

2012 Spring Football position breakdowns: Secondary (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

If there's one group that may have to lead the Iowa defense not just this spring but in the fall as well, it's the Hawkeye secondary.

Iowa brings back two starters in the defensive backfield, as well as a third player who was used primarily as a nickel back in 2011 that should replace Shaun Prater at cornerback.

One returning starter that will be considered not only a leader in the secondary, but also along the entire defense, is senior cornerback Micah Hyde. The Fostoria, Ohio native began the season starting the first two games at free safety, but then moved back to his natural position of corner where he started the rest of the way.

In 13 games, Hyde recorded 72 tackles, had eight pass break-ups, and tied for a team-high three interceptions, two of which came in his first start last season at cornerback, a 31-27 win over Pittsburgh. Returning to cornerback turned out to be a wise move for Hyde. Now with him back for his senior season and working this spring at corner as opposed to free safety, this ought to pay dividends for the Hawkeyes down the road as well.

The other returning starter from last season back in the secondary is junior free safety Tanner Miller, who began working with the first-team defense shortly after Hyde was moved back to corner. Like Hyde, Miller recorded three

interceptions last fall, one of which was a 98-yard return for a touchdown that came in Iowa's 41-31 win over Northwestern. Now with most of a full season under his belt and two seasons of eligibility left, Miller is in position to become an ever bigger focal point in the secondary this year.

Coming in to replace Prater at the corner spot opposite Hyde is junior cornerback B.J. Lowery. Last season, Lowery missed the first five games due to a wrist injury suffered during fall camp. When he did see the field, he was used primarily as a nickel back. Lowery did record 11 tackles (10 of which were solo) and broke up three passes, one of which was the final play of Iowa's 24-16 win over Michigan on Nov. 5. Like Miller, an increase in game experience ought to help Lowery as he continues to develop.

The position of intrigue for new defensive backs coach Darrell Wilson this spring is strong safety. The player he and other coaches seem to be highest on is sophomore Nico Law, who came into the spring listed first-team and has worked this spring with the first-team defense. As a true freshman last season, Law appeared in all 13 games primarily playing special teams and recorded 11 tackles. With Law replacing Jordan Bernstine at strong safety, one would think Iowa won't miss a beat at the position.

Two other sophomores to keep an eye on as far as providing depth to the defensive backfield are Jordan Lomax and Johnny Lowdermilk. Lomax is currently listed behind Lowery at left cornerback and had seven tackles in 11 games last year. As for Lowdermilk, he had four tackles while also playing in 11 games. He entered this spring listed second at free safety behind Miller.

Other guys who have playing experience and provide depth are senior cornerback Greg Castillo, senior safety Tom Donatell and senior safety Collin Sleeper. Castillo and Sleeper both started games against Tennessee Tech and Iowa State last

season, while Donatell gained some playing experience moving to linebacker last year before returning back to safety, where Wilson now continues to coach him.

This is a group that has the playmakers needed to be a successful defense, so it shouldn't be a secret that the secondary will be counted on to contribute big for the Hawkeyes in 2012.