



College football

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— C-5

SPORTS

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The News-Gazette **C**



ILLINOIS 67, CINCINNATI 45



What happened

■ Illinois did the Big Ten right by holding off Alabama. Purdue wasn't as fortunate.

What it means

■ The Illini wrap up a perfect nonconference season. And Illinois has the first of the four trophies it's looking for this season.

What the Illini said

■ "(A perfect nonconference season) was always possible to us. We knew if we did all the right things, it wasn't that hard to do. And look at us now."

What the Bearcats said

■ "We didn't help ourselves. We need to rebound better. We need to shoot 46 percent (from the field) or better."

What's next

■ Illinois will start the Big Ten season with a visit from Hoopston's Thad Matta and Ohio State on Wednesday at the Assembly Hall (8 p.m., WCIA).

What's inside

- Williams holds his own against physical opponent, C-2.
■ Game 14 report card, C-2.
■ Game 14 box score, C-2.
■ Classic roundup, C-3.
■ UI 1,000-point scorers, C-3.
■ Ohio State wins again, C-3.

Jackpot!

UI guards right on the money

LAS VEGAS

Like the blindfolded youth trying to pin the tail on a donkey, the selection committee plucked Luther Head from the wealth of UI backcourt talent and presented him with MVP honors in the Las Vegas Holiday Classic.

They should have divided it three ways. Really. Just as coach Bruce Weber predicted in early December, Deron Williams' game is entering the New Year at the anticipated high level. And Dee Brown is

outplaying every 6-footer he lines up against. All three were terrific here Thursday and Friday. And Illinois, 14-0 after drubbing Cincinnati again, sent



TATELINES

LOREN TATE

a message to the Big Ten Conference: As long as Roger Powell, James Augustine and their lanky backups can hold their own in the paint, nobody ... but nobody ... is going to withstand these Illini.

That's how Illinois won the battle of unbeaten in a high school gym on New Year's Eve. The Illini broke even on rebounds (39-39), and the defense was so overwhelming that Cincinnati didn't have a double-figure scorer until the final 2 1/2 minutes when rugged Jason Maxiell broke through.

"This was a highly physical game, much more so than last March," Weber said. "We shot them out (92-68) in the NCAA in Columbus (Ohio). Tonight the shots weren't falling (season-low 39 percent) so we had to battle. After seeing our defense slip in recent games, I thought we turned in 40 solid minutes. We didn't give them many good looks. It's great that we could defeat them again, and do it in an entirely different way. It's quite a feat to hold Cincinnati to 45 points and 28 percent shooting.

"As for our shooting, I'd say some of it is that defenses are tougher, and some of it is their ability to game-plan us by studying our film."

Head-turners In Indianapolis, the Illini guards wowed the greatest collegiate coach of all time, John Wooden. And they made another veteran believer Friday night.

"These are the best guards in the country as far as I'm concerned," said Jerry Tarkanian, a longtime Las Vegas resident who led UNLV to the national title in 1990.

Please see TATELINES, C-3



Matthew Minard/AP

Dee Brown reacts to scoring and being fouled in the first half. Brown had 13 points — surpassing 1,000 in his career — and a game-high three steals as top-ranked Illinois beat No. 22 Cincinnati 67-45 on Friday in the final game at the Las Vegas Holiday Classic.

Big Ten breakdown

Illinois, like a lot of Big Ten teams, is finished with nonconference play. Here's what we know about the Big Ten in advance of Wednesday's league openers, courtesy sports editor Jim Rossow:

THE GOOD NEWS In Steve they believe

We knew Illinois would be good, but Iowa's climb to No. 16 has caught many by surprise. The Hawkeyes, off to their best start in Steve Alford's six seasons, have three talented guards of their own in Jeff Horner (right), Pierre Pierce and Adam Haluska.

Dials him up

Remember how well Terence Dials played against Illinois last March? Thad Matta has the Ohio State big man operating at an even higher level. Dials winning the last two Big Ten Player of the Week awards. That hasn't been done since Wisconsin's Kirk Penney went back-to-back in 2001.

Take that, Vitale

Sure, basically every team in the ACC is ranked. But the Big Ten has an edge on Dickie V's favorite conference when it comes to Top 10 teams in the always important RPI. The Big Ten is the only league in the nation with three in this week's Top 10: No. 5 Illinois, No. 8 Iowa and No. 9 Wisconsin.



Charlie Neibergall/AP

THE BAD NEWS Dazed and blue

So much for Tommy Amaker's breakthrough season at Michigan. The Wolverines, beset by injuries, have been the league's sob story, eliminating themselves from NCAA play barring a Big Ten tournament run. Losing Daniel Horton, Lester Abram and Graham Brown to ouchies was too much.

Who's next?

That's the question at Indiana, which is sure to send Mike Davis packing if the product doesn't improve quickly. The Hoosiers can't make baskets or draw fans (no sell-outs this season) and are on their way to a second consecutive losing season, something that last happened 35 years ago.

What was Painter thinking?

