

2012 Iowa position breakdowns: Quarterbacks

This week, HawkeyeDrive.com presents an eight-part series of position breakdowns as the Iowa Hawkeyes continue preparing for the 2012 season. Our first part examines the team's quarterbacks.

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When Greg Davis was first named offensive coordinator last February, one of the first players to embrace his new coach and the philosophy he would be bringing to Iowa City this fall was James Vandenberg.

As a junior last season, the Keokuk native had his ups and downs. In some instances, Vandenberg showed flashes of brilliance, whether it was erasing a 21-point deficit to defeat Pittsburgh or showing touch on some of the touchdown passes he tossed. There were also instances however where he played poorly and the offense looked lackluster. Road losses to teams such as Penn State and Nebraska best illustrated those downs.

With new nomenclature and essentially a new culture, Vandenberg now has an opportunity entering his senior campaign to set a precedent with the leadership he provides to not just the offense, but the entire team.

"Nobody is more invested than James," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said. "Nobody works harder."

Vandenberg threw for 3,022 yards in 2011, more than any other returning Big Ten quarterback entering this season. He tossed 25 touchdowns to only seven interceptions. Having gone through

that full experience of being the starting signal-caller from the start of spring practices to the end of last season, Vandenberg believes what he can learn from the past will only aid him going forward.

"I don't think you can quantify that or tell how much it does for you," Vandenberg said. "But having a season under my belt, having a season being the starter and a spring being the starter again, just that continued experience I think it makes you more and more comfortable and the more comfortable you are, the easier it is to play at your best."

While Vandenberg looks to thrive in this new offense, there's also the question of who becomes the No. 2 quarterback on this Iowa team. Both Jake Rudock and Cody Sokol have had reps this fall with the second offense. Rudock has an edge as a redshirt freshman having been in the program for an entire year.

"You learn a lot. You learn game-planning," Rudock said about what he took away from redshirting in 2011. "You learn as much about the offense as you can like every freshman is during camp and during the season, you start learning game-planning, what you check to in certain situations and that helps in being able to go to certain games. You get to see how the flow of things is."

But with that being said, Davis replacing O'Keefe may have also evened the playing field for Sokol, who joined the Hawkeyes after playing two seasons at Scottsdale Community College in Arizona and for now at least, is listed as a junior. Last year as a sophomore, Sokol compiled 3,807 yards passing and tossed 43 touchdowns.

Regardless of whether Sokol ends up redshirting this year or not, he has two years of playing eligibility at Iowa.

"The plan is let us see what happens as we go through camp," Davis said about whether a redshirt would be placed on Sokol this season. "If it were a perfect scenario, you'd like to

redshirt Cody because Jake already redshirted and then both can come into spring training and battle from there.”

There’s also true freshman C.J. Beathard and fifth-year senior John Wienke, who is also competing to be the Hawkeyes’ punter this season and will handle the holding duties for Iowa in 2012, as he also did last season.

“That position overall, they’re learning,” Ferentz said. “They’re getting a lot of work right now and I’m really pleased with it.”