

2014 Big Ten football previews: Minnesota (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

After examining [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#), [Michigan State](#), [Indiana](#), [Maryland](#), [Purdue](#) and [Illinois](#), we now shift our attention to the Minnesota Golden Gophers. For the fourth time in the last five years, Iowa will visit TCF Bank Stadium in Minneapolis, Minn., on Nov. 8.

Coming off a 6-win season in 2012, the feeling at this time last year was Minnesota would take a step back. It easily could have when head coach Jerry Kill was forced to take a leave of absence following another epileptic episode. But instead, the Golden Gophers played inspired and put together a memorable 8-5 campaign in 2013. A shot at making a third straight bowl game in 2014 isn't unrealistic, but it could also prove more challenging.

At quarterback, Mitch Leidner returns for his sophomore season and with Philip Nelson out of the picture, the burden of leading this offense has been placed on Leidner, who started four of the 10 games he appeared in last year. When he was under center, Leidner was effective as a runner, compiling 407 yards rushing on 102 carries and tied for a team-high seven touchdowns on the ground. But it's his passing that needs the most improvement. Leidner only threw the ball 78 times in 2013 and completed 43 of those attempts for 619 yards and three touchdowns. These numbers should improve now that he's the guy, but they're going to need to improve for Minnesota to have any chance offensively.

The Golden Gophers' best offensive player is their running back, senior David Cobb. He led Minnesota in rushing last

season with 1,202 yards and seven touchdowns on 237 carries. He also had 17 catches for 174 yards receiving, good for third and fourth respectively on the team. He's the one player Minnesota can ill-afford to lose at any point this fall.

The receiving corps is a glaring question mark, especially when you tack on Leidner's lack of passing productivity a year ago. Sophomore tight end Maxx Williams returns after leading the Golden Gophers in receiving with 25 catches for 417 yards and five touchdowns (all team-highs). The two most experienced wideouts are senior Isaac Fruechte and sophomore Drew Wolitarsky. Fruechte had 13 catches for 154 yards receiving last season, while Wolitarsky had 15 grabs for 259 yards and a touchdown. This is also a group where younger players could potentially emerge and provide an immediate impact.

One thing Minnesota has going for it offensively is experience up front, as it brings back five O-linemen whom started games in 2013. The cogs of this line are senior left guard Zac Epping and junior right tackle Josh Campion, both of whom started every game last season. Senior center Tommy Olson and junior right guard Foster Bush both face similar predicaments having started the last four games of last season, yet competing for those same spots in 2014. Olson's currently battling junior Brian Bobek at center, while junior Jon Christenson is looking to unseat Bush at right guard. Sophomore Ben Lauer is on pace to start at left tackle, where he started four times in 2013.

Minnesota brings back seven starters on defense, including three defensive linemen. But that front four has an enormous void to fill this year after the Atlanta Falcons drafted Ra'Shede Hageman last spring. Junior Scott Ekpe faces the task of replacing Hageman inside. Meanwhile, junior Theiren Cockran is back at one D-end spot after leading the Golden Gophers with 7.5 sacks last season, while senior Michael Amaefula occupies the other end spot. Senior Cameron Botticelli returns at defensive tackle after recording 23 tackles in 2013.

At linebacker, senior Damien Wilson returns to the middle after recording 78 tackles playing that spot last year. But Wilson will have new faces alongside him in 2014. Junior linebacker De'Vondre Campbell started a game at Indiana in place of Wilson last season and is expected to take over at the weak-side spot. As for the strong-side vacancy, it looks as though sophomore Jack Lynn will emerge there.

Much like the defensive line, Minnesota's secondary brings back three starters from a season ago. But the one void at cornerback is enormous with Brock Vereen now playing for the Chicago Bears. Senior strong safety Cedric Thompson returns after leading the Golden Gophers with 79 tackles, two fumble recoveries and an interception. Junior Antonio Johnson started Minnesota's final seven games at free safety after Vereen moved over to corner and finished 2013 with 69 tackles and three pass break ups.

