

LOREN TATE: ON COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Love is in the air for Final Four fellas



CHAMPAIGN — Nothing signifies the pleasant memories enjoyed on the UI campus more than when people return. And it strikes a special chord when those people are named Deron, Dee, Luther and James. The four starters for the 2005 NCAA runners-up took the court with the Illini varsity again this weekend in a final get-

together before reporting to their NBA teams. They drew more cheers when they were introduced as a foursome at Saturday's football game.

"I love Illinois," said the former Texan, Deron Williams. "It's great to be back with the guys here."

"We intend to do it every year," said

Luther Head, "to work out with the basketball team and do what we can for recruiting."

NBA practice officially begins a week from Tuesday with Dee Brown and Williams reporting to Utah, Head to Houston and James Augustine to Orlando. The fifth starter on their Illini team, Roger Powell Jr.,

already has taken up residence in Utah, giving the Illini three candidates for positions on the Jazz roster.

"We come back here to show the love we have for people who love us," Brown said. "We'll stay in communication. I look forward

Please see TATE, D-3



SWEET & SOUR



Robert K. O'Daniell/The News-Gazette

Iowa lineman Matt Kroul can't stop Illinois quarterback Juice Williams on Saturday. Williams was 9 of 32 for 161 yards and a score in his starting debut.

Juice loses debut, gains confidence

By BOB ASMUSSEN
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CHAMPAIGN — The freshman quarterback walked off the field, healthy and with his head held high. Knowing he will get another chance.

"Even though I'm young, the quarterback has to be a leader out there on the field," Illinois' Juice Williams said. "That's what I'm trying to do."

Williams' starting debut wasn't a thing of beauty. He missed 23 of 32 passes and threw three interceptions in a 24-7 loss Saturday to No. 14 Iowa.

But it wasn't a devastate-him-beyond-repair disaster some might have expected. Instead of covering into a shell after the interceptions, Williams kept fir-

ing. He completed seven of his final 12 passes, including a 31-yarder for a touchdown to Jacob Willis.

"Knowing that I have the ability to score when I get settled down and just have fun and play ball, that definitely boosts my confidence," Williams said. "I just want to go into Michigan State next week and do that earlier versus coming out (and doing it) in the third or fourth quarter."

Illinois coach Ron Zook wasn't ready to name a starter for Saturday. But the way Williams played late in the game makes it hard to imagine a change.

Some of his teammates already were talking about Williams like he would be in charge. Not before first using the disclaimer "whatever the coaches

decide to do."

"Everybody has the most confidence in the world in him, and he has confidence in himself," Illinois receiver DaJuan Warren said. "That's a big thing. We'll be good next week."

"When he gets his chance, he's going to do a good job," Illinois tailback Pierre Thomas said.

Zook is challenging the rest of his players, especially on offense, to do their part.

"When he's in there, everyone else has to play well also," Zook said. "Everyone has to be able to stand up and be accounted for."

"We're not going to ask Juice to win the game for us. We're going to ask him to manage the offense."

EXTRA POINTS

STORY OF THE GAME DEBUT AND DROPS



Robert K. O'Daniell/The News-Gazette

Juice Williams made the first start of his career and needed more help from his receivers (Joe Morgan, above), who dropped a string of catchable balls. After a 2-for-20 start, Williams hit seven of his final 12.

D-5

NUMBERS GAME

5-18-57

Those are Dave Wilson's completions-attempts-yards in his Illinois starting debut in 1980. Wilson finished the year with 3,154 passing yards, becoming the first Illini quarterback to break the 3,000 mark.

WHAT IT MEANS

While the Big Ten losing streak continues for Illinois (it's now at 10), the days of opponent domination might be over. Saturday's loss didn't have the look of the previous nine, especially when it came to the Illini defense.

WHAT'S NEXT

Another week in front of the JUGS machine for the Illini receivers, then a short flight to East Lansing on Friday for a game against Michigan State (11 a.m. on WCIA). Like Iowa, Michigan State is coming off an emotional game Saturday against Notre Dame.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Monthly Memorial Stadium construction update.

Columnist Loren Tate says the Illini are Juice Williams' team.

Game 4 review, grades.

D-3

D-4

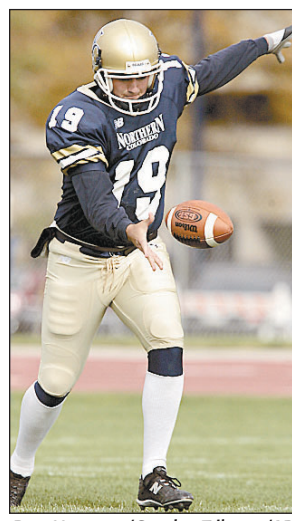
D-5

SPEED READ

GOOD CHEER

Copy editor Rich Barak's three reasons we love sports today:

- Northern Colorado punter Rafael Mendoza (right) was back, less than two weeks after being stabbed in his kicking leg. Mendoza hit a 58-yard punt against Western Illinois, which won 42-28 Saturday in Greeley, Colo.
- Cubs fans, rejoice. The North Siders cannot lose 100 games this season (story, D-10).
- There's no need to get up early today to watch the Ryder Cup. The real drama, if it occurs, won't happen until late in the match.



Bret Hartman/Greeley Tribune/AP

LIGHT ON THE NUMBER

1915

The year Olympia Fields Country Club was constructed. The suburban Chicago club's historic North Course is hosting the Fighting Illini Invitational men's golf tournament, which tees off today.

TODAY'S TOP FIVE

Copy editor Mike Goebel's top college football surprises on Saturday:

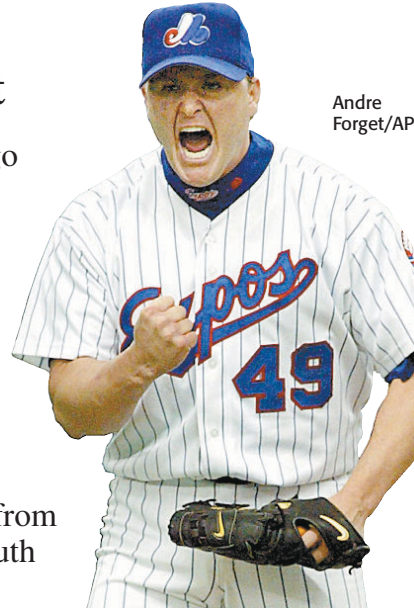
- 1. Rally hat.** Irish fans will remember Saturday's second-half comeback (26-6) at Michigan State for years to come.
- 2. Quite a turnaround.** Colorado, which lost to Montana State, almost beat No. 9 Georgia.
- 3. Tiger pride.** Missouri is 4-0 for the first time since 2003.
- 4. Home defense.** Hawaii nearly pulled off the impossible. Boise State held on for its 48th win (out of 50) on that blue field.
- 5. It's academic.** Love that the military academies are competitive again: Army won in overtime, Navy lost in extra time and Air Force looks solid again. Can't wait for Army-Navy on Dec. 2.



Sunday's best

Each week, we'll go behind the scenes to give readers something more to chew on besides college football.

Today, Tony Bleill's look at Centennial product Matt Herges, who's pitched everywhere from Canada (right) to South Beach, D-2.



Andre Forget/AP