



### College football

■ Illinois football coach Ron Zook hired Michigan State's Reggie Mitchell (left) as an assistant.  
— **Sportfolio, C-5**

# SPORTS

Thursday, December 23, 2004

The News-Gazette **C**

## BRAGGIN' RIGHTS: ILLINOIS 70, MISSOURI 64



### What happened

Missouri hung tough, climbing to within four points in the second half, but Illinois hung on, winning its fifth straight Braggin' Rights game and the second in Bruce Weber's two tries.

### What it means

The Illini aren't unbeatable. For the first time this season, Illinois didn't win by double digits, and Mizzou's physical, defensive-minded approach likely will become the book other teams try to follow in bids to upset Weber's team.

### What the Illini said

"We're going to lose a game. Sometime, we're probably going to lose. But we didn't want to lose this one." — coach **Bruce Weber**

### What the Tigers said

"Sometimes it just comes down to being able to make some plays at the end, and we weren't able to make enough plays." — Missouri coach **Quin Snyder**

### What's next

A few days off for Christmas, then a home game in the Las Vegas Holiday Classic against Longwood (Monday, 7 p.m., no TV), one of the worst teams in Division I basketball. Then it's off to Vegas for the real fun.

### What's inside

- **Bleill column:** Illinois' seniors have reason to smile, **C-3**.
- **Dee Brown** isn't too worried about high injury, **C-3**.
- **Game 11** grades, box score, report card, **C-3**.
- **Indiana** loses heartbreaker, **C-7**.

# Holiday stress



## Illini celebration tame after first real scare

By **BRETT DAWSON**  
News-Gazette Staff Writer

ST. LOUIS — It's supposed to be the other reason to celebrate this week, cause to parade around the court, maybe to pop a cork or two. A reason to party. But Illinois' post-Braggin' Rights celebration here Wednesday, after a 70-64 win against Missouri, was relatively tame.

"We're happy to win," Illini guard Deron Williams said after his team continued its stranglehold on the series, winning a fifth straight against the Tigers. "Mostly, we're tired."

The Illini will celebrate this week with their families, unwrapping presents and feasting on home-cooked food.

On Wednesday, though, they left the merriment to the orange-clad among the 22,153 fans in the Savvis Center.

Fact is, the top-ranked Illini (11-0) didn't feel much like celebrating.

Not after their hardest-fought, most physical victory of the season.

It was uglier than the Illini hoped. It was closer than anyone expected.

And it was tiring. "I think they enjoyed getting the trophy, they enjoyed the atmosphere," Illinois coach Bruce Weber said. "But we got in the locker room and it was more like a relief."

Small wonder. Illinois, a model of offensive efficiency all season, shot like someone spiked the nog, tying a season low by shooting 42.3 percent from the floor and firing mostly blanks (5 of 20) from three-point range.

And though Illinois' defense was mostly steady, limiting Mizzou to 37.7 percent shooting,



Darrell Hoemann/The News-Gazette

Roger Powell Jr. and his Illini teammates hoist the trophy awarded to the winner of the Braggin' Rights game. For the fifth consecutive year, it went to Illinois.

it was wobbly enough to allow Tigers sophomore Linas Kleiza a 25-point night.

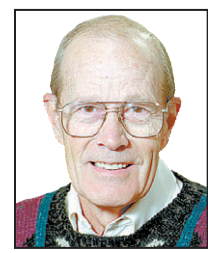
So hold off on the fireworks. The Illini were smiling when the buzzer sounded, but the ear-to-ear grins you've come to associate with a Braggin' Rights win were hard to find in the postgame.

"We're happy to get a win, yeah, but we didn't play our best basketball," said forward Roger Powell Jr., who battled Kleiza and foul trouble and finished with 14 points.

Please see **ILLINI, C-7**

## Margin of victory won't spread cheer

ST. LOUIS  
Bill Lyon, a bright C-U native who turned columnist in Philadelphia, wrote a biting article recently about his Brotherly



**TATELINES**  
**LOREN TATE**

Lovers who showed displeasure with a close Eagles victory. They've become so accustomed to success in the Donovan McNabb era that it isn't acceptable if their favorites don't Beat The Spread.

You could feel some of that sentiment in the electric Savvis Center on Wednesday night.

Much like a year ago, the

Illini carved out a big lead (41-25) and needed clutch free throws (nine in the last 1:53) as Missouri reduced a 16-point deficit to four.

