

2011 Iowa position breakdowns: Secondary (premium)

*Every day this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will be previewing the 2011 version of the Iowa Hawkeyes position by position. Here in Part Six of our seven-part series, we examine this season's crop of defensive backs. Click here for Parts [One](#), [Two](#), [Three](#), [Four](#), and [Five](#).*

By Brendan Stiles

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Right now, figuring out the Iowa secondary is like assembling a line of dominoes. A couple of pieces are known, but not necessarily the order.

The first two dominoes are obvious. Shaun Prater decided to return for his senior season and will be back at left cornerback. The Hawkeyes are also return junior Micah Hyde, who was the defensive MVP in Iowa's 27-24 win in the 2010 Insight Bowl over Missouri after he returned a Blaine Gabbert interception back 72 yards for the game-winning touchdown. Together, this DB duo combined for 150 tackles, eight interceptions and 13 pass break-ups last season.

But until it's established where in the secondary Hyde ends up playing – free safety or right cornerback – he's that domino everyone is waiting to see set off a chain reaction one way or the other.

"We feel confident that Micah can play free safety, and we know he can play corner," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said. "He's a little bit of a luxury for us right now."

Hyde started all 13 games last season at right corner opposite

Prater. However, the Fostoria, Ohio native moved to free safety in the spring with sophomore Tanner Miller being sidelined following offseason surgery. When the preseason 2-deep was released last month, Hyde was still listed as the starter at free safety.

As far as Hyde is concerned, where in the secondary he plays doesn't matter.

"I have no preference," Hyde said. "My exact answer would be put me at whatever, wherever you want me at, and I'll do it, because I don't have a preference at all."

Miller currently sits as the "next man in" at free safety should Hyde move back to corner. He did make an appearance on defense against Missouri in the 2010 Insight Bowl, and recorded three tackles.

If Hyde sticks at safety though, then the battle at his old right corner spot is worth keeping an eye on. Junior Greg Castillo appears to have the upper hand right now on sophomore B.J. Lowery. Castillo has started both of Iowa's season-openers the past two seasons in place of Prater, once due to suspension, the other due to injury. He also has 15 tackles over the course of his career.

The previous starting experience, even though it was only a couple of games, is something Castillo said gives him confidence as far as knowing his assignments are concerned.

"The defense is a product of just me producing, of me going out there and doing what I do on the field," Castillo said. "I just need to get my confidence back up."

Meanwhile, Lowery did see some playing time as a true freshman last season, a little bit on defense, but mainly as a special teams contributor. He recorded five tackles in 2010, four of which were solo.

Then there's the void at strong safety left by Tyler Sash, who decided to forego his senior season and was a sixth-round draft pick of the New York Giants last spring. Junior Collin Sleeper was listed as the starter there during the spring and his name was atop the preseason 2-deep again recently.

However, this could also be where senior defensive back Jordan Bernstine gets his opportunity to see the field after having been moved around the secondary throughout his Hawkeye tenure. Bernstine entered fall camp listed behind Prater at left cornerback, but he has also gotten a chance to work with the first-string unit during DB drills since camp began.

The Des Moines native has never actually started a game, but has seen the field plenty. Over his career, which includes a medical redshirt in 2009, Bernstine has recorded 25 tackles and an interception that came during his sophomore campaign in 2008.

"I've done it all in miniature roles since I've been here," Bernstine said. "I mean, I know it all. It's just a matter of getting out there and doing it."

Once that Hyde domino eventually falls, the rest of the questions will be answered. But whichever way that domino goes, defensive backs coach Phil Parker already knows he has something in the secondary this year he's normally not accustomed to having – versatility.

"It definitely has a factor in what we're doing, but it's a good problem to have right now with the flexibility that we have back there," Parker said. "We have a couple of guys that can flip back from safety to corner, and still not lose much depth in there."