

# 2011 Iowa position breakdowns: Offensive Line (premium)

\*Every day this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will be previewing the 2011 version of the Iowa Hawkeyes position-by-position. After focusing on quarterbacks and running backs in [Part One](#), and wide receivers and tight ends in [Part Two](#), Part Three in our seven-part series focuses on the Hawkeye offensive line.\*

By Brendan Stiles

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At first glance, it appears the strength of this year's Iowa Hawkeyes will be the offense. One of the biggest reasons why is because of the experience returning up front along the offensive line.

The Hawkeyes return three linemen that started all 13 of Iowa's games in 2010 – juniors Riley Reiff (left tackle) and James Ferentz (center), and senior right tackle Markus Zusevics. Of this trio, the one to watch this fall is Reiff. The Parkston, S.D., native has become highly-touted by NFL scouts and could have a chance at season's end to jump to the next level instead of playing his senior season.

Reiff is the third Iowa left tackle in the Kirk Ferentz era that will be surrounded by this type of publicity. Robert Gallery opted to return for his senior season and ended up being the second overall pick in the 2004 NFL Draft. Bryan Bulaga did go pro a year early and won Super Bowl XLV as a rookie with the Green Bay Packers, who took him 23rd overall in 2010.

"Right now, he needs to worry about getting better, and I know

that's what he's thinking about," Kirk Ferentz said. "If there's a decision to make, he'll make it."

As for James Ferentz, Iowa offensive line coach Reese Morgan senses big things out of the head coach's son as he enters his second season handling snaps. The Iowa City High product found himself listed on the watch list for the Rimington Trophy earlier this year.

"James, in one year, has just become a very strong leader," Morgan said.

At left guard, the Hawkeyes will need to find a replacement for Julian Vandervelde, who was a three-year starter and got picked in the fifth round of the NFL Draft by the Philadelphia Eagles last spring. Sophomore Nolan MacMillan, who started six games at right guard as a redshirt freshman last season, was listed as the starting left guard on the preseason 2-deep sent out July 28.

However, Kirk Ferentz revealed at the conclusion of Iowa's Media Day on Aug. 5 that MacMillan has suffered from a sports hernia and wouldn't be practicing in the immediate future. A timetable wasn't given on when exactly he could return. In the event he can't make it back before the Hawkeyes' season-opener against Tennessee Tech, his likely replacement at left guard would be redshirt freshman Brandon Scherff, who entered the start of fall camp listed at 6-5, 310 pounds.

Right guard seems to be less of a concern for now. Senior Adam Gettis filled in for an injured MacMillan, but ended up starting just two games for Iowa before injuries sidelined him for the rest of the 2010 season and paved the way for former offensive lineman Josh Koeppel to see the field as a fifth-year senior.

Gettis was listed on the preseason 2-deep as the starter at right guard. Ferentz continues to believe Gettis could have a major impact up front barring another significant injury.

"They're both real good players," Zusevics said of Gettis and MacMillan. "They're both good run blockers, good pass blockers. They're experienced. They know the defenses. So we're definitely confident with guys like that in."

Other linemen that appeared on the preseason 2-deep include senior Woody Orne, junior Matt Tobin, and sophomores Conor Bofelli and Brett Van Sloten. Of these four, Van Sloten has the most playing experience for the Hawkeyes, being a special teams contributor last season. The other three players all saw some playing time in Iowa's blowout wins over Eastern Illinois, Iowa State, Ball State and Michigan State.

Morgan believes anywhere between 8-10 linemen could end up competing for positions, even with some of the line being well-established already.

"I think four of the five guys are guys who you feel comfortable with, and I think we're looking at who is going to be that fifth guy," Morgan said. "I think there are several candidates who can do it, and I don't think anybody has been eliminated from that equation yet."