

2013 Spring Football position breakdowns: Linebackers (premium)

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The Iowa defense will have plenty of questions continue surrounding it between now and when the 2013 season gets underway. One area that won't be a major question mark, however, is its linebacking corps.

This group might be the Hawkeyes' most experienced and most veteran of the entire team, not just the defense. Questions about the linebacking corps will hold significant merit at this time next year, but for right now, it's a plus for Iowa to not only have three seniors in place, but to have three seniors in place that all have starting experience.

It's with the Iowa linebackers where the Hawkeyes' unquestioned leader resides in senior MIKE 'backer James Morris. The Solon native has taken ownership not just of the linebacking corps and not just of the defense, but the entire team. Joining him are seniors Christian Kirksey and Anthony Hitchens.

Morris and Kirksey both experienced being team captains during the 2012 season. Meanwhile, one year after both players were among the Big Ten's leaders in tackles, it was Hitchens who led the conference in tackles last season. Barring any injuries, this is a trio that will have to come up big again for the Hawkeyes if they're going to rebound in 2013.

Behind them is where things get interesting. Junior Quinton Alston continues to wait in the wings, but he did get the

opportunity to start in a game last season against Michigan for an injured Morris. Another player who also saw some playing time in crucial games for Iowa was sophomore Travis Perry. These two guys, along with junior Marcus Collins and sophomore Cole Fisher make up the majority of the linebacking depth possessed by the Hawkeyes this spring.

One other intriguing storyline to mention with this group is the addition of former Virginia defensive coordinator Jim Reid to the coaching staff. Reid and LeVar Woods are working as co-linebackers coaches this year after Woods was brought onto the staff in 2012 and was the lone coach working specifically with the group.

Right now, Reid's focus has mainly been on MIKE (middle) linebackers such as Morris and Alston, while Woods is mainly working with WILL (weak side) and LEO (strong side) linebackers such as Hitchens and Kirksey. This is a very similar structure to what Iowa was once had under Kirk Ferentz where then-defensive coordinator Norm Parker and former assistant Darrell Wilson teamed up with coaching linebackers.

One thing mentioned by many within the program – both coaches and players – is the energy Reid provides working with the group. His persona comes off strikingly similar to that of Parker, which again makes the point about how Iowa once had co-linebacker coaches under Ferentz noteworthy.

This is a group that the Hawkeyes should be counting on and are going to need to count on to have success in 2013. The experience is there, as is the leadership. Morris mentioned how having a higher football IQ and being able to better communicate have been emphasized this offseason, and this is the group that would have to lead by example in those areas in order for Iowa to improve from what it was a year ago.