

and horizontal directions, such that it is noticeably larger in both dimensions. Conversely, the bar of FIG. 5B has only been resized in a vertical direction, such that it has been stretched into both adjacent blank reel stops, but not in a horizontal direction within its own reel stop. It will be readily understood that these illustrative examples only demonstrate a few possibilities, and that resizing of visible reel symbols can be made in one or more directions and with any type or kind of reel symbol. For example, the bar of FIG. 5B could be stretched horizontally as well, and the cherry and/or barrel could be stretched only in a vertical direction, if desired. Virtually all other kinds of visible reel symbols can be similarly resized as well.

[0067] In some embodiments, the blank areas of substantially all of the blank reel stops or ghosts are reduced in size via the expansion of any adjacent visible reel symbols. In this manner, much of the blank regions on the gaming reels are reduced, such that the reels are more visually appealing. Such blank areas can be reduced in size by a set amount, such as, for example, about fifty percent. Of course, other percentages may also be used, as may be desired. In some gaming jurisdictions, the size of blank reel stops may be limited by regulation or rule. Accordingly, it is preferable that any resizing of visible reel symbols does not result in any ghosts or blank reel stops that are too small or otherwise illegal. Further code restricting the maximum amount that visible reel strips can be stretched or otherwise resized can be contained within the reel configurator to control for such possibilities.

[0068] Moving next to FIGS. 6A and 6B, further examples of the resizing of various reel symbols are illustrated in a screenshot format. In both figures, three exemplary adjacent virtual rotating reels adapted for use in a processor-based gaming machine are presented in front elevation view. FIG. 6A depicts the virtual reels prior to symbol resizing, while FIG. 6B depicts the virtual reels after symbol resizing. In FIG. 6A, viewing window 90 generally permits a view of three reel stops per reel, with one of a triple bar reel symbol 94, blank reel stop 95 and numeral "7" reel symbol 96 occupying each reel stop that can be seen. After a reel symbol resizing process, the results can be seen in the viewing window 190 of FIG. 6B. The triple bar reel symbols 194 and numeral "7" reel symbols 196 are decidedly larger, and the blank reel stops or ghosts 195 are decidedly smaller. As can be seen, the resized visible reel symbols 194, 196 have been stretched into adjacent blank reel stops 195, thereby reducing the size of the blank reel stops.

[0069] As will be readily appreciated, numerous variations can be practiced with respect to the resizing of visible reel symbols. For example, where a particular reel symbol is located at a reel stop that has only one adjacent ghost or blank region, a reel symbol resizing can be made that stretches that reel symbol only into the single adjacent ghost or blank reel stop. Such a variation might be preferred in the event that a reel has ghosts as well as visible reel symbols that are adjacent to visible reel symbols, and where it is desirable to avoid any unsightly "stacking" of visible reel symbols onto each other. Such a variation in the script code for any reel symbols that are so affected might include an appropriate scale adjustment, as well as a suitable location adjustment. For example, where a visible reel symbol that is adjacent to two blank reel stops might require only a scale adjustment, such that the reel symbol is stretched both upward and downward, another visible reel symbol that is adjacent to only one blank reel stop might require a same or similar scale adjustment, as well as a

plus or minus distance component regarding its display location with respect to its own reel stop. This and/or other suitable programming features can be used to stretch a given visible reel symbol into one adjacent reel stop, but not another.

[0070] Although much of the focus herein has been made with respect to sizing or resizing visible reel symbols that are adjacent to blanks, it will be readily appreciated that such sizing or resizing of reel symbols is not limited to such instances. As one alternative, sizing of reel symbols can emphasize one or more particular reel symbols regardless of the existence or position of any blanks. A gaming machine operator or manufacturer may desire to "oversize" all of a particular reel symbol for a given game, such as, for example, all "wild 7s" or all "triple bars" on every reel of a game containing such reel symbols. In such cases, all of these particular reel symbols are sized or resized to stretch outside one or both boundaries of their respective reel stops, regardless of whether another reel symbol or a blank is adjacent thereto. In some embodiments, such an oversizing might be applied to only one visible reel symbol, which might be a particular bonus symbol for one or more game plays.

[0071] Such an oversizing of specific reel symbols and/or reel symbol types might be done as an overall theme for a particular game, or might be done as part of a limited time promotion involving that game. In some instances, the oversizing of one visible reel symbol into the reel stop of another visible reel symbol can result in an unsightly "stacking" of reel symbols, depending upon various symbol types, shapes colors and other factors. In such instances, it may be desirable to counteract any unsightly results by resizing the affected neighbor reel symbol, such as by resizing this other reel symbol to be smaller, to shift away from the enlarged adjacent reel symbol, or both. Various added code implementations and/or features to reduce the size and/or position of such a neighbor reel symbol to accommodate the oversizing of an adjacent reel symbol will be generally understood by those skilled in the art.

[0072] It will be readily appreciated that the various disclosures herein with respect to gaming machines, reels and methods involving the sizing or resizing of visible reel symbols can also be applied to wager-based gaming systems having networked gaming machines and other network components. Such systems can include components and configurations such as those described above with respect to FIG. 2. In particular, such a wager-based gaming system can include a remote host that is in communication with some or all of the processor-based gaming machines, with the remote host being adapted to download reel symbols, virtual reel strips, or both to the networked gaming machines. Where gaming machines are to be networked in such a wager-based gaming system, various gaming machine embodiments can also include a network interface (not shown) coupling the gaming machine to the system and its various remotely located networked components. Such a network interface would preferably facilitate the downloading of reel symbols, virtual reel strips or both to the gaming machine.

[0073] Such reel symbols and/or reel strips can be stored, for example, at database 70, and then be made available to various gaming machines within the gaming system. Storage of various virtual reel symbols and entire virtual reels or reel strips can be made with respect to both original versions and one or more resized versions thereof. As such, resizing of the same reel symbol or reel strip can be done in different scales,