

2013 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 2013 season. [After previously focusing on quarterbacks](#), our second part examines the team's group of running backs.

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When Chris White was first brought on board to replace Lester Erb as Iowa's running backs coach, he placed an emphasis on what he refers to as the four Bs – Base, Bend, Balance and Burst. These four Bs are the traits he believes makes a quality running back and things he believes the Hawkeyes' crop of backs have made strides with this offseason.

The base comes first for a reason. Without it, the others can't take place.

"As a runner, you're very rarely running full stride, full speed down the field," said White, who joined Kirk Ferentz's staff after spending the last four years as an assistant with the Minnesota Vikings. "You're always in a base, trying to make a cut. That's what I'm trying to do. When they're getting in contact areas, they need to be in a base so they're not getting knocked over."

Compared to recent seasons past, Iowa has a deep backfield entering 2013. It features what looks to be a 1-2 punch in juniors Mark Weisman and Damon Bullock. Both had their shares of injuries in 2012, but when healthy, were among the few bright spots for a dreadful Hawkeye offense. Weisman led the Hawkeyes in rushing last season with 815 yards on the ground

and eight touchdowns. Bullock, who dealt with an early-season concussion that allowed Weisman to get reps at running back in the first place, appeared in six games for Iowa and had 513 yards rushing and three scores.

It also includes a sophomore in Jordan Canzeri, who looks to make a major statement this fall after an ACL injury prevented him from playing entirely in 2012. Behind Canzeri are a pair of redshirt freshmen in Barkley Hill and Michael Malloy.

But regardless of which back is on the field and what formation is being utilized for a given play, they all echo White's sentiments about base being most important.

"It just makes everything else come in together," Canzeri said. "When you have the base, you have the balance. When you have the bend from that base, and then the burst, it just all comes from that base."

In Weisman's case, the area where he made the biggest improvement from when last season ended to when Iowa concluded spring practices earlier this year came with the second B, bend. Part of the reason for this improvement with bend not only is a result of what he's doing on the field, but also off of it.

"It's just about stretching and staying loose between practices, getting your rest so you're not so sore," Weisman said. "It has been good so far and I love what Coach White brings to the table."

For Bullock, the most important stride for him came with balance.

"Being a running back, you've always got to have your balance," Bullock said. "I just feel like a way more complete player this year. I'm ready to go and I feel comfortable."

Finally, there's burst. This is what fans are wanting to see

out of Iowa's running backs when the Hawkeyes open the 2013 season against Northern Illinois in three weeks. This is also an area Canzeri believes every running back on the team (not just him) has gotten better with as a result of White's tutelage.

"We all run a lot better and we all feel a lot better with the running technique," Canzeri said.

When observing Iowa running backs this season, the four Bs are what should be examined most closely considering this is the barometer for how White measures his group of players and what type of improvement is being made by them on a daily basis.

"I think too many times last year on film, they were in open space and they were getting tackled," White said. "We're going to get to the second level – the safety level – and we're going to try to do a better job of breaking tackles, ripping through tackles, making people miss. Those types of things. That's what I think the four Bs are all about."