Junior Eric Murray started every game last season at corner and managed to not only record 52 tackles (44 unassisted), but also lead the Golden Gophers with 10 pass break ups. The other corner spot is a battle between junior Briean Boddy-Calhoun and senior Derrick Wells, both of whom started games at corner last season before Vereen switched positions.

Minnesota is still unsettled at kicker, but returns junior punter Peter Mortell after he averaged 43.3 yards per punt in 2013. Senior Marcus Jones will handle punt and kickoff return duties after returning one of each for touchdowns last season.

Now when it comes to the schedule, the Golden Gophers are going to want to rack up as many wins as possible before the month of November. Following a bye week that first November weekend, Minnesota concludes its regular season with a four-game stretch consisting of Iowa and Ohio State visiting TCF Bank Stadium, followed by consecutive road trips to Nebraska and Wisconsin.

The Golden Gophers have three key games before this stretch and will need to win at least one of them if they want to go bowling for a third straight year – Sept. 13 at TCU, Sept. 27 at Michigan (Minnesota's Big Ten opener) and Oct. 11 against Northwestern at home. Every other game in September and October is winnable. These three contests will make or break Minnesota's season because on one hand, they're all difficult contests, but on the other hand, these are games the Golden Gophers could realistically win if enough breaks go their way in any one of them.

There's no question Kill has this Minnesota program going in the right direction. But while this isn't a make or break season for the Golden Gophers, it's one that could set the tone for what lies ahead in their future.

AUDIO:

Minnesota quarterback Mitch Leidner –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Mitch-Leidner-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

2014 Big Ten football previews: Illinois (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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To this point, we have discussed [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#), [Michigan State](#), [Indiana](#), [Maryland](#) and [Purdue](#). Our next preview looks at the upcoming season for the Illinois Fighting Illini. Iowa and Illinois will finally meet

for the first time since 2008 when the Hawkeyes visit Memorial Stadium in Champaign, Ill., on Nov. 15.

As Illinois embarks on its 2014 season, it's a program that seems stable on the inside, yet is anything but on the outside. Tim Beckman enters his third season as the Fighting Illini's head coach and his current players have bought into what he's selling. Internally, there's no friction. Externally, fans and media alike are starting to wonder if Beckman is even suitable for the job.

Illinois showed improvement from 2012 to 2013 and the only way that trajectory continues this fall is if the Fighting Illini reach a bowl game, something they haven't done since Beckman's predecessor, Ron Zook, was in charge. Yet as brutal as Illinois' path appears to be, this team winning six games isn't really that far-fetched.

Part of what makes the Fighting Illini so intriguing this season is their quarterback situation. Sophomore signal-caller Wes Lunt appears poised to fill the void left by four-year starter Nathan Scheelhaase and the intrigue with Lunt is that this is his first season of eligibility after transferring from Oklahoma State after the 2012 season.

Lunt completed 81-of-131 pass attempts for 1,108 yards, six touchdowns and seven interceptions while starting five games for the Cowboys. If he secures this job, he'd do so by beating out senior Reilly O'Toole, who made six appearances last season after starting two games in 2012.

Illinois' backfield features both of its top two rushers from a season ago. Junior Josh Ferguson led the Fighting Illini in rushing with 779 yards and seven touchdowns on 141 carries, while senior Donovan Young is coming off a year where he racked up 376 yards rushing and three touchdowns on 93 carries. Ferguson will remain the top back, but Illinois having this 1-2 punch should prove beneficial to Lunt.

The biggest question mark with this offense surrounds a receiving corps missing its top four players in catches and receiving yards from a season ago, a quartet that combined for 13 of Illinois' 23 touchdowns through the air. Among the voids that needed to be filled is that of Steve Hull, who had 993 yards receiving, 59 catches and seven touchdowns (all team-highs).

Statistically speaking, the top returning wideout is senior Martize Barr, who had 26 catches for 246 yards and one touchdown in 2013. One receiver the Fighting Illini are hoping has an immediate impact this fall is junior Geronimo Allison, who joins the program after transferring from Iowa Western Community College. Illinois also returns a pair of senior tight ends in Jon Davis and Matt LaCosse that combined for 45 catches, 445 receiving yards and five touchdowns last year.

