

Iowa position breakdowns: Defensive Line (premium)

*Every day this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will be previewing the 2010 version of the Iowa Hawkeyes position-by-position. After discussing the offense in Parts [One](#), [Two](#), and [Three](#), Part Four in our seven-part series begins the focus on this year's defense, starting with the defensive line.*

By Brendan Stiles

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As the Iowa Hawkeyes continued finding ways to win throughout a storybook 2009 campaign, it was the defensive line emerging as one of the key components to the success.

With all four starting linemen returning for 2010, this unit will once again be counted on to do big things for the Hawkeyes.

Undoubtedly, the leader of this group is defensive end Adrian Clayborn, who decided last winter to return for his senior season. Last year, Clayborn had 70 tackles, 11.5 sacks, and four forced fumbles for the Hawkeyes. He made arguably the biggest play of the season, blocking a Penn State punt and returning it 53 yards for a go-ahead touchdown during Iowa's 21-10 win over the Nittany Lions.

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz went as far as proclaiming Clayborn as "one of the top players in the country."

He also had 12 solo tackles in a 27-24 overtime loss to Ohio State, and wound up being the Most Valuable Player in Iowa's 24-14 victory over Georgia Tech in the 2010 FedEx Orange Bowl.

For all the preseason accolades coming Clayborn's way, and all the watch lists he has been mentioned on, the St. Louis native

has only one thing in mind when it comes to having a successful senior year.

“Just helping my defense and my team win as many games as he can,” he said when asked this question at Big Ten Football Media Days in Chicago.

Inside, there are a couple of senior defensive tackles who return for the Hawkeyes – Karl Klug and Christian Ballard. Klug got his chance to start last season and made the most of it, recording 65 tackles and four sacks.

Meanwhile, Ballard enters his second season playing defensive tackle after making the switch over from end to make room for junior Broderick Binns. The move to tackle paid off for the Lawrence, Kan., native last season, as he posted 54 tackles and 5.5 sacks for the Hawkeyes last season.

Ballard, who has a couple of years of starting experience to his name like Clayborn, knows the importance of being able to have a solid final year up front.

“Anybody can take this away from you, so pressing hard every day, studying film extra hard, is definitely going to be a priority this year,” Ballard said. “You can always get better fundamentally. You can always get better when you’re watching your opponent. You can always learn more.”

Binns returns after tripling his production as a full-time starter last season. The 6-2, 261 pound end went from 20 tackles in 2008 to 63 in 2009, and his sack total went up from two sacks as a redshirt freshman to six sacks last year.

However, an OWI arrest in July has the St. Paul native suspended for Iowa’s season opener against Eastern Illinois. Binns showed remorse when speaking publicly about it for the first time last week, saying he was grateful his teammates were willing to welcome him back.

He also is excited by the idea of playing with the trio of seniors he got the chance to start alongside in 2009 once again.

"All these guys put in 4-5 years of work, and I'm just excited to be mentioned with those guys," Binns said. "They're great guys, awesome teammates, and I can't wait for the season."

The two most likely candidates to take Binns' spot on the D-Line for that first game are juniors Lebron Daniel and Mike Daniels. Daniel is listed behind Clayborn on the 2-deep at defensive end, coming in at 6-2, 250 pounds. Daniels is listed as a defensive tackle and is listed at 6-1, 275 pounds.

Regardless of which one gets the chance to start, the defensive line will be the ones teams will be game-planning for all season. And that's fine with the rest of the defense.

"It's ridiculous, just watching them every day in practice," sophomore cornerback Micah Hyde said. "They get the job done, that's for sure. It's definitely a big help being a corner, knowing that you have a defensive line like that, knowing that the quarterback has to get rid of the ball on every play. It's wonderful."