Enjoy it while you can, Illini

CHAMPAIGN Bill Self's Illini could have named the score against Oakland here Saturday night. For the record, it was 88-53 with all five starters in double figures.

But there was none of the tension you felt watching those overtime games on television, Dayton outlasting No. 13 Marquette, Ohio State's Buckeyes running out of gas against Louisville and Missouri needing a banked three-pointer to ease its regulation win at Iowa.

TATELINES

LOREN TATE

By comparison, Illinois' outing was a cakewalk. All that changes when they board the flight at 3:30 p.m. Monday for wintry Minnesota.

Forget the UI's 10-1 record. Forget the Gophers lost by 20 at Nebraska. A "take no prisoners" attitude will hover over Williams Arena when the Illini and Gophers kick off the Big Ten season Tuesday night.

"Every game from this point is like Missouri and North Carolina," Self said. "It's why guys come to this league: to get the exposure and play in the big buildings. There are more big bodies and more homecourt advantages. Your mistakes are amplified."

Good news first

So, are the Illini ready?

First, the positives:

Illinoisans virtually had forgotten four-year regular Cory Bradford until the Illini visited his hometown of Memphis last week. Few have fretted about Frank Williams skipping his final season since Dee Brown arrived. Freshmen Brown, Deron Williams and James Augustine combined for 35 points, 13 assists, 12 rebounds and five blocks (all by Augustine) against Oakland. They've played more like veterans than rookies, which is critical for an injury-plagued squad.

Brian Cook was hands down the premier player in the Big Ten during the nonconference period, topping 20 points for the sixth time in nine games while adding 10 rebounds for a double-double Saturday. He and Sean Harrington combined for 80 points in the last two games.

Self places a high premium on teamwork, and there was a striking difference Saturday between a squad of you-first passers and an adversary built on one-on-one assaults. The Illini had 25 assists on 37 baskets. Through 11 games, they are averaging 22 assists to their opponents' 11½. The result is a team making more than half its field attempts.

Bad news second

Now for the negatives:

Oakland, called a "good

Please see TATE, D-9

News-Gazette photo by Robert K. O'Daniel

Illinois freshman Dee Brown has fans everywhere, including the Orange Krush, who were more than willing to show up on short notice at the Alma Mater sporting Brown's trademark headband. They aren't the only ones taken with Brown, who's made a national splash during his first season with the Illini.

Follow the leader

Personality, talent make Brown an irresistible Illini

By BRETT DAWSON
News-Gazette Staff Writer

The buzz started when Dee Brown hit Chalmers Street, built to a roar when he reached Daniel (no, it wasn't named after him) and didn't stop from there.

By the time the Illinois freshman got to Wright and Green, he was the recipient of a standing ovation. At the epicenter of the Illinois campus. On a school day.

This is the effect that Daniel "Dee" Brown, 18 years old and on top of his world, can have on people.

On a cool, clear day in December, Brown crossed campus to pose for the photo that accompanies this story, and he all but stopped traffic.

The Orange Krush members set to pose with him chanted his name. Drivers craned their necks to get a look. Passers-by wondered what all the fuss was.

The whole scene — the buzz that preceded him, the splash his arrival caused — mirrored Brown's brief but eventful Illinois career to date, a wild 11-game ride that shows no signs of slowing down.

"I didn't ask for any of this," Brown said last week, after his image appeared in Sports Illustrated and after ESPN named him one of the nation's top freshman basketball players. "The whole thing is a surprise to me just like it is to everybody else. I just wanted to come in here and play basketball. All this recognition and everything? I had no idea."

But then, maybe it shouldn't be such a surprise.

This is a guy, after all, whom Illini coach Bill Self said he envisioned from the start as "the poster child for Illinois basketball."

This is a player who dazzles defenders (and crowds) with his speed, who energizes teammates with his very presence, who sends tape recorders into overdrive with his nonstop chatter.

"He's the future of our program," Self said. "By the time Dee is a junior, (the coaching staff) may not need to show up for practice. Dee might just be down there running things on his own."

Watching the impact Brown has had in the first half of his freshman year, it doesn't sound like such a stretch. Brown is scoring (14.1 points a game), he's setting up teammates (4.6 assists a night) and he's filling it up from downtown (39 percent from three-point range).

And Self couldn't care less.

You want the real measure of Brown's impact? Watch a practice some Wednesday afternoon, when Illinois' battling the midweek blues, and Brown's energy gets his teammates going. Or talk to Brian Randle, the Illinois signee from Peoria Notre

Please see BROWN, D-9

What's inside

Illinois basketball

■ **The middle man:** Self likes Illini's position going into Big Ten play, **D-2**.
■ **Spears cheers:** Illini returns to team after surgery, **D-2**.
■ Game 11 grades, box score, **D-2**.
■ **Tough crowd:** UI women's recruit her own toughest critic, **D-3**.
■ UI-Michigan women's preview, **D-3**.
■ **UI men's fast starts:** Legends, Lists & Lore, **D-9**.

Big Ten basketball

■ **Bank on it:** Missouri uses late bank shot to turn back Iowa, **D-3**.

Leaders of the pack

Michigan State's Tom Izzo calls them "Pied Pipers": college players with talent and charisma who impact every aspect of their program. If Dee Brown continues on his current path, he could put his name alongside the four best in the Big Ten in the past 30 years:

MAGIC JOHNSON
Michigan State (1977-79)

Arguably the greatest player in Big Ten history, Magic's only fault might have been skipping town early. Said Izzo: "Everybody wanted to play with him. James Worthy once told me he probably would have gone to Michigan State if Magic would have just stuck around."

