

Baseball team blasts Blueboys 17-0

Illini shutout is 'pleasant surprise' for head coach

BY DAVID JUST
STAFF WRITER

It didn't take long for the Illini to take control of Wednesday night's game against Illinois College. And once they did, they never looked back.

After two quiet innings, the Illini jumped on Blueboy starter Ben Eilerman in the third inning, scoring eight runs on seven hits and sending 13 batters to the plate. It was plenty more than the Illini would need in the 17-0 shutout victory.

Every Illini starter reached base in the run-filled third, starting with right fielder Craig Lutes' bloop single to left. After Casey McMurray popped out to the second baseman, Kyle Hudson walked and things got progressively worse for Eilerman.

The Illini (18-8) strung six straight hits together, including Daniel Webb's third home run of the season that came with two runners on base. Webb finished the game 2-for-3 with four RBIs and a run scored. His RBI single in the fourth was the ninth Illini run.

"I was feeling really good at the plate coming into today," Webb said. "(Eilerman) had gotten me out on an inside fastball my first time out, so I was just sitting on it."



See **BASEBALL**, Page 4B Illinois' Craig Lutes slides into third base during the game against Illinois College, Wednesday.

JEREMY BERG THE DAILY ILLINI

Illinois adds four to class of '08 roster

BY JASON GRODSKY
SENIOR WRITER

The Illinois baseball program announced four new additions to its class of 2008 on Wednesday.

Prior to the Illini's game against Illinois College, head coach Dan Hartleb received commitments from Willie Argo (Davenport, Iowa), Bill Charvat (Elk Grove Village, Ill.), Mike Santa Maria (Des Plaines, Ill.) and Will Strack (Sycamore, Ill.), all of whom will don Illinois uniforms on the diamond next year.

"I'm very pleased, I think we got some good athletes," Hartleb said, "including a few who can really swing the bat."

Argo can really run, and if you look at the two pitchers, that's going to add some depth.

"They have good arms and they'll continue to give us help."

Argo, a four-sport athlete in high school, will add athleticism to the outfield and could find his way into the lineup next season.

He hit over .500 last year for his high school team, but his biggest claim to fame came in 2001 when he hit a home run in the

See **BRIEF**, Page 4B

Receiver James looking to catch some action this fall

Sophomore spent 2007 on sideline with knee injury

BY MIKE THEODORE
STAFF WRITER

With the program's biggest game in years finally upon the Illini, the closest that Chris James came to helping his team on the field against USC in the Rose Bowl was participating in pregame warm up drills.

James' season had come to an end before it had even really started after the receiver

injured his left knee last fall in the same scrimmage that freshman receiver Arrelious Benn suffered a nagging shoulder injury.

Benn would recover and become Big Ten Freshman of the Year, but James, known as C.J. to his teammates, watched the entire Rose Bowl campaign from the sideline with a torn-up knee. James' patella tendon was harvested from his right knee and used to replace his left ACL.

"It was real tough but I got through it," said the sophomore from Chicago. "I kind of wanted to play (in the Rose Bowl), but I knew if I played I wouldn't have gotten the extra year. It was cool

to get the extra year because I'll be an Illini for three more years, so that's not bad."

Surgery and months of rehab later, James is regaining trust in his knee and providing quarterback Juice Williams with another dangerous option. A slot receiver earlier in his career, James has switched to the outside.

In last Saturday's scrimmage, James caught three passes for 45 yards and hauled in a red-zone touchdown.

"I thought it went good for me," James said. "After breaking down film I see some little things I need to work on, but there's always things you have to work on."



BRAD VEST THE DAILY ILLINI Illinois' Chris James left, gets hit by Vontae Davis during a scrimmage during spring practice at St. Rita High School in Chicago on April 14, 2007.

"It kind of felt like a spring game a little bit. We kind of got after (it) a little bit. The offense kind of struggled in the beginning, but we picked it up at the

end. It was faster than a normal scrimmage."

With five months remaining

See **FOOTBALL**, Page 4B

Ditch the politics, champion the athletes



KEVIN SPITZ
Sports columnist

Gene Mills was a wrestler competing for a spot in the Moscow Olympics for the United States back in 1980. In the book "Wrestlers at the Trials," Mills said, "I wanted to pin my way through the Olympic Games and knew I needed to drop down to 114.5 to meet my goal. That was a tough pull for me but I made it. It was only after I won the wrestle-offs that I finally realized we wouldn't be wrestling in the Games."

In February of 1980, President Jimmy Carter made the decision that the United States would boycott the Olympic Games because of the Soviet Union attack on Afghanistan.

Mills went on to say, "I was so mad, I wasn't pulling all that weight to have a good time. I was devastated, furious, angry, you name it."

Like many other athletes in 1980, Mills had missed his chance to compete at the highest level when the United States and 61 other countries boycotted. Even more missed their chance at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, when the Soviets boycotted due to "chauvinistic sentiments and an anti-Soviet hysteria being whipped up in the United States."

In these cases, athletes around the world were reduced to mere pawns for world leaders to use as they saw fit.

