

# Illini fall after incredible Big Ten run

BY JASON GRODSKY  
SENIOR WRITER

Illinois' shot at a ninth consecutive NCAA Tournament bid fell just short after a valiant run in the Big Ten Tournament in Indianapolis.

Needing to win the Big Ten Tournament to receive the conference's automatic bid to the

**More online:**  
For photo slideshows of the tournament, check out [DailyIllini.com](http://DailyIllini.com).

Big Dance, the 10th-seeded Illini upset No. 7 Penn State, 64-63, No. 2 Purdue, 74-67

in overtime, and No. 6 Minnesota, 54-50, to reach the tournament final.

With weary legs, the Illini's improbable run ended in the title game when top-seeded Wisconsin prevailed 61-48 and claimed the tournament championship.

"We made a great run, but it's unfortunate it came so late," senior forward Brian Randle said. "It's tough we couldn't finish it off with a win. We came in here feeling great on the verge of winning a championship and making the NCAA. It's a tough day but I know the future is bright for these guys."

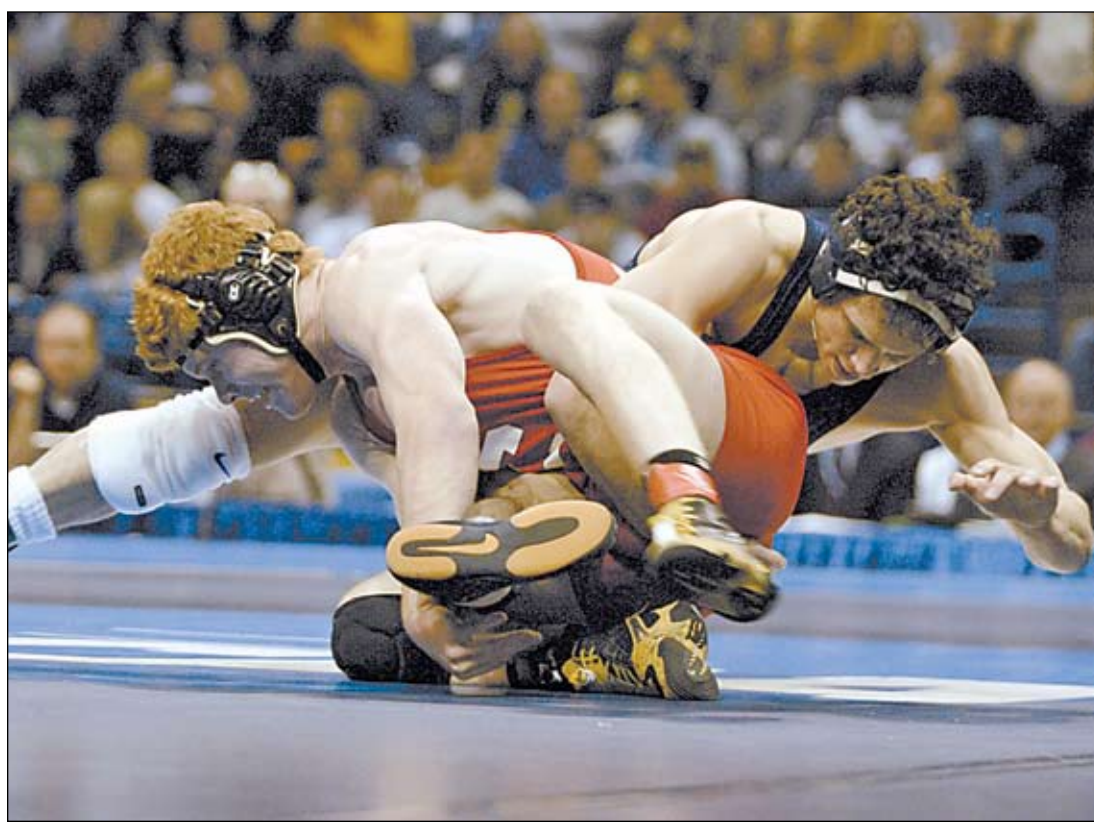
Despite being handed their 19th loss of the season, the most in program history, the Illini's late season run provided a handful of exhilarating highlights and a sense of optimism for the future.

The Illini were a mere 3.8 seconds away from elimination in the first round of the tournament, but a Chester Frazier layup and a defensive stop in the waning moments against Penn State allowed them to survive another day.



BRAD VEST THE DAILY ILLINI

See **MEN'S BBALL**, Page 3B Illinois head coach Bruce Weber watches play during the opening-round game against Penn State at Conesco Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, March 13.



TOM GANNAM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cornell's Jordan Leen, left, wrestles Illinois' Mike Poeta in a 157 pound championship match at the NCAA Wrestling Championship on Saturday in St. Louis. Leen beat Poeta 5-4.

## Poeta's final-period charge foiled by last-minute escape

BY RYAN DIXON  
STAFF WRITER

Mike Poeta fell just short of securing his first NCAA Wrestling Championship last weekend in St. Louis. After plowing through the rest of the bracket, Poeta was unable to defeat Cornell's Jordan Leen in the title match at 157 pounds, losing 5-4. Despite the loss, Poeta's second-place finish made the Illinois wrestler a two-time All-American.

"(Poeta's) had a good tournament," head coach Mark Johnson said.

"(It's) obviously a disappointment that he didn't come away with the national championship, but he's only a junior. He's got another shot at it."

The No. 8-seeded Leen surprised most of his opponents by even appearing in Saturday's

### Run to the championship match

No. 2 seed All-American Mike Poeta took second place in the 157-pound bracket at the NCAA Championships in St. Louis. His quest for top honors ended in the title match after being upset by Cornell's Jordan Leen.

