

# 2013 Iowa position breakdowns: Defensive Line

*\*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](#), [running backs](#), [wide receivers and tight ends](#), and the [offensive line](#), our fifth part examines the team's defensive line.\**

By Brendan Stiles

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If there's a reason to believe Iowa will get better production out of its defensive line in 2013 as opposed to last season, that reason is experience.

But the talk about this group's experience goes beyond the cumulative number of games played for two significant reasons. First, there's Reese Morgan, who enters his second year coaching the Hawkeyes' D-line after previously coaching on the other side of the trenches for Iowa. That means a second year of him stressing fundamentals and technique to his players, which they all to a T said was the most noticeable difference when he took over coaching them last season.

Which leads to the second and perhaps more important point. For all the issues Iowa had with its front four in 2012, the players that provided the bulk of whatever bright spots there were are a year older, a year wiser and healthier than before.

"There's a better chemistry amongst the D-linemen and with the defensive unit as a whole," senior defensive end Dominic Alvis said. "We have a lot of guys who have played with each other, who have on-field experience, know what it's like to be in a critical situation, know how to communicate. That's huge."

The two most veteran linemen returning are Alvis – who Morgan called “the most consistent” player right now – and junior defensive tackle Louis Trinca-Pasat and both are as healthy as they’ve ever been. A torn ACL late in the 2011 season didn’t keep Alvis from playing last year, but it hampered the amount of time he got to practice prior to that opener at Soldier Field against Northern Illinois. As for Trinca-Pasat, he revealed back in the spring that he played all of 2012 with a torn rotator cuff, an injury he said took place in 2011 before he became the fixture he is today along Iowa’s front four.

As for who starts alongside them, the likely candidates are junior defensive tackle Carl Davis and sophomore defensive end Drew Ott. After underwhelming for the majority of his first two seasons, the light came on for Davis last spring. Morgan described Davis during Iowa’s Media Day last week as “a conceptual learner” that has become more committed to working on little things and providing more effort. As a result, Davis now finds himself in a position where he could prove vital to the Hawkeyes’ success.

“I think Carl is playing a lot more confident,” Morgan said. “I think he understands where he is supposed to fit in his role, how he fits into the bigger picture.”

Then there’s Ott, who saw his redshirt get burned during Iowa’s game at Northwestern last season and from that point forward was heavily involved in the Hawkeyes’ D-line rotation. In giving his assessment of Ott, Morgan mentioned how the Nebraska native has been “a steady climber” that takes meticulous notes during position and team meetings.

“I really like Drew,” Alvis said. “He’s tough, he’s smart. He has progressed faster than anyone projected him to. I think he’s going to do big things this year.”

For the third straight year, heavy rotation is expected and the good news for Iowa this time around is there’s enough

talent in place for the Hawkeyes to go 8-9 players deep along the defensive line. Sophomore defensive tackle Darian Cooper will see plenty of reps in 2013, but appears to be the odd man out in terms of starters with Davis' emergence.

Two other names to watch inside are redshirt freshman Jaleel Johnson and junior Mike Hardy, who is also in the mix for playing time at one of the end spots behind either Alvis or Ott. On the outside, the players worth keeping an eye on are sophomore Riley McMin and redshirt freshman Faith Ekakitie, who was originally brought in as a tackle, but began working at end this past spring.

"Just having those guys who can step up and you don't have to worry about them, that's huge," Alvis said. "It develops more of a competitiveness in practice."

In terms of age, Iowa's defensive line is young. But with the actual amount of experience returning along both the first and second string units, there's reason for optimism with this group in 2013.

"I think we have some guys that realistically have an opportunity to help us a little bit," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said.