

2012 Spring Football position breakdowns: Running Backs (premium)

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One of the biggest questions surrounding the Iowa Hawkeyes during the spring football period is how things turn out at the running back position. Yes, this is something that will be heavily dissected again later in August, but head coach Kirk Ferentz didn't rule out the possibility of someone emerging as the top back in Iowa's offense by the time spring ball concludes.

Two reasons exist for why this is such a significant situation. First, there's the departure of leading rusher Marcus Coker, who transferred to Stony Brook last winter. Coker's decision to transfer came after he was suspended from last season's Insight Bowl for being found in violation of the UI's Student-Athlete Code of Conduct. His absence was felt in the 31-14 Insight Bowl loss to Oklahoma as the Hawkeyes only had 76 yards rushing on 37 carries.

What makes Coker's absence even more alarming though is that he accounted for over 80 percent of Iowa's rushing in 2011, tallying 1,384 yards and 15 touchdowns on the ground last season. It should also be mentioned that Iowa no longer has Mika'il McCall either, who only played two games during an injury-shortened/suspension-riddled 2011 season before leaving the program for good.

Now the other reason running back is significant right now stems back to Greg Davis coming in as the new offensive coordinator. Davis stressed before how he'll call plays based

on how much play-making ability Iowa has at given positions, so how much running backs will be utilized still remains to be seen.

Here's what is known right now: There are three realistic options at running back (four, depending on how much junior fullback Brad Rogers gets utilized in Davis' offense), plus two more running backs will be on campus later this summer in incoming freshmen Greg Garmon and Barkley Hill. Garmon is a four-star recruit out of Erie, Pa., and one of the most prized recruits from Iowa's 2012 class. Hill originally committed to Iowa State, but the Cedar Falls native switched commitments and signed with Iowa.

If there is a leader in the clubhouse, one would think it'd be sophomore running back Jordan Canzeri. The Hawkeyes went running back by committee against Oklahoma in the Insight Bowl, but Canzeri rushed for 58 yards on 22 carries and got the start. He also scored one of Iowa's two touchdowns in that game, catching a 9-yard touchdown pass from quarterback James Vandenberg.

Canzeri has competition right now, however, from a pair of sophomores – Damon Bullock and De'Andre Johnson. Bullock, like Canzeri, was used as a true freshman last year and actually played at both wide receiver and running back in 2011. As for Johnson, he comes in as the most experienced of the running backs with this being his third year in the program. As a redshirt freshman, he rushed for 79 yards on 18 carries.

Rogers should also be in the discussion, but again, a lot of it will depend on how often the Hawkeyes elect to use the fullback under Davis. After coming back from a heart condition that sidelined him for nearly an entire calendar year, Rogers was used primarily as a fullback in 2011, but did get the first Iowa carry in the Insight Bowl against Oklahoma, rushing for three yards on the Hawkeyes' opening play from scrimmage.

Again, running back is something that will likely be re-examined again in August as Garmon could very well be in position to get carries right away as a true freshman. But for now, during this spring period, four players have an opportunity to distinguish themselves from the rest and possibly be in position to become the No. 1 back regardless of what transpires during fall camp later this year.