

2014 Spring Football position breakdowns: Tight Ends (premium)

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Iowa's tight end group was an intriguing bunch in 2013. Five different tight ends managed to see the field at various points last season, which wasn't a surprise given the expectations Kirk Ferentz had for this group. What made them unique though was how they were utilized and in some instances, the specific roles each of them played.

Four of the five have returned in 2014, but the one absence is a significant one in C.J. Fiedorowicz. Even though five tight ends saw the field, there wasn't really much debate about Fiedorowicz being the best of the bunch and it was evident last fall. Whenever the Hawkeye offense reached the end zone, Fiedorowicz was as reliable a target for Jake Rudock as anyone. In the final six games of the regular season, Fiedorowicz had at least one touchdown reception in five of them. The most notable was his game-winning catch in overtime to defeat Northwestern.

As for the four returning, there does appear to be two tiers at the moment. The first consists of senior Ray Hamilton and junior Jake Duzey. In most of the instances where Iowa utilized 3-tight end sets during the second half of the season, these two were on the field alongside Fiedorowicz.

Hamilton and Duzey are the leaders of this group now, but their roles seem vastly different. Hamilton has been more of a run-blocking tight end throughout his career, a guy that Iowa has never been afraid of using in short-yardage or goal-line

situations because it knows he can help create lanes on the edge for whoever is running the ball. Meanwhile, Duzey really came on last fall as a pass-catching threat, most notably when the Hawkeyes played at Ohio State and he caught an 85-yard touchdown pass to tie that game during the third quarter.

This isn't to say Hamilton can't catch or that Duzey can't block. But there will probably be many occurrences in 2014 where (assuming both are healthy) they're on the field at the same time because having both out there could keep defenses guessing. What will be interesting to watch though is when Iowa does get in the red zone, does Hamilton take that role Fiedorowicz played (especially in short-yardage) or does Duzey become the all-around receiving tight end of the bunch.

The second tier consists of junior Henry Kreiger-Coble and sophomore George Kittle. Both have shown glimpses throughout their careers, but Kittle emerged as more of a threat in the passing game last season. His signature play came when the Hawkeyes defeated Iowa State and he was utilized on a play-action that caught the Cyclones completely off guard.

Should Iowa continue making a habit of using 3-tight end sets like it did last season, the intrigue will be which of these two gets that crack as the third guy alongside Duzey and Hamilton. If there's any sort of competition going on with this group, this will be the most heated and the edge will go to whichever tight end of the two proves to be a better blocker.

Collectively, the numbers won't be as strong this year with Fiedorowicz no longer in the picture. But given the amount of depth and experience that is returning, his absence shouldn't be much of a negative impact (if any) and the guys who are back should continue to develop into reliable players for Ferentz to depend on, no matter the situation.