

- Men's swimming pulls off win against Michigan State.
- Women's swimming has a shot at the Big Ten Championships.

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Fighting Illini could teach Lions to smile

By Robert Spruck

The game was over, for all intents and purposes. The outcome was decided, and only the final seconds had to tick off the clock.

Another missed Penn State shot, and Illinois' Dee Brown broke out of the pack with the ball with no Nittany Lion defender in his path.

Brown took the ball and threw it off the backboard. The trailer, Luther Head, caught the ball and dunked it. Exclamation point. The officials were not pleased and Head received a technical for hanging on the rim. The irony is that Head was not on the rim for more than a few seconds. But it didn't matter in the outcome or in the player's mind. When asked about the play after the game, Brown said: "It's part of the game, we're just having fun." Brown added that there is no difference between that and an alley-oop, "it's an alley-oop just off the backboard."

"An alley-oop isn't showing anyone up," Brown continued. He added that he wanted to do it early in the game but the game was a little too tight, but the end of the game was a great opportunity to do it. He has practiced the play for a while.

The important thing — they were just having fun. Even Brian Cook, who played a mere 17 minutes, was upbeat afterwards. Cook trailed Head on the play, and said he hoped that Head was going to leave it for him. "I was looking something maybe like the Globetrotters."

Not everyone had fun with the final play. Illinois coach Bill Self was not pleased, to say the least. It wasn't so much the play but the result of the call that followed the basket. He said there is no room in basketball for it, as it was showing up the Lions. Brown put it real simply: "That's coach for you. It's like shots, if you make them then good, but if you miss then you will hear it from him." Cook struggled to get involved in the game, after picking up a first-half technical, the second of his career, he could only laugh. He was questioned if he was starting to turn into a young Rasheed Wallace.

"Nah," he chuckled. "Hopefully, it's my last if I can keep my mouth shut. The gym was quiet and everyone heard it. I was just speaking my mind. I think he thought I was trying to show him up." Cook picked up his fourth foul with over 12 minutes and forced him into a cheerleader. Instead, Cook took the opportunity as it presented himself and acted as an assistant coach.

"What else can I do?" he told reporters. "It was the only thing I could do." Even freshman guard Deron Williams got into the act with the reporters. As he walked out of the locker room, he announced where all the other players were in order to dodge answering questions himself. When Williams wasn't the focus of any questions, he decided to switch roles and turned into a reporter. Williams grabbed a reporter's notebook and pen and stood alongside the rest of the reporters who were talking to Brown. With a can of Pepsi in his mouth he continued pretending to take notes, until he got a reaction from Brown. He didn't stop there as he broke out his cell phone and put it in front of Cook, until he finally reacted. Illinois wins and is stacked with an abundance of talent, so it's easier to have fun and just play the game. On the other hand, even following the scarce Penn State wins, it's just not the same as the players barely break a smile. The locker room is not open and basketball doesn't seem like just a game anymore. The interaction between players and reporters just isn't the same. The two or three Penn State players sit there, and rattle off exactly what everyone already knows in a robotic manner. It's as if talking with the media is another chore. It's obvious to everyone that they don't want to be there, the one exception might be Brandon Watkins after the Purdue game. Otherwise the players enter with their jackets on with the hope of making it as uneventful as possible and exiting the door quickly. The Illini were more than willing to talk. Even Cook after his worst game of the season with an NBA scout in attendance to watch him was willing to stand and answer any question anyone had. He didn't dodge them, or dodge the media all together, which he could have done. Illinois remained relaxed and comfortable and Penn State is normally uptight. Maybe if the Lions starting having a little more fun, it would translate into wins and that ugly goose egg would not be present.

Hey, it couldn't hurt.

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MY OPINION



Kelly Mazzante goes to pass against an Old Dominion defender. Mazzante took a step back at yesterday's game, while Tanisha Wright stepped up to bring the Lady Lions another win.

Wright shoots game-winner

By Lawrence Fischer
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Everybody knew that Kelly Mazzante was going to get the ball. There was only one twist — she didn't.

Tanisha Wright took the ball with time winding down and the game on the line, and proceeded to hit the winning runner in the lane with 5.8 seconds remaining.

The bucket gave the No. 13 Penn State women's basketball team (16-5, 6-1 Big Ten) a 72-70 come-from-behind victory over Michigan (11-6, 2-4) last night at Crisler Arena.

The Wolverines dominated the first 30 minutes of play and had built up a seemingly insurmountable 56-43 lead midway through the second half. The Lions were playing their fourth game in eight days and it showed, but something happened as the Lady Lions all of a sudden picked up their intensity and energy. "[Tanisha] Wright brought this team together," Penn State women's basketball coach Rene Portland said on the Penn State Sports Radio

Network. "There was a time tonight when they could have folded. They didn't, they stayed together."

The Lions stayed together thanks to a 17-1 run during a five-minute stretch, which gave them their first lead at 58-57 since early in the first half.

From there the teams went back and fourth trading baskets the rest of the way until the score was deadlocked at 70 with 22.6 seconds left.

The Wolverines did a great job of denying Mazzante the ball, but not Wright, who stepped up to hit the winning shot. She finished with 13 points and ten rebounds, picking up the slack for Mazzante who struggled to get her shots to fall all night and ended with just 13 points.

Six Wolverine players scored in double figures, but it was Jess Brungo's game-high 25 points, which helped put the Lions over the top. "It was almost like Braveheart,"

Portland said. "They can't take away your rebounding; they can't take away your heart."

The Lions played the entire game with one less heartbeat, as starting center Ashli Schwab didn't even make the trip to Michigan, as she is sidelined for 10 days with a leg injury.

Portland was forced to start Hazel Joseph, and give valuable minutes to Tiffany Tomlinson once Joseph got into foul trouble. She still expects big things out of whoever is on the floor.

