

## Gamblers bet on age

"Not many 49-year-olds in the crowd tonight," state racing steward Jack Fickler said at the state fairgrounds Wednesday night.

Six 9-4 combination tickets paid a record \$3,481.80 for the exacta in the fifth race.

"Generally there are enough who bet their age, either forwards or backwards, to keep the odds down," he said.

Choosing your age is one of several popular ways to bet the exacta and daily double, he said.

"Baseball, four box, betting the same numbers for years, and just plain 'hard old' handicapping are also popular," he said.

### Baseball

"Baseball," he explained, "consists of betting all the combinations for three horses."

For the exacta, it costs \$18 for six tickets. Daily double tickets cost \$2, so the price is reduced to \$12.

He said the horses are picked at random or logically from the racing sheet which is published in newspaper form for every track in the country. The sheet tells how the horse has done in the past, assigns a handicap based on the record and predicts if he'll win, place or show in the upcoming race.

"Four box" is a variation of "baseball" using home plate, he said. Since the bettor chooses four horses, he pays more.

### A matter of luck

Fickler told a story of a 73-year-old man who lost by betting his age.

The old man bet his age faithfully on the daily double for a year but he could not win. He often complained of his bad luck at the stable where he worked.

"I waters the horses, cleans the stable and feeds the jockeys," he griped, "but can I win?—I've bet 7-3 a hundred times and lost."

The next day, another man who had overheard, bet the 7-3 combination and won. But when he returned to the stable to share in the old man's joy, he found him complaining as usual.

"Why are you griping?" he said. "The daily paid \$480 and doubled your money."

"Today's my birthday," he answered. "I bet 7-4."

