

Class examines, analyzes athletes' behavior

By Mary C. Reilly

Nervous twitching, slouched posture and finger-nail biting are all human behaviors that can signal an athlete's performance.

Anthropology 442, a class that studies sports behavior, was offered at UNL for the first time this semester.

The class studies how human behaviors will affect or indicate levels of sports performance, said Jann Steel, an associate professor of anthropology and co-teacher of the course. Open to all students, the course should also teach students how to analyze human behavior and determine if it is random, Steel said.

"As an athlete, I am now consciously aware of my behavior," said class member Renee Gould, a freshman gymnast. "Now I try not to display nervous behavior."

Attending the class helps to control her behavior, she said, and it helps her athletic performance.

Steel said the course benefits athletes and their performances because they tune into their anxiety levels.

To help them tune in, the class collects behavior data in a lab situation. Students observe athletic competition and record the athletes' behaviors, Steel said. This semester, the class watches gymnastics meets.

Observed behaviors not only will help athletes, but also coaches, she said. By knowing the behaviors their athletes display, coaches can help them avoid those behaviors and possibly improve their scores.

If a gymnastics judge sees that gymnasts start their routines immediately, that is a positive image, Gould said. But, she said, if gymnasts who wait before their routines do well, they do not express negative feelings, either.

However, Gould said, if gymnasts' faces express insecurity after a landing or during a performance, that tells the judge something negative.

Gould cited one example of sports behavior. At the Feb. 7 Nebraska vs.

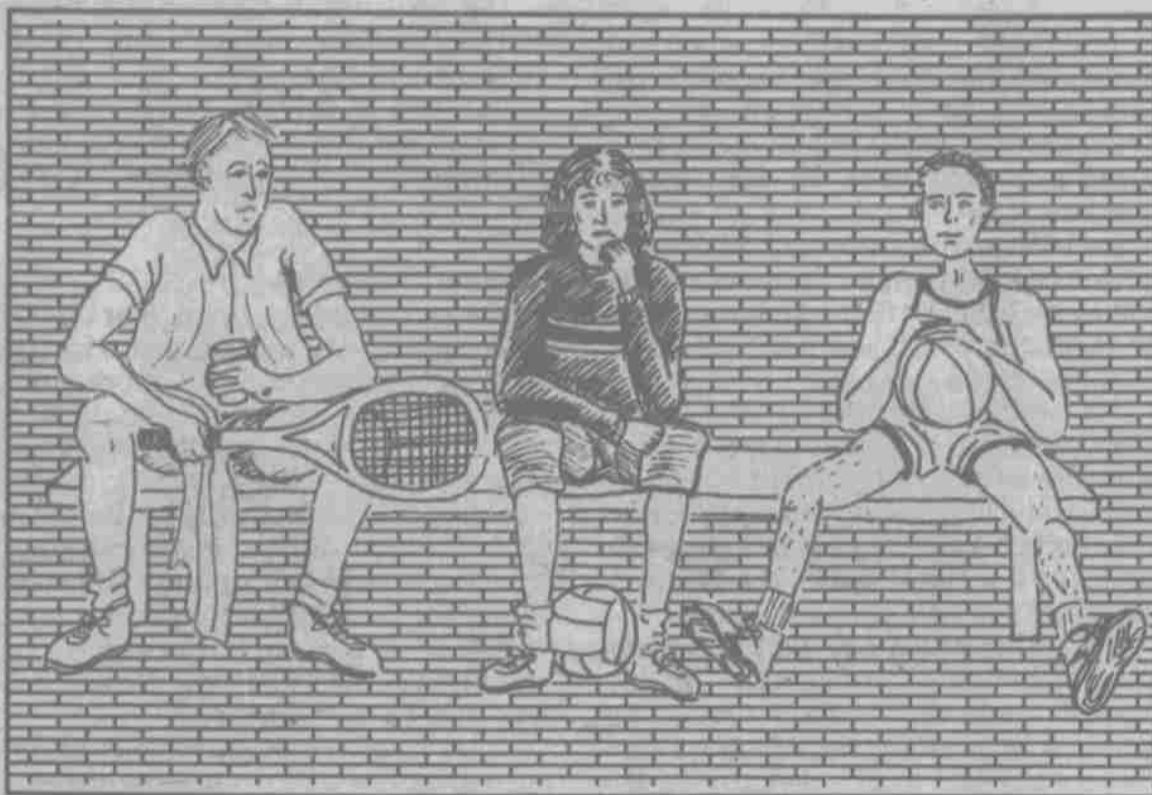
Penn State meet, a top female athlete on one team showed two behavior types while she waited to perform.