Hey, that's five straight against Mizzou and a 16-8 advantage in the Braggin' Rights series. That makes the Illini 11-0 at Christmas. Time to celebrate? Right?

Well, not exactly. Expectations change when you're a 17-point favorite (Illini fans giving points lost money). And the imperfections that were glossed over in a 12-point defeat of Arkansas were even more glaring here.

Before enumerating the warts, let's point out some positives. Dee Brown was superb before being slowed by a knee to the thigh early in the second half, scoring eight points in a critical 15-8 getaway and serving assists on three straight

Please see **TATELINES, C-7**

Illinois guard Deron Williams soars past Missouri's Jason Conley for a basket in the second half. A strong finish allowed Williams to wind up with 19 points and five assists as Illinois beat Missouri 70-64 on Wednesday in St. Louis.

Darrell Hoemann/The News-Gazette

### Best of the bunch

Illinois on Wednesday matched the fifth-best start in school history:

START	SEASON	FINAL	COACH	COMMENT
17-0	1988-89	31-5	Lou Henson	Final Four team a fan favorite
16-0	1914-15	16-0	Ralph Jones	Only undefeated season in school history
15-0	1978-79	19-11	Lou Henson	Slump cost team NCAA tourney bid
12-0	1907-08	20-6	Fletcher Lane	Ten wins during start came against YMCAs
11-0	1989-90	21-8	Lou Henson	Team underachieved in NCAA tournament
11-0	1951-52	22-4	Harry Combes	Big Ten champs reached Final Four
11-0	2004-05	?	Bruce Weber	Next test for Dee Brown (right) and Co.: Cincinnati



Darrell Hoemann/The News-Gazette

## Speed Read

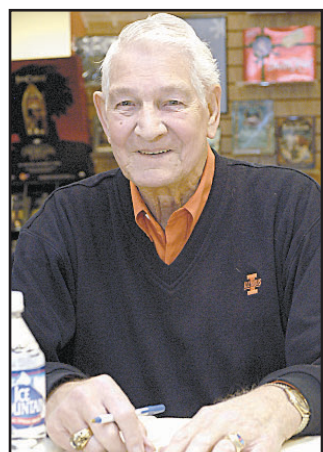
### Good cheer

Sports editor Jim Rossow's three reasons we love sports today:

■ Think the buildup and followup to the Braggin' Rights game was fun? Wait until the Big Ten and NCAA tournaments.

■ Good to see the last remaining Whiz Kid, Gene Vance (right), out and about signing books. You can read about one of the good guys in Illinois sports in Sunday's section.

■ Smart move by The Associated Press to pull its football poll from the BCS, which used it for its rankings. Reason No. 592 to create a playoff.



Darrell Hoemann/The News-Gazette

### Who am I?

■ I played for the Illini from 1945 through 1948 after starring at Elgin High School. I captained the UI's team as a senior and also was the MVP. Only Dike Eddleman scored more points than I did during the 1947-48 season, a campaign in which I earned second-team All-Big Ten honors. When it came to shooting free throws, none of my teammates shot as well as I did. I stayed in basketball after leaving Illinois, playing in the NBA for three seasons, then I coached prep ball at Evanston High for 25 years. Today I live in Glenview and celebrate my 78th birthday. (Answer to the right)

### On this date in ...

**1978** — Bryan Trottier had five goals and three assists to lead the New York Islanders past the Rangers 9-4. Trottier set an NHL record with three goals and three assists in the second period.

**2001** — Baltimore blanked Cincinnati 16-0 at PSINet Stadium, marking the first time an NFL team shut out an opponent at home over three seasons since the Oakland Raiders did it to San Diego from 1975 to '77.

### Today's Top Five

Staff writer Brian Dietz's list of candidates for the Southern Cal basketball job.

- 1. Bob Knight.** Could star in his own ESPN movies.
- 2. Rick Majerus.** Never know. He could change his mind again.
- 3. Bill and Nancy Laurie.** At least the players would have the finest tutors in the land.
- 4. Jerry Tarkanian.** Championship is worth the legal fees.
- 5. Tim Floyd.** Team can't be any worse than the Bulls.



### Click it

■ **Today's question:** Is Illinois (7-2) a women's NCAA tournament team?

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### Trivia answer

Jack Burnmaster