

2014 NFL Draft: Teams that could take Hawkeyes (premium)

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HawkeyeDrive.com

Whenever I cover an Iowa football game, I always go through a structured protocol from the moment I arrive at the stadium to the moment I leave. I usually make an effort to arrive approximately two-and-a-half hours before kickoff.

The first thing I do after going through security and arriving in the press box and find the seating chart, where I look for two things. One, of course, is where my seat is. The other thing I do with the seating chart is tally two lists – one of which bowl games have representatives on hand, the other list consists of NFL teams listed as having scouts in attendance.

The reason for that second list is this – Iowa (and most of its opponents) are going to have players drafted every year. While scouting games isn't a be-all, end-all for these NFL teams and their employees, knowing who was on hand each week during the fall can be a helpful tool now as the NFL Draft begins Thursday.

This year, Iowa is looking at two players for sure (possibly three) being drafted by NFL teams this weekend. The two sure bets are tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz and linebacker Christian Kirksey, while the one maybe is linebacker James Morris. Fiedorowicz will most likely be the first Hawkeye off the board, with most mock drafts projecting him somewhere in the third round. Kirksey's projection isn't as uniform with various mock drafts, but the majority of them have Kirksey projected somewhere in the middle (fourth-fifth rounds), which means he would be picked on the third and final day of the draft. The mock drafts that do include Morris have him taken

in either the sixth or seventh rounds.

With this in mind and with three seasons of data compiled by *HawkeyeDrive.com* that includes which teams were in attendance to scout Iowa's games between 2011-2013, I figured I'd make educated guesses here on which teams I can see looking at drafting these three players. These guesses are based off the following – which teams scouted what were some of these guys' best games statistically over the past three seasons.

C.J. Fiedorowicz:

I looked at 12 games over the past three seasons where Fiedorowicz would have been viewed as a bright spot for Iowa. Six of these 12 games came last season, while two of them were in 2011 and four in 2012. From this list of 12 games, 21 NFL teams were listed as having scouts in attendance. There are eight teams to appear more than once and all eight of those teams scouted at least one game last season where Fiedorowicz played well.

The eight teams appearing multiple times are as follows: Baltimore, Carolina, Jacksonville, Kansas City, N.Y. Giants, N.Y. Jets, Tampa Bay and Tennessee. The Jets and Titans were on hand in 2011 when Fiedorowicz caught his first career touchdown pass against Michigan State and the Titans and Panthers were among the teams scouting the 2014 Outback Bowl against LSU. Carolina was also on hand at Michigan Stadium in 2012 when Fiedorowicz caught eight passes for 99 yards receiving against Michigan.

Three of these eight teams came up thrice and should be the ones to watch most closely as it pertains to Fiedorowicz – Baltimore, Kansas City and the N.Y. Giants.

In 2012, Iowa played a pair of home games against Iowa State and Penn State. The Giants were at Kinnick Stadium for both of these, while the Ravens were in attendance for Iowa State and the Chiefs for Penn State. In 2013, the Giants (along with the

Jaguars) witnessed Fiedorowicz catch a game-winning touchdown pass in overtime against Northwestern.

Both the Ravens and Chiefs were among the teams at Ohio Stadium when Iowa played Ohio State, the game where the Hawkeyes began to heavily use its "13" personnel. Kansas City was also at Kinnick when Iowa played Michigan State and Baltimore was in town for Fiedorowicz's final home game against Michigan.

Depending on what these three teams do in the first two rounds, all three will likely have Fiedorowicz on their draft board and could look at him if he's still there in the third round when they pick. Because of the heavy use of "13" personnel from the Ohio State game on, the team I'm watching here is Baltimore. The Ravens have Dennis Pitta and brought in Owen Daniels during free agency. Daniels isn't a long-term option however and it's also worth noting their general manager, Ozzie Newsome, is a Hall of Fame tight end.

He might not be an immediate contributor in Baltimore, but the Ravens are a team I can see finding a way to utilize Fiedorowicz early on and allow him to grow into a bigger role over time. Not to mention he would give Joe Flacco a much-needed red zone target. Baltimore also has two third round picks (one of which is a compensatory selection, meaning the Ravens can't trade it), so if a tight end isn't taken beforehand, one of those could be Fiedorowicz.

Looking at the third round selection order, the Giants pick 74th overall. That's the earliest I see Fiedorowicz getting picked. If he falls out of the third round altogether, they would also be in a position to take him early fourth. Baltimore has two third-round picks, one of which is a compensatory selection at the end of the third round that can't be traded. Kansas City's third round pick is in-between the two Raven picks.

Christian Kirksey:

I looked at 16 games from the past three seasons where Kirksey played an integral part in whatever success Iowa had defensively. Even though he was a 3-year starter, Kirksey made his biggest jump last year as a senior as eight of those 16 games came from 2013. From these 16 games, 24 NFL teams appear as having scouts in attendance and 14 of them were listed more than once.

Three teams – Chicago, New Orleans and Tennessee – appear twice each with the 2013 Outback Bowl against LSU being one of the two games scouted. The Bears also scouted Iowa's game at Iowa State last season while the Titans were one of seven teams in attendance when Iowa played at Minnesota last September. The only team on this list not to scout any of Iowa's games last season is Green Bay.