Sadly, in 2008, world leaders and other zealots for causes are starting down the same path.

Now, I am in no way supporting China's treatment of those in Tibet. I am not defending them in any way, but with the absence of any safety concern for our athletes, it is terribly unfair to drag them into what is becoming a political mess.

Luckily, recent reports have centered less on a total boycott of the Olympic Games and more on whether President Bush will show up for the opening ceremony. To put it bluntly, I don't care. The Olympics do not, and certainly should not, revolve around any world leader. It should revolve around the people who matter — the athletes.

According to the official Olympic charter, "Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of

See **SPITZ**, Page 4B

Offense revives as softball defeats Bradley twice

BY MEGHAN MONTEMURRO
DEPUTY SPORTS EDITOR

The offensive woes are no more. After being shut out their last three games by a combined score of 26-0, the Illini finally righted the ship on the softball diamond. Facing off against in-state foe Bradley University, Illinois (22-20, 2-4 Big Ten)

swept their doubleheader, winning 5-2 and 9-1, respectively.

"It's nice to get a sweep on the road; it's not easy to do," head coach Terri Sullivan said. "It took a little while (for us) to hit ... but there wasn't a panic mode when we got down early."

While the Illini did manage

to register two more wins, early game-one play suggested the team would continue to be offensively challenged. The Orange and Blue managed to finally break through in the fifth inning on first baseman Katrina Ross' home run — her fifth of the season — to bring Illinois closer, down 2-1.

"We treat all the opponents the same and we come in and prepare to be aggressive," Ross said of the team's offensive turnaround.

Illinois added two insurance runs in both the sixth and the seventh inning, led by freshman Hollie Pinchback's two-run homer in the final frame to ultimate-

ly put the game away against the Braves (11-16, 3-9 MVC). The pitching performance of Ashley Wright was just what the Illini needed. The sophomore threw a complete game, surrendering only one earned run on five hits while

See **SOFTBALL**, Page 4B



KATHERINE KUKUC THE DAILY ILLINI Illinois' Krystal Melcarek performs on the uneven bars during a meet against No. 15 Missouri at Huff Hall in Champaign on March 8.

After rocky start, women's gymnastics may earn bid to national championships

Success at Big Tens powers No. 24 Illini into regional qualifier

BY LAURA HETTIGER
STAFF WRITER

All year, the coaches and athletes have been stressing how much potential the Illinois women's gymnastics team has — if only everything could come together.

After placing second at the Big Ten Championships two weeks ago, it's time to put potential aside and fully capitalize on their talent.

As the No. 24 Illini travel to Norman, Okla., for the South Central Regional on Saturday, they will be focusing on the competition at hand. Although the team started off the season on a very rocky note — going 2-8 during the regular season — head coach Bob Starkell is excited for the competition.

"From the start of the season in January, I thought the team had the potential to be very close to where it is right now — to be in the top 25, seeded into a Regional, building up on each meet and just having our best competition (at Big Tens)," Starkell said.

Finishing his ninth season with the Orange and Blue, Starkell knows "Championship Time" is extremely important, and the coach is excited for the squad to show off this weekend.

As the No. 5 seed in the six-team competition, the only place the Illini expect to go is up. Its steep competition includes No. 4 Alabama, No. 10 Oklahoma, No. 16 Boise State, No. 19 Arizona State and Southeast Missouri State.

"We're not quite seeded as high as we wanted to be, we wanted to be in the top three out of six teams," said all-around competitor Nicole Cowart. "I really think we have a chance at upsetting number four ... and possibly making our first Nationals trip."

The sophomore is confident in her teammates, especially after coming off a strong showing in the conference championship. Posting a 195.125 as its Regional Qualifying Score, Illinois is a point and a half away from top-seeded Alabama and one point ahead of sixth-place SEMO.

Cowart believes the team's recent practice strategy will go a long way. With "meticulous" coaching, the gymnasts are fine-tuning every move because "every tenth (of a point) we can get" is critical.

The Illini are focused on reaching the NCAA National Championship as a group. Starkell believes if each individual does well and thinks about how she can help the team, then Nationals will be within their reach.

"The key is to be at the top of their game," Starkell said.

However, there is a chance for Illinois gymnasts to win individual event titles.

Recently crowned Big Ten Beam Champion, Julie Crall has the chance to capture the Regional title and get her personal ticket punched to Nationals. Also, all-around competitor Allison Buckley has prevailed on every event this season, and her fellow Illini feel she will have a successful meet.

"Ultimately, I think that Allison has a really good chance to at least make it on one event, or two events, or all-around," said senior Krystal Melcarek.

Though the gymnasts are excited to compete and happy to be a

See **WOMEN'S GYM**, Page 4B

Regional Qualifiers

No. 4 Alabama	(196.870)
No. 10 Oklahoma	(196.450)
No. 16 Boise State	(195.690)
No. 19 Arizona State	(195.405)
No. 24 ILLINOIS	(195.125)
No. 36 Southeast Missouri State	(194.065)

(RQS)

(196.870)
(196.450)
(195.690)
(195.405)
(195.125)
(194.065)