

2014 Iowa position breakdowns: Defensive 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](#), [wide receivers and tight ends](#), and the [offensive line](#), our fifth part examines the defensive line.

By Brendan Stiles

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Iowa's front four had a resurgence of sorts in 2013 and as the Hawkeyes enter 2014, it's a group not only returning plenty of experience, but also leadership.

Last season, the face of this defense was its senior trio of linebackers. This fall, it will be reminiscent of 2008 with a pair of senior defensive tackles leading the charge. It was Mitch King and Matt Kroul back then. It is Louis Trinca-Pasat and Carl Davis now. Both have some subtle differences, but both have also allowed their play to speak for itself.

"Carl's nature is more, 'Hey listen, I want to help you along and I'm going to bring you along,' but Louie's going to drag you," Iowa defensive line coach Reese Morgan said. "So you've got two different leadership styles. Both are effective."

Trinca-Pasat has been a fixture along the D-line for two seasons now. He played all of 2012 with a torn rotator cuff and managed to elevate his game even more last year as he finished with 38 tackles, including eight tackles for lost yardage. Morgan described him as high-energy and the kind of guy who wouldn't be afraid to call a teammate out for poor effort.

For Davis, his development made a quantum leap in 2013. He embraced the responsibility that came with playing a bigger role and it showed in his game as he compiled 42 tackles in his first season as a starter. Both players say they try to lead by example, but Davis believes Trinca-Pasat is the more vocal of the two.

"I talk like it's fun, I'm having fun and we're on the field before practice trying to get guys going and stuff like that," Davis said. "In the games, I don't talk at all unless it's a real tight situation.

"If we're slacking, that's where Louie picks it up. If we're slow coming into practice, Louie's like, 'Hey, we need to pick this tempo up.' That's the kind of guy he is."

Trinca-Pasat and Davis are the cornerstones of the 2014 Iowa defense, but they're not alone in terms of what they mean to the defensive line. Another player who has received high praise throughout the offseason has been junior defensive end Drew Ott, who statistically speaking had more tackles (50) and more sacks (2.5) than his two fellow D-linemen inside.

Morgan and Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz both took notice of Ott this past spring when he willingly asked to switch from left to right defensive end so he could go head-to-head with senior left tackle Brandon Scherff every day in practice. Ott is listed at 6-4, 270 pounds, but by all accounts held his own against Scherff when they battled every day in practice.

"I'm a lot more focused every time I put my hand in the ground," Ott said. "Lining up against him, I got to be focused, otherwise I'm going to get flattened. It has just helped my sharpness and being ready to go every snap."

The big question surrounding this front four is who controls the other end spot, with senior Mike Hardy being the likely candidate to start. Hardy started Iowa's last six games and entered fall camp listed atop the 2-deep at the end spot

opposite Ott.

Like Iowa has each of the last three seasons, it will continue using a heavy rotation of 7-8 players along the D-line. Junior defensive end Nate Meier showed glimpses last season when he was used in the Hawkeyes' Raider package on third down and spent the entire spring competing with Hardy.

The Hawkeyes also have a trio of defensive tackles at their disposal should they choose to rotate Trinca-Pasat or Davis out at any point. Darian Cooper has been a regular in the Iowa rotation each of the last two seasons and will continue to be in 2014. Two other names to watch for this fall as part of the Hawkeyes' rotation are sophomores Jaleel Johnson and Faith Ekakitie. Johnson is a defensive tackle, while Ekakitie has played both tackle and end, but said he is better suited playing at tackle.

"It's where I came in and it's where I got started," Ekakitie said. "I moved out to end for a little bit, then moved back in, so I'd say there's a little more comfort at tackle."

Between its two senior tackles, as well as Ott, this D-line will be counted on as the tone setters for Iowa in 2014.