2013 Spring Football position breakdowns: Running Backs (premium)

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Running back has become a much-maligned position when it comes to Iowa football and this proved to be no different in 2012.

While the Hawkeyes got contributions from running backs like Damon Bullock and Greg Garmon and even had a bright spot emerge in the form of walk-on fullback Mark Weisman, Iowa had issues running the football last season and that played a big role in the Hawkeyes finishing 4-8.

Garmon is now out of the picture after he opted to transfer three weeks following the end of the season. Bullock and Weisman (now on scholarship) return to the Hawkeye backfield, as does sophomore running back Jordan Canzeri. This is the good news for the Hawkeyes as they go through spring practices right now.

The question however becomes which running backs get utilized and how, especially with a new position coach in place. Lester Erb, who served on Ferentz's staff for 13 years, wasn't retained and has since taken the running backs coach job at Nevada. In Erb's place is Chris White, who had spent the past four seasons as an assistant with the Minnesota Vikings. White will also assume the primary responsibility of coaching special teams, another aspect of Erb's job when he was at Iowa.

Canzeri returns after missing all of the 2012 season due to a torn ACL injury suffered at this time last spring. He was

actually cleared medically to practice midway through last season, but head coach Kirk Ferentz opted to hold him out and allow Canzeri to take a medical redshirt, giving him three more years of eligibility.

Another player who also returns to the mix is redshirt freshman running back Barkley Hill, who looked to be part of the mix last season before suffering a season-ending knee injury during fall camp. Hill also had an offseason arrest and Ferentz has already suspended him from Iowa's season-opener against Northern Illinois.

But the main guys in play here right now are Bullock and Weisman. Bullock entered last season as the team's No. 1 running back before suffering a concussion against Northern Iowa in Iowa's third game. In Bullock's place came Weisman, who started the Hawkeyes' first three games at fullback, but became a primary ball-carrier for the team when it had success on the ground with him in the backfield.

Given the versatility both players possess, Ferentz looked to use packages last season where both Bullock and Weisman were in the backfield. But aside from early in the season before Bullock's concussion and before Weisman started getting any carries as a feature back, it wasn't meant to be. When one of them was healthy, the other was hurt and there was never a point where both of them were on the field together.

If there are two things worth watching this spring, one is how these players handle having a new position coach in place and the other is seeing how much cohesion can take place when Bullock and Weisman are both on the field since they're both going to get the first cracks at carries.

When Iowa does want to utilize the fullback, Weisman can always move back there and be a lead-blocker for Bullock. When Iowa uses more than three wide receivers in a set, Bullock can line up in the slot given his prior background as a receiver

in 2011 and Weisman can line up in the backfield behind whoever takes over at quarterback.

More will develop here over time, but these are the names that are worth watching at running back right now as Iowa progresses through spring football.