

# Pool player hopes to pocket national championship



Photo by Bob Pearson

Champion pool player Richard Vargas

By Kathy Epreman

This year a UNL senior is shooting for the big one... the national intercollegiate billiard championship. And after nabbing an eighth place finish in last year's national tournament, that could be an easy shot for 22-year-old Richard Vargas.

Vargas, a secondary education student majoring in Spanish, first picked up a pool cue at age 12. From that time on, his "desire to control the game" became an obsession that led Vargas to practice 8 to 10 hours a day.

The perseverance seems to have paid off for Vargas who is looking for his third consecutive regional title. The title is under the auspices of the Association of College Unions Intercollegiate Tournaments (14.1 Pocket Billiards.) By winning the UNL title each year, Vargas has traveled (expenses paid) to regional competition, facing players from Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Nebraska.

Last year, Vargas captured the regional championship at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, which won him yet another expense-paid trip. This time, however, the ticket sent him to national competition at the University of South Carolina, in Columbia. For five days, Vargas was matched against college students from around the nation. When it was over, out of the approximately 50,000 college students that had entered local tournaments, Vargas had finished eighth in the nation.

#### Dress code

Vargas said the regional and national tournaments require a strict suit-and-tie dress code, whereas local tournaments are usually "come as you are." Vargas explained that the finals of the regional and national matches usually are televised and the dress code is an effort to improve on the ragged, bar room stereo-typed image of pool players.

One thing all competitions have in common, according to the UNL champion, is the "tense and serious atmosphere."

"Everyone is a good loser but everyone is trying to win," Vargas said. The night before a match, the soft-spoken senior stays away from the pool table, he said.

"I try to keep the match out of my mind by going to a movie or something." But during a match, Vargas is cool

and calm, describing himself as "trying not to let any emotions show."

Now, in his last year of college tournament eligibility, Vargas is cautiously optimistic about achieving his national-title goal.

"The competition is always tough and winning this year will be especially hard because of my school load." Vargas currently is student teaching at Culler Junior High School in Lincoln. He also is taking two other university classes and is tutoring Spanish 20 hours a week in the UNL Learning Center on a work/study program.

#### Little practice

Although his schedule this semester does not allow him much time to practice, ("I'm lucky to get to play an hour a day.") Vargas said he thinks playing pool this past summer in Denver, Colo. has improved his game. While in Denver, Vargas played against professional pool players, gaining valuable experience.

Radiating the calm inner strength and self-assurance of a man much older, Vargas is quick to say the money-making aspect of pool has given the sport a bad reputation. Vargas said he "always has and always will play mainly for fun and relaxation."

"Pool is a good way to understand people since the way a player plans strategy or reacts to losing tells you a lot about that person," he said.

#### Competition increased

Vargas said he is encouraged by the gaining popularity of pool in the past few years. Vargas said that last year the increase of female contestants prompted the first women's division of the collegiate competition. The senior said he hopes the trend will surface at the All University Tournament (scheduled for November in the Nebraska Union) producing the UNL's first women competitors.

"I also wish people would start thinking of pool more as family recreation," Vargas said. He said all ages, from teens to retirees, are finding pool is "a great winter sport."

Vargas said he always will be fascinated by pool. "You can always get better," he said. "I'll play pool until the last day I can."

## arts & entertainment

### Hobby Town is for Walter Mittys, ordinary folks with grand desires

By Jim Williams

Some ordinary people have extraordinary desires. They'd like to do roaring figure-8s in a shining P-51 Mustang. Or painstakingly refurbish a classic Rolls-Royce. Or improve on Lee's generalship at Bull Run. Or howl flat-out through the turns in a turbocharged Porsche.

Letting ordinary people do these things—scaled down to manageable size—is the business of stores like Hobby Town, 134 N. 13 St.

Business is brisk at Hobby Town. Proprietor Chick Bartlett hustles between talking to suppliers on the phone, helping customers with plane, train, boat or car problems, and simply saying hello to people who walk in.

"We are always busy," according to Chick's wife Betty. "It's so specialized it takes a lot of time with each customer. You can't be self-serving in here."

Betty Bartlett said the biggest trade is in models. Military subjects are the most popular. Plastic models sell best, but wood airplane and ship models do well too. The shop also carries the figures, maps and rulebooks used for simulated war games, a pastime Betty Bartlett said is especially popular with students.

"Some of them come in here every day to see what's new," she said.

The shop is small, with shelves stacked to the ceiling with adult toys. A working steam-powered tractor—\$89.95. Controlmaster model-train control center—\$49.98. An HO gauge Logging Climax railroad engine, a few inches long but precisely detailed—\$225. A Pocher D'Italia model Rolls-Royce kit, in perfect 1/8 scale, with working brakes, steering, suspension and almost everything else on the real car—\$199.95. The same price for an O.S. model airplane engine, a gorgeous chunk of polished metal with a cylinder as big as your fist, delicate exposed rocker arms on top, and a spacey little stub exhaust pipe poking out the side.

Not everything in the store is that expensive. There's a full range of 1/12 scale Grand Prix racing cars from Tamiya of Japan for under \$25. About a foot long when completed, each has hundreds of tiny parts that fit together like the real thing, providing working steering and suspension through tiny gears and springs. Planes, tanks, rockers, motorcycles and most other interesting mechanical widgets are represented by kits of varying complexity and price. There's even special "Contest Rubber" for rubber-band-powered airplanes for 95 cents a box.

Betty Bartlett said most of the store's customers are high-school age or older. "A lot of professional men, too," she said. "They start when they're young. There's four generations of people Chick has seen come through here."

