

# 2011 Spring Football position breakdowns: Quarterbacks (premium)

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No position in football is more scrutinized and dissected more than quarterback, and for the first time in three years, it is a bit of an unknown for the Iowa Hawkeyes.

Barring any significant injury between now and Sept. 3, junior James Vandenberg should be the Hawkeye signal-caller when Iowa opens the 2011 season at home against Tennessee Tech. Vandenberg has started two games in his career, one of which came at the Horseshoe against Ohio State in a game that determined the Big Ten's 2009 champion and Rose Bowl representative. His one win as a starter came the following week in a game the Hawkeyes defeated Minnesota, 12-0.

The brief starting experience is something that should be of benefit to Vandenberg, assuming he holds down the starting job between now and the fall. But it really cannot be stressed enough just how big a void he has to fill in replacing Ricky Stanzi.

He might not be the greatest quarterback to ever don an Iowa uniform, but the success Stanzi had over three seasons as the Hawkeyes' starting quarterback is nearly unprecedented. When Stanzi is selected next month in the 2011 NFL Draft, he will be the first Iowa quarterback to be drafted by an NFL team since Matt Rodgers in 1992. That's a span of 19 years.

To put that in perspective, the Hawkeyes have had a Heisman Trophy runner-up in Brad Banks and a three-year starter in

Drew Tate. Neither of them were drafted, let alone took a snap in the NFL.

Stanzi was also the first Iowa quarterback to ever lead the Hawkeyes to victories in three bowl games, all of which were consecutive, one of which was the 2010 Orange Bowl.

On film, his entire body of work under center may not have left Iowa fans in complete awe, but coming off a season where he threw 25 touchdown passes to only six interceptions, it's easy to understand the impact Stanzi had on the program and why replacing him will be a tall task. Not to mention that he won 26 games during this time span.

Moving forward, Vandenberg brings some similarities and differences to the gridiron. His football IQ is strong. He is a quarterback that will know where everyone else needs to be and a guy that will have the playbook down pat. Where he differs from Stanzi is arm strength.

In that aforementioned game against the Buckeyes two seasons ago, a game Vandenberg started as a redshirt freshman, his first of two touchdown passes to Marvin McNutt was a bullet. The Keokuk, Iowa product has a quick release, and can really get some zip on his throws. Assuming he gets proper protection up front, there shouldn't be too many interceptions. If he does make mistakes, chances are they'll happen when he feels pressure or is about to get crushed.

Behind Vandenberg is another junior in John Wienke. At this time a year ago, there was plenty of praise from both head coach Kirk Ferentz and offensive coordinator Ken O'Keefe about Wienke's development in terms of understanding the Hawkeye offense. While the odds of him surpassing Vandenberg on the depth chart appear slim, this could be an important spring for Wienke as well, especially in the event he does have to come in a game at some point this fall.

Going down the depth chart, there are two other quarterbacks

worth discussing for now. Redshirt freshman A.J. Derby is an Iowa City native that has been heavily brought up because at 6-4 and 232 pounds, some have wondered if he would see the field sooner playing another position. At his spring press conference on March 23, Ferentz said Derby was still working with the quarterbacks this spring and will continue to do so for now.

The last name to briefly mention is incoming freshman Jake Rudock, a Florida product that signed his letter on intent with Iowa on Feb. 2. Expect Rudock to redshirt in 2011.

How all these quarterbacks manage to do this spring without having the luxury of a bonafide starter to learn from is unclear right now. But given the enormity of Stanzi's departure, this is the one area that every college football expert will see as a concern for the Hawkeyes entering 2011 and while Vandenberg has the decisive edge, it's still an area to keep an eye on between now and September.