

## Masheto gears up for Olympics

UI track star excited for chance to compete on Botswana team

BY KEVIN OLSEN  
STAFF WRITER

With the Olympic torch getting closer to its home in Beijing, junior Gakologelwang Masheto's journey away from home is just beginning.

Masheto, a native of Muan, Botswana, has been in the United States for less than two years, but he will leave for yet another part of the world this summer. In January, Masheto was named to the 2008 Botswana Olympic team by the Botswana Athletic Association. He will compete as part of the 4x400-meter relay, as well as individually in the 400 meters, in China.

The University of Illinois standout has endured a lot in his life, and now, the Olympics provide him a chance to live out his dreams. His parents were tragically killed in a car accident that subsequently saw Masheto under the care of coach Adam Letham for the four years before he moved to the United States. It was Letham who played a major role with Illinois head coach Wayne Angel in drawing Masheto to Illinois.

"In 1992, I saw the Olympics on television and I told myself one day I wanted to see myself running at the Olympics, so this is a dream come true," Masheto said. "For a small country such as Botswana, this is something big to go to the Olympics and go there to represent my family and people back home."

Masheto was originally a standout soccer player when he was younger before making the switch to track. The

decision to trade sports initiated a chain reaction of success for the budding star.

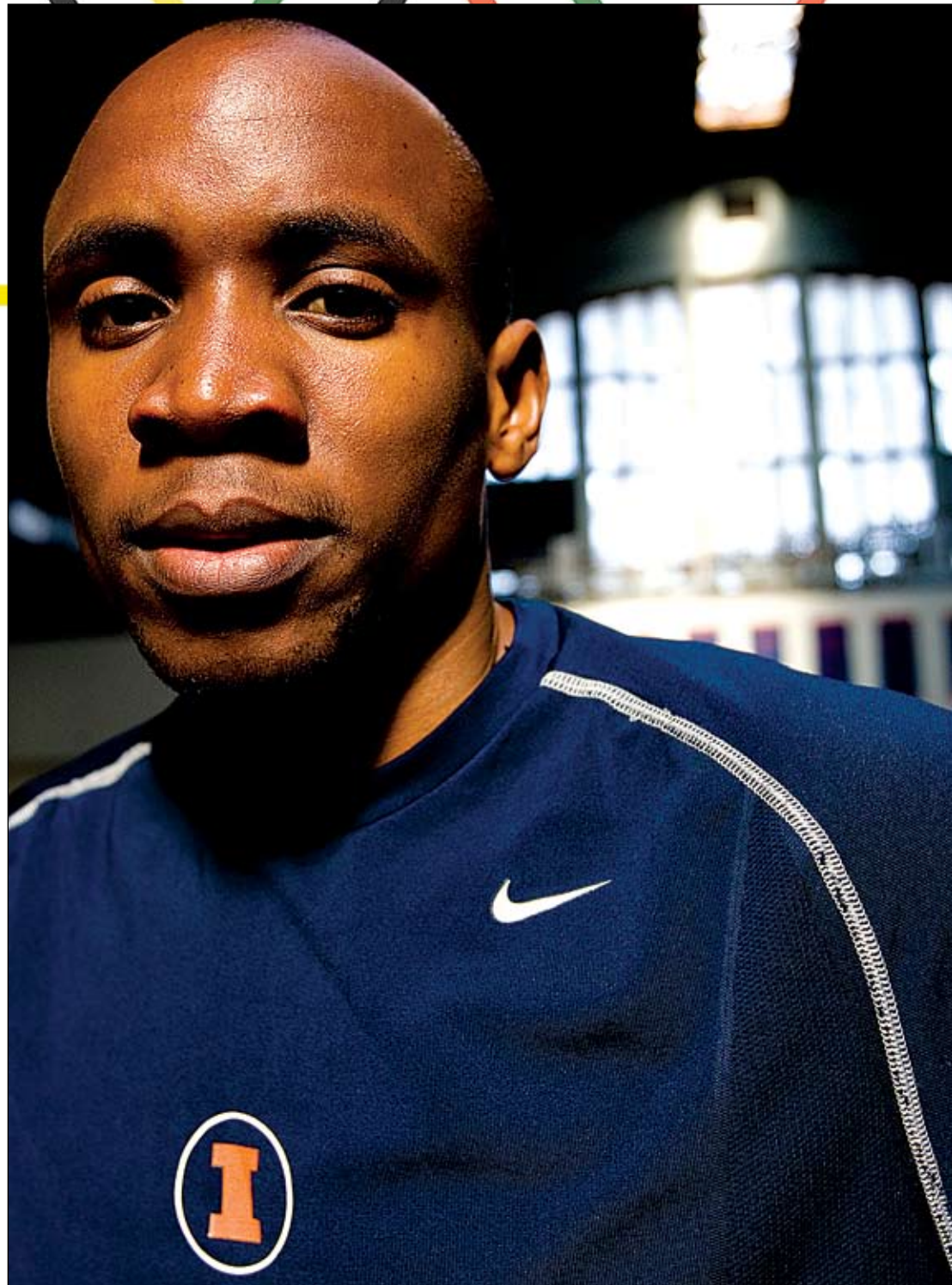
Known to teammates, coaches and acquaintances alike as "Shoes," this quiet competitor lets his legs do all the talking. On Feb. 8, Masheto, a 400-meter runner, set an NCAA record in the 500 meters at the New Balance Invitational in New York. It was the fastest time in the world this year. The event is not a sanctioned NCAA Championship event, but it is still a collegiate record.