Up front, the Fighting Illini return four starters with the one vacancy being at right tackle. Among the returnees are three seniors on the line's left side – tackle Simon Cvijanovic, guard Michael Heitz and center Alex Hill. Junior Ted Karras – the great nephew of former Iowa and Detroit Lion legend Alex Karras – returns at right guard, where he started 10 games for Illinois last year. Junior Patrick Flavin currently sits atop the depth chart at right tackle.

Defensively, the Fighting Illini should feel good about having eight starters back for its 4-2-5 scheme. Paving the way along the D-line is senior nose tackle Austin Teitsma, who recorded 53 tackles in 2013. Illinois also brings back junior defensive tackle Teko Powell. Controlling the two end spots this fall are senior Dejazza Woods and junior Kenny Nelson, who had two fumble recoveries last season.

The linebacking corps took a massive hit losing both Jonathan Brown and Houston Bates. Brown led the Fighting Illini with 119 tackles, while Bates had 40 tackles, including 12 for lost yardage. The two 'backers also combined for 8.5 sacks and were

the top two players in that category. One player who is back is junior Mason Monheim, who finished third on the team with 97 tackles a year ago. Junior linebacker Mike Svetina is currently out with a foot injury, but is expected back by Big Ten play. Svetina is coming off a season where he recorded 57 tackles.

Illinois' secondary features a lot of experience and it's a group led by senior safety Earnest Thomas III, who had 101 tackles and a team-high seven pass break ups for the Fighting Illini in 2013. Senior Zane Petty returns at the other safety spot coming off a 75-tackle season. Junior cornerbacks Eaton Spence and V'Angelo Bentley also return. Spence started every game in 2013 and finished with 49 tackles and four pass break ups, while Bentley made nine starts and compiled 22 tackles, along with one of only three interceptions by the entire Fighting Illini defense. Another name to watch is sophomore Taylor Barton at safety.

On special teams, Bentley will likely handle return duties on both punts and kickoffs after returning one of each for touchdowns last year. Illinois also brings back senior punter Justin DuVernois after he averaged 41.1 yards per punt in 2013, as well as junior kicker Taylor Zalewski, who was 12-of-17 on field goal tries.

Looking at the schedule, it's a mixed bag for the Fighting Illini. While Illinois might not be favored in all seven of its home games, there isn't a single game at Memorial Stadium that won't be winnable. The two toughest challenges appear to be Iowa and Penn State, who both visit Champaign in November. Conversely, there may not be a more daunting road slate in the entire country. Illinois travels to Washington during non-conference play, then has to play Nebraska, Wisconsin, Ohio State and Northwestern all away from home. Winning any one of those games might be enough for bowl eligibility if the Fighting Illini can win the games they'll be expected to win at home.

The clock might be ticking on Beckman, but his program seems to be one heading in the right direction. How Lunt is able to transition at quarterback could make an enormous difference one way or the other because Illinois seems to have enough elsewhere that it can turn 4-8 last year into six wins or better in 2014.

AUDIO:

Illinois defensive tackle Austin Teitsma –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Austin-Teitsma-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

2014 Big Ten football previews: Purdue (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

After previewing the Big Ten's East Division consisting of [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#), [Michigan State](#), [Indiana](#) and [Maryland](#), our first look at the West Division features the Purdue Boilermakers. Iowa makes its second consecutive trip to Ross-Ade Stadium in West Lafayette, Ind., on Sept. 27.

Not much was expected of Purdue in Darrell Hazell's first season. But as it turned out, the Boilermakers were even worse than anticipated. It began with a 41-7 loss in the opener at Cincinnati and avalanched into a 1-11 season where the lone win came against a 1-11 FCS opponent (Indiana State) by single digits. Now as Hazell enters his second year at the helm,

Purdue still has a steep climb ahead of it, but should also be better in 2014.