The athlete displayed dominant posture throughout the meet, indicating team leadership and good performance, Gould said. Keeping her shoulders held back and placing her hands on her hips, crossing her arms before her or holding her hands at her sides indicated her confidence while she waited to perform. Gould said the girl also stood on mats while she waited, putting herself on a higher level than other athletes who waited while standing or sitting on the floor.

However, Gould said, when the same girl approached the balance beam, she bit her nails and her shoulders slumped. She fell off the beam and received a low score, Gould said.

About 28 students are enrolled in the class this semester, five of whom are graduate students. Most of the undergraduates in the class are athletes, Gould said.

Steel said she did not know if the course would be continued. Martin Peterson, associate professor of anthropology, co-teaches the course this semester. Anthropology 110 is the prerequisite to the sports behavior class.



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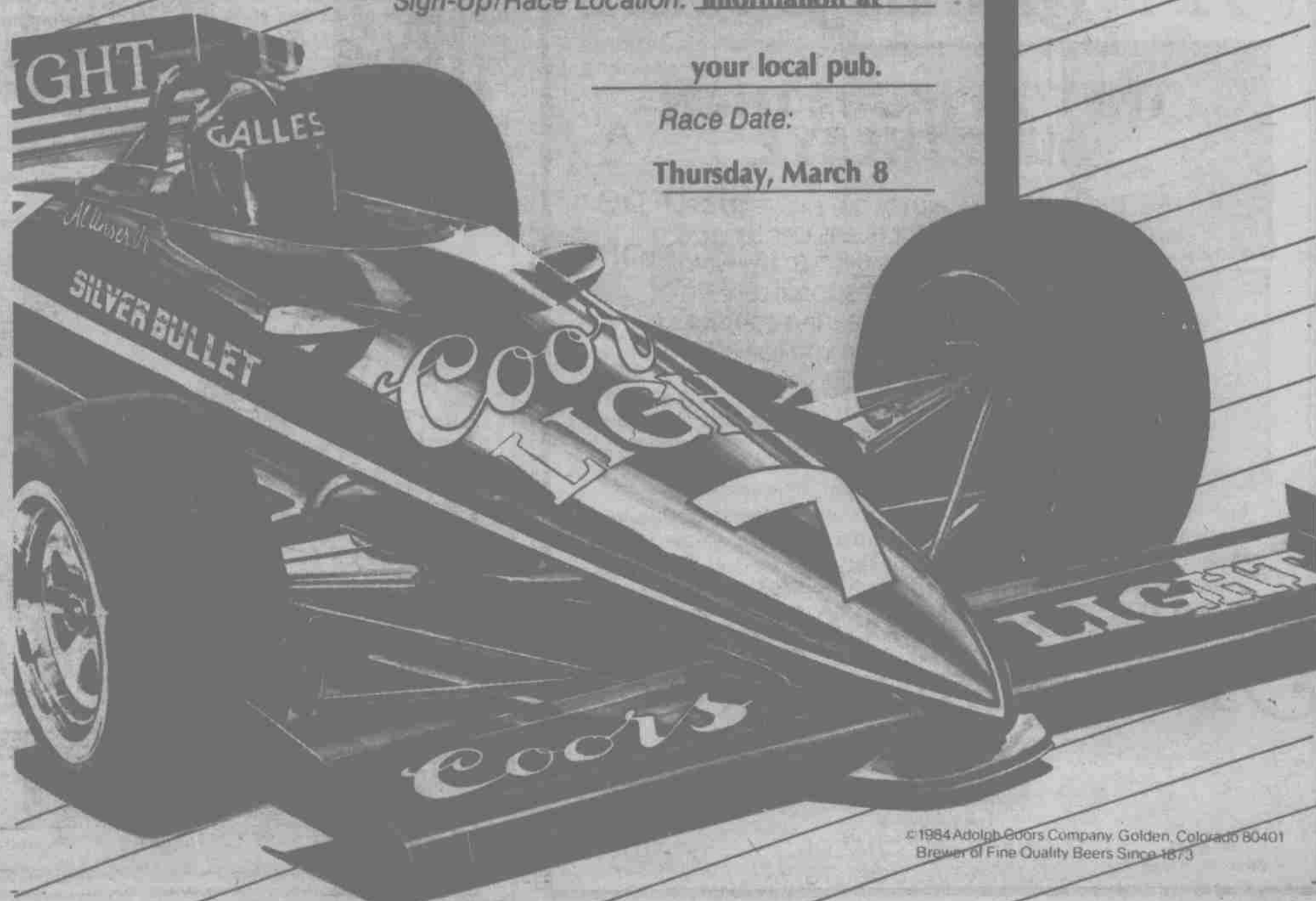
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