MATEEN CLEAVES (right)
Michigan State (1996-2000)

The hardest-working guy on a team full of lunchpail players, Cleaves guided the Spartans to two Final Fours, and his charisma helped recruit the foundation for a third. Morris Peterson might have been the best player on Michigan State's 2000 NCAA champs, but those Spartans were Cleaves' team.

QUINN BUCKNER
Indiana (1972-76)

You still can hear his personality spilling out during TV broadcasts, and Buckner's impact on Indiana went far beyond his 10 points a game. His iron will rubbed off on a Hoosiers program that went 63-1 in his final two seasons.

ISIAH THOMAS
Indiana (1979-81)

He only stuck around for two years, but Thomas helped Bob Knight's machine keep rolling in Bloomington, averaging better than 15 points a game for his career and willing the Hoosiers to the 1981 national title.

Ohio State's upset no surprise to Turner

By BOB ASMUSSEN
News-Gazette Staff Writer

First and 10

Each Sunday beginning today, Bob Asmussen will provide the latest news and notes from around college football. *Column, D-4*

By rule, Illinois football coach Ron Turner had no choice but to vote for Ohio State in the final USA Today/ESPN poll. Not that Turner would argue against the Buckeyes.

After having Miami at the top of his ballot all season, Turner happily made the switch to Ohio State early Saturday morning.

On Friday, Turner predicted an Ohio State win.

"They've got a better football team than people give them credit for," Turner said. "They've got a really good defense."

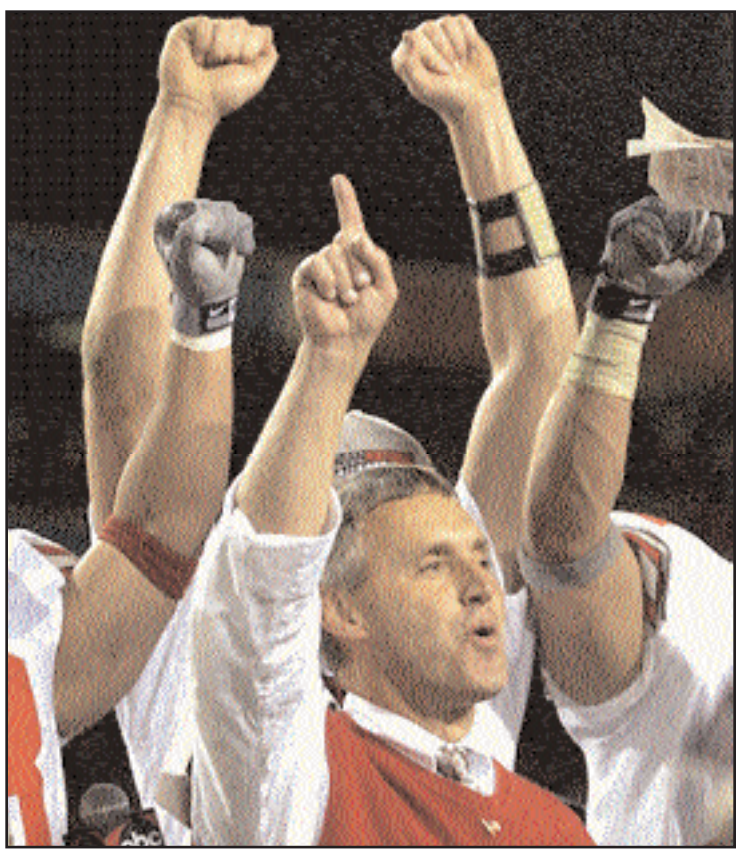
Turner and 60 of his coaching cohorts made the Buckeyes a unanimous No. 1, followed by Miami, Georgia, Southern Cal and Oklahoma. Iowa (No. 8), Michigan (No. 9) and Penn State (No. 15) are the other Big Ten teams among the final 25.

Only Miami played a tighter game against the national champions than Illinois. It took the Buckeyes two overtimes to beat the Hurricanes and one to knock off Turner's team.

"We wanted to win the game," he said. "Our objective was to win the game, not to make it close. We had chances to win it. I go back and look at the film, and we had plenty of chances to win it."

Losing the game cost Illinois the six wins needed to be bowl eligible.

Turner and the Illini won't have to worry about the Buckeyes until 2005. Because of the Big Ten's schedule rotation, the teams don't play the next two seasons. The schools have met every year since 1914.



Associated Press

Ohio State coach Jim Tressel celebrates on the podium after the Buckeyes beat Miami 31-24 in two overtimes Friday night in the Fiesta Bowl to win the NCAA championship.

Repeat after me: Buckeyes know success fleeting

TEMPE, Ariz. (AP) — Jim Tressel loves to tell the story of how, after he won his first I-AA national championship as the coach at Youngstown State, he was met by a reporter as he left the field.

"Can you repeat?" Tressel was asked.

The point is that success is fleeting. No sooner do you win a national title than people are asking whether you can do it again. There's no chance to savor the moment.

So it came as no shock after No. 2 Ohio State's dramatic 31-24 double-overtime victory against No. 1 Miami in Friday night's Fiesta Bowl that Tressel was kiddingly asked whether he thought the Buckeyes could repeat as national champions.

"Life is about what comes next," said Tressel, who won four titles at Youngstown State and was in his second year with the Buckeyes. "You know, we'll go to work pretty soon."

Miami, seeking to become the first repeat national champion since Nebraska in the 1994-95 seasons, had won 34 straight games, the sixth-longest streak in major-college history. Ohio State, meanwhile, went 14-0 this season to win its fourth national title and first since the 1968 season.

The scary part for opponents is that Ohio State, which went 7-5 in 2001, was considered a year

Please see BUCKEYES, D-10

More on college football:

■ Hurricanes devastated, **D-4**.
■ McGahee's road long, **D-4**.
■ Grossman going pro, **D-4**.