

2012 Iowa position breakdowns: Running Backs

This week, HawkeyeDrive.com presents an eight-part series of position breakdowns as the Iowa Hawkeyes continue preparing for the 2012 season. [After previously focusing on quarterbacks](#), our second part examines the team's group of running backs.

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The woes of the running back position at Iowa have become well-documented. Since the turn of the calendar, three of the Hawkeyes' top rushers – including Marcus Coker – no longer find themselves donning black and gold.

As Iowa continues to prepare for its season opener on Sept. 1 against Northern Illinois, the attention has now shifted to who's still around and what type of impact can be created out of the backfield.

"Anybody that's in the backfield position is going to get a look at carrying the football and just see if they can help us out in some way," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said during the team's Media Day on Aug. 6.

Back in the spring, it appeared sophomore Jordan Canzeri would earn the starting nod before tearing his ACL during a non-contact drill. As a result, Canzeri's injury seems to have paved the way for fellow sophomore running back Damon Bullock, who went back-and-forth last season between running back and wide receiver before the coaching staff finally settled on him being in the backfield prior to the Hawkeyes' 31-14 loss to Oklahoma in the 2011 Insight Bowl.

Bullock began taking the first-team reps after Canzeri got hurt and appeared to be in competition for the starting spot with De'Andre Johnson. But with Johnson being dismissed from the team on Aug. 1, all signs now point to Bullock being the No. 1 back when the season starts.

With Iowa running a slightly more up-tempo offense under first-year offensive coordinator Greg Davis, Bullock's role as a running back will include the ability to catch passes out of the backfield and become a threat to opposing defenses when the Hawkeyes resort to the short passing game. The experience he had as a wideout last year, he said, has proven beneficial.

"It was great because I got to go out to receiver and work on route running and work on catching and then come back to running back and work on pass blocking," Bullock said. "It just helped me on both sides, so coming into this new offense that we have where the running back is able to play receiver and running back, it's going to be great because I have a good feel for both."

In filling this void, Bullock said he tries to emulate former NFL running backs such as Michael Bennett and Kevin Faulk, both of whom were known during their careers as being multi-dimensional.

Behind Bullock (for now anyway) are a pair of true freshmen – Barkley Hill and Greg Garmon. Hill is an in-state product having played at Cedar Falls High School, while Garmon hails from Erie, Pa. Both put up gaudy numbers in high school. Hill rushed for 2,493 yards and 40 touchdowns as a senior last fall, while Garmon compiled 2,859 yards and 27 touchdowns over a span of three years.

They aren't the only freshmen running backs Iowa has right now in terms of depth, but both Hill and Garmon are among those that, after Bullock, would be most likely to contribute.

"They're all talented guys, but they are all young," Iowa

running backs coach Lester Erb said. "Things are moving a little bit fast for them, which we expect. But they've all shown flashes."

Then there's junior Brad Rogers, who is listed as the starting fullback but now might become prevalent in Iowa's rushing game as a feature back. Rogers made his return to the field midway through last season after dealing with a heart condition that sidelined him for nearly an entire calendar year and actually ended up getting the Hawkeyes' first carry in the Insight Bowl loss to Oklahoma.

"They try to work it around so that I'm getting an equal amount of reps at both," Rogers said, adding he was unsure about how often the coaches would look to use him as a fullback.

With a relatively inexperienced group, the cause for concern with Iowa's running backs is legitimate and could continue to be that way in 2012 unless Bullock, Rogers or any of the freshmen backs elevate their game over the coming weeks and months.

"I think we have guys that are capable," Ferentz said. "Right now, we just have to piece that together."