

2011 Spring Football position breakdowns: Secondary (premium)

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In attempting to determine the potential of the Iowa Hawkeye secondary in 2011, the result is somewhat of a mixed bag.

Looking back at the 2010 season, the strength of the secondary was in the safeties. Iowa had two safeties in Brett Greenwood and Tyler Sash that ultimately started three seasons together, knew the roles of everyone on the defense, and provided the leadership needed to help make the Hawkeyes a formidable defense.

The concern last year came with the cornerback position. Although Shaun Prater had started throughout 2009, he suddenly found himself in a slightly different role. With Amari Spievey jumping to the NFL a year early, Prater suddenly had the pressure of being Iowa's top cover corner while Micah Hyde emerged as the guy trying to fill Spievey's shoes.

This spring, the script from last year has pretty much flipped.

The good news for the Hawkeyes was that Prater decided last January to return for his senior season after a junior campaign that saw him named first team all-Big Ten after recording 68 tackles and four interceptions. Prater looks the part of a natural leader on the field, and the impact of his decision to come back cannot be stressed enough. He is arguably the best player at his position in the conference, and having the ability to take away a good chunk of the field

is going to help this Iowa defense significantly in the fall.

While cornerback seems to be solid, the concern this spring is filling the safety spots. Not only did Greenwood graduate, but Sash declared early for the NFL, so both free safety and strong safety need to be determined. Although Hyde was listed at the start of the spring as the corner opposite Prater, there is a strong feeling that he will move over to one of the safety spots to make way for sophomore B.J. Lowery at corner. Lowery is listed this spring at 5-11, 185 pounds.

Hyde finished 2010 with 82 tackles, good enough to finish second on the team behind only linebacker Jeremiha Hunter. The Fostoria, Ohio native also earned Defensive Player of the Game honors in the 2010 Insight Bowl after returning a Blaine Gabbert interception for what proved to be the game-winning touchdown in Iowa's 27-24 victory over Missouri.

Two other names to have risen here in the spring are safeties Tanner Miller and Collin Sleeper. Miller is out this spring following off-season surgery, but found himself thrown in there against Missouri in the Insight Bowl last December. He was listed first team at free safety on the 2-deep where Greenwood played. Sleeper, meanwhile, was listed first string at strong safety when spring practices began. He is a junior listed at 6-2, 200 pounds.

The final name to keep an eye on between now and September is senior Jordan Bernstine. Although Bernstine has always been listed as a corner and was the guy Hyde beat out to start opposite Prater in 2010, the Des Moines native could see the field at safety alongside Hyde should the Hawkeyes ultimately elect to go that route.

When it comes to the Iowa secondary, the two burning questions will be who ends up emerging at the two safety positions, and if Hyde moves to safety, how productive will Lowery be at corner opposite Prater. Greenwood and Sash provided a big

impact to the Hawkeye defense the last three years (just ask Iowa State), so filling those voids is a must. Also, if Lowery does start at corner, expect opposing offenses to test him given the reputation Prater has earned in the conference.

How everything unfolds here will be intriguing to see once August rolls around.