The improvement starts at the quarterback position. The Boilermakers claim there's a QB battle going on for the starting spot between sophomores Danny Etling and Austin Appleby, but make no mistake. Etling will remain the starter when Purdue hosts Western Michigan on Aug. 30 after starting seven of the eight games he appeared in as a true freshman last season. His most recent outing stands out because even though the Boilermakers lost to in-state rival Indiana, Etling completed 33-of-49 pass attempts for 485 yards and four touchdowns. He should be in position to build off that performance.

At running back, Purdue has a pair of options that are both seniors. One is Akeem Hunt, who led the Boilermakers in rushing last season with 464 yards rushing and one touchdown on 123 carries. The other is Raheem Mostert, who made the move to running back last year and helps give Purdue a 1-2 punch in the backfield. If the offense manages to improve, both players should be reasons why.

The good news for Purdue's offense is that its top seven leading receivers are all back in 2014. However, the top two receivers on the team last season were senior tight end Justin Sinz and Hunt. Sinz recorded team-highs of 41 receptions and four touchdowns and both he and Hunt tied for second on the team with 340 yards receiving. Sophomore wideout DeAngelo Yancey returns after leading Purdue with 546 yards receiving on 32 catches and two scores last year. Another name to watch with this group is junior receiver Danny Anthrop, who hauled in 17 catches for 313 yards receiving in 2013.

Up front, Purdue returns its three interior linemen from last season in junior center Robert Kugler and sophomore guards Jason King and Jordan Roos. Kugler started every game at center for the Boilermakers in 2013, while King became the

starting left guard back in November and Roos started six of Purdue's last seven games at right guard. Sophomore J.J. Prince is being counted on to take over at right tackle, while left tackle will feature junior Corey Clements, who is listed at 6-8, 400 pounds.

Defensively, Purdue is changing things up in 2014 by moving to a 3-3-5 scheme. The leader of the defensive line is senior end Ryan Russell, who has started each of the previous three seasons and recorded 35 tackles and two sacks in 2013. Sophomore Ra'Zahn Howard is projected to take over nose tackle and the end spot opposite Russell features a competition between sophomore Jake Replogle and junior Michael Rouse III.

The linebacking corps features three seniors, two of which started games last season. But the interesting deal here is the two returning starters – Joe Gilliam and Sean Robinson – are swapping spots. Robinson takes over the middle after starting nine games as an outside 'backer, while Gilliam is now at the weak-side spot after starting eight games at middle linebacker. Robinson comes off a 45-tackle year, while Gilliam recorded 31 tackles and three pass break ups in 2013.

This defense's strongest group is the secondary and that's despite Purdue losing a corner who was easily its best player last season in Ricardo Allen. The Boilermakers' top three returning tacklers are all defensive backs that return in 2014. A pair of juniors will control the corner spots in Anthony Brown (69 tackles) and Frankie Williams (61 tackles and two picks). Brown moves over to corner this year after previously playing at safety. Senior safety Taylor Richards recorded 64 tackles in 2013, but is competing for a starting spot with redshirt freshman Robert Gregory. Seniors Landon Feichter and Antoine Lewis are also listed as starters at safety and nickel back, respectively.

On special teams, junior Paul Griggs returns as the placekicker, but is coming off a difficult 2013 where he only

connected on 6-of-12 field goal attempts. Junior Thomas Meadows handled kickoff duties last season and is now taking over for Cody Webster at punter. Williams will handle punt return duties again, while the backfield of Hunt and Mostert will continue handling kickoff returns.

Looking at Purdue's schedule, it should be able to go 3-1 in non-conference play. Beating Notre Dame on Sept. 13 in Indianapolis appears unlikely, but the Boilermakers' three home games against Western Michigan, Central Michigan and Southern Illinois are all winnable. Interestingly enough, its Big Ten opener at home against Iowa might be Purdue's key game. After playing the Hawkeyes, the Boilermakers also have to play Michigan State, Wisconsin and Northwestern at Ross-Ade Stadium and trips to Lincoln, Neb., and Bloomington, Ind., (for the second straight year) are also included.

