

Football reveals winning potential

Moveable defense leads to win

BY JOHN KEKIS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — With the Big Ten season looming, Illinois needed to find some more positive signs. Syracuse was more than happy to provide them.

Rashard Mendenhall rushed for 150 yards and three touchdowns, Juice Williams threw for one touchdown and ran for another, and the Illini beat the Orange 41-20 on Saturday.

For Illinois (2-1), which snapped an eight-game losing streak last week with a 21-0 win over Western Illinois, it was the Illini's first win over a team from college football's top division since a 23-20 victory over Michigan State nearly a year ago. Western Illinois plays in the Football Championship Subdivision, formerly I-AA.

"The Big Ten begins next week, and I told them that will be real ball then," Illinois head coach Ron Zook said. "This should give us confidence. Our whole thing is continuous improvement, and people can see it out there."

Especially the Orange (0-3), who hadn't started a season with three straight losses in 21 years. So far this season, Syracuse has been outscored 118-32 by three teams whose combined record in 2006 was 13-24.

"It's frustrating, but it's not discouraging," said Syracuse head coach Greg Robinson, whose lone road victory in three years was last year over the Illini. "We're frustrated we got beat. They played well. We didn't play well."

Syracuse is accustomed to that — the Orange entered the game allowing 426 yards and 38.5 points. Illinois had 443 yards after three quarters and finished with 508. And the Illini gained 378 yards rushing, the most since they had 420 in a 42-23 win over Minnesota in 1975. Even little-used freshman Troy Pollard chipped in with 92 yards on 13 carries as the Illini averaged 7.4 yards per carry.

"I was extremely surprised at the ease we moved the Syracuse defense," said Williams, who was 13-for-18 passing for 97 yards and gained 90 yards rushing. "They're smart, strong and fast, but I was surprised we were able to run the ball like that. When



Illinois wide receiver Brian Gamble (26) is grabbed by Syracuse defender Joe Fields (5) during the game in Syracuse, N.Y., on Saturday.

Rushing attack

Player.....	Rush.....	Yards.....	Long.....	TD
Rashard Mendenhall.....	16.....	150.....	50.....	3
Troy Pollard.....	13.....	92.....	31.....	0
Juice Williams.....	12.....	90.....	22.....	1
Arrelious Benn.....	4.....	28.....	23.....	0

SOURCE: FIGHTINGILLINI.COM

things are going so well on the ground, the other players feed off that momentum."

Big plays have haunted the Orange for a long time. Syracuse allowed 12 touchdown plays of 28 or more yards last season and gave up three more in the first two games this year, a 42-12 home loss to Washington and 35-0 a week ago at Iowa.

It was more of the same against the Illini, who took a 7-0 lead on the game's first possession. Mendenhall ran right

» **More inside:** For more coverage of the Illinois football team, check out our notebook on **Page 3B**

through a tackle by linebacker Vincenzo Giruzzi for 25 yards to the Syracuse 22, and Williams hit tight end Jeff Cumberland for a touchdown on the next play.

The Illini, who are at Indiana next week, made it 14-0 behind the running of Williams and Men-

See **FOOTBALL**, Page 8B



Illinois tight end Jeff Cumberland celebrates a touchdown catch against Syracuse during a college football game in Syracuse, N.Y., on Saturday.



Far too soon for optimism over Illinois' nice 2-1 start

Before any one gets too giddy, remember, we've only just finished week three.

Illinois has already equaled its victory total from last year in that three weeks time but take note of the competition. The Playoff Subdivision Western Illinois and subpar Syracuse haven't exactly challenged the Illini. While I feel like I should be more optimistic, there are some small things — that seem small with the team lead as big as it was — that could come back to haunt the team.

It has been impressive to see the Illini run all over the two schools for a combined 655 yards in the games. What's more impressive is that the Illini were able to rush for 101 more yards against, in theory, a more capable Syracuse defense.

As much as most people thought that Rashard Mendenhall would be the featured back in the offense, more and more it seems that Daniel Dufrene and Troy Pollard will be getting a good amount of carries. Dufrene didn't have his best showing on Saturday but has been more than capable of spelling Mendenhall when need be. After Saturday's performance Pollard will likely be game planned for by opposing teams now, too.

Juice Williams and Eddie McGee both looked good on Saturday, even if it was only for 130 yards. The stat that should be more encouraging is that neither threw an interception. I can live with the paltry passing offense totals when the team is rushing as well as it is.

Williams was very effective on the first drive, both on the run and through the air. He was making good decisions in the pocket and his touchdown pass to Jeff

See **JOHNSON**, Page 8B



Potential pays more than skill

Imagine graduating college, landing a job and receiving a top-end salary before ever stepping foot in the office. Ridiculous, right? Not so in the NFL.

JaMarcus Russell, the top overall selection in the NFL draft this year, agreed to a six-year, \$61 million deal with the Oakland Raiders last week, ending six months of contract negotiations and a lengthy holdout.

Russell's record deal guarantees him \$29 million without ever having stepped foot on the field. This is the way of NFL rookie contracts for first-round picks. Successful college football players are drafted and immediately paid as much as the NFL's best players.

In the NFL, contracts are not guaranteed. If a team cuts a player they are not obligated to pay out the rest of the contract. This works well for teams because they can then "backload" the last years of the contracts. For instance, Russell will make only \$3.2 million this season but could earn up to \$30 million in the final two years of his contract.

If Russell fails to live up to his lofty draft pick, the Raiders can cut him and be off the hook for the remaining years of his contract. However, even if he were to be cut, Russell will have the \$29 million of

See **WERNER**, Page 8B

Volleyball team bumps Rockets in four games

Win marks head coach's 200th victory at Illinois

BY MEGHAN MONTEMURRO
STAFF WRITER

It was an eventful night for the Illinois volleyball team in Ohio. The Illini battled Toledo and came out on top in four games, 30-26, 30-25, 25-30, 30-21. The victory also marked Illi-

nois head coach Don Hardin's 200th at Illinois.

"It's close to 20 a season, but my standard for happiness is significantly higher than that," Hardin said when reflecting on her career with the Illini. "It's not about my record, it's not about how many wins I've had, but it's about how many wins our program has."

The Illini finish their non-conference schedule with an 8-2 record, accomplishing their goal of eight nonconference

victories. Toledo, Ohio, native Vicki Brown had an impressive performance during her homecoming game, tallying 15 kills and hitting .429.

"It was a lot of fun just to see a lot of familiar faces out in the crowd," Brown said. "It was a good time, and I'm glad they got to see me play."

With the pressures of playing in front of family, Hardin thought Brown handled it well.

"The story tonight was Vicki

coming in front of her home crowd in her senior year," Hardin said. "That could have been a huge distraction and a lot of players might not have managed that as well as Vicki did. She was really, really sharp and played her best volleyball."

The Illini were able to get on track quickly against Toledo, taking the first two games. But the team faltered in the third game, due to Toledo's solid serving. Hardin said Toledo was "the best serving team we've

» **More on-air:** For more Illini volleyball coverage, tune into **WPGU 107.1 FM** at 5 p.m.

faced all year."

Toledo had to switch to an aggressive serving attack in game three in order to give itself a chance to come back in the game and the adjustment paid off.

During the fourth and final

See **VOLLEYBALL**, Page 8B

Illini wrassle down Gators for upset



Illinois' Chichi Nweke tries to outrun Florida's Shana Hudson during the game at Illinois Soccer and Track Stadium in Champaign on Friday. Illinois defeated the No. 9 Gators, 1-0.

Masar's late goal, stifling defense lead soccer to win

BY STEVE CONTORNO
DEPUTY SPORTS EDITOR

The Illinois soccer team found itself tied at zero against the ninth-best team in the country 83 minutes into the contest.

By the 84th minute, they had all but clinched the game.

The Illini (3-2-0) defeated No. 9 Florida (3-2-0) on Friday 1-0 in front of the second-largest home crowd in the program's history. Senior forward Ella Masar scored the game's only goal on a breakaway with just under seven minutes remaining.

"I had faith we'd put it in the back of the net," Masar said. "We were going all out every minute of this game and at half-time (head coach Janet Rayfield) said, 'Keep hammerin', keep hammerin', keep hammerin'. You guys can get it in,' and we did."

For the 1,264 fans watching in the first period, the Illini displayed what Rayfield

» **More online:** For a photo slideshow of the soccer team and their game this weekend, visit **DailyIllini.com**

described as "the best half of soccer" they've played all season. Illinois constantly pressured the Gators into turning the ball over, creating a seemingly endless attack for the Illini offense. The Illini outshot and outcornered the Gators, who were only able to challenge goalkeeper Lindsey Carstens one time with a shot on goal.

"We dominated most of the game," Masar said of the victory. "We came out here physically and we took it to them. And that's all you can do. It's your home turf in front of amazing fans and we went at them for 90 minutes and we came out victorious."

With the game broadcasted on Big Ten Network, both teams had the benefit of a TV timeout midway through each half. The Illini offense flowed so well and was rested enough from the extra stoppage that Rayfield didn't even substitute until nearly 30 minutes into

See **SOCCER**, Page 8B