. However, the system 10 may allow the casino to implement special rules for players to bypass the queue or list. For example, the casino may present vouchers to players under certain conditions, such as a win in a tournament, to be placed at the head of a queue.

[00114] In one aspect of the present invention, the server 50 provides an interface which allows a user, such as an authorized or designated employee of the casino, to set-up a new table 18 or to modify the parameters of an existing table 18. The interface may be implemented on a server 50 or on another device networked to the server 50.

[00115] The interface may provide one or more of the following features: ability to turn a table on/off, and ability to change game parameters, such as the permitted wagers, the game being played, the rake, etc.

[00116] In one aspect of the present invention, as stated above the system 10 tracks each transaction, wager, card dealt in a database. The system 10 also tracks the players which are playing at each table 18. This information is stored in the database, summarized, and may be presented in any numerous forms of reporting formats. Any information regarding the player's, the games, and how each hand is played may be tracked. This available data may also be analyzed for purposes of determining the frequency of poker hands (per hour) for a table or all games in which a particular player or players played or detecting, e.g., collusion between players.

[00117] As discussed above, in one embodiment every player must belong to a player club and have an assigned player ID card to log-in to an EPIA 24 to play poker at a table 18. Each player has an account in the player tracking club. The player's account in the tracking club tracks the amount of cash or money that the player has available for play at poker. The player's account also tracks the player's play at a poker table 18, including amounts wagered and amounts won.

[00118] The system 10 allows jackpots, i.e., progressive jackpots, to be generated by and won across multiple hands and/or multiple tables. A progressive jackpot may increase based on the amounts wagered and/or won at the included tables. The progressive jackpot may continue to increase until won under a set of predetermined conditions. Alternatively, it may be active for only a predetermined time period. The

conditions for winning the jackpot may be that it is won by one or more players before the end of the time period.

[00119] The system 10 allows a progressive jackpot to be funded in multiple ways. The way in which a progressive jackpot is funded may be funded through a computer program application on the server 50 or other device. For example, the progressive jackpot may be funded by taking a set percentage from every pot, every other pot, or every n^{th} pot.

[00120] The amount of the progressive jackpot may be displayed on the central display 38 and/or a remote display.

[00121] The progressive jackpot may be initiated randomly, under certain defineable conditions, and/or for a specific event, i.e., a marketing event. The progressive jackpot may be a single hand (across multiple hands), a predetermined number of hands at one table or across multiple hands, for a predetermined time period, etc.

[00122] In another aspect of the present invention, after a jackpot is won by a player or the player logs out or any winner exceeds a predetermined amount, or at any other appropriate time, one or more government reporting forms may be presented to the player on their EPIA 24. The form may accept the player's electronic signature (if permissible) or may notify the player of the requirements and direct them to a location where they can fill out the form. The device may be a personal, notebook, or tablet computer, handheld computer, PDA, or other suitable device.

[00123] In one aspect of the present invention, one or more employees of the casino may be assigned to manage a plurality of tables. One of the employees may manage the queueing system (where provided). A device, networked to the server, may be provided which provides various functions to the employees. The device provides a dashboard application which allows the employee to manage various aspect of the tables 18

[00124] In one aspect of the present invention, the employee may view various data related to the current state of a table, including, but not limited to, the players, the pot, wager information, the common cards, etc.

[00125] The employee, for example, in response to an in-person query or a query made through an EPIA 24, may view tracked data to look for evidence of collusion between two or more players. For example, the employee may determine if two or more persons at a particular table have a habit of playing at the same time and to determine if there is

any pattern discernable in the play which would provide evidence that they are impermissibly working together.

[00126] In one aspect of the present invention, each EPIA 24 may provide a player with buttons which summon or direct specific employees of the casino. For example the player may request a host/hostess to order a drink. Additionally, the player may request that an employee review something that occurred or is occurring at the table 18, e.g., possible collusion. This may be done anonymously.

[00127] As described above, the device which allows the players to manage the tables 18, may also allow the employee to automatically or manually assign players to particular tables and/or seats and/or EPIA 24.

