

Looking for the Big Ten's next Marvin McNutt (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Marvin McNutt originally came to Iowa as a quarterback, and found himself competing for a back-up job as a redshirt freshman with then-sophomore Ricky Stanzi back in 2008.

McNutt eventually switched over to wide receiver, and as a full-time starter last season, the St. Louis native burst onto the scene. It began with two touchdown catches in a 24-21 win over Arkansas State on Oct. 3, and then three weeks later, he caught the game-winning touchdown on the final play to beat Michigan State, 15-13.

He ended up catching eight touchdown passes in 2009, as the Hawkeyes went 11-2 and won the 2010 FedEx Orange Bowl.

The fact that McNutt was once a quarterback is something current Iowa signal-caller Ricky Stanzi found to be beneficial last season.

"I was excited to see Marvin get out on the field because he has great talent," Stanzi said. "It was awesome to see him transition into receiver, which he has never played and become very good at it within pretty much just a year, which is very impressive.

"He played quarterback, so he understands a lot of things. He does a great job of understanding what he needs to do to get better. He has become a great weapon for us, obviously and we're just excited to see what his progress is going to be for us this year."

This year, there are a couple of Big Ten teams that maybe

aren't trying to copy what Iowa did with McNutt, but are looking for similar results with their offenses.

When Eddie McGee arrived at Illinois, he, too, was a quarterback. In fact, as a freshman, he ended up playing the majority of Illinois' season-opener against Missouri after Juice Williams was injured. Throughout the Fighting Illini's 2007 Rose Bowl campaign, McGee was getting the chance to make plays for Illinois behind center. He even threw a 56-yard touchdown pass in that Rose Bowl loss to USC.

Last year, McGee made the switch over to wide receiver. He had one reception in each of Illinois' final four games of 2009, including catches of 48 yards against Fresno State and 42 yards against Minnesota.

"I just want to show versatility, and just help my team as best as I can," McGee said. "Right now, that's at receiver, and that's what I'm going to do. I'm confident with that, and I feel comfortable and good with it."

He added that having the knowledge of playing the quarterback position has been an advantage as he's progressed into a go-to target for Illinois' new quarterback, Nate Scheelhaase.

And then there's Keith Nichol, who originally transferred to Michigan State after losing the quarterback battle at Oklahoma to Sam Bradford, who had since won a Heisman Trophy and was recently the No. 1 pick in the 2010 NFL Draft by the St. Louis Rams.

Last season, Nichol and fellow Spartan quarterback Kirk Cousins were in an on-going battle to see who would replace Brian Hoyer. Cousins eventually emerged as the starter, and now Nichol is making the switch this season to wideout. Just like McGee did last season, and McNutt the year prior.

Nichol's emergence as a wideout has caught the attention of one prominent player on the defensive side of the ball for

Michigan State.

"Keith is about 6-2, 6-3, and is about 220 [pounds] at wide receiver and can run," senior linebacker Greg Jones said. "I think that's a threat physically, already. He knows the game, and he knows where the ball needs to be from the quarterback's stand point.

"He picks up the offense really well. He has made a great transition."

As McGee and Nichol look to be the Marvin McNutts for the Fighting Illini and Spartans in 2010, the real McNutt enters his second full season as a wide receiver for the Hawkeyes, more confident and relaxed now that the challenging parts of the position switch are behind him.

"It was a lot easier to come in and not worry so much for it as far as conditioning-wise, and just to better improve other things that I need to work on," McNutt said.