

# Iowa position breakdowns: Special Teams (premium)

\*Every day this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will be previewing the 2010 version of the Iowa Hawkeyes position by position. In the first six parts, we have examined [quarterbacks and running backs](#), [wide receivers and tight ends](#), [the offensive line](#), [the defensive line](#), [linebackers](#), and [secondary](#). In the final part of our seven-part series, we look at Iowa's special teams.\*

By Brendan Stiles

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Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz understands the importance of good special teams play. Football's third phase played a vital role throughout the 2009 season for the Hawkeyes, as they went 11-2 and secured a 24-14 win over Georgia Tech in the 2010 FedEx Orange Bowl.

Broderick Binns and Jeremiha Hunter both blocked field goals against UNI in the final seven seconds, allowing Iowa to survive a 17-16 affair. Bruce Davis recovered an early onside kick against Iowa State before the floodgates opened in the 35-3 Hawkeye victory. Adrian Clayborn made one of the biggest plays of the season against Penn State, blocking a fourth-quarter punt and returning it 53 yards for what proved to be the game-winning score. Derrell Johnson-Koulianos gave Iowa life in the fourth quarter against Ohio State after taking a kickoff back 99 yards for a touchdown, propelling a near-comeback.

Like most areas on this year's squad, special teams play features experience returning. It starts with senior punter Ryan Donahue, who has handled the punting duties for the Hawkeyes since he was a redshirt freshman in 2007.

Considered by many to be one of the Big Ten's elite punters, Donahue is coming off a season where he punted 61 times for an average of 40.9 yards, with 27 of those 61 punts landing inside the opponent's 20-yard line.

"We thought Ryan Donahue had a tremendous season last year punting, probably as well as anybody in the country," Ferentz said. "We are certainly counting on him to come back and have a great season."

Iowa also has a veteran long-snapper returning this year in senior Andrew Schulze, someone Ferentz was quick to recognize when discussing special teams at Iowa's Media Day earlier this month. Schulze comes in listed at 6-5, 255 pounds. Behind him on Iowa's 2-deep is redshirt freshman Charlie Knipper, who is 6-4 and weighs 230 pounds.

Meanwhile, one of the biggest question marks with this year's team comes with place-kicking, as once again, senior Daniel Murray and sophomore Trent Mossbrucker will be squaring off to decide who will be kicking field goals and PATs for the Hawkeyes in 2010.

The two had gone back and forth in terms of who was kicking until Iowa's 24-23 victory over Penn State in 2008, when Murray was called upon instead of Mossbrucker to kick what proved to be the game-winning field goal.

Last season, Mossbrucker was redshirted and Murray handled all the team's kicking duties. The Mooresville, Ind., native said it was an opportunity for him to mature, as one of his problems earlier in his career was dealing with what those outside the program thought of him as a kicker.

"I think that was a really important year for me, being able to watch and see how things were done at a high level, and learn from it" Mossbrucker said. "Learn from every aspect of the game and from every game that we played in last year. I think it was a good year."

As for Murray, he connected on 19-of-26 field goals in 2009 for the Hawkeyes, including a career-long 48-yard field goal in Iowa's 20-10 win over Wisconsin. He also said how in the spring, his primary focus was trying to regain consistency in his kicking after suffering an ankle injury against Georgia Tech in the Orange Bowl.

The Iowa City native admitted he has become accustomed to always being in a battle for kicking duties every year, and that it puts some sort of chip on his shoulders. Murray also said his biggest goal right now during fall camp was to improve mentally.

"Kicking is a very black-and-white game. You either miss it or you make it," Murray said. "It can kind of wear on you. If you have a bad day, you just got to try and move on, and that's kind of the way it is in the season. If you have a bad game, you just got to try and move on. There's nothing you can do about that.

"You just got to go on to the next one, and that's just something I've been trying to work on, moving on and trying to do the best that I can on the next kick."

The return game appears more set. Senior Colin Sandeman is atop the 2-deep as the team's punt returner, although senior Paul Chaney, Jr. was also listed second-string. Chaney, Jr., handled these duties early last season before suffering a torn ACL against Michigan.

Returning punts is a role that Sandeman said he has grown into taking pride with playing, knowing that at any time, he can bust a return open and give the offense momentum and a short field to work with.

"As I've grown older, I really do cherish that role," the Bettendorf native said. "For [the coaches] to have the confidence in me and putting me back there really says a lot. I'm just trying to make plays out there, and try not to

fumble.”

On kickoff returns, Iowa has both Johnson-Koulianos and Chaney, Jr., listed on the 2-deep, as well as sophomore running back Brandon Wegher.