[00128] In one embodiment, the server 50 controls the advertising on the central display 38. Advertising may also be provided on the EPIA's 24 and/or a remote display associated with the poker tables 18. The server 50 may control the content, frequency, and/or the cycling of the advertising.

[00129] In one aspect of the present invention, a player may refrain from playing in one or more hands or get up from a table and not play in one or more hands. Typically, however, if the player decides to play a subsequent hand, then the player owes the current pot a predetermined amount, i.e., the "missed blind", per hand missed. In one embodiment, if the player decides to sit-out one or more hands, then the system 10 tracks the number of hands missed and automatically deducts an amount equal to the number of hands missed multiplied by the blind once the player decides to play another hand.

[00130] As discussed above, the system 10 records every transaction, card dealt or played, wager, etc. in a database. This allows the system 10 to recover from any error and put the game back into the same state.

[00131] The system 10 facilitates tournament play. In a tournament, a predetermined number of tables 18 having a predetermined number of players are involved. A buy-in, e.g., $100 is required. Typically, after a player loses all of their money, they are eliminated from the tournament.

[00132] Under predetermined rules, players may register for a tournament and be assigned to seats at a table. During play, under predetermined rules, tables may be broken down and the players distributed to other tables. The system 10 facilitates the tournament by providing one or more of the following features:

a) Registration

b) Tracking tournament information

c) Display of tournament information on central display and/or remote display

d) Tournament set-up, e.g., buy-in

e) Re buy-in

f) Tournament jackpot, cash or entry voucher for entry another tournament (specific tournament or expiration date)

g) Process for breaking tables

(1) message that table is breaking

(2) convey new seat assignment

(3) determination of breaking order

(4) display of breaking order

h) Display information on status of other tables and players at other tables

i) System to monitor and adjust hands per hour of an individual table during a tournament: During a poker tournament it is important that each table play roughly the same number of hands per hour as all other tables. This can be accomplished by pausing a game and/or slowing a game down with out pausing.

j) Multi-site tournaments.

k) System for automatically paying players tournament winnings based on tournament pay tables and their final position in the tournament.

[00133] In one aspect of the present invention, remote or virtual games may be provided by the system 10. The remote or virtual games may be provided on wireless devices and may be played at predetermined locations.

[00134] Virtual games may also be provided through the EPIAs 24. For example, the virtual or remote games may be played by the poker players when it is not their turn. The virtual or remote games may be another poker hand, played against other players, at the table or at other tables, or played against virtual players. Alternatively, the remote or

virtual games may be other types of games, including, but not limited to blackjack, keno, slot machines, etc.

[00135] In addition to running other casino games on the EPIAs 24 or other terminals, the system 10 can be run on other gaming devices throughout the casino. For example, a virtual poker game can be run on an existing electronic bingo terminal or an electronic race book terminal.

[00136] With reference to Figures 14, 15A, and 15B, in another aspect of the present invention, the system 10 provides one or more electronic poker tables 18 which implements and allows the players to create and access user accounts. With particular reference to Figure 14, the system 10 includes a database 104 for maintaining a player account for each player. Each player account may include identification information and a monetary amount. The database 104 may be stored on the server computer 50 or another computer networked to the server computer 50.

[00137] The monetary amount may be initially established at a kiosk 106 and/or a cage computer 108. The kiosk 106 may be a stand-alone unit which may access the database 104. In one embodiment, the kiosk 106 may be used to set-up a player account, by allowing a player to enter identification information. The player may also be allowed to create a user name, personal identification number (PIN) or password. The kiosk 106 may also be adapted to provide an identification card to the player. The kiosk 106 may also be used to fund the account or to add additional funds to the account. Funds may be added in the form of cash, tickets or other mediums representing cash, electronic funds transfer from another account, such as bank account, credit card, check card, and the like, and/or in any other suitable manner.

[00138] In another aspect, the player's account may be linked or provided in conjunction with the player tracking system. In such a system 10, a single player ID card may provide access to the player account, as well as be used for player tracking purposes.

[00139] In a similar manner, the cage computer 108 may be used to create, fund, or otherwise access the player account. The cage computer 108 may require operation by an operator and be operated by the player.

