

2014 Spring Football position breakdowns: Secondary (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

With defensive coordinator Phil Parker opting to also take on his old title of defensive backs coach last season, there was improvement in the way Iowa's secondary played in 2013. Some of that improvement came from players expected to lead the way. This group also saw a true freshman rise up into arguably one of the Hawkeyes' better defensive players now entering 2014.

The big story this spring has been the position change done by junior Jordan Lomax. Before getting injured in Iowa's season opener last year, he was the player expected to fill the void left by Micah Hyde. Following that injury, Lomax saw Desmond King permanently take what was once his starting spot at cornerback opposite B.J. Lowery.

With Lowery gone, one figured Lomax would just start opposite King at corner this coming fall. Except the decision was made to have Lomax move over to free safety and fill the void left by the outgoing Tanner Miller. Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said he envisions this being a long-term move, but that was also the same school of thought with Hyde when he moved to free safety in the spring of 2011, only to move back to corner after two games.

Because of this, there's now a competition at corner opposite King at corner between junior Sean Draper and sophomore Maurice Fleming. Draper has a slight edge because he has more playing experience, primarily as the nickel whenever Parker

used that formation. But Draper also saw himself benched after giving up a long touchdown pass while playing nickel against Michigan State. Not only was he not on the field again on defense in 2013, but Iowa abandoned the nickel completely in favor of the Raider package.

Assuming Draper is the guy, his development is vital. Not just for himself in terms of playing time, but also for Iowa because how he plays at corner will ultimately determine whether or not the Hawkeyes keep Lomax at free safety.

The other thing Lomax's move to free safety does is (at least more than likely) ensure that senior John Lowdermilk will remain the starter at strong safety, a position he started every game at last season after beating out Nico Law for the No. 1 spot. Had Lomax stayed at corner, it may have opened up the possibility of Lowdermilk moving over to free safety and Law starting at strong safety. In the event Lomax does move to corner, this is something to possibly keep an eye on.

Then there's King, the one obvious certainty with this unit after the way he played as a true freshman. An argument could be made that opposing offenses would rather attack him than Lowery, but nevertheless, King held his own when he saw the field last season. Now that he gets this spring to work on his game, there's no reason to think he might elevate himself into the conversation of being one of the Big Ten's top corners for the next few years to come.

Other defensive backs that will remain part of the conversation beyond this spring are Anthony Gair, Greg Mabin and Malik Rucker, a redshirt freshman who managed to crack the spring 2-deep. Along with Fleming, these are the next group of guys that would be behind the players most likely starting in the secondary when Iowa plays Northern Iowa on Aug. 30.

A lot remains to be seen with this group, but like the linebackers, they too would benefit immensely from stout play

along the defensive line. It will be interesting to see how much more (or less) aggressive Parker is with his scheme defensively in 2014 because of what he has at his disposal with this secondary.