

# Iowa position breakdowns: Linebackers (premium)

\*Every day this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will be previewing the 2010 version of the Iowa Hawkeyes position-by-position. In Part Five of our seven-part series, we will break down the Hawkeye linebackers. Click here for Parts [One](#), [Two](#), [Three](#) and [Four](#).\*

By Brendan Stiles

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There was no doubt that the heart and soul of the Iowa defense in 2009 was located in its linebacking corps with guys such as Pat Angerer and A.J. Edds leading the way.

With both linebackers graduated and in the NFL, this is the one area that seems to have the most concern on the defensive side of the ball as the Hawkeyes approach the 2010 season.

The good news for this linebacking corps is that there is one starter who does return in senior outside linebacker Jeremiha Hunter. The York, Pa., native has started there for two seasons, recording 80 tackles in 2008 and 89 tackles last season. The number that stands out in terms of progress is that Hunter's number of solo tackles went up from 22 as a sophomore to 34 as a junior.

He also made one of the biggest plays of the 2009 season in the opener, blocking what would've been a game-winning field goal by UNI in the final seconds.

As for the players filling the voids left by Angerer and Edds, those two spots have been filled since the start of spring practice last March. Moving over to middle linebacker this season to replace Angerer is senior Jeff Tarpinian, who has

been a defensive back and outside linebacker before for Iowa.

In fact, it was Tarpinian that was beat out in 2008 for the outside linebacker spot held by Hunter.

"We were just looking for that player that we felt was athletic enough to play inside and do the things we wanted to do in the passing game, but also the mature, physical linebacker that we need to play versus the run," Iowa linebackers coach Darrell Wilson said. "Jeff has really grown into that position.

"It has been almost a perfect position for him."

As for replacing Edds, the Hawkeyes believe they have the answer in junior Tyler Nielsen. The Humboldt, Iowa native comes into this year listed at 6-4, 235 pounds.

"I think it just took time for him to realize that, 'Hey, I can do this,'" Iowa defensive coordinator Norm Parker said. "Now that he has realized that, I think he's starting to blossom and take off."

Parker likes what both Tarpinian and Nielsen will be able to provide to the linebacking corps, but made clear that at this time, the inexperience is a factor.

"Both of them are very intelligent guys, both of them are hard-working guys, so they've got a chance," Parker said. "But they're inexperienced. They just haven't had a lot of game action."

Iowa also has a couple of linebackers listed on the 2-deep that not only got playing time last season, but made some major contributions along the way for the Hawkeyes en route to their 11-2 mark. Senior Troy Johnson started for an injured Hunter in Iowa's 12-0 win over Minnesota, and ended up being named the Big Ten's Co-Defensive Player of the Week after recording 11 tackles, a sack, and a fumble recovery.

Backing up Tarpinian at middle linebacker is junior Bruce Davis, who made a key play on special teams in Iowa's 35-3 victory over Iowa State, recovering an onside kick attempt by the Cyclones in the first quarter, which led to the first of five Hawkeye touchdowns.

"It's a deep unit, and we got a lot of good freshmen coming in. They'll be tough players in the future," Nielsen said. "We're 2-3 deep at almost every linebacking position, so anyone can play any one of the positions, and we're looking forward to the year."

Two of those younger linebackers Nielsen talked about are redshirt freshman Shane DiBona and true freshman James Morris, the son of Iowa equipment manager Greg Morris. DiBona is listed at 6-2, 230 pounds, and is one of two freshmen players that is a member of the team's Leadership Group.

Meanwhile, Morris comes in after recording 276 career tackles while playing at Solon High School.

Also of note is the return of junior Lance Tillison. The Seffner, Fla., native did not play in 2009, and he has made the move to linebacker after originally coming to Iowa as a defensive back.