

2013 Spring Football position breakdowns: Wide Receivers (premium)

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If there was a position that underwhelmed in 2012 for the Iowa Hawkeyes, it was the receiving corps. Between the drops, miscommunications with quarterback James Vandenberg and that only a handful of touchdowns were even caught by receivers last season, this is probably the one group that needs the most work this spring.

One major change took place in the offseason, as Erik Campbell is out as the receivers coach and in his place now is Bobby Kennedy. This change was schematic-based, as Kennedy had worked alongside offensive coordinator Greg Davis for seven seasons on Mack Brown's staff in Texas. Kennedy also spent the last two seasons as an assistant at Colorado.

While the change might prove to be a welcoming one long term, Kennedy is going to have his work cut out for him. Iowa loses the services of Keenan Davis, but does return junior wideout Kevonte Martin-Manley, who actually led the Hawkeyes in receiving last season.

Martin-Manley is the unquestioned leader of this group, and quite frankly, he kind of took that role away from Davis last season – not because Davis diminished as a receiver, but because Martin-Manley showed significant improvement in this area as the season progressed.

Beyond Martin-Manley however is a lot of unproven. Not unknown, but unproven.

The two receivers who will get the first crack at playing alongside Martin-Manley with the first unit are sophomore Tevaun Smith and senior Jordan Cotton. Smith has the mold of a receiver who could become that possession-type pass-catcher. Any strides he can make with his game would be hugely beneficial to Iowa in 2013, because it could enable the Hawkeyes to use Martin-Manley more in the slot like they have.

As for Cotton, his strength is his speed, which is evident by what he was able to do in the return game for the Hawkeyes last season. While he'll likely be more of a factor for this team on special teams again than as a receiver, Cotton gives Iowa another threat on the outside, which in essence takes pressure off guys like Martin-Manley, Smith and whoever's on the field at tight end or Y-back.

Then there are receivers such as Jacob Hillyer and Don Shumpert that either have little playing experience or have shown struggles with the experience they've gotten in years past. If either could show improvement over the course of the spring and during the upcoming season, it would give the Hawkeyes some much-needed depth at this position that right now, they appear to lack.

Ultimately, a lot could depend on who gets the starting nod at quarterback because the challenge these receivers have now is establishing a rapport with all three guys competing for that job when only one of them will start. But the one thing that's clear at this point in time is the receiving corps has to improve if Iowa's going to make any sort of improvements offensively.