

2012 Iowa position breakdowns: Wide Receivers/Tight Ends

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](#) and [running backs](#), our third part examines the team's group of wide receivers and tight ends.

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All of the accomplishments garnered last season by former Iowa wide receiver Marvin McNutt cannot be overstated. Look at the record books, and just about everything listed in the receiving category features his name at the top.

Now with McNutt taking his skills to the Philadelphia Eagles, the challenge for Iowa in 2012 will be how to make up for some of that production he provided last season.

With just over two weeks remaining before the Hawkeyes' season opener, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz believes his receiving corps has made enormous strides since last spring and that his collection of tight ends might be as impressive a group as Iowa has had thus far in fall camp.

"I think tight ends are one of our better positions right now," Ferentz said following Iowa's Kid's Day practice on Aug. 11. "I will say our receivers have done better. I wasn't really pleased with them in the spring. I think they've done better thus far."

Filling that void left by McNutt as the top wideout is senior Keenan Davis, who was second to McNutt in nearly every

receiving category last season. Davis spent the offseason becoming a leaner receiver, currently sitting at 210 pounds after being 220 pounds before.

"I'm in more shape. I'm not as winded as I was," Davis said. "Compared to last year, the first couple of practices I couldn't breathe out there. It felt good to actually come in in shape and come in ready."

As a junior, Davis caught 50 passes for 713 receiving yards and four touchdowns. Not only have those in Iowa begun shining the spotlight on the Cedar Rapids native, but those around the Big Ten as well. Among returning Big Ten wideouts, Davis averaged the most receptions per game and second-most receiving yards per game last season.

Elevating into the role of the No. 2 receiver now is sophomore Kevonte Martin-Manley, who had perhaps the best game of his career thus far last season catching two fourth-quarter touchdowns in a 31-27 win over Pittsburgh that featured the Hawkeyes trailing by as much as 21 points in the second half. This season, Martin-Manley's responsibilities increase, but Iowa plans to use him frequently as a slot receiver in addition to playing on the outside.

Prior to Iowa's appearance in the 2011 Insight Bowl, both McNutt and Davis raved about Martin-Manley's work ethic on and off the field. Wide receivers coach Erik Campbell echoed those same sentiments about the Michigan native.

"I think he's one of the hardest working players, not just at receiver, but hardest working players on the team," Campbell said. "I mean, he's a guy that comes to practice every day, he's going 100 miles an hour full speed and he doesn't back off from anything. From blocking to running routes to making a catch, he's a guy that's going to go after everything and try to be the best."

While there is uncertainty beyond Davis and Martin-Manley, the

one player who has emerged as the likely No. 3 receiver for Iowa is junior Don Shumpert. While Shumpert hasn't made a catch in his Hawkeye career, he has gotten work in along with Davis and Martin-Manley with the first-team offense when practicing plays out of three-receiver sets. Beyond those three, other names to keep an eye on over the course of the season are redshirt freshman Jacob Hillyer, senior Steven Staggs and junior Jordan Cotton.

"We've all progressed and we've all gotten better as a group," Martin-Manley said. "Everyone needs to step up if we're going to be better."

Then there's the tight end group Ferentz raved about, which will be led by junior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz. Late in his sophomore season is when the light turned on for Fiedorowicz. Of his 16 catches last season, 14 of them came in the Hawkeyes' final six games and all three touchdown receptions took place during Iowa's last four contests.

In the new offense implemented by first-year offensive coordinator Greg Davis, the 6-7 tight end looks to be an integral part.

"C.J. has got a chance to be an outstanding player," Greg Davis said. "He's a year older. I was very pleased in the spring, not only with the way he ran and caught the ball, but with his ability to block and set the edge for us. I think we have high expectations for him and I know he has high expectations for himself."

When Iowa goes to a two-TE set, most likely joining Fiedorowicz on the field will be senior tight end Zach Derby. Others vying for playing time include sophomore Ray Hamilton and redshirt freshmen Henry Krieger-Coble and Jake Duzey, who practiced well during the Hawkeyes' Kid's Day practice at Kinnick Stadium on Aug. 11.

"Since Coach Davis has come in, we've all just really hit the

playbooks hard,” Hamilton said. “I think that’s what it came down to. We’re all really trying to get down the concepts, how many steps we have to take on this block, how many steps he wants on this route. It’s really just the new things that he likes and what he likes in his tight ends.

“He does such a great job with his tight ends that we need to be able to do whatever he asks of us.”

Maybe there isn’t that one guy who sets milestone after milestone in the passing game like McNutt did in 2011. But if the Hawkeyes have any shot at competing for a conference title, success in the passing game – whether it’s through the wide receivers, tight ends or both – will be essential.