If Purdue somehow managed to upset Iowa, finding two wins over the course of October and November seems easier to obtain than three wins over those final two months. Again, the Boilermakers probably aren't reaching bowl eligibility coming off a 1-11 campaign and finding just one win in Big Ten play might be hard to come by. But the schedule sets up for a better season in terms of wins and losses and Purdue's a program that under Hazell's guidance should continue improving over the next few seasons.

AUDIO:

Purdue defensive end Ryan Russell –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Ryan-Russell-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

2014 Big Ten football previews: Maryland (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Our first six season previews have dissected [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#), [Michigan State](#) and [Indiana](#). The final preview from the East Division examines one of the Big Ten's newest members, the Maryland Terrapins. Iowa will visit Byrd Stadium in College Park, Md., on Oct. 18.

In its final season as an ACC member, 2013 began well for Maryland as it started out 4-0. Injuries began to decimate the Terrapins during a 34-10 loss to Wake Forest and they limped to a 7-6 finish that featured a 31-20 loss to Marshall in the Military Bowl. Now in its inaugural Big Ten season, Maryland is going to face much stiffer competition. But if the injury bug can be avoided, Randy Edsall's squad might fare better than expected.

Returning as a sixth-year senior at quarterback is C.J. Brown, who has been productive for the Terrapins when healthy. Brown only had 13 touchdown passes last season, but seven of those came before suffering a concussion against Florida State and the other six came after he lost his top two wideouts to season-ending injuries. Brown also rushed for 12 touchdowns on the ground last season, which makes him just as much of a threat on the ground as he would be through the air.

As for the rest of Maryland's backfield, junior Brandon Ross returns after leading the team in rushing with 776 yards and four touchdowns on 166 carries. The Terrapins will also have the services of sophomore Wes Brown, who missed all of 2013 after rushing for 392 yards in 2012.

When healthy, the strength of Maryland's offense is its receiving corps. Junior wideout Stefon Diggs is already being regarded as the best receiver in the Big Ten and the duo of him and senior Deon Long is considered among the best. Both players were on their way to big seasons last fall before both suffered season-ending injuries in the aforementioned loss to Wake Forest.

Prior to their injuries, Diggs had 34 catches for 587 yards receiving and three touchdowns while Long – who transferred to Maryland last year from Iowa Western – had 32 catches for 489 yards and a touchdown. Add in former NFL wideout Keenan McCardell now coaching the Terrapin receivers and both could have monster seasons if they're able to stay on the field.

Up front, Maryland brings back four players with starting experience. This group is led by senior center Sal Conaboy, who started every game there for the Terrapins last season. After moving from right tackle to left for the final four games of 2013, junior Ryan Doyle will stay at left tackle in 2014, while right tackle will be handled by sophomore Michael Dunn and right guard by junior Andrew Zeller. The lone question mark is at left guard, where true freshman Derwin Gray currently sits atop Maryland's depth chart.

Defensively, the Terrapins present a 3-4 scheme to the Big Ten and return nine starters from a year ago including all three of their guys along the D-line. But after starting most of last season at one end spot, senior Keith Bowers is now moving inside and could very well be second-string behind senior Darius Kilgo, who had more tackles (37) and sacks (2) than Bowers. On the outside, junior Quinton Jefferson returns after recording a group-high 47 tackles in 2013, while senior Andre Monroe will be a permanent starter in 2014 after leading the Terrapins with 9.5 sacks a year ago.

Gone from the linebacking corps is Marcus Whitfield, who had nine sacks in 2013. But his spot is the only vacant one.

Senior inside linebackers Cole Farrand and L.A. Goree were second and third, respectively, on the Terrapins in tackles (Farrand had 84 tackles, Goree had 75). Senior outside linebacker Matt Robinson was right behind them with 73 tackles, including 10 for lost yardage. The most likely candidate to replace Whitfield at the other outside spot is another senior, Yannik Cudjoe-Virgil. He made one start last season and finished with 18 tackles and three sacks. Undoubtedly, this the group Maryland's defense will be leaning on for leadership.