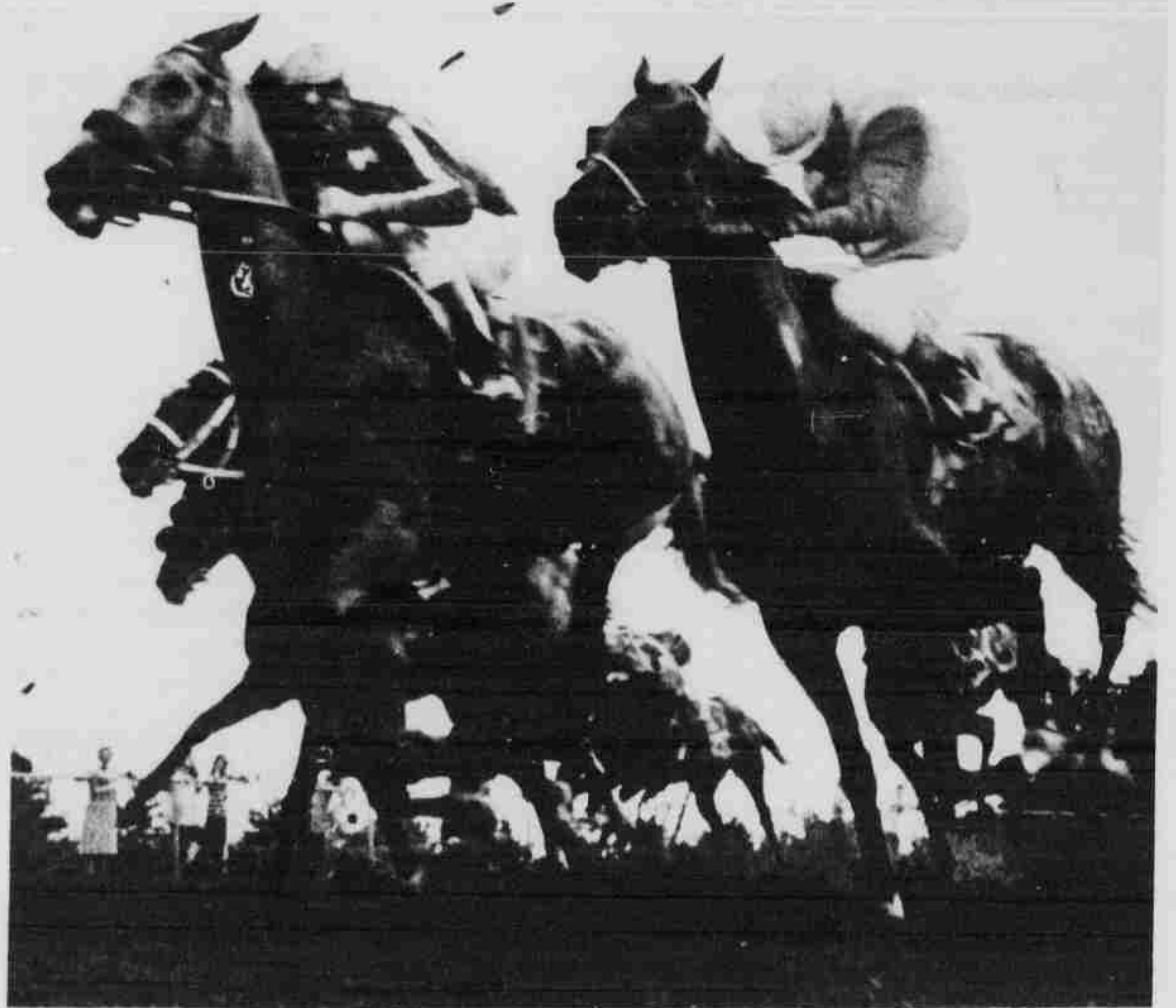


Photo by Bill Ganzel

## UNL coed earns \$\$ from races

By Ken Merlin  
School of Journalism

"Hurry up folks, there's still time to place your bets on the daily double before the windows close for the first race in just one minute."

As the announcement blared across the track and

under the grandstand at the state fairgrounds, a few fans scurried in the carnival atmosphere to join the line at window No. 25.

A man in a short-sleeved, light-green shirt, leaned against the screen and called out numbers from the racing form

in some mysterious sequence—"1-1. . . . 2-10. . . . 3-5-10 combinations in all.

Peg Fairfield, 23, a senior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, listened carefully for each \$2 bet combining the first and second race winners.

### Continuous motion

In a continuous motion she recorded the bet on a totalizer pressing a red button for the first horse, a green for the second. Then red-green-red-green until it was all done and she handed the man his tickets.

"Change!" she cried out, as the man took a fifty from a wad of bills in his left pocket.

The change runner, a young housewife from Columbus, appeared in a pocketed apron full of fives, tens, and larger bills. She held the ones in groups of five between the fingers of her left hand.

Peg handed the man his change and the ritual ended moments later with a bell signalling the start of the first race.

She closed her window, took money from a slotted wooden box and carried it in a bank bag to the money room.

Meanwhile, Lance Fickler, son of state racing steward Jack Fickler, cleared the daily double codes and tickets from the totalizers and set in the same items for the exacta in the fifth race.

### All kinds of people

Peg, whose husband Terry works for the alumni foundation, talked about her part-time job during the second race.

"You meet all kinds of people," she said.

"I still get a kick out of the customer who comes up and whispers 'I got one for you.'"

"I just listen, but I think it's funny," she said. Peg said her first job at the track was walking horses for two trainers.

### Jobs available

She said there are still jobs for university girls who want to walk horses.

"All they have to do is ask," she said. "The trainers get a kick out of it."

Peg said in her last job she

had to clean the stable. She said that was "too much" so she quit and joined the mutuels as a clerk. That was three summers ago. She worked the straight bet windows—win, place and show—until last Tuesday when she began selling daily double and exacta tickets.

When the windows opened after the second race, Peg had \$1,450 in a wooden box to pay the daily double winners. She called for additional money several times.

### Famous last words

"Famous last words around here are 'I should have . . . if only I'd . . .,'" she said.

"I enjoy paying the winners," she said with a smile. "They sometimes tip, but not that often."

By now the floor was scattered with ticket stubs, money bands, change wrappers, cigarette butts and tissues. Peg used dry-wash tissues frequently to clean the ticket ink from her fingers. She stood most of the time, as did the other clerks although stools were available.

"Standing doesn't bother me" she said. There's nothing bad about the job. I wouldn't be working here if there was." Another clerk expressed a different opinion. "I started out as a runner and things haven't changed since I've been here. It's the worst track in Nebraska. They ought'a close it down. They pay twice as much in Omaha for this job."

### Cash volume

Chris Baade, head supervisor, who travels with the mutuels in Nebraska, attributed the difference in pay to the larger 'handle' (cash receipts) and greater volume of tickets sold per clerk at Ak-sar-ben.

"Ten percent of the handle goes to pay the purse (winner's earnings) and the track personnel, five per cent goes to the state and the remaining 85 per cent is returned to the public. The handle last Wednesday was \$200,000. An average handle at Omaha is close to a million.

"Here a clerk sells 80-120 tickets per race. An Omaha

clerk sells more tickets per race and so the track can afford to pay more," he said.

### Many applicants

But Peg doesn't complain about the pay. She said she makes \$15 on an average night of eight races and \$2 more for a ninth race.

One money runner said she got \$8 per night.

