



Prep hoops

■ Champaign Central's William Keaton dished out eight assists as the Maroons topped Danville. — C-3

SPORTS

Wednesday, February 2, 2005



Speed Read



Jack Dempsey/AP

Good cheer

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

- If it can open the Assembly Hall for a football signing party, Illini should invite the public in to watch the NCAA tournament selection show March 13. The popcorn line would be really long.
- You know Cardinals broadcaster Al Hrabosky will have plenty to say about the Sammy Sosa trade when he speaks Feb. 12 in Champaign. For details, call 333-8605.
- The Winter X Games (above) ended Tuesday.



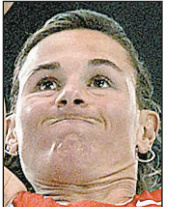
Who am I?

■ At 5-foot-9, I was a first-team All-Big Ten honoree in 1956. Michigan State's Julius McCoy, Ohio State's Robin Freeman and UI teammates George BonSalle and Paul Judson were among the other first-teamers. I played high school ball at Taylorville and was a charter member of the Illinois Basketball Hall of Fame. I averaged 12.4 points for the Illini from 1954 to '56 and finished my career in fifth place on the school's all-time list. Though we never won the conference title, the three Illini teams on which I played had a cumulative Big Ten record of 31-11. Today marks my 71st birthday (answer below).

On this date in ...

1991 — New Hampshire's men's basketball team snapped its 32-game losing streak at home with a 72-56 win against Holy Cross. The NCAA-record streak started in 1988.

2001 — Stacy Dragila took center stage at the Millrose Games in New York, breaking her world indoor pole vault record with a vault of 15 feet, 2 1/4 inches.



DRAGILA

Today's Top Five

Staff writer Fred Kroner's list of veteran assistant coaches who would make good head coaches:

1. **Jerry O'Neill, Schlarman.** In 16th year (under sixth head coach) helping with basketball, 10 years with girls and six with boys.
2. **Brian Loman, Heritage.** Has helped his dad with basketball for seven years.
3. **Barry Eakle, Salt Fork.** Helped direct teams to super-sectionals three of the five years he was on staff with his wife, Dawn, in the 1990s.
4. **Mike Johnson, Bismarck-Henning.** Has been involved with the high school wrestling program for 24 years.
5. **Dan Ryan, Mahomet-Seymour.** Seventh-year assistant directed freshmen to four straight Corn Belt Conference titles; guided varsity one year as interim coach.



Click it

■ Today's question: How many Big Ten teams will make the NCAA tournament? Go to www.news-gazette.com and click on SportsFacts, or e-mail your response to sports@news-gazette.com. We'll run selected responses for our Sounding Board page on Mondays.

Trivia answer

Bill Miller

I

ILLINOIS 81, MICHIGAN STATE 68

What happened
■ Illinois made 13 three-pointers, got 54 points from its starting backcourt and blitzed Michigan State, leading by as many as 17 points and never trailing by more than two. Along the way, the Illini set a school record with their 18th consecutive regular season Big Ten win.

What it means
■ An undefeated regular season is a realistic possibility. With its two toughest road tests (Wisconsin and Michigan State) dispatched, Illinois has a real shot at winning the remaining nine games it needs to follow St. Joseph's feat from last season.

What the Illini said
■ "I'm not going to say nobody can beat us. I just think if we take care of business and do the things we're supposed to do, it's tough to beat us." — guard **Deron Williams**

What the Spartans said
■ "I really like that team. I like the way they play. They just play the game. No fancy stuff, no BS. They just get it done." — coach **Tom Izzo**

What's next
■ Indiana, the last Big Ten program to post an undefeated regular season, visits the Assembly Hall at noon on Super Bowl Sunday (WCIA). You can bet countless comparisons will be made this week between these Illini and those '76 Hoosiers.

What's inside
■ **Mezydlo column:** Illini continue to excel in tough circumstances. **C-2.**
■ Williams tired of getting snubbed by media. **C-2.**
■ Brown apologizes for technical, makes it up to team. **C-2.**
■ Game 22 report card. **C-2.**
■ Game 22 box score. **C-2.**

Best keeps getting better



Illini clear path in title chase

By **BRETT DAWSON**
News-Gazette Staff Writer
EAST LANSING, Mich. — On paper, this was the one.

