



NCAA wrestling

■ Illinois' top-ranked Matt Lackey won his first two 165-pound matches at the championships.

— C-7

SPORTS

Friday, March 21, 2003

WHAT HAPPENED

Illinois had its hands full, but Dee Brown's big plays helped hold off the Hilltoppers and send the Illini into the NCAA tournament's second round.



ILLINOIS 65, WESTERN KENTUCKY 60



WHAT WAS SAID

"It was a heck of a basketball game to watch, just a little too close for our comfort."
— UI forward James Augustine

Sigh of relief

Fresh faces busting out in prime time

INDIANAPOLIS

Under the most intense pressure, with the world outside gone crazy and a feverish opponent attacking like a pack of hungry wolves, three hustling Illini made Thursday's most popular question seem silly:

"Do you still feel like freshmen?"

For your answer, check the box score. In a bitterly fought 65-60 defeat of Western Kentucky in the NCAA's first round, the trio of Dee Brown, Deron Williams and James Augustine combined for 37 points



TATELINES
LOREN TATE

on 14-for-28 shooting, 13 of the team's 15 assists, 16 rebounds and six steals. This does not include their defensive prowess that included Brown's wipe-out of Hilltoppers sensation Patrick Sparks, who went 2 for 13 from the

field and missed his last nine three-pointers.

In summation: "If our young ones don't play well, we don't win," Illinois coach Bill Self said.

All this in a bruising, banging game that was a 180-degree turnaround from the clean-up-the-paint approach Rich Falk preached to his Big Ten officials throughout the season. On Thursday, the striped trio of Tom Lopes, Jamie Jones and Bob Perone elected to "let 'em play," which was fine with Self and athletic director Ron Guenther but caught some of the UI athletes off guard.

"This was a game where the toughest team wins," Augustine said. "On the first couple of plays, guys were getting hacked on both ends and nothing was called. It began to kick in that this would be different and that they were going to try to overpower us with their physical play. It was really hard to score inside."

"I liked it. It helped me stay in the game. In the Big Ten, I fouled out like crazy."

Said sophomore Luther Head: "I'm not sure what I'm supposed to say about officiating. But, to be honest, I didn't expect it to be this physical. They pressured us, and we had to adjust. They let a lot of things go that were called during the season."