Like the first two levels, the secondary also returns three starters, plus another defensive back that missed 2013, but started every game at corner in 2012. Junior safety Sean Davis' 102 tackles led the team in 2013, while fellow junior safety Anthony Nixon compiled 60 tackles. Sophomore cornerback William Likely returns after a true freshman campaign where he had 70 tackles and a team-high six pass break ups. The other corner spot is a battle between junior Alvin Hill and senior Jeremiah Johnson, who had 43 tackles and eight pass break ups as a starting corner two seasons ago.

Junior punter Nathan Renfro returns after averaging 40.8 yards per punt last season, while junior kicker Brad Craddock looks to build off a sophomore campaign where he was 21-of-25 on field goal attempts. Back returning both punts and kickoffs this season will be Likely, who compiled 934 yards as a return man in 2013.

Maryland has some intriguing non-conference games. Its slate includes a home game against long-time rival West Virginia and road trips to both South Florida and former conference foe Syracuse.

As far as the Big Ten slate is concerned, that first ever Big Ten game on Sept. 27 at Indiana could loom large for the Terrapins. Sandwiched between that contest and the regular season finale at home against Rutgers is a six-game stretch

that is absolutely brutal.

This starts with Maryland playing its first Big Ten home game against Ohio State, then Iowa visits College Park after the Terrapins' first bye week. Another bye follows consecutive trips to Wisconsin and Penn State, then Michigan State pays a visit to Byrd Stadium. This stretch then concludes with a contest at Michigan.

While the schedule isn't doing the Terrapins any favors, Maryland has enough talent on both sides of the ball to be formidable. Assuming it can get that Big Ten opener against Indiana, winning 1-2 of those games during that eight-week stretch wouldn't be too far-fetched.

The defense should be able to keep the Terrapins in most (if not all) of these games. But it's the offense that will need to be productive in 2014 and a lot of that will hinge on whether Brown, Diggs and Long can all manage to stay healthy over the course of the fall. If they can, Maryland can easily reach six wins and maybe even win 7-8 games. If they can't, this could be a long season.

AUDIO:

Maryland wide receiver Stefon Diggs –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Stefon-Diggs-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

2014 Big Ten football

previews: Indiana (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

After examining [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#) and [Michigan State](#), we now take time to discuss the upcoming 2014 season for the Indiana Hoosiers. Iowa plays its Homecoming Game against Indiana at Kinnick Stadium on Oct. 11.

Last season was set up favorably for Indiana, yet despite having eight games in Bloomington, the Hoosiers found themselves with a 5-7 mark at season's end and were unable to become bowl-eligible. Entering 2014, Indiana is in a rather unique situation. On one hand, this team has a boatload of starters returning on both sides of the ball and that experience should result in more veteran leadership. But with a more grueling schedule this fall, the Hoosiers still might find themselves home for the holidays.

Offensively, Indiana should remain prolific under head coach Kevin Wilson and one of the biggest reasons why is its quarterback. With Tre' Roberson transferring to Illinois State this summer, the starting nod belongs entirely to junior Nate Sudfeld. Last season, Sudfeld threw for over 2,500 yards and that was while splitting time with Roberson. He also tossed 21 touchdowns to nine interceptions. Now that he's the guy, those numbers should all go up in 2014 given the Hoosiers' system.

Junior Tevin Coleman returns at running back for Indiana. He rushed for 958 yards and 12 touchdowns on 131 carries in 2013. Coleman may also become a bigger threat in the passing game this season. His sophomore receiving numbers went up by nine catches and 144 yards from what they were his freshman campaign.

At receiver, the good news for Indiana is that senior Shane

Wynn returns. His production in terms of receptions and receiving yards were down a year ago from what they were in 2012. What improved though was he caught 11 touchdown passes last season after hauling in six of them two seasons ago.

