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Illinois gives away conference opener, loses to Nebraska, 42-38

Illinois' ground game kept the team afloat.

By [Mariah Guzman](#) | [@MariahLGuzman](#) | Sep 21, 2019, 11:52pm EDT ⚙️



Brad Repplinger - The Champaign Room

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — That's not the way you want to start off conference play.

One week removed from suffering its first loss of the season in the final seconds against Eastern Michigan, Illinois's ground attack wasn't enough its first Big Ten game of the season versus Nebraska in a 42-38 loss on Saturday night at Memorial Stadium.

"Disappointment. No other way to put it" Lovie Smith said after the loss, "I thought the guys played well. The fans were outstanding, the students were really into the game, the energy and doing all they could to help their team win."

Illinois fans thought it would be impossible for the Illini to beat Nebraska this week. But Illinois knew how important it would be for them to get this win, but it just didn't happen as the

Cornhuskers gained more than 700 total yards.

The first quarter started off hot with **Reggie Corbin** running 66 yards for a touchdown just 48 seconds into the game. But Illinois fans knew not to get their hopes up because strong starts seemed to be a pattern this season, and a strong start last week resulted in a loss.

“Reggie Corbin and the running game of course it was outstanding most of the game” said Smith.

The Illini tallied another score, a **Brandon Peters** touchdown pass to **Josh Imatorbhebhe** before Nebraska was even on the score sheet.

Defense was strong, and it was clear that they were doing everything in their power to not let Nebraska get past them. The Illini was much better in the open field tackling and not giving up easy first downs.

Nebraska also hadn't let a team rush for more than 89 yards this season, while Illinois was well past that 100-mark early in the second quarter. Heck, the Illini were halfway there on their second play from scrimmage.

Illinois lost its momentum just before the end of the first half, so going into the second — if they wanted to win — their first drive would mean a lot. **Dre Brown** showed up with a 36-yard touchdown, his first rushing touchdown of the season. This gave the Illini the cushion they needed to stay on top of Nebraska — for the moment.

There wasn't much of a passing game, but Illinois found success through the ground by collecting over 200 yards. What kept the Illini alive were points off turnovers, as Illinois had four fumble recoveries and scored on three of those opportunities, giving the defense its biggest moments of the game.

Everyone doubted Illinois. Everyone was over the conference season before it began, and Saturday night, the Illini confirmed their fan thoughts — that Illinois football hasn't changed as much as they want everyone to think.

After the game Corbin said all they had to do was score, “Gotta score. We have to score every single time we touch the ball. The objective of the same is to score one more point than they do and we didn't do that today” said Corbin.

Linebacker Jake Hansen seemed visibly frustrated, and mentally exhausted. When asking what thoughts were running through his head, he said, "I take this L on my shoulders. Like this is my fault as a leader, I have to be better than that. Our team has to be better than that. I have to prepare us better than that. Wasn't good enough."

Up Next

Illinois has its first bye week next Saturday before traveling to Minnesota the following weekend. This will be Illinois' first road-conference game of the season.

The game time has yet to be announced.

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7'6"