A young professional man was in the store to buy a fuel tank for the radio controlled P-51 fighter plane he's

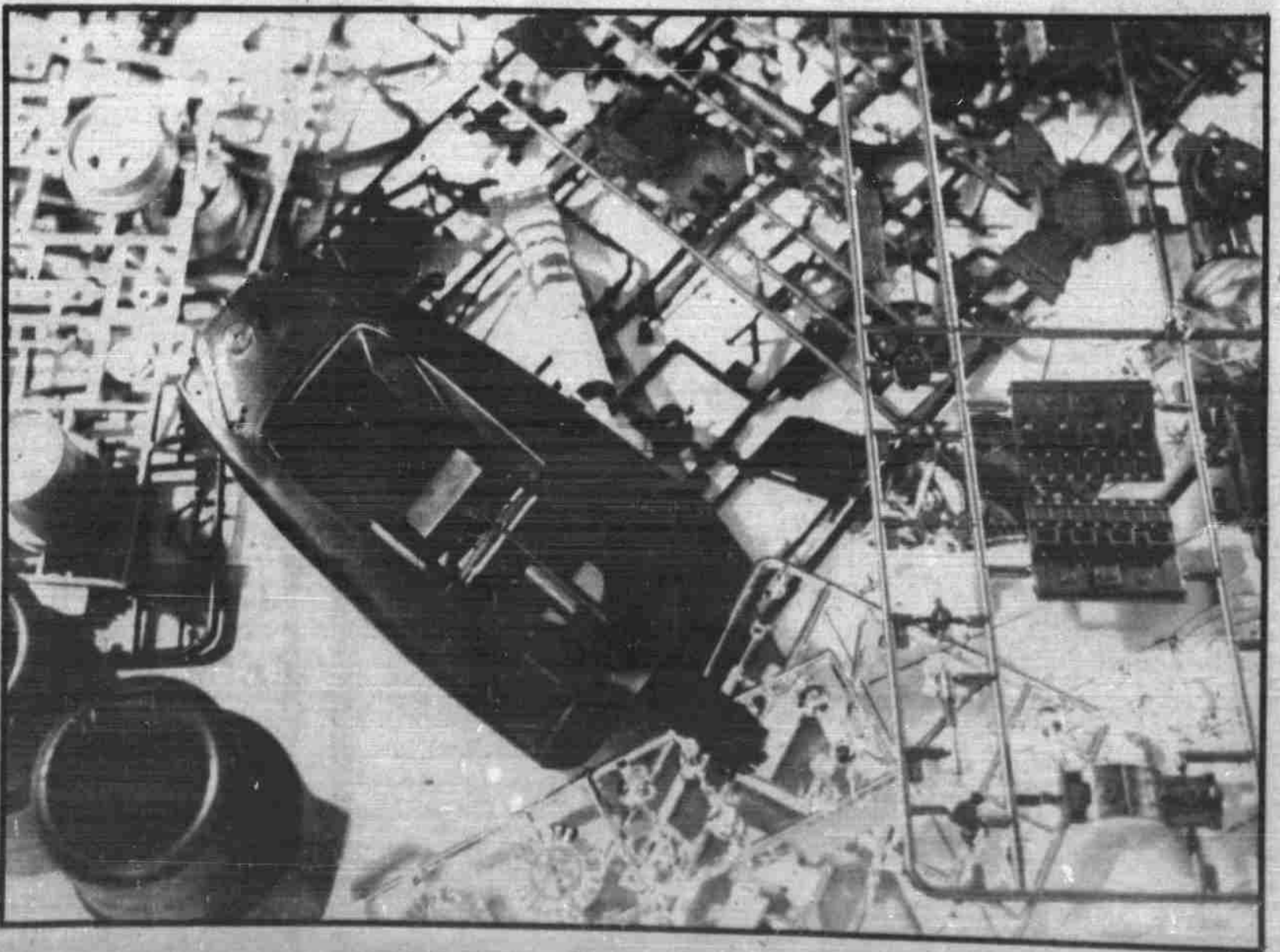
building. He said the total cost for such a project is around \$500, and suggested beginners start with radio-controlled boats.

"A boat you can tip over and it'll still work," he said.

The store has sold three of Tamiya's new 1/12 scale kits of the Porsche Turbo 934 racing car. It's superbly detailed, with full interior and the electric motor, differential gears, coil-spring rear suspension and mountings needed for racing.

The presence of danger safely scaled down, may be one appeal of the adult model idea. But there's another simple pleasure to it that doesn't cost a cent. It was demonstrated by a gray-haired man who walked into the store. Betty Bartlett asked him if he needed help finding anything.

"No," he said, "I just love to come in here and look around."



An unfinished racing car of a Lotus 72D Grand Prix in 1/8 scale.

### Films scheduled

The Ralph Mueller Planetarium is sponsoring a series of free film showings on NU home-football game days. These films will be at 11:45 a.m. on most Saturdays, and 10:45 a.m. on days the games are televised.

Many of the films have been provided by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Jack Dunn, coordinator of planetarium programs and activities, said the public has shown a good response in the last three years films have been offered.

A tentative schedule of films:

- Sept. 24—*Skylab-The Second Manned Mission-A Scientific Harvest*
- Oct. 1—*Apollo 17-On the Shoulders of Giants*
- Oct. 15—*Who's Out There?*
- Oct. 22—*Jupiter Odyssey*
- Nov. 12—*Mercury-Exploration of a Planet*

### Guitarist will perform

The first artist-in-residence for the Centennial Education Program will perform a public concert Friday night, in Kimball Recital Hall.

Steve Waechter, a classical guitarist, will present his program at 8 p.m.

Tickets are \$1 and are available from Kimball box office in the Westbrook Music Building and the Centennial Education Office in the Neihardt Residential Center, 540 N. 16th St.