John Skold, who also works for the mutuels and does most of the hiring, said he had 50 applicants waiting for a job opening. He said he judges an applicant by his present job and hires mostly school teachers, postmen and college students who get along well with the public.

Baade who judges the clerks on their daily performance said he "gets rid of the ones who don't work out."

### Clerks not flustered

"A good clerk isn't flustered by a \$100 bill and seldom makes mistakes. They also like their jobs," he said.

Peg said she doesn't worry about mistakes which can come out of her salary. "If you punch the wrong ticket, you may have to pay for it. We shout it out so the other clerks can try to sell it. We all try to help each other out."

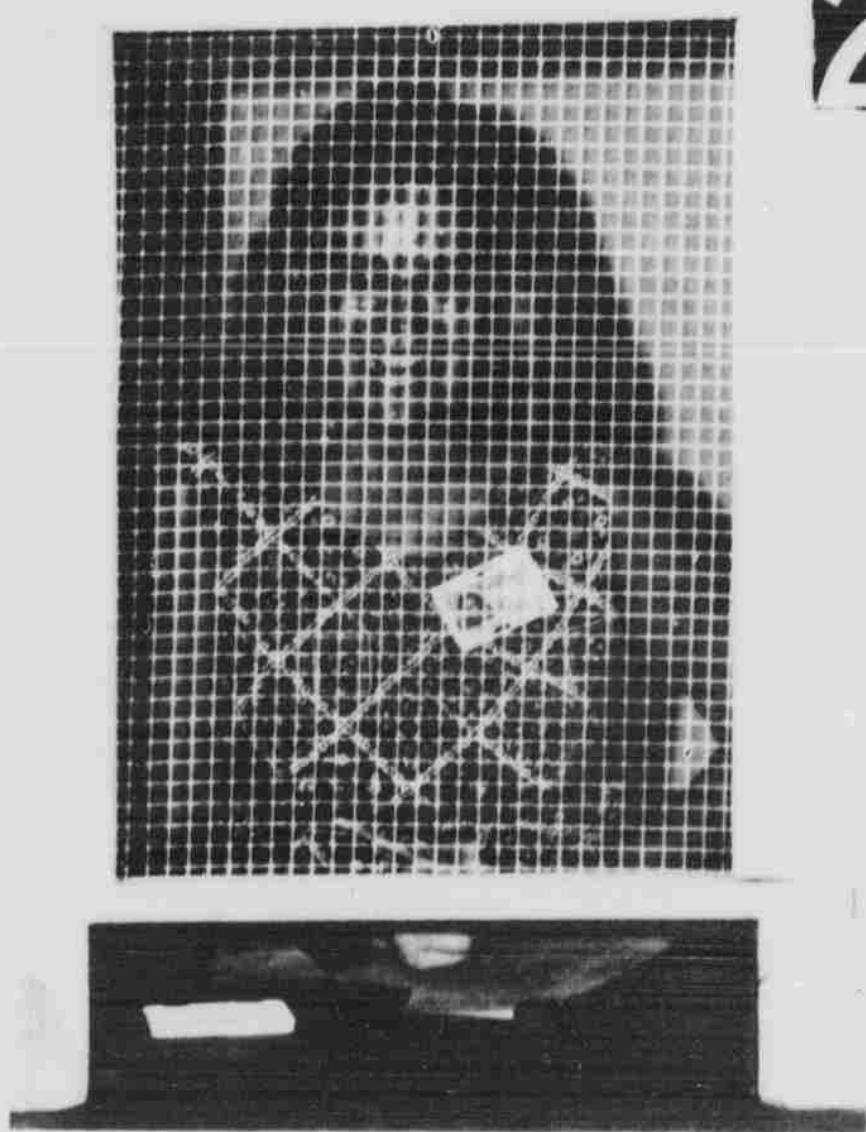
"If you're stuck with it, you can always hope it comes in," she said.

"I try to watch what I'm doing, listen close, press the right buttons and count the change. Some people just mumble and you have to ask them to repeat it," she said.

During the exacta sales, Baade encouraged the clerks as he walked down the line. "If we don't get 'em now, we'll get 'em later."

Peg sold 325 tickets at \$3 each without a mistake. Elsewhere several clerks were shouting numbers they had punched up.

The fifth race exacta on Wednesday made history. The first and second horses to cross the finish line, despite two protests, were officially CuiK Date and Spiffy Beau. Baade assigned one cashier to pay out the six winning tickets of \$3,481.80 each, a state fairgrounds record.



Peg Fairfield

Photo by Ken Merlin