

# 2011 Iowa position breakdowns: Special Teams (premium)

\*Every day this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will be previewing the 2011 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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If there was one area that may have held Iowa back in 2010, it was the play of its special teams over the course of the season.

An executed fake punt by Eastern Illinois in the season opener led to the Panthers' only score in a 37-7 Iowa win. It was also a play that inspired Wisconsin coach Bret Bielema to call something similar when the Badgers visited Kinnick Stadium. A 17-yard scramble late in the fourth quarter resulted in a Wisconsin first down, and the Badgers wound up winning in the final minutes, 31-30.

Even after a 35-7 win over Iowa State, special teams play concerned head coach Kirk Ferentz. The very next week at Arizona, the Hawkeyes' opening drive ended with a blocked punt leading to a Wildcat touchdown. Then a blocked PAT that would've given Iowa a 28-27 lead kept the game tied, and Arizona managed to drive down the field for a game-winning score.

In the aforementioned loss to the Badgers, it wasn't just the

blocked punt. A mishandled snap on a second-quarter field goal attempt also occurred. And when the Hawkeyes lost at Minnesota, the Golden Gophers executed an onside kick and had an early 10-0 lead before Iowa's offense even touched the football.

Now entering 2011, the third phase will be critical for a Hawkeye squad that lost a lot of firepower both offensively and defensively.

For starters, Iowa had to replace long-snapper Andrew Schulze, who handled the snapping duties on special teams the last three seasons and is currently on the Atlanta Falcons' roster. In Schulze's place is sophomore Casey Kreiter.

The most glaring situation is at punter. Gone is Ryan Donahue, a four-year starter at Iowa and a Ray Guy Award finalist in 2010. Donahue not only proved to be one of the best punters in the country during his collegiate days, but he also handled the holding duties on field goal and extra point attempts, including Daniel Murray's game-winning field goal to beat Penn State in 2008.

Replacing Donahue at punter is senior Eric Guthrie, who has patiently waited for his opportunity after sitting behind Donahue, who averaged 44.6 yards per punt as a senior.

"A lot of it is just having the confidence and mental toughness," Guthrie said of his predecessor. "He was really strong mentally and he had confidence in himself."

During Iowa's Media Day on Aug. 5, Ferentz referred to his 6-6 punter as "one of the more improved guys on the entire roster."

"I think he has worked hard," Ferentz said. "He's a very conscientious young guy, so he'll go out there and do well."

At kicker, it appears sophomore Mike Meyer will handle field

goals and PATs again in 2011 after he beat out both Murray and Trent Mossbrucker last season as a true freshman walk-on. Meyer connected on 14-of-17 field goal attempts and 31-of-33 extra point tries during the final 10 games of the 2010 season.

Then there's the return game, where Iowa loses its punt returner and one of its two kickoff returners. The kickoff returner who is back and is likely to be returning again this season is junior wide receiver Keenan Davis. No second return man has been established yet.

As for returning punts, the two names to emerge as Colin Sandeman's successor are junior free safety Micah Hyde and senior wideout Marvin McNutt. Although he didn't return any kicks last season, Hyde did score a touchdown against Michigan State when safety Tyler Sash intercepted a Kirk Cousins pass and lateraled the ball back to him. He also returned a Blaine Gabbert interception 72 yards for the game-winning touchdown in Iowa's 27-24 win over Missouri in the 2010 Insight Bowl.

"I think we have a healthy list of return candidates, both on kickoff and on the punt team," Ferentz said. "We've been in situations before where we've had guys injured and really gotten pretty thin."

Some answers will become more clear at the end of fall camp, but how much better or worse special teams ends up being for the Hawkeyes in 2011 won't be determined until the season's conclusion.