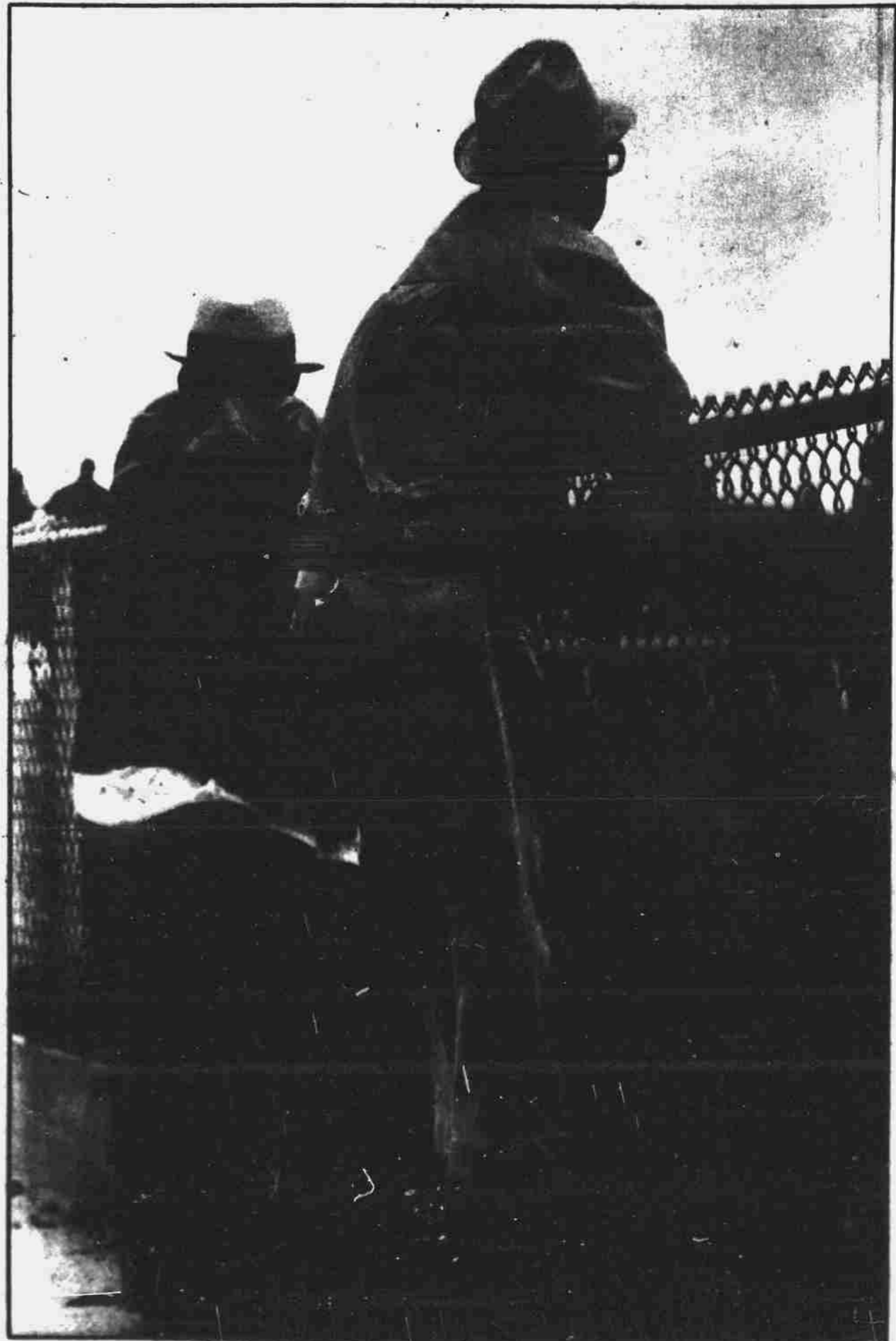


# And they're off... to



With racing forms under their arms and foaming brew or watery cocktails in hand, spectators rustle through the stands between races at the Lincoln Fairgrounds.

The talk is of longshots and favorites; also-rans and surprise winners. The accent is on fun.

There is no catch-all description to define the individuals in the crowd.

An elderly man ponders the entries of the next race listed on his scratch sheet as his gnarled and slow-moving fingers awkwardly thumb through a modest stack of one-dollar bills.

In the next row, a young man gulps down the last remaining slosh of beer from a crumpled wax cup. He wipes the foam away from his mustache and jokes with his companions about the money he has "dropped."

An unidentified cashier at a betting window says one of the most interesting things about the temporary job is, "the variety of people that come to the track."

"They're all so different, yet I think everybody out here has something in common," he said. "We're all crazy."

As the lights on the infield tote board flash the odds for the next race, bettors make their decisions and head for windows to place their bets.

The horses are paraded past the grandstand en route to the starting gate. The jockeys sit high in their saddles as they move their mounts down the track.

With tickets clutched in hand, many people move to the rail for a better vantage point from which to watch the race.

The announcer informs the crowd that the horses are nearing the gate. Then the long-awaited: "And they're all in place."

A bell rings and the race begins. Spectators spring to their feet and cheer horses on by name or by number.

The horses are coming out of the final turn as a herd of people rush to the rail near the finish line to see them thunder past.

The race is over.

The unofficial results are posted on the board, followed soon by the official results.

Some members of the crowd scamper to cash tickets. Disgusted, other spectators wad or tear losing tickets and throw the remnants.

But the losers will have a chance to win their money back. The next race is coming right up.