

# 2014 Spring Football position breakdowns: Defensive Line (premium)

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Much like Iowa's linebacking corps was considered the leaders of the Hawkeye defense last season, the same can be said about its front four entering 2014.

Coaches always talk about how everything starts up front on both sides of the football and while the defensive line does have some questions that need to be answered between now and late August, there's security at the two tackle spots. Carl Davis and Louis Trinca-Pasat both enter their senior seasons and both played instrumental roles in Iowa's 2013 turnaround.

Davis was a player who improved before everyone's eyes last spring and his maturity showed on the field last year. As for Trinca-Pasat, he only continued down the path he started in 2012 and didn't have an injured shoulder hampering him in 2013. As long as these two stay healthy, they will be counted on to pave the way like Mitch King and Matt Kroul did in 2008 playing at those two tackle spots.

Much like the situation facing the Hawkeyes' offensive line however, development will prove essential in 2014 at those two spots held by Davis and Trinca-Pasat. Junior Darian Cooper has been a consistent part of the rotation and is the most likely defensive tackle to take that next step in becoming a leader for the group in 2015.

Two other players to possibly watch are a pair of sophomores who came to Iowa highly touted – Jaleel Johnson and Faith

Ekakitie. At defensive tackle specifically, Johnson is probably more likely to see the field because of his size. But Ekakitie has versatility that could allow him to see more snaps.

Once again though, the biggest questions concerning this group are at defensive end. Now given that junior Drew Ott started 12 games in 2013, there's no reason to think he won't remain a starter at his end spot. But it's the spot vacated by the outgoing Dominic Alvis where the competition is fierce.

On one hand, there's senior Mike Hardy. When Alvis was dealing with back issues last season, Hardy finally got his opportunity as the next man in and made the most of it. Right now, it appears to be his spot to lose. Two others who are going to push him – and Ott, for that matter – are Riley McMinn and Nate Meier.

McMinn has frequently appeared on the 2-deep, but has also dealt with injuries throughout his career, so how much of a push he makes will be determined by his health. As for Meier, he originally moved from running back to linebacker, then got his chance at seeing the field as a defensive end when Iowa ran its Raider package late last season.

If the Hawkeyes ran a 3-4 look more frequently, Meier would probably be out there more. But in a 4-3, his snaps probably won't be as frequent next season. One thing to keep in mind is if Hardy does win the job, McMinn and Meier will simply be competing for that spot again in 2015.

Regardless of how everything shakes out at the end spots though, two things are certain. One is with Reese Morgan coaching these guys, fundamentals are still going to be stressed and if Iowa sticks with the rotation it has used since 2011, knowing the basics will play a role in how much some of these reserves see the field. The other thing, again, is the leadership. Just with the presences of Davis and

Trinca-Pasat, this is the group that will be counted on in 2014 as far as how good the Hawkeyes will actually be.