But with Cody Latimer and Kofi Hughes both gone, the Hoosiers will need other receivers to step up this fall. Senior wideouts Isaiah Roundtree and Nick Stoner are the likely candidates to fill those voids, but at least one underclassman will need to have a big year so Indiana isn't going into 2015 totally inexperienced.

Up front, the Hoosiers pretty much return their entire offensive line from 2013. The left side of the line is set in stone with junior Jason Spriggs back at left tackle, senior Bernard Taylor back at left guard and senior Collin Rahrig back at center. The right side carries a little more intrigue. Junior David Kaminski started the first five games of last season at right guard, but is now competing with sophomore Dan Feeney for that spot. Then at right tackle, junior Ralston Evans started every game in 2013, yet will battle with junior Peyton Eckert, who started every game there in 2012.

Defensively, there's plenty of experience with 15 of Indiana's top 17 tacklers returning. But this is also a unit that was the Big Ten's worst in nearly every meaningful defensive statistical category. No defense gave up more yards per game or more touchdowns last season than Indiana did. It was the sieve that kept the Hoosiers from bowling.

Along the front four, the one loss is Ryan Phillis, who also happened to be the only defensive lineman to start every game last season. Junior defensive end Nick Mangieri is the best of the bunch returning after he had 26 tackles and three sacks. Senior Bobby Richardson started the last 10 games at defensive tackle in 2013, but is moving over to end this season to fill Phillis' void. That makes sophomore Ralph Green III the most experienced D-tackle Indiana brings back.

If any part of this defense is considered strong, it's at linebacker. Senior strong-side 'backer David Cooper returns after leading the Hoosiers with 85 tackles a year ago. Also returning is sophomore middle linebacker T.J. Simmons, who had 68 tackles and like Cooper, started every game in 2013 for Indiana. The weak-side spot is the unknown with senior Forisse Hardin and sophomore Clyde Newton competing for that spot. Hardin started the first eight games of 2013, while Newton took over for the final four contests.

The secondary loses its best player from last season in safety Greg Heban, who led the Hoosiers with three interceptions and also compiled 82 tackles. While an underclassman will likely replace Heban, Indiana does return senior safety Mark Murphy, who was second on the team with 84 tackles a year ago. The Hoosiers also return both of their starting corners in senior Tim Bennett – who had 20 pass break ups in 2013 – and junior Michael Hunter. Bennett also had 73 tackles, including a team-high 61 unassisted.

On special teams, punter Erich Toth returns for his junior season while Indiana will be counting on one of two freshman kickers – Aaron Del Grosso or Griffin Oakes – to replace Mitch Ewald. Wynn will more than likely handle punt return duties again, while kickoff returning is more up in the air.

Now getting to Indiana's schedule, it's more daunting than it was a year ago. The Hoosiers had both MAC champion and SEC East champion Missouri at home last season. This year, they have to play both teams on the road and do so in back-to-back weeks during the month of September. Indiana also has a non-conference home game against North Texas, who won the Heart of Dallas Bowl last season.

In Big Ten play, it doesn't get much easier and the conference opener at home against Maryland on Sept. 27 might very well dictate Indiana's fate. The Hoosiers have two difficult games in October – Oct. 11 at Iowa and Oct. 18 at home against

defending Big Ten champion Michigan State. November features trips to both The Big House and The Horseshoe for the second consecutive year, but the Hoosiers also have some winnable games down the stretch at home against Penn State and in-state rival Purdue and then at Rutgers on Nov. 15.

Again, there should be more than enough in place for Indiana to make the jump many in the college football world thought it would make last year, especially if the defense improves. The Hoosiers are going to score enough points every week. But given how their schedule's shaped, it's easy to question whether or not getting to six wins and becoming bowl-eligible can actually get done.

AUDIO:

Indiana quarterback Nate Sudfeld –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Nate-Sudfeld-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Iowa making two “Super Tuesday” appearances in 2015

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

The Iowa Hawkeyes will be featured twice on ESPN as part of its “Super Tuesday” slate for the 2014-15 college basketball season, which was released by the network Wednesday afternoon.