Taking this one step further, seven teams appeared on this 16-game list three or more times. Those teams are as follows: Buffalo, Cleveland, Jacksonville, Kansas City, Minnesota, N.Y. Giants and Tampa Bay. In fact, the Jaguars and Chiefs both made four appearances on this list, the most of any NFL teams. However, the only game from last season where Kansas City came up was Iowa's game at Ohio State. The Chiefs scouted two games in 2011 and one in 2012.

As for Jacksonville, it scouted two games in 2012 – vs. Penn State, at Northwestern – and two in 2013 – vs. Northwestern, at Purdue. The data would suggest the Jaguars having the strongest interest in Kirksey and considering how there's stability right now with both the coaching staff and front office, Jacksonville's a team that probably still has Kirksey on its board as it pertains to players expected to be there in the middle rounds.

There are two teams from the 3-appearance list to also keep an eye on though, even with both teams going through coaching and

front office turnover this winter. One is the Browns, who are the only team from this short list to scout Iowa three times during 2013 alone. Cleveland was on hand for the Hawkeyes' games against Minnesota, Ohio State and Wisconsin. The other team is one where Kirksey might end up being a really good fit, Tampa Bay.

The Buccaneers also scouted the Minnesota game last season. They are also the only team that scouted either of Iowa's games at Nebraska in both 2011 and 2013. If you recall, the 2013 contest against the Cornhuskers is the one that earned Kirksey the weekly Walter Camp Player of the Week honor. The other notable thing from that game is Kirksey is the one who snuffed out Nebraska's fake punt in the third quarter, which would suggest he can be an immediate special teams contributor with whoever drafts him.

One other factor regarding the Buccaneers is that they already have a former Hawkeye who like Kirksey is from the St. Louis area – Adrian Clayborn. Kirksey burned his redshirt playing special teams in 2010 when Clayborn was the anchor of Iowa's defense, so if Tampa Bay still has interest in Kirksey, it has a resource in Clayborn that could prove to be a resource for Kirksey should he end up there.

Of these three teams (the Jaguars, Browns and Buccaneers), Jacksonville's in the best position to select Kirksey in that fourth-fifth round range. In the fourth and fifth rounds, the Jaguars currently have five draft picks. The Browns have two fourth-round picks. Tampa Bay doesn't have any fourth round picks right now, but would be the first of these teams to pick in the fifth round should Kirksey fall that far.

James Morris:

Now because there's more uncertainty as to whether or not Morris actually gets drafted, deciphering teams here is more challenging because later round picks aren't being brought in

to become immediate contributors. That said, there is some interesting data to consider.

I looked at 17 games between 2011-13 where Morris played a major role for the Hawkeyes and just like with Kirksey, eight of these games are from last season. Also like Kirksey, 24 teams appear on this list with Morris. Of the 24 teams listed, 16 of them came up more than once and all of them scouted Iowa at least once in 2013. Three teams in the 2013 games only category are the Bears, Titans and Vikings and as mentioned earlier, Chicago and Tennessee both scouted the Outback Bowl against LSU.

From the teams listed twice, the one that stands out most is San Francisco and here's why. The two Iowa games on this list the 49ers were in attendance for both were against Iowa State – 2012 at Kinnick, 2013 at Jack Trice Stadium in Ames. Considering how the 49ers' biggest obstacle right now is a team inside their own division and also enter the draft with 11 picks, it wouldn't surprise me at all if one of those late round picks ended up being Morris.

Morris was named Big Ten Defensive Player of the Week twice in 2013 following games against Minnesota and Northwestern. Between those two games, nine different NFL teams were scouting, but none of them scouted both games.

Shortening the list further, five teams appear three times each – Baltimore, Buffalo, Kansas City, N.Y. Giants and Tampa Bay. The Bills and Buccaneers were among the teams at Minnesota last September, while the Giants scouted the Northwestern game from last season. Buffalo also scouted Iowa's game against Wisconsin, where Morris had an interception on the Badgers' opening possession. Tampa Bay also scouted the Nebraska game, which was arguably the best game Iowa's linebacker trio played as a collective unit during this 3-year span.

Then there's the Cleveland Browns, who came up on this list five times. Cleveland scouted two games in 2011, one of which was Iowa's season opener against Tennessee Tech, a game where Morris had a 49-yard interception return. The Browns also scouted the Minnesota game from this past season where Morris earned Big Ten accolades, as well as Iowa's game at Ohio State and at home against Wisconsin.

But there's another interesting dynamic with the Browns. Cleveland's new head coach is Mike Pettine, who was the defensive coordinator for the Bills last season. Both Buffalo and Cleveland scouted the Minnesota and Wisconsin games last season, so whatever information the Browns had gathered before about Morris is probably similar to whatever the Bills have, if not more thorough.

Cleveland has the most information and has seen Morris play at his best more than any other NFL team. San Francisco has three seventh round picks at its disposal and the experience of scouting games where Morris excelled against a big rival, not to mention stability (for now) in both the coaching staff and front office. My gut feeling is Morris ends up being picked by one of these two teams.