It's as ugly in West Lafayette as it is in Bloomington, Gene Keady picking the wrong team to go out with. The Boilermakers, 3-6 for the first time since 1965-66, can't even win at Mackey Arena, where they're 2-3 after Brandon McKnight's Chris Webber moment in Thursday's loss.



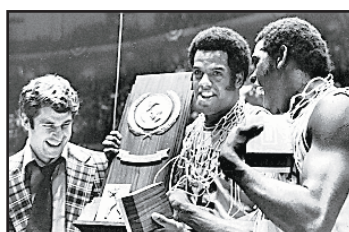
No. 1 Illini leave Vegas big winners

By BRETT DAWSON News-Gazette Staff Writer

LAS VEGAS — It would be a great story.

Bruce Weber scrawls "14-0" on a dry erase board before Illinois' first basketball game of the season. He tells his players the odds are long, the competition tough, but he wants to go undefeated in the nonconference schedule.

It would be a great story. But it's not entirely true.



Coming Sunday

At 14-0, Illinois is one of eight Division I teams yet to lose this season. Staff writer Jeff Mezydlo caught up with members of the last team to complete an undefeated season, the 1975-76 Indiana Hoosiers (above), who weighed in on the chances of a team like Illinois matching their hard-to-believe feat.

"Actually, he wrote 13-0," Illinois guard Deron Williams said Friday night, after Illinois rang out the old year with a 67-45 triumph of Cincinnati in the title game of the Las Vegas Holiday Classic. "A couple of days ago, he figured out that it was 14-0 and he started talking about that."

That's about the only thing Weber's done wrong this season.

Make it 14-0 for the Illini, their first perfect preconference run since 1989-90. With that out of the way, the New Year's resolution is simple: Win the Big Ten.

Illinois certainly is prepared for it.

Cincinnati saw to that, trying to override the Illini's hustle with its muscle. But the previously unbeaten Bearcats (11-1) found an Illinois team unwilling to back down from a bump.

And, in a case of turnabout being foul play, the Illini gave as good as they got.

"They were crying to the refs for fouls," said Illinois guard Dee Brown, whose 13 points pushed him to 1,010 for his career. "They said we were too physical."

Whichever was the most physical team, there was little doubt when the buzzer sounded which one was the best. Illinois, which had humbled Cincinnati 92-68 last season in a run-and-gun NCAA tournament tilt, proved it had the mettle to match its pedal-to-the-metal pace, and when it was over, the Illini felt they'd gotten over one more hurdle in the search for the national championship.

Please see ILLINI, C-3

Speed Read

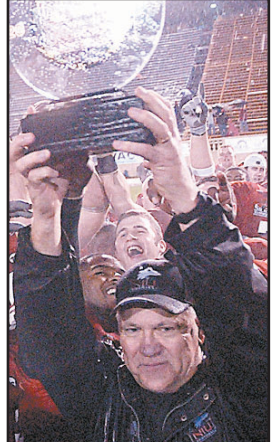
Good cheer

Staff writer Bob Asmussen's three reasons we love sports today:

■ Great to see Northern Illinois (left) gain its first bowl victory in 21 years. Coach Joe Novak has built a MAC power in DeKalb and the wins will continue in the coming seasons.

■ There isn't a better five hours of college football than at 10 a.m. today. You can watch four games during the stretch, including two with Big Ten teams. Nobody else touch the remote.

■ Just three days left until the BCS title game between Southern Cal and Oklahoma. Stock up on goodies.



Marcio Jose Sanchez/AP

Who am I?

■ I was Champaign High's most decorated athlete of the 1940s, leading the Maroons to the state basketball title in 1946. In my three seasons as a member of Coach Harry Combes' Illini team, we compiled a 58-17 record. Twice we went to the NCAA's Final Four, and I earned first-team All-America honors. I was one of the team's leading scorers and once grabbed 27 rebounds in a 1952 game against Purdue. My dad, Ralph, and my uncle, Bob, played football for Bob Zuppke. Today, I'm the general manager of a window accessories company and live in Orange County, Calif. Today is my 74th birthday. (Answer to the right).

On this date in ...

1934 — Columbia upset Stanford 7-0 in the Rose Bowl when Al Barabas scored in the third quarter on a 17-yard hidden-ball play.

1991 — Georgia Tech routed Nebraska 45-21 in the Citrus Bowl to finish as college football's only unbeaten team (11-0-1).

1999 — Ron Dayne rushed for 246 yards and a record-tying four touchdowns, leading Wisconsin past UCLA 38-31 in the Rose Bowl.

Today's Top Five

Staff writer Fred Kroner's list of freshmen who've made the biggest impact on varsity during the girls' basketball season:

- 1. Rachael Follmer, Centennial. Averaging 9.2 points.
2. Stephanie Denius, Oakwood. Scored 20 points against a 13-1 Westville team.
3. Mandy Kirby, Urbana. Team-leader in assists after 16 games.
4. Kaela McCabe, St. Thomas More. Averaging 9.2 ppg.
5. Skylar Buckley, Chrisman. Averaging team-high 8.9 ppg.



Click it

■ Today's question: Will another team — maybe Illinois — match what the 1975-76 Indiana Hoosiers did and go undefeated?

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.

Trivia answer

HOOD HITCHER