"They have to give us the double-double Ashli was giving us," she said prior to the game. "I still expect that much even with Ashli not with us."

The win prevented the Lions from dropping their second straight on the road, but more importantly kept them in a first place conference tie with Ohio State.

Fans will not have to wait long to see these two go at it, as the Buckeyes come to Happy Valley on Thursday with first place at stake for the victor.

W. basketball
PSU 72,
Michigan 70

M. basketball
Illinois 75,
PSU 63

Lions struggle to come alive after fifth conference loss

By Matt Finkelstein
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Close counts in horseshoes and hand grenades, not basketball.

With 10:52 left in the second half of Saturday's Big Ten match-up at the Bryce Jordan Center, Sharif Chambliss hit a three-pointer to bring the Penn State men's basketball team (5-11, 0-5 Big Ten) within two points of Illinois (14-3, 4-2). It was that close. But the Fighting Illini came right back, scored an easy lay-up, and never looked back. Within three minutes, Illinois was back up by 16, and the game was essentially over. The final was 75-63 in favor of the Illini. A key play during that stretch occurred when Robert Summers tipped a pass for an apparent steal and tried to run the ball down. Illinois center Nick Smith forced his way to the ball first, causing Penn State men's basketball coach Jerry Dunn and the BJC crowd to erupt in anger over an un-called foul.

Smith got the ball to freshman Deron Williams, who found Sean Harrington for a wide-open three-pointer, which he calmly sank to make the score 55-46. The boos continued as Penn State called a time-out and Dunn continued his verbal assault on the officials. Clearly, the play deflated the hopes of the Nittany Lions, who were down by as many as 19 in the first half.

"We were battling, and that was just a dagger," said Penn State freshman Aaron Johnson. "We were just fighting and fighting, kept chipping and chipping, and that was just a great shot."

The statistic that tells the real story of the game, however, is points in the paint. Illinois scored 50 points from within the key, while the Lions scored just 26. Time and time again, Penn State players fronted the Illinois big men, and the Illinois guards calmly lobbed the ball over them for an easy two points. The Illini shot 57 percent for the game, showing how effective

their offense was, and freshman guard Dee Brown had 11 assists. Especially effective in the paint was freshman James Augustine, who was 9-of-14 while scoring 19 points and racking up 12 rebounds, five on the offensive glass.

"James had a heck of a game," Illinois men's basketball Bill Self said. "Certainly in the first half we got a lot of easy baskets off the high-low."

Amazingly, Illinois dominated the paint while its best player was having one of the worst games of his career. Big Ten scoring leader and Illinois senior forward Brian Cook was in foul trouble right from the start, and played



Robert Summers and Aaron Johnson battle for a loose ball against Illinois. The Lions lost the game, despite bringing it within two points in the second half.

just 17 minutes. He did end up scoring 11 points, including two low-post buckets in the closing minutes to put the game away for good. Self was surprised by how well his team did despite Cook's problems.

"Brian got off to a bad start, he was rushing everything," Self said. "We got in a jam without Brian, and we got out of it without Brian." Dunn acknowledged that his team's 0-5 Big Ten record, the worst start Penn State has had since joining the conference, is starting to get to his players.

"We all get frustrated, when we get as close as we get," he said. "We just have to continue to reinforce what

Jackson earns MVP with two interceptions

■ After grabbing the ball late in the first quarter, Dexter Jackson lead the Bucs on a scoring tirade and never looked back.

By The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — When Dexter Jackson played high school football he was a highly recruited all-state quarterback.

He became defensive back in college at Florida State and that led to him being the MVP of yesterday's Super Bowl.

Jackson had two of Tampa Bay's five interceptions in the Buccaneers' 48-21 rout of the Oakland Raiders.

He was only the eighth defensive player to win the MVP award in the 37-year history of this game.

Jackson began Oakland's downfall when he intercepted Rich Gannon's pass on the last play of the first quarter.

That started Tampa Bay on the way to Martin Gramatica's 43-yard field goal early in the second quarter that gave the Bucs the lead for good at 6-3.

On the next possession, Jackson picked off Gannon again, this time at the Oakland 45.

The Bucs did not score on the ensuing possession but got the field position that led to Mike Alstott's touchdown that made it 13-3.

When the Bucs scored again before halftime, the rout was on.

Jackson is in his fourth year in the NFL and his three interceptions this season were a career high.

He also had 67 unassisted tackles during the season and was a key component of the No. 1 defense in the NFL, providing stability at free safety.

His best game came against New Orleans early in the season when he made 10 tackles.

His first interception of the season came in a Monday night game against St. Louis.

The Bucs had five interceptions yesterday, returning three for touchdowns.

Jackson earned first-team honors on Florida's Class 4A all-state high school squad with over 1,000 yards passing and rushing his senior year. He passed for a total of 2,013 yards in his last two high school seasons.

He was also a track star in high school and averaged 16.8 points per game for the basketball team.

But when he got to Florida State, he became a defensive starter in the secondary and led it for four years with 194 tackles and seven interceptions.

But in the NFL, on a team dominated by defensive stars like Warren Sapp, Derrick Brooks and John Lynch, Jackson was largely overlooked.

Yesterday, he was overlooked again, this time by Gannon, and it led him to the MVP award.

we're doing well." Self was quick to applaud Penn State's effort on its home court, and was especially impressed with Johnson, the freshman walk-on.

"I think he's a stud, I bet he's having a ball," Self said. "He's tough, he's hard-nosed and he's playing like there's nothing to lose." Johnson agreed with the assessment, but would like some wins to add to his experience. "This is the best time of my life, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else," he said. "Game day, this is what I'm here for. I'm having a great time — we just have to start winning, it will be even better."