[00140] The server computer 50 may allow each player to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas 24, draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount.

[00141] The electronic poker table 18 may include at least one card reader 102. The player may access their account by inserting the player ID card into the card reader 102 and entering their PIN or password.

[00142] In one embodiment, each electronic player interaction area 24 includes a card reader 102. The server computer 50 may assign each player to one of the electronic player interaction areas 24. The player may be required to log-in to the assigned electronic player interaction area 24 by entering their user name and password, inserting their player ID card into the card reader 102 and entering their password or PIN, or any suitable manner.

[00143] In one another embodiment, a player may go to any un-assigned or un-occupied electronic player interaction area 24 and, by selecting the sit-in button 72A, access the electronic player interaction area 24. The player may then access their player account to download funds to purchase electronic chips by inserting the player ID card into the card reader 102.

[00144] In another aspect of the present invention, the server computer 50 allows a player to leave the electronic poker table 18 and cash out. Any remaining electronic chips associated with the player may then be converted into a monetary amount and added to the monetary value in their player account. Alternatively, the player may be paid in cash or a ticket may be printed which represents the monetary amount.

[00145] With particular reference to Figure 15A, a method 110 for providing an electronic poker game to a plurality of players using a plurality of electronic player interaction areas 24 and a server computer 50 is shown. In a first step 112, the players are allowed to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas 24. In a second step 114, the players are allowed to draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount. In a third step 116, the server computer 50 administers the electronic poker game using electronic cards and the electronic chips (see above).

[00146] With particular reference to Figure 15B, a method 120 for providing an electronic poker game to a plurality of players using a plurality of electronic player interaction areas 24 and a server computer 50 is shown. Each electronic player interaction area 24 provides a player interface 54 for interaction with one of the players. The server computer 50 is coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas 24. In a first step 122, the players may sign up or establish a player account. In a second

step 124, a player account is created in the database 104. The player account includes at least identification information, which may be a name or some type of user identification name or ID (which allows the player to remain anonymous).

[00147] In a third step 126, the players may fund the account with a monetary amount and associate the monetary amount with the corresponding player account. In a fourth step 128, the players may log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas 24. In a fifth step 128, the players are allowed to draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount. In a fifth step 130, the electronic poker game is administered using electronic cards and the electronic chips.

[00148] Obviously, many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. The invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described within the scope of the appended claims.

CLAIMS

1. A system for providing an electronic card game to a plurality of players, comprising:

an electronic card table having a table top with a playing surface and a plurality of electronic player interaction areas located around a periphery of the table top, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of the players;

a database for maintaining a player account for each player, each player account including identification information and a monetary amount; and

a server computer coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas and the database for administering the electronic card game using electronic cards and electronic chips, the server computer for allowing each player to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas, draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount.

2. A system, as set forth in claim 1, the server computer for assigning players to the electronic player interaction areas.

3. A system, as set forth in claim 1, the player interfaces having a sit-in button, the server computer allowing the players to log-in to the one of the electronic player interaction areas in response to actuation of the sit-in button.

4. A system, as set forth in claim 1, wherein the player must enter a personal identification number to log-in to the electronic player interaction area.

5. A system, as set forth in claim 1, further comprising at least one card reader located at the electronic card table, wherein the player must insert a player id card into the card reader to log-in to the system.

6. A system, as set forth in claim 5, wherein each electronic player interaction area includes an associated card reader.

7. A system, as set forth in claim 5, wherein the player must also enter a personal identification number to log-in to the electronic player interaction area.

8. A system, as set forth in claim 1, the server computer for allowing the player to fund their associated player account.

9. A system, as set forth in claim 1, the server computer for allowing a player to leave the electronic card table and cash out, any remaining electronic chips associated with the player being converted into a monetary amount and (1) added to the monetary value in their player account, (2) paid to the player in cash, or (3) printed on a ticket.

10. A system, as set forth in claim 1, the electronic card game having at least one betting round prior to the dealing of the at least one common card, the server computer for providing the players an opportunity to make a wager or fold during the betting round.

11. A system, as set forth in claim 1, the electronic card table including a central display area located in a central location of the table top for displaying information to the players.

