

Iowa position breakdowns: Offensive Line (premium)

*Every day this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will be previewing the 2010 version of the Iowa Hawkeyes position-by-position. After focusing on quarterbacks and running backs in [Part One](#), and wide receivers and tight ends in [Part Two](#), Part Three in our seven-part series focuses on the Hawkeye offensive line.*

By Brendan Stiles

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Many would say if there was a weakness in the Iowa offense this season, it would be the offensive line. Gone are the likes of Bryan Bulaga, Kyle Calloway, Dace Richardson and Rafael Eubanks, all of whom provided strong leadership to this unit.

While the O-Line appears as a weakness, however, the vibe surrounding the football team is that it isn't, that it's only a matter of time before the guys up front are able to gel and all be on the same page.

The leaders in this year's group are the two guys who gained the most playing experience a season ago. Anchoring Bulaga's old spot at left tackle is sophomore Riley Reiff. The Parkston, S.D., native found himself starting three games at left tackle last September when Bulaga was out of action due to a thyroid condition.

Not only did Reiff hold down the left tackle spot until Bulaga returned, but he played well enough to keep a spot on the offensive line, and played the majority of the 2009 season at left guard. He then switched over to right tackle and started there in the Hawkeyes' 24-14 win over Georgia Tech in the 2010 FedEx Orange Bowl.

Now that he is back at left tackle, Reiff has the burden of being the one that protects the blind side of senior quarterback Ricky Stanzi.

"I just come out every day. You got to show up every day, and I just try to get better," Reiff said. "I got a lot I can improve on, and that's really all I can control."

Joining Reiff in the experience department is senior Julian Vandervelde, who will be lined up at left guard again, a position he moved back for the Orange Bowl when Reiff moved over to play right tackle against the Yellow Jackets. The Davenport native has the most playing experience along the O-Line, having been a starter during each of the past two seasons for the Hawkeyes.

The intriguing battle right now is at center between a couple of Iowa City High products, senior Josh Koeppel and sophomore James Ferentz, the son of Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz.

"It's a healthy competition, but both guys know that only one can play that position," Iowa offensive line coach Reese Morgan said.

Behind the two of them on the 2-deep at center is redshirt freshman Conor Bofelli.

The right side of the offensive line features a couple of juniors that the coaches appear to be high on in guard Adam Gettis and tackle Markus Zusevics. Gettis actually got a chance to start the season opener against UNI last year at right guard because Vandervelde was out with a torn pectoral muscle during last year's camp.

Gettis believes he is a much better player than he was a year ago, and that both he and Zusevics will be able to perform well because the two are "best friends" and have gone through the same obstacles together to reach this point.

"You've been playing with a guy for 3-4 years, and you get used to him on your side," Gettis said. "We make calls to each other, and working together just makes it that much easier."

There are also plenty of offensive linemen that maybe aren't going to get a ton of playing time, but have caught the attention of the coaches. Among those listed on the 2-deep released last week were redshirt freshman Brett Van Sloten, sophomore Matt Tobin, and juniors Woody Orne and Cody Hundertmark, who switched over from the defensive line prior to Iowa's Orange Bowl appearance.

Also leaving solid impressions, Morgan said, are a couple of linemen who didn't get a chance to compete last spring – redshirt freshman Nolan MacMillan and senior Kyle Haganman.

"The guys have approached it really well," Morgan said. "You feel good because they want to do well, and they're putting in the extra time. They're studying. They're doing the right things to be in that position."

The offensive line may not have the experience the other positions on the offense have, but Kirk Ferentz isn't as worried as many on the outside appear to be. He isn't expecting the line to completely be in sync by the time Iowa takes the field on Sept. 4 against Eastern Illinois, but he also thinks as the season progresses, the line will as well.

"The real thing is we have to move forward the next four weeks, and we have to keep our foot on the gas the rest of the way," the 12th-year head coach said. "The good news is there's a lot of potential there for improvement."

"I think it will be O.K., as long as we can keep guys out there working and getting better."