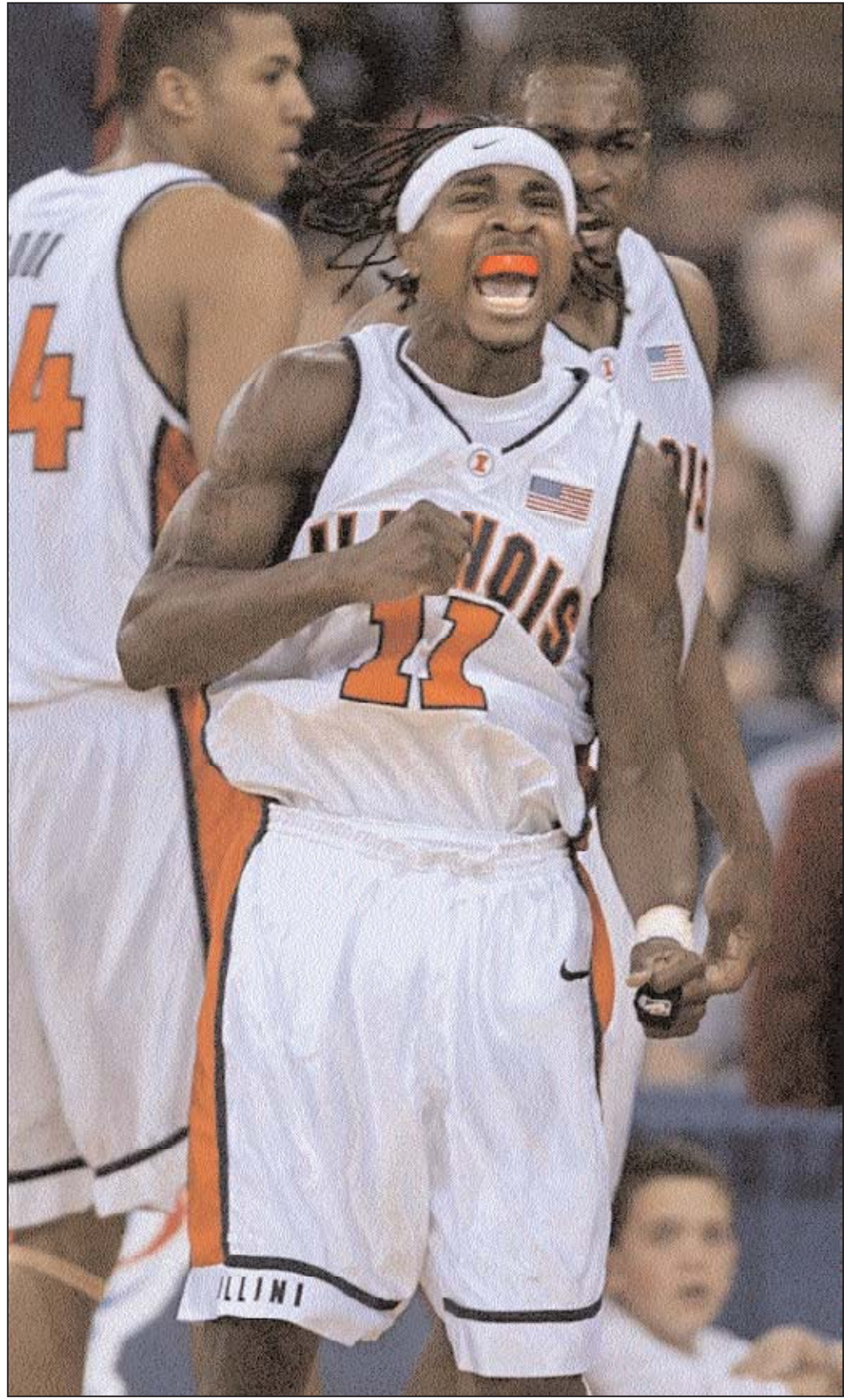
Playing to strengths

Nor did Self complain. "It was called the same on both ends, and I much prefer this. As a coach, I didn't have to make so many adjustments," he said.

There were negatives, however. Neither Nick Smith nor Sean Harrington was a factor — both went shotless and scoreless — as Self limited his less-physical players to 13 minutes apiece.

"The pressure was forcing Smith out, and he isn't the best at relieving pressure," Self said. "And that was also true for Sean. The way Western Kentucky was cutting off the passing lanes with their pressure, we needed to penetrate off the dribble, and that isn't Sean's strength."

Please see TATE, C-4



John Dixon/The News-Gazette

Illinois' Dee Brown pounds his chest in celebration after being fouled in the first half Thursday against Western Kentucky in the NCAA tournament's first round at Indianapolis. Brown made the basket and the free throw, and the Illini advanced.



Fast out of the gate

Illinois on Thursday stretched its winning streak in NCAA tournament openers to a school-record six:

Year	Score	Comment
1997	Illinois 90, Southern Cal 77	Illini's first NCAA tourney win since 1993
1998	Illinois 64, South Alabama 51	Lon Kruger's Big Ten champs survived scare
2000	Illinois 68, Penn 58	Marcus Griffin's double-double paved way
2001	Illinois 96, Northwestern State 54	Most lopsided NCAA tourney win in UI history
2002	Illinois 93, San Diego State 64	Frank Williams (25 points, eight assists) at his best
2003	Illinois 65, Western Kentucky 60	First NCAA tourney win in Indy since Flyin' Illini's run



Cook's cool as Illini sweat close opener

By BRETT DAWSON

News-Gazette Staff Writer

INDIANAPOLIS — A few rows behind the Illinois bench, an off-duty student manager went to work on his fingernails, gnawing at what little he had left.

Just a few seats behind, Joyce Cook was in the aisle, rubbing her hands together and swaying nervously.

Her son, Brian, sat on the Illinois bench. Frustrated, yes, but cooler than almost everyone else wearing orange Thursday night in the RCA Dome.

