

# 2012 Spring Football position breakdowns: Defensive Line (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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Last season, one of the biggest challenges facing the Iowa Hawkeyes was shoring up a defensive line that had three players selected in the 2011 NFL Draft. While it wasn't the strongest group of players last fall, it had a pair of defensive linemen in tackle Mike Daniels and end Broderick Binns that were key leaders.

Daniels led the team with nine sacks and recorded 67 tackles in his second year as a starter. Meanwhile, Binns finished with 60 tackles last season and compiled five sacks, two fumble recoveries and nine pass deflections.

This spring, not only do the Hawkeyes have to find replacements for those two players, but for the entire defensive line with four seniors starting in the 2011 Insight Bowl against Oklahoma. Also gone are Thomas Nardo and Lebron Daniel, both of whom dealt with injuries in 2011 but managed to return to the gridiron in time for the bowl game.

And then there's the coaching change. With Rick Kaczinski moving on to become the defensive line coach at Nebraska, Iowa found itself moving offensive line coach Reese Morgan over to the other side of the trenches to coach the D-line in 2012. Morgan is being regarded as someone who isn't nearly as fiery and intense as Kaczinski but has enough influence on players to make them grow. Whether it happens with what is easily the most inexperienced group on the entire team remains to be seen, but this is worth keeping an eye on both this spring and

beyond.

The one defensive lineman who is both healthy this spring and has enough game experience under his belt to possibly emerge as a leader on this team is senior defensive lineman Steve Bigach. As a junior, Bigach played in 12 games and recorded 24 tackles. He got starts at both tackle and end in 2011 while Nardo and Daniel dealt with injuries and showed enough versatility that the coaches could move him to either position if needed. This spring, he has been working primarily as a tackle.

Iowa will be optimistic in hoping junior defensive end Dominic Alvis returns in time for the start of the season. Alvis is still sidelined with a knee injury that took place during the Hawkeyes' 24-16 win over then-No. 13 Michigan on Nov. 5 at Kinnick Stadium. Prior to the injury, Alvis recorded 30 tackles and 1.5 sacks.

With Alvis not in the picture right now, two names to watch at defensive end are Joe Gaglione and Riley McMin. Gaglione is a senior who saw action in 10 games last season and recorded seven tackles. McMin is a redshirt freshman that entered the spring at 6-7, 245 pounds.

In addition to Alvis being hurt, another injured D-lineman at the moment is sophomore defensive tackle Carl Davis. Prior to the start of last season, Davis was being touted as a guy who would clog up the middle of the field. Instead, he only had two tackles in six games and now has been rehabbing from a knee issue addressed in January. At 6-5, 310 pounds, Davis is easily the biggest D-lineman currently on the roster.

One defensive tackle who has shown progress this spring is redshirt freshman Darian Cooper, who came into the spring listed at 6-2, 280 pounds. Despite not being the biggest sized tackle, Cooper came in highly-touted and seems to have the attention of the coaching staff as he has worked with the

first-team defense throughout the spring thus far.

There are also a pair of incoming freshmen in Jaleel Johnson and Faith Ekakitie that, should neither redshirt, could potentially see the field right away for the Hawkeyes as true freshmen.

This group is easily the one that has the most uncertainty for now and what's on display right now probably will be completely different come fall camp. There's promise with some of the younger players, but that's where the difference will be made. If the growing pains that come with being an underclassman linger, then it could be a long season. If anyone shows flashes of brilliance right away in live game action, then Iowa might prove to be in better shape than expected along its front four.