

# 2014 Iowa position breakdowns: Running Backs

*\*This week, HawkeyeDrive.com presents an eight-part series of position breakdowns as the Iowa Hawkeyes continue preparing for the 2014 season. After previously focusing on [quarterbacks](#), our second part examines the team's group of running backs.\**

By Brendan Stiles

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For years, the running back position at Iowa was harpooned with injuries, attrition and the like. But that wasn't the case in 2013.

The Hawkeyes had four running backs at their disposal last season – Mark Weisman, Damon Bullock, Jordan Canzeri and LeShun Daniels, Jr. All four of them made it through Iowa's 13-game slate without any significant injuries and combined for 455 total carries. All four of them are back in 2014.

Entering his senior season, Weisman is for intents and purposes the face of this group. The first time Iowa's offense takes to the gridiron, he's the first back getting carries. He led the Hawkeyes in rushing as a junior with 975 yards and eight touchdowns on the ground while compiling 227 carries (approximately half of the carries between the four backs).

The one concern with Weisman each of the past two seasons however has been durability, getting off to strong starts only to not hold up deep into November. Weisman said if he's able to help the team, he wants as many carries as he can get. But he's also open to the idea of the other three backs sharing the workload if it means he can be more durable late in the season.

"If someone else can be helping the team in a better way and keeping you more fresh and you're keeping them fresh, that's really what you want," Weisman said. "Any way to help the team possible, that's what us running backs, we really care about. We're a selfless group."

Bullock was second on the team in carries last season with 118 of them, but he has two things working against him in terms of duplicating that in 2014. One is that despite being used primarily as a running back in 2013, his past versatility having worked at receiver has led to questions about whether he should be out wide as opposed to in the backfield.

The other thing is the label of being the third-down back and only being used in passing situations either to catch short passes out of the backfield (or out wide like he did on his touchdown against Michigan State) or pick up blitzing defenders.

Bullock said he was accepting of that role late in the season last year, but wants to have a bigger role on first and second down if possible. Among the areas he has worked to improve on this offseason has been with vision – not just seeing the hole, but also with seeing passes when they do come his direction.

"This year, I just want to put it all together and just try to work on the little things," Bullock said.

There's also the strong likelihood that most of those carries Bullock had last season will go to Canzeri this season. It wasn't until November when Canzeri began being used more frequently by the Iowa coaches and he made the most of that opportunity. His most noteworthy performance during this stretch came in a 38-14 win over Purdue where Canzeri rushed for 165 yards and one touchdown on 20 carries.

The question regarding Canzeri is how much he'll actually be used because not only might he be taking some of Bullock's

carries in 2014, but also some of Weisman's carries.

"There's definitely a lot more that I think I can do and that I'll be ready to do," Canzeri said. "We'll really see once we can put the pads back on and everything."

Finally, there's Daniels, Jr., who possesses a similar build physically to Weisman and was among the few true freshmen Iowa had last season to see his redshirt burned. He appeared in seven games for the Hawkeyes in 2013 and while he didn't record any touchdowns, Daniels, Jr., did rush for 142 yards on 36 carries.

Iowa running backs coach Chris White made film cut-ups for all four backs of every carry they had in 2013 – good and bad. Daniels, Jr., may have had the shortest cut-up since he had the least carries, but he took plenty away from it including the importance of staying pad level.

"When I was watching through all my bad tape from last season, that was probably the most consistent thing that I saw," Daniels, Jr., said. "Even on my good runs, my pads were still high, so that was the main thing I took away from that."

How the carries ultimately get divided in 2014 remains to be seen, but the confidence Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz has in all four players remains on full display.

"I think the challenge right now is trying to utilize everybody's skills to the best way possible and also hopefully make it a combination that's going to be good for our entire team," Ferentz said. "It's nice to have some choices and options."