12. A system, as set forth in claim 1, further comprising a cage computer coupled to the database for allowing the players to fund their player account and/or withdraw cash from their player account.

13. A system, as set forth in claim 1, further comprising a kiosk coupled to the database for allowing the players to fund the player account and/or withdraw cash from the player account.

14. A method for providing an electronic card game to a plurality of players using a plurality of electronic player interface areas and a server computer, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of the players, the server computer being coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas, comprising:

providing a database for maintaining a player account for each player, each player account including identification information and a monetary amount; and

allowing the players to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas;

allowing the players to draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of

the monetary amount; and

administering, by the server computer, the electronic card game using electronic cards and the electronic chips.

15. A method, as set forth in claim 14, including the step of assigning players to the electronic player interaction areas.

16. A method, as set forth in claim 14 the player interfaces having a sit-in button, wherein the step of allowing the one of the players to log-in to the electronic player interaction areas is in response to actuation of the sit-in button.

17. A method, as set forth in claim 14, wherein the step of allowing the players to log-in to the system includes the step of requiring the player to enter a personal identification number on the electronic player interaction area.

18. A method, as set forth in claim 14 wherein the step of allowing the players to log-in to the system includes the step of requiring the player to insert a player id card into a card reader located at the electronic card table.

19. A method, as set forth in claim 18, wherein each electronic player interaction area includes an associated card reader.

20. A method, as set forth in claim 18, wherein the step of allowing the one of the players to log-in to the system includes the step of requiring the player to enter a personal identification number.

21. A method, as set forth in claim 14, including the step of allowing the players to fund their associated player account.

22. A method, as set forth in claim 14, including the step of allowing a player to leave the electronic card table and cash out, any remaining electronic chips associated with the player being converted into a monetary amount and (1) added to the monetary value in their player account, (2) paid to the player in cash, or (3) printed on a ticket.

23. A method, as set forth in claim 14, including the step of allowing the player to fund the account and/or withdraw cash from the account at a cage computer coupled to the database.

24. A method, as set forth in claim 14, including the step of allowing the player to fund the account and/or withdraw cash from the account at a kiosk coupled to the database.

25. A method for providing an electronic card game to a plurality of players using a plurality of electronic player interface areas and a server computer, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of the players, the server computer being coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas, comprising:

allowing the players to sign up for a player account;

creating a player account for each player in a database, the player account including identification information;

allowing each player to fund the account with a monetary amount and associating the monetary amount with the corresponding player account;

allowing the players to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas;

allowing the players to draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount; and

administering, by the server computer, the electronic card game using electronic cards and the electronic chips.

26. A system for providing an electronic poker game to a plurality of players, comprising:

an electronic poker table having a table top with a playing surface and a plurality of electronic player interaction areas located around a periphery of the table top, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of the players;

a database for maintaining a player account for each player, each player account including identification information and a monetary amount; and

a server computer coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas

and the database for administering the electronic poker game using electronic cards and electronic chips, the server computer for allowing each player to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas, draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount.

27. A method for providing an electronic poker game to a plurality of players using a plurality of electronic player interface areas and a server computer, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of the players, the server computer being coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas, comprising:

providing a database for maintaining a player account for each player, each player account including identification information and a monetary amount; and

allowing the players to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas;

allowing the players to draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount; and

administering, by the server computer, the electronic poker game using electronic cards and the electronic chips.

28. A method for providing an electronic poker game to a plurality of players using a plurality of electronic player interface areas and a server computer, each electronic player interaction area providing a player interface for interaction with one of the players, the server computer being coupled to the plurality of electronic player interaction areas, comprising:

allowing the players to sign up for a player account;

creating a player account for each player in a database, the player account including identification information;

allowing each player to fund the account with a monetary amount and associating the monetary amount with the corresponding player account;

allowing the players to log-in to one of the electronic player interaction areas;

allowing the players to draw down at least a portion of the monetary amount in their player account and purchase electronic chips using the drawn down portion of the monetary amount; and

administering, by the server computer, the electronic poker game using electronic cards and the electronic chips.