

Iowa position breakdowns: Quarterbacks/Running Backs (premium)

*Every day this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will be previewing the 2010 version of the Iowa Hawkeyes position-by-position. This is the first of our seven-part series, focusing on the Iowa quarterbacks and running backs.*

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If there's one factor the Iowa Hawkeyes will have in the backfield in 2010, it's depth.

At quarterback, senior Ricky Stanzi is not only the starter, but he is being viewed upon as a key leader for the Hawkeyes once again this season.

As a full-time starter last season, Stanzi guided Iowa to a 9-0 start before injuring his ankle in the Hawkeyes' 17-10 loss to Northwestern. The Mentor, Ohio native threw for 2,417 yards in 11 games on 171-of-304 passing, with 17 touchdowns and 15 interceptions.

The touchdown-to-interception ratio isn't stellar by any means, and Stanzi knows that. He said he has gone back to watch the film, see what he did wrong, and try to fix it.

"It wasn't that we were making, or I was making, bad reads. It was throwing it somewhere that it didn't really need to be thrown, to be honest," Stanzi said. "Yeah, maybe one out of five times, it would've been completed, but you can't take that chance.

"That's what I've learned from watching film. There's just so

many other options that are out there. Hopefully I can learn from that and not make those same mistakes.”

Should Stanzi go down again to injury like he did in 2009, Iowa has a couple of back-ups that could be depended on in redshirt sophomores James Vandenberg and John Wienke.

Vandenberg was the one who got called into duty last season with Stanzi’s injury, and started the Hawkeyes’ final two regular-season contests against Ohio State and Minnesota. As for Wienke, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said he was one of the players he felt made the most progression throughout the offseason.

Behind all three is freshman A.J. Derby, who actually enrolled into Iowa last winter after guiding Iowa City High to a Class 4A State Championship.

“Each guy, they learn every day,” junior wide receiver Marvin McNutt, a former quarterback, said. “You see their improvement throughout practice, looking to each other. They can find each other and see what they can do to get better.”

Going deeper into the backfield, and there are plenty of players that could be seeing action in 2010.

Seeing how the Hawkeyes don’t run a spread offense and actually utilize the fullback position, senior Brett Morse is a fullback the coaches have found to be reliable, especially with this being his third season starting at the position since taking over for Tom Busch.

“I know the offense very well, and I think [the coaches] definitely have trust in me in that I know my job and I’m going to execute on the field and in tough situations,” Morse said.

Then, of course, there are the three running backs that will all be competing for playing time in sophomores Jewel Hampton,

Adam Robinson, and Brandon Wegher. Hampton returns to the team after missing all of 2009 with a torn ACL, but will be sitting out the season-opener on Sept. 4 against Eastern Illinois as part of a punishment for a public intoxication arrest back in June.

With Hampton out last season, Robinson and Wegher both saw themselves getting action on the gridiron right away. Robinson started all but three games for the Hawkeyes in 2009, while Wegher wound up starting two games Robinson missed due to an ankle sprain against Indiana and Northwestern.

Wegher had more rushing touchdowns with eight to Robinson's five, including a 32-yard touchdown run that sealed the Hawkeyes' 24-14 win over Georgia Tech in the 2010 FedEx Orange Bowl. However, Robinson led the Hawkeyes in rushing with 834 yards on the ground, while Wegher had 641.

As of now, Robinson is listed atop the depth chart. The Des Moines native said he took a lot away from the experience he ended up getting in 2009 and that he believes he knows what goes into game preparation and handling the pressure that comes with being a featured running back.

"It's been like a roller-coaster ride," he said. "I really didn't expect to play last year. I got my opportunity, and I just ran with it."

The question as to who ends up being the guy at running back may not be answered fully once the season does start. Once Hampton completes his one-game suspension, he could still end up starting the bulk of the games this fall. The coaches will continue to explore the different possibilities they're going to have.

"We're going to wait and see how the whole thing plays out, and kind of go from there," Iowa offensive coordinator Ken O'Keefe said. "It's a great problem to have, but it won't necessarily be an easy thing to do."