On paper, the Michigan State puffed and Brechlin problems for No. 1 Illinois. On paper, the Breslin Center was the last great roadblock between Illinois and a Big Ten title run.

On paper, the Spartans were the team, and Breslin the venue, that could do in the Illini's perfect season.

Illinois (22-0, 8-0 Big Ten) shredded that paper — and the 12th-ranked Spartans — on Tuesday, cruising past Michigan State 81-68 in what was supposed to be its toughest test yet.

"I can see where you would think that," said Illini guard Deron Williams, who scored 14 points and dished out five assists. "Just because this is a tough place to play, Michigan State (has) athleticism. It's tough to compete with those guys, and they have a great coach. But I don't think we were ready to accept that. We never thought that way."

And no wonder. Nobody's beaten Illinois this season. Hardly anybody has come close.

But the Illini's confidence springs less from what's come so far as from what they think is coming.

Here's a scary thought for the Big Ten, and maybe for the nation: Illinois is (gulp) getting better.

"Every single day," Williams said.

Toughened by a gut-check at Wisconsin, Illinois came north this week certain it would leave Michigan State with a win.

Please see ILLINI, C-6

Reality sets in for Spartans

EAST LANSING, Mich.

The Spartan faithful should have been checked for steroids. Nearly 15,000 strong, they turned Breslin Center into a "white-out" madhouse Tuesday night, scorching the ears as they prepared to celebrate the building's 108th consecutive sellout.

Students came with green hair, bare-skinned and painted, or all of the above.

In the mix were Superman, Spider-Man and Incredible Hulks. Fairyland released Grumpy and Happy (both went home grumpy), and Frankenstein made the trek. There was the Blue Man Group in green. They hooted and booed everything orange and chastised senior Roger Powell Jr. for smiling at the feverish, lower-level students during warmups. Signs were everywhere, insulting Illinois interlopers while the band enhanced the ear-splitting, mind-altering noise.

And from the beginning, from the moment Powell tipped in his miss for a 2-0 lead, Bruce Weber's Illini kept shutting them up, discouraging their ardor, deadening the rampant emotions, spoiling their fun.

Oh, it took a good 38 minutes before nervous athletic director Ron Guenther, seated at mid-court, could breathe easily. Michigan State pulled within 75-68 and had the ball with 2:11

Please see TATE, C-6



TATELINES
LOREN TATE

Illinois' Luther Head leaves the court after the top-ranked Illini's 81-68 road victory against Michigan State on Tuesday night. Head led the Illini with 22 points — including four three-pointers — and also had five steals.

Al Goldis/AP

NATIONAL SIGNING DAY

Illini funk easy to trace

By **BOB ASMUSSEN**
News-Gazette Staff Writer

How do you go from 10-2 one season to 1-11 two years later? Simple: talent. Or lack thereof.

The first three years of Ron Turner's eight seasons at Illinois, the coach put together a winning mix of high-profile recruits and hidden gems. For every Luke Butkus, there was a Jay Kulaga.

For every Brandon Lloyd, there was a Walter Young.

The three classes formed the foundation of a bowl winner in 1999 and a Big Ten champion in 2001.

"You'd think you'd get some momentum because of that," Illinois recruiting expert "Edgy" Tim O'Halloran said.

Please see RECRUITING, C-5

Early outs

The following Illinois football signees were gone from the team before the end of their eligibility:

2000	2001	2002
PLAYERPOS.	Sedrick DavenportDB	Steve HarrisDB
Nana AgyemanDB	Matt DlugoleckiQB	Anthony LongeDB
Kevin AndersonDB	Cory FlisakowskiQB	James McGill*DB
Clark CollinsOL	Jim GoransonLB	Darnell RayDB
Matt HendersonDB	Mario IvyLB	Mike TrepinaTE
Lamont HoldenDE	Abe JonesRB	Mike ZandeOL
Patrick KingK	Rob NeedhamOL	
Jemari PerryDE	T.W. NormanLB	
Kenny RogersRB		

2004

Brock BolenFB
Tony SparkmanOL
* never enrolled at Illinois

Sign here

Our signing day coverage concludes Thursday with a player-by-player look at Illini's incoming football class, plus coverage of area high school stars and their college choices.