Both contests are away from Carver-Hawkeye Arena. The first appearance is at 8 p.m. Central on Jan. 20 when Iowa travels

to the Kohl Center to face Wisconsin, who is coming off a Final Four appearance last season and will most likely be favorites to win the Big Ten in 2014-15. The Hawkeyes have lost each of their last two games in Madison and have lost three straight overall to the Badgers.

The other "Super Tuesday" contest is March 3 with the Hawkeyes traveling to Assembly Hall to face Indiana in a game set for 6 p.m. Central that evening. Last season, Iowa was scheduled to play at Indiana as part of ESPN's "Super Tuesday," but the game was pushed back nine days after a 50-pound piece of metal fell from the Assembly Hall ceiling.

It was also announced earlier in the week that the Hawkeyes' Big Ten/ACC Challenge contest on Dec. 3 at North Carolina will be televised nationally by ESPN and start at 6:30 p.m. Central. In addition, Iowa will make at least one appearance on ESPN2 during the 2K Classic in November when the Hawkeyes play Texas at Madison Square Garden in New York City on Nov. 20.

The remainder of Iowa's 2014-15 schedule is expected to be finalized later this month.

Hawkeyes in the NFL: 2014 Preseason Week Two

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

The second week of the 2014 NFL preseason begins Thursday evening. As of Wednesday morning, there remains 36 former Iowa

players currently listed on NFL rosters. One player – Philadelphia Eagles center Julian Vandervelde – is currently out of action [after recently having back surgery](#).

Below is a list of this week's preseason games in the NFL, including which former Iowa players are with which teams. Included will be a list of television stations in Iowa carrying preseason games of two Midwest teams – the Green Bay Packers and Minnesota Vikings. The Packers' game Aug. 16 against the Rams is also being nationally carried on NFL Network for those not listed in the Iowa markets below.

There are also eight nationally televised preseason games, including the Aug. 16 contest on NFL Network between the Baltimore Ravens and Dallas Cowboys, both of whom feature pairs of former Hawkeyes. The Ravens have Marshal Yanda and Brett Van Sloten, while the Cowboys have rookies Anthony Hitchens and Casey Kreiter.

Thursday, Aug. 14:

Jacksonville at Chicago, 7 p.m. (**ESPN**) – **Jaguars:** Ricky Stanzi (#2)

Friday, Aug. 15:

Philadelphia at New England, 6:30 p.m. (**NFL Network**) – **Eagles:** Bradley Fletcher (#24), Matt Tobin (#64), Julian Vandervelde (#61); **Patriots:** James Morris (#52)

Tennessee at New Orleans, 7 p.m. – **Titans:** Shonn Greene (#23), Karl Klug (#97)

Detroit at Oakland, 9 p.m. – **Lions:** Riley Reiff (#71)

San Diego at Seattle, 9 p.m. (**NFL Network; JIP**)

Saturday, Aug. 16:

Green Bay at St. Louis, 3 p.m. (**NFL Network**) – **Packers:** Bryan

Bulaga (#75), Mike Daniels (#76), Micah Hyde (#33), Tanner Miller (#40)

***TV stations in Iowa carrying Packers/Rams:** KWWL-DT 7.1 (*Eastern Iowa*); KLJB-DT 18.1 (*Quad Cities*); KCWI-CW 23.1 (*Des Moines*); KMTV-DT 3.1 (*Council Bluffs/Omaha*); WXOW-DT 19.1 (*Northeast Iowa/La Crosse*)

NY Jets at Cincinnati, 6 p.m. – **Jets:** A.J. Edds (#47), Markus Zusevics (#76)

Baltimore at Dallas, 6 p.m. (**NFL Network**) – **Ravens:** Brett Van Sloten (#61), Marshal Yanda (#73); **Cowboys:** Anthony Hitchens (#59), Casey Kreiter (#49)

NY Giants at Indianapolis, 6 p.m.

Buffalo at Pittsburgh, 6:30 p.m. – **Bills:** Scott Chandler (#84), Tony Moeaki (#82)

Miami at Tampa