

WEEK TWO
ILLINOIS at CONNECTICUT

Illini end nonconference road losing streak 31-23 over UConn

EAST HARTFORD, Conn. -- Illinois passed its first road test on Saturday.

Brandon Peters set career highs, throwing for 225 yards and four touchdowns as the Illini overcame an early 13-point deficit to beat UConn 31-23.

It was the first nonconference road win for Illinois (2-0) in a dozen years.

"Whenever you can eliminate a bad streak like that, it's a positive thing," said coach Lovie Smith. "We're going to be a good football team this year. Hopefully, there will be more of those."

Jakari Norwood had 62 yards to lead a rushing attack that accounted for 130 yards.

Jack Zergiotis, making his first start in place of an injured Michael Beaudry, completed 21 of 31 passes for 275 yards for the Huskies (1-1).

Beaudry was available, if needed, but coach Randy Edsall said there will be no quarterback controversy. Zergiotis, a true freshman, has won the starting job.

"He's got a little bit of the 'it' factor," Edsall said.

UConn, a three touchdown underdog, jumped out to an early lead when defensive back Tyler Coyle stepped in front of a Peters pass in the first quarter and returned it down the left sideline 52 yards. Clayton Harris added two of his three field goals in the first half.

But Ra'Von Bonner got the Illini rolling, taking a screen pass and weaving 28 yards down the right side for a score. That was the first of three second quarter touchdown passes for Peters, the Michigan transfer. The Illini put up 24 unanswered points, closing the half with a 53-yard field goal from James McCourt that was set up by a 29-yard interception return from Michael Marchese.

"We just all came together and said, 'We've got to do better,'" said Norwood. "We started off bad. We started off slow. We were like, 'We got to pick it up. We've got to lock in and make more plays.'"

Illinois fumbled its first handoff after a 68-yard second half kickoff return from Dre Brown and UConn drove 59 yards, getting back in the game when Kevin Mensah dove into the end zone from 2 yards out.

But Southern Cal transfer Josh Imatorbhebhe capped an 87-yard drive with his second touchdown catch of the game to put Illinois on top 31-20 and an interception by Dele Harding stopped a late UConn drive to preserve the win.

"Good football teams are going to have to fight through adversity," Smith said. "It's really tough when you're on the road and you get in a hole like the way we did. But we fought back through it."

BY COMMITTEE

Illinois junior running back Mike Epstein suffered a season-ending knee injury against Akron and his main backup, Reggie Corbin, also was injured and could not go Saturday, despite warming up. That left Norwood, Brown and Bonner to share the load.

"We were kind of thrown right in the fire," said Brown, who had 33 yards rushing and returned five kickoffs for 163 yards. "We're excited to get Reggie back to get the whole crew back together. We really balance each other really well."

DEFENSIVE STAR

Defensive end Oluwole Betiku, another Southern Cal transfer, was in the UConn backfield much of the game, recording 3 1/2 sacks. He had six tackles, three for losses and 1 1/2 sacks in the Illini's opening win over Akron.

"It's a heck of a start and he hasn't played a lot of ball," Smith said. "He can take another step, I really believe that."

NO NERVES

Zergiotis said he expected to be nervous, but the butterflies went away a couple hours before the game.

"Thankfully they did go away and we performed at a level that was fine," he said. "But, we want to improve."

THE TAKEAWAY

Illinois: Illinois' last win on the road outside the Big Ten came in 2007 at Syracuse. The only other regular season nonconference road win this century was in 2001, at California.

UConn: Despite the respectable showing, the Huskies have now lost 17 straight games to FBS opponents. Their last win against the Bowl Subdivision came on Oct. 21, 2017 against Tulsa.

Final	1	2	3	4	T
ILL	0	24	7	0	31
UCONN	10	3	7	3	23

Scoring Summary -----

	ILL	UCONN
FIRST QUARTER		
UCONN TD 11:14 Tyler Coyle 52 Yd Interception Return (Clayton Harris Kick)		
5 plays, 10 yards, 1:58	0	7
UCONN FG 3:56 Clayton Harris 35 Yd Field Goal		
11 plays, 74 yards, 5:15	0	10
SECOND QUARTER		
UCONN FG 14:57 Clayton Harris 29 Yd Field Goal		
5 plays, 38 yards, 2:22	0	13
ILL TD 11:43 Ra'Von Bonner 28 Yd pass from Brandon Peters (James McCourt Kick)		
8 plays, 75 yards, 3:14	7	13
ILL TD 5:51 Josh Imatorbhebhe 9 Yd pass from Brandon Peters (James McCourt Kick)		
8 plays, 59 yards, 3:35	14	13
ILL TD 0:55 Daniel Barker 18 Yd pass from Brandon Peters (James McCourt Kick)		
7 plays, 59 yards, 2:42	21	13
ILL FG 0:00 James McCourt 53 Yd Field Goal		
3 plays, 19 yards, 0:21	24	13
THIRD QUARTER		
UCONN TD 11:36 Kevin Mensah 2 Yd Run (Clayton Harris Kick)		
8 plays, 59 yards, 3:05	24	20
ILL TD 6:09 Josh Imatorbhebhe 13 Yd pass from Brandon Peters (James McCourt Kick)		
8 plays, 87 yards, 2:58	31	20
FOURTH QUARTER		
UCONN FG 11:39 Clayton Harris 33 Yd Field Goal		
15 plays, 64 yards, 8:02	31	23

Team Stats	ILL	UCONN
First Downs	21	16
Passes for First	12	10
Rushes for First	6	3
Penalties for First	3	3
Third Down Efficiency	6-11	6-15
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-1	0-0
Total Yards	355	285
Total Plays	70	60
Avg Gain Per Play	5.1	4.8
Net Yards Rushing	130	10
Rushes	35	29
Yards Per Rush	3.7	0.3
Net Yards Passing	225	275
Comp-Att	24-35	21-31
Yards Per Pass	6.4	8.9
Times Sacked	5	2
Yds Lost To Sacks	-30	-9
Interceptions	1	2
Punts	4	5
Punt Average	0.0	0.0
Penalties	9	4
Penalty Yards	98	34
Fumbles	3	2
Fumbles Lost	2	1
Time of Poss	29:15	30:45

Individual Stats

RUSHING							
ILLINOIS	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG		
Jakari Norwood	6	62	10.3	0	50		
Dre Brown	9	33	3.7	0	13		
Ra'Von Bonner	10	19	1.9	0	5		
Brandon Peters	6	16	2.7	0	13		
Kenyon Sims	1	13	13.0	0	8		
Team	2	-3	-1.5	0	0		
Dominic Stampley	1	-10	-10.0	0	0		
CONNECTICUT	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG		
Kevin Mensah	14	27	1.9	1	9		
Art Thompkins	8	14	1.8	0	11		
Jack Zergiotis	7	-31	-4.4	0	1		
PASSING							
ILLINOIS	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Brandon Peters	24	35	227	6.5	4	1	71.1
CONNECTICUT	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Jack Zergiotis	21	31	275	8.9	0	2	36.6
RECEIVING							
ILLINOIS	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG		
Ricky Smalling	7	56	8.0	0	26		
Daniel Barker	2	44	22.0	1	26		
Josh Imatorbhebhe	4	42	10.5	2	14		
Ra'Von Bonner	1	28	28.0	1	28		
Trevon Sidney	5	25	5.0	0	9		
Justice Williams	1	14	14.0	0	14		
Dre Brown	1	9	9.0	0	9		
Kenyon Sims	2	7	3.5	0	5		
Jakari Norwood	1	2	2.0	0	2		
CONNECTICUT	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG		
Cameron Ross	4	85	21.3	0	40		
Ardell Brown	7	81	11.6	0	25		
Jay Rose	2	31	15.5	0	23		
Donovan Williams	1	23	23.0	0	23		
Art Thompkins	4	21	5.3	0	8		
Matt Drayton	1	19	19.0	0	19		
Heron Maurisseau	1	8	8.0	0	8		
Cameron Hairston	1	7	7.0	0	7		