"He's a very humble individual," Angel said about Masheto. "He focuses on his academics. He knows how hard and how hard not to train and he just takes things one step at a time."

The last meet he competed at as an individual was the Big Ten Indoor Championships. Masheto exhibited his toughness in capturing the 400 meters, while nursing a stress fracture in his foot. This marked his fourth Big Ten title in just a year and a half at Illinois. This was nothing new to Masheto, who has been a big-time winner since the first time Angel saw him compete in person.

Angel traveled to the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean for the 2006 African Championships after reading about Masheto online and seeing his times. He wanted to "put facts with a face" and witnessed Masheto and his teammates take the bronze in the 4x400 relay. An instant relationship was born between the

See **MASHETO**, Page 4B



PORTRAIT BY BRAD VEST THE DAILY ILLINI

## Why blame coaches for their team's loss, failure?



KEVIN SPITZ  
Sports columnist

The man who holds the record for the highest regular season winning percentage of all time, Avery Johnson, was fired by the Dallas Mavericks yesterday. During his tenure, the Mavericks went to the NBA Finals once and were consistently one of the best teams in the league. From reports in various newspapers and from ESPN.com, though, it seems as if Johnson lost his way with both ownership and the players and it was time for a change.

When it comes to successes and failures, coaching is always a very interesting topic to discuss. What makes a coach so successful for a certain period of time and then have that success disappear?

Looking back at the recent history of Chicago's two baseball teams, I point out that former White Sox skipper Jerry Manuel won the Coach of the Year award in 2000 for the White Sox's impressive 95 win season. Four mediocre seasons later, he was fired.

In addition, Dusty Baker won three Coach of the Year awards with San Francisco and was highly touted by the Cubs when he was hired to be the coach that ends the curse. Baker lasted four years before he was fired.

But was it ever really coaching ability that led to their demise? Could it have been? When it comes to strategy in any sport, different coaches have different theories as to what works the best. The ones who can refine those theories and adapt seem to hold up the best, but it's not like a coach would ever lose those skills once they gain them.

So it would seem to me that the ones who actually deter-

See **SPITZ**, Page 4B

## Illini shortstop breaks Big Ten single season home run record

Sophomore pitcher also steps up against SIU

BY KATE MUNSON  
STAFF WRITER

While the results of Wednesday's doubleheader against Southern Illinois (27-23, 12-8 Missouri Valley Conference) at Eichelberger Field at Martin Stadium were mixed, one Illini made the games memorable. Illinois senior shortstop Angelena Mexicano tied the Big Ten single season home run record in game one and broke it in game two.

