

# 2014 Iowa position breakdowns: Offensive Line

*\*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](#), [running backs](#) and the group of [wide receivers and tight ends](#), our fourth part examines the team's offensive line.\**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

Brandon Scherff might not be seeking the attention coming his way. But after being at Big Ten Media Days in Chicago last month, that attention has only magnified greater.

It began in the spring when offensive line coach Brian Ferentz called him the best offensive lineman in college football last season. Then came the video of Scherff hang-cleaning 443 pounds just before he went to Chicago for Big Ten Media Days last week. After that came Kirk Ferentz saying at Big Ten Media Days – and reiterating again Monday – how Scherff could go down as one of Iowa's best players ever.

Just in the last few weeks, *ESPN's* Travis Haney wrote Scherff is “[the best player in college football](#)” and *NFL.com's* Gil Brandt said Scherff [has a realistic chance of being the top pick in next year's draft](#). One person who saw the potential in Scherff was the man who recruited him and was originally his position coach.

Before handling duties coaching Iowa's defensive line, Reese Morgan was the lead recruiter and Scherff and raved about his potential all the way back in 2010 when Scherff first arrived on the UI campus. Seeing the publicity Scherff has received

has not come as a surprise for Morgan, who has also coached players like Robert Gallery, Bryan Bulaga and Riley Reiff during his Iowa tenure.

"He's probably, athletically, as good as any tackle that we've had here," Morgan said. "Brandon is explosive, powerful. He has done some things in the weight room that none of those guys have done. He has done some things on the football field that none of those guys have done."

The Hawkeyes have a legitimate Outland Trophy candidate returning at left tackle. So naturally, the one spot on the offensive line that is currently an unknown is right next to Scherff at left guard. The "who" isn't necessarily the unknown because Sean Welsh has been listed since the start of spring as the first-string left guard. The unknown is that Welsh is a redshirt freshman and the only first-string offensive lineman who hasn't played a snap in a real game.

With this season likely being his first taste of game experience at the college level, the one piece of advice Welsh said he has gotten from the older linemen to accept the mistakes he'll inevitably make.

"When I first came in here, I wasn't used to making mistakes," Welsh said. "You're going to make mistakes and you've got to accept them because that's the best way you're going to learn."

As for the rest of this group, there's good and bad news for Iowa. The good is having three experienced linemen controlling the center and right sides of the line. Junior center Austin Blythe returns to anchor the line after making the transition over to center from guard last year.

The right side features a pair of linemen that rotated at the same spot last season and will now start together in 2014. After always being that "next man in" the last three seasons at various spots up front, senior Andrew Donnal is finally

getting his opportunity at right tackle, where he replaces a two-year starter in Brett Van Sloten. Both he and his head coach believe tackle has always been the best-suited position for Donnal to play.

Donnal getting his shot at right tackle also means junior Jordan Walsh is going to get even more snaps as the starting right guard than he did in 2013. Kirk and Brian Ferentz both believe Walsh is poised to make a jump this season similar to what they saw last year from center Austin Blythe.

"He had a good spring, he had a good summer, he has done everything we've asked, he's on the right track right now," Brian Ferentz said. "I fully expect over the next 2-3 weeks that he'll demonstrate a little bit more consistency and then as we progress in the season, I see the same thing happening.

"It's up to him to continue on the track he has been on, but so far, it has been very encouraging."

The bad news is lack of depth because after the five first-string guys, there's a significant drop-off in terms of experience. This is something that has concerned both Kirk Ferentz and offensive coordinator Greg Davis all offseason. In fact, Davis called the lack of depth his biggest concern with the entire offense back in the spring.

Currently, the second group primarily consists of the following blend – redshirt freshmen, older players who have never played meaningful minutes in a game and walk-ons.

Iowa's offensive line has potential to be considered a strength in 2014, but only if the Hawkeyes can avoid major injuries up front. With Scherff's presence, it's also a group that will be watched closer than it ever has since Brian Ferentz first took over as offensive line coach back in 2012.