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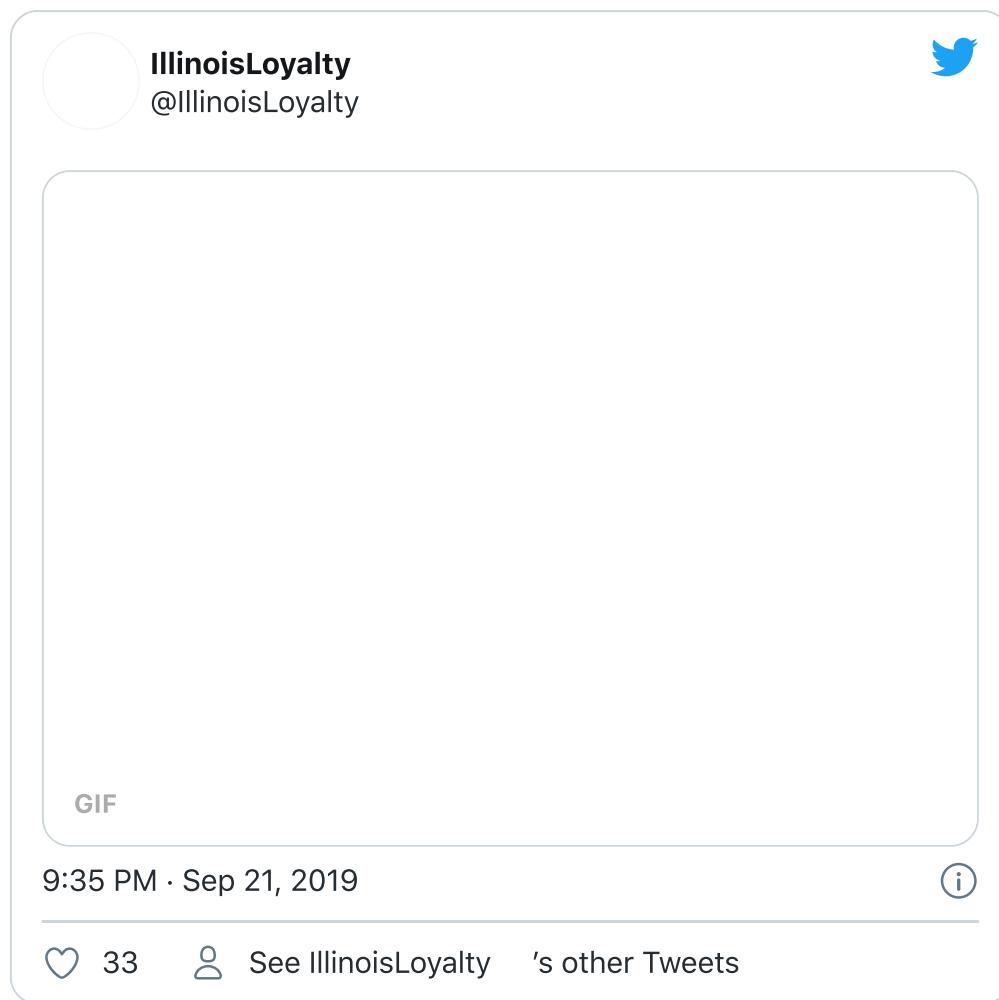


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Moments that Mattered

- **BUTTERFINGERS:** The Illini forced two first half fumbles that led to points for Illinois. Jake Hansen recovered the first on a botched handoff and the second was forced by **Dele Harding** and recovered by Quan Martin and returned to the two yard line. And then there was this:

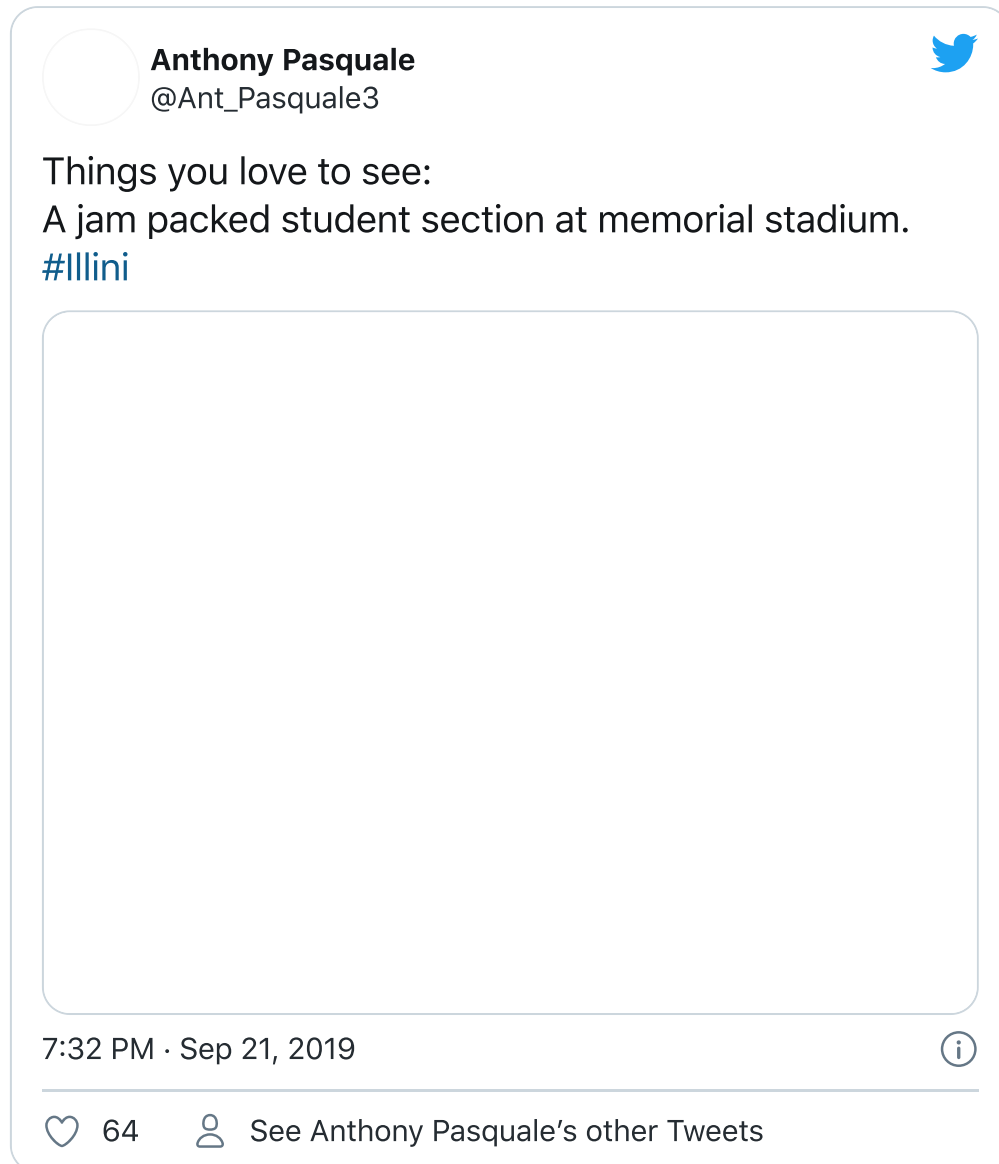


But that wasn't yet. **Ayo Shogbonyo** forced the Illini's fourth fumble and Oluwole Betiku recovered the ball at the 14. Illinois converted the fourth into a **Brandon Peters** 10 yard scramble for a score.

- **BROWN'S CROWN:** Dre Brown fielded a kickoff at the three yard line, but because he had the awareness to field it with his body out of bounds , the Illini got the ball at the 35 instead of the three.
- **BLAKE HAYES EFFECT:** The Illini punter continued to impress all game long. One punt was a quick boot to avoid pressure, and it skipped all the way to the two yard line. The

Illini forced a turnover in the moments that followed.

- **HOW MUCH TIME IS LEFT?:** For the second straight week, the end of the first half consisted of the Illini brutally managing the clock and not getting a chance to score on either drive.
- **NOISE FACTOR:** The Illini had a good crowd showing for the first time this year. The fans were loud when they needed to be, especially on Nebraska third downs - potentially leading to miscommunications instead of conversions.



Sound Smart



Reggie Corbin's first 60+ yard run of the season is a 66-yard TD on the opening drive.

He was third in the nation last year with five 60+ yard runs.

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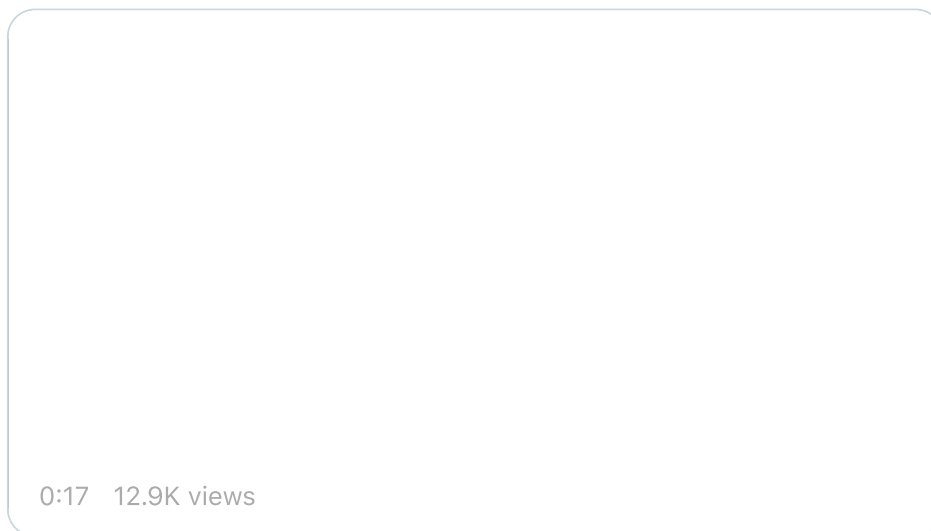
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Think Reggie Corbin (@JuicedUpReg) came ready to play?

He houses it on the second play from scrimmage. 7-0
[@IlliniFootball](#):



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He Said It