

2013 Iowa position breakdowns: Special Teams

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](#), the [offensive line](#), [defensive line](#), [linebackers](#) and the [secondary](#), our eighth and final part examines the Hawkeyes' special teams.

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For all the questions facing the Iowa Hawkeyes on both the offensive and defensive sides of the football entering the 2013 season, special teams is an area that, for the most part, appears set in stone.

Nothing has been determined as far as which younger players see the field during punts and kickoffs (both coverage and return), but the most important positions on special teams have continuity of some sort. Senior Mike Meyer is back to handle place-kicking duties after coming off what was easily his best season as a Hawkeye in 2012.

After having kicking struggles during the latter stretch of his sophomore campaign, the Dubuque native bounced back in a huge way as a junior. Meyer connected on 17-of-21 field goal attempts and had two games against Northern Illinois and Michigan State – both of which were Iowa victories – where he made four field goals.

“Each and every year, he has improved and I think he really gained his confidence,” Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said regarding Meyer’s 2012 season. “Mike was really hitting the

gas pedal and doing a great job.

“He continues to do a nice job. We’re really counting on him.”

Sophomore Connor Kornbrath handled the majority of the punting for Iowa last season, but the intrigue lies in Kornbrath now being the lone Hawkeye punter that will likely see the field this fall. As a true freshman, Kornbrath was relied on mainly in situations where Iowa found itself deep in its own territory and needed a punt that drastically shifted field position battles. But in instances where the Hawkeyes would be in opposing territory and simply looking to pin teams inside their own 20, John Wienke was the guy called upon 14 times and was successful getting punts inside the 20-yard line on nine such occasions.

With Kornbrath now handling practice reps for every single punting scenario this fall, he has found himself working on coffin corner punts, where the idea is to directional punt into a corner where the ball lands out of bounds before crossing the plane for a touchback. He also mentioned working more this offseason on having shorter steps and improving his follow through.

“Last year, I was new to the Aussie-type punt that Wienke did, but I’ve practiced that this offseason and I’ve become very comfortable with it,” Kornbrath said. “Long punt, you’re going to want a nice, flat drop. For pinning them deep, if you’re say a plus-50 punt, you’ll angle the ball and the nose is more right up towards you, so you’ll try to get a different kind of spin with a better bounce.”

Whenever Iowa finds itself punting, or attempting either a field goal or extra point, senior Casey Kreiter will be the one handling long-snapping for the third consecutive season. During Iowa’s Media Day, first-year assistant coach Chris White – who will oversee the Hawkeyes’ special teams after having the same duties for four years with the Minnesota

Vikings – was asked about Kreiter and used the word “outstanding” to describe him.

“I wish we had a whole team of Caseys,” White said. “Casey is dialed into football. He works as hard or harder than any guy on this football team. He’s really serious about his craft and I really expect that Casey will have a chance to play after college here.”

Now the return game is a bit more interesting. Ferentz said he is fully committed to senior wide receiver Jordan Cotton being one of the guys back on kickoff return, and for good reason. Cotton led the Big Ten last season with an average of 28.2 yards per return and did have one touchdown return that came in the Hawkeyes’ 38-14 loss to Penn State. He also said getting the opportunity to return kicks allowed him to gain confidence as a football player.

However, Ferentz also made clear during Iowa’s Media Day that Cotton wouldn’t be used on both kickoff and punt returns, meaning someone else will be replacing former cornerback Micah Hyde as the Hawkeyes’ punt returner. Ferentz mentioned three names when asked about punt return and junior wideout Kevonte Martin-Manley – who was the first of the three names mentioned – will most likely be the guy returning punts.

Sophomore receiver Tevaun Smith saw some time as a kickoff returner last season, but didn’t have any returns in 2012. The one name to keep an eye on being opposite Cotton on kickoff returns this fall is sophomore running back Jordan Canzeri, especially if he remains behind both juniors Mark Weisman and Damon Bullock at running back on Iowa’s 2-deep throughout the season.

“If I do get that spot, I would love to [return kicks], just to be able to help out the team,” Canzeri said.

Two things are clear right now as it relates to Iowa and football’s third phase – The hiring of White to oversee all of

the Hawkeye special teams was done to show commitment to an area that has haunted Iowa in some sort of manner each of the past three seasons, and the team feels comfortable with what's currently in place.

"I like what I see," White said.