The first game started out looking like a pitcher's duel with neither team crossing the plate until the fifth inning. Unfortunately, the scoring didn't go in favor of the Illini (30-29, 8-10 Big Ten) as they fell to the Salukis 6-3.

Getting the start for the Fighting Illini in game one was sophomore pitcher Christine Christophoulos. The lefty went four innings without allowing a run before Southern Illinois struck in the fifth.

"Christine threw well today," head coach Terri Sullivan said.



JEREMY BERG THE DAILY ILLINI

Illinois' Angelena Mexicano hits a home run during the game against Southern Illinois on Wednesday. Mexicano broke the Big Ten single season home run record with 24 home runs.

"Especially through the first four innings."

Christophoulos allowed her first walk to lead off the fifth, and the Salukis followed it up

with a base hit. Following a two-run double by junior designated player Katie Schmidt that put Southern Illinois up 2-0, Christophoulos was pulled in

favor of senior pitcher Claire DeVreese.

Two more Southern Illinois

See **SOFTBALL**, Page 4B

## Club teams reflect on successful year, accomplishments



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ILLINOIS MEN'S CLUB VOLLEYBALL TEAM  
The Illinois Men's Club Volleyball team poses after its second place finish at the Club National Volleyball Championships in Dallas.

### Noteworthy season shows drive, talent of UI men's volleyball

BY KATE MUNSON  
STAFF WRITER

Men's club volleyball has a strong tradition at Illinois, dating back to 1984. But for all three of the program's teams, this season was especially remarkable.

The Blue Team is the Fighting Illini's "A" team and participates in the most tournaments each year. This season, it won its second consecutive Midwest Intercollegiate Volleyball Association (MIVA) Division I title while riding a 35-match winning streak. The title complemented its Big Ten Men's Volleyball Association (BTMVA) regular season and tournament championship victories.

And plans for next season are even more ambitious.

"This year we really focused on our serving and defense," said Doug Burchett, club vice

president and captain of the Blue Team. "I would like to see our team become a better 'out of system' team, which means getting kills when we don't have a perfect pass. Otherwise, our goal is to get back to that championship game and win a National Championship."

In Division II play, the Orange (B) Team clinched the MIVA Championship by defeating rival University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and ended its official MIVA season without losing a single game en route to snagging its fifth consecutive MIVA title. The Orange Team also claimed the BTMVA title for its division, as well as the BTMVA tournament championship.

"Our team's biggest accomplishment was the amount of respect that we earned from all the other programs in the country," Orange Team member Brendan Ori said. "It's not easy fielding one really good team, but Illinois' club

See **IMVB**, Page 4B

## Farewell from an Illini sports writer, fan



MIKE THEODORE  
Staff writer

Covering wrestling, softball and football the past two years, I am privileged and thankful to have seen a side of Illinois athletics many covet but few realize. In just more than 100 bylines, I've been provided with an incredible

assortment of memories and experiences.

A few highlights: Watching from the sideline as Juice Williams took down then top-ranked Ohio State in the Horseshoe with a gutsy time-consuming drive, which will rank in the upper-echelon of Illini football memories forever.

A week in California covering the Rose Bowl and dining with coach Locksley and his family at the Lawry's Beef Bowl.

Taking in conference wrestling matches at a packed Huff Hall.

A 50-hour plus Greyhound trip with tear-dropped ex-convicts, alleged illegal immigrants, no heat, a self-proclaimed Jesus/Armageddon savant, way too much heat and frightening tales of the road from an over-cafeinated early morning driver.

This being my one and only time to write a column, I'd like to state two brief thoughts: Let Chief Illiniwek XXXVII and all

future Chiefs dance, and stop with the unwarranted Bruce Weber criticism (haven't Illini fans seen first hand these overly simplified blanket statements made about head coaches to be inaccurate?).

Special thanks to Dave Just, Steve Contorno, Dan Johnson, Jason Grodsky, Alex Symonds, Adam Harris, Cassie Arner, coach Mark Johnson, the Birnbaum family, Ron Seliga, Frank Napolitano and most importantly my friends and family. So long, Champaign.