More on NCAA basketball:

- Jeff Mezydlo: Newly coifed Brown wears stardom well, C-2.
- The Daily Grind, C-2.
- Game 31 by the numbers, C-2.
- Game 31 grades, box, C-2.
- Williams at home in dome, C-3.
- Fans deal with security, C-3.
- Inside the Circle City, C-4.
- Notre Dame holds on, C-5.
- Penney leads Wisconsin, C-5.
- NCAA Insider, C-5.

"I was pretty calm, really," Cook said after his fourth-seeded Illini beat Western Kentucky 65-60 in the first round of the NCAA tournament, surviving a scare from the 13th-seeded Hilltoppers. "I wasn't too worried."

There was worry enough in the stands to go around when, with 2:03 to play and the Hilltoppers trailing by eight, Cook fouled out, leaving the Illini without their leader, best offensive option and top free throw shooter down the stretch.

Western Kentucky, which played Illinois toe to toe most of the game, clawed back to within three with 56 seconds to play, and even as things got tight, Cook stayed loose on the sideline.

The Illini followed suit on the court.

Illinois (25-6) couldn't slam the door on Western Kentucky, but the Illini kept the 'Toppers from busting through it, forcing four turnovers in the final five minutes and holding Western to 2-for-6 shooting in the final 2:34.

In doing that, Illinois overcame a Hilltoppers team that put forth as sticky a defensive effort as any the Illini have seen all season. Western Kentucky pressured Illinois' guards hard, pushing the Illini offense to a starting spot well beyond the three-point line.

"I don't think we've seen defense like that all year," Illinois guard Luther Head said. "We survived. It probably wasn't the best performance we've had, but we won the game, and that's what it's all about."

Now it's all about a Saturday meeting against Notre Dame (12:10 p.m.), but on Thursday Illinois scarcely had an opportunity to look ahead.

Instead, the Illini were staring upset in the eyes, facing the real possibility of their first first-round NCAA exit since 1995.

Western Kentucky led as late as the 6:51 mark, when a Mike Wells jumper put the 'Toppers on top 54-53. Two Cook free throws put Illinois back in front 32 seconds later, and the game never was tied from that point on.

But to say the Illini were in control would be an overstatement, and

Please see ILLINI, C-4

We asked Bob Asmussen, who writes a media column for The News-Gazette, to spend Thursday in front of his big-screen TV — in his Scooby-Doo pajamas the whole time — watching NCAA tournament games from start to finish. A grueling task for sure, but thanks to pizza delivery he was able to pull it off. His report:



Direct me to NCAA heaven

Actually, they are Grumpy (of "Snow White" fame) pajamas, though that in no way diminishes my respect for Scooby-Doo.

How do I love DirecTV? Let me count the ways. Start with the NCAA March Madness package, which gives the Asmussen household an extra 37 games during the weekend.

At \$49 for the entire deal, it comes out to \$1.32 a game. I'm no genius, but that sounds like a bargain.

My boss, known behind his back in the office as "Tightwad Jim," offers to help with \$4.90. Yippee. I can buy a gallon of gas. Thanks, Ebenezer. Let's be real. I would pay for it

anyway. Given the choice of a free trip to Maui or 48 basketball games in four days, I'd take the tournament. Layups over leis, and Bill Raftery over Don Ho. Not even close.

For today's exercise, I'll be flipping between 16 games during a 12-hour window. I've got the fridge stocked with Lemon Diet Pepsi, the cupboard loaded with spray cheese and the candy jar stuffed with jellybeans. Jolly Rancher Jellybeans to be precise.

You know how some folks play drinking games like "Hi, Bob?" I prefer food games. Every time

there's a dunk, I'm downing a handful of jellybeans. Every time Raftery shouts "MAN-TO-MAN," I'm ordering a pizza.

But enough of my personal problems. Let's get to the action:

10:55 a.m. — Tune in to CBS and see Dan Rather on the screen. He tells me the network is sticking with war coverage and to flip over to ESPN for basketball. No mention of "frequency" or "Kenneth."

11 a.m. — Studio hosts Greg Gumbel and Clark Kellogg open with brief mentions of the war. But they

Please see ASMUSSEN, C-8



11:34 a.m. — Marquette's Travis Diener drains a three-point shot against Holy Cross.