**First Round:** Bye

**Second Round:** dec. #17 Newly McSpadden (Oklahoma State), 3-2

**Quarterfinals:** dec. No. 10 seed, #12 Michael Chandler (Missouri), 7-3

**Semifinals:** dec. No. 3 seed, #3 Dan Vallimont (Penn State), 6-5

**Championship:** dec. by No. 8 seed, #8 Jordan Leen (Cornell), 5-4

championship match.

The Cornell grappler defeated the top-seeded and 12th-seeded wrestlers in the bracket to earn his way into the title match versus second-seeded Poeta, who he also went on to defeat.

Poeta trailed the match 4-1 heading into the final period.

The momentum swung in Poe-

ta's favor after an escape and a takedown locked the match at 4-4.

Poeta then let Leen escape late in regulation, and Leen defended his one-point lead and held on for the victory.

"Mike's good on his feet and

See **WRESTLING**, Page 3B

## Illini gymnasts gearing up for championships

Women prove confident in routines coming off of two straight victories

BY LAURA HETTIGER  
STAFF WRITER

At the end of its regular season, the No. 24 Fighting Illini women's gymnastics team found the momentum and confidence it has been searching for all year.

With victories against a collection of intrastate teams in its last two meets, Illinois is ready for the rest of "championship time" as it prepares for the Big Ten Championships this Saturday.

"The fact that at this time of the year, in the championship time, we've had quite a few meets under our belt," said head coach Bob Starkell.

"Just fine-tune the gymnastics that we're doing."

At the beginning of spring break, the team traveled to the University of Illinois-Chicago on March 15, scoring a season-high 195.725 against the Flames.

See **GYMNASTICS**, Page 3B

### Buckley receives top honors for performance

Freshman Allison Buckley, both a team player and a competition leader, was honored over spring break for her success during the UIC competition.

The Schaumburg, Ill., native posted a 39.450 to receive the second best all-around score in Illinois history. For her efforts, the Big Ten Conference named her Big Ten Gymnast of the Week for the week of March 17-21.

The modest and bubbly freshman was excited with the honor but blind-sided when she found out.

"I wasn't expecting that," Buckley said. "My mom ended up calling me, I don't really check the Big Ten Web site, so my mom called and told me about it."

Now, after the Illinois Classic Competition, Buckley has claimed 19 individual titles during her freshman campaign.

"Even as a freshman, she's finding out she's extremely confident in the routines she's doing now," Starkell said.

## Women's basketball set for NIT tournament

Invite follows failure to receive bid for NCAA tournament

BY WESLEY DEBERRY  
STAFF WRITER

The status of their season was uncertain for the Illini after the last-second loss to Purdue in the Big Ten Tournament Championship. A win would have given the Illini an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament.

But Illini head coach Jollette Law still had the "faith of a mus-



KATHERINE KUKUC THE DAILY ILLINI

Illinois' Jenna Smith (left) and teammate Audrey Tabon (right) high five in front of teammate Chelsea Buher before the women's basketball game on March 2 at Assembly Hall.

tard seed" that the NCAA gods would be kind to the Orange and Blue in the selection process.

Her hope of an NCAA bid

did not come true, but the Illini were offered a spot in the

See **WOMEN'S BBALL**, Page 3B

## Curry, Davidson erase 16-point deficit in second half to bounce Georgetown, advance to Sweet 16

BY MIKE CRANSTON  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH, N.C. — Stephen Curry couldn't stop jumping up and down at midcourt at the final buzzer. Little Davidson was on its way to the NCAA tournament's round of 16 after another brilliant performance by its big-time guard.

Curry scored 25 of his 30 points in the second half and Davidson staged a remarkable comeback behind their star sophomore to

stun mighty Georgetown 74-70 on Sunday in the second round of the Midwest Regional.

Curry missed 10 of his first 12 shots but stepped up at crunch time for Davidson, which trailed by 16 points with 15 minutes left. He had the go-ahead basket, a key three-pointer, and then hit five of six free throws in the final 23 seconds in a performance that left the Hoyas, and everyone else, stunned.

No. 2 seed Georgetown was

shooting 71 percent from the field early in the second half and led 48-32 before a stunning collapse under the weight of 20 turnovers and Curry's dominance.

Jason Richards added 20 points and kept Davidson (28-6) in it early when Curry was missing everything.

Jessie Sapp scored 14 points and Jonathan Wallace finished with 12 for Georgetown (28-6), which lost despite shooting 63 percent from the field.

Davidson, which hadn't won an NCAA tournament game since 1969 before Friday, advanced to face Wisconsin on Friday in Detroit.

Georgetown, the nation's stingiest defensive team, came in allowing only 57.6 points per game and 37 percent shooting. That defensive prowess was on display early.

With waves of different defenders fighting through screens, Curry looked exhausted, and David-

son appeared spent.

Georgetown built a big lead and then started making mistakes. Ineffective center Roy Hibbert picked up his fourth foul by pushing off in the post. It was one of a series of turnovers that allowed Davidson to get back in it.

When Georgetown's defense finally lost Curry, he buried a three-pointer. He then fed Andrew Lovedale for a layup to make it 50-48 with 8:47 left.

After picking up his fourth foul

with 4:15 left, Curry scored on a nifty scoop shot in the lane and hit a deep three to give Davidson a 65-60 lead with 2:56 left.

It led to a roar from the partisan crowd. Not only was Davidson playing 160 miles from campus, but North Carolina fans adopted the in-state school.

The Hoyas' comeback bid was foiled by Curry's free-throw shooting, allowing Davidson to extend the nation's longest winning streak to 24.