

2014 Spring Football position breakdowns: Wide Receivers (premium)

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Going into 2013, it was expected that Iowa would have turbulence with its receiving corps. Outside of Kevonte Martin-Manley, it was a group full of players that were inexperienced and unproven.

Looking at the Hawkeyes' set of wide receivers right now, there's more experience and at least a subset of players who have proven themselves at one point or another.

Once again, Martin-Manley returns and after leading the team in receiving each of the past two seasons, it should be expected that he remains the No. 1 guy entering his senior year. Next in line would be a pair of juniors who showed glimpses in 2013. Tevaun Smith ultimately became a No. 1 wideout opposite Martin-Manley and showed progress late last season – his touchdown against Michigan where most of the yards came after the catch immediately comes to mind – and Jacob Hillyer proved he can be reliable in third-down situations when Iowa was throwing.

Now that both receivers are a year older and have more experience under their belts, these two guys will be leaned on even more now in 2014. Neither Smith nor Hillyer likely overtakes Martin-Manley as the No. 1 guy on the field or in the stat sheet, but those glimpses shown at various points throughout 2013 need to become the norm in 2014.

Another name to keep an eye on is senior Damond Powell, who

joined the Hawkeyes last fall as a junior college transfer. A lot was made last season about how he didn't have the playbook entirely down and therefore didn't see the field as much as Iowa fans probably wanted. However, his touchdown reception against Minnesota is proof of what Powell is capable of and he's someone that should be benefiting right now from these extra reps that he simply didn't have last year.

Two other receivers who gained some experience last season were sophomores Matt VandeBerg and Riley McCarron. How much either continues to be utilized however is something to watch because neither was listed on Iowa's spring 2-deep when it was released late last month and there's a big group of redshirt freshman wideouts they'll be competing with for playing time.

Of those redshirt freshmen, the two names to watch might be Derrick Willies and A.J. Jones. Willies was among those listed on the spring 2-deep when spring football began and Jones is someone who might possibly see the field as a returner early on.

The experience is there and the depth is there in this Hawkeye receiving corps. Rudock mentioned last week how this group is one he feels has come a long way, thus allowing him to make better decisions with the football during practice. How much either the experience or depth ends up being of benefit is something to keep an eye on now because this is a group that needs to continue developing under Bobby Kennedy if Iowa is going to have any success as an offense.