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Illini fall to Texas in overtime

Fight back from 9-point deficit in 2nd half, but Longhorns' size, athleticism too much

By Chris Hine, Tribune reporter

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NEW YORK — This was Illinois' first chance to show what it can do. The first chance to show it could be a Big Ten title contender and to make a splash on the national scene.

But the 13th-ranked Illini (3-1) came up short Thursday in a hard-fought 90-84 overtime defeat to Texas (3-0) in the 2K Sports Classic at Madison Square Garden.

Illinois came back from a nine-point deficit to take a second-half lead, but Texas' size and athleticism inside ultimately did in the Illini. Jordan Hamilton led the Longhorns with 25 points, while Tristan Thompson added 20 points on 8-for-11 shooting and six blocked shots.

Demetri McCamey led Illinois with 22 points, and D.J. Richardson scored 15.

Texas scored the first eight points in overtime, and Illinois was out of answers after battling from behind much of the night. The Illini showed a toughness during their comeback that wasn't always apparent last season, but the defense that was a hallmark of the three early victories betrayed them in the first half and early in overtime.

"We didn't start the first half well, didn't start the second half well and didn't start overtime well," Illinois coach Bruce Weber said. "We had our chances in the second half. They killed us on the boards."

After the teams played to a 45-45 halftime tie, Texas seized a nine-point lead while the Illini came out flat. Three times the Longhorns rebounded their own missed free throws.

Illinois cleared a key mental hurdle when McCamey hit the Illini's first field goal of the half with 14:16 remaining to get them jump-started. Richardson hit a pair of baskets, and McCamey brought Illinois within 63-62 with a nice back-to-the-basket move.

McCamey gave Illinois its first lead of the second half at 69-68 with a pair of free throws at the 5:59 mark. Illinois' largest lead in the half was two.

With the score tied at 73, Texas guard Cory Joseph hit a 15-footer with 24 seconds remaining. Illinois

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tied it again when Jereme Richmond hit with 10 seconds remaining in regulation.

The outcome might have been different had the Illini defense started the game differently. The Longhorns shot 53 percent in the first half. Illinois shot the same percentage, but up against Texas' size and their own foul trouble, the Illini never completely got going.

The Illini will play Maryland on Friday after No. 4 Pittsburgh defeated the Terrapins 79-70 in the first game. Freshman Talib Zanna had 14 points and 13 rebounds for the Panthers, including a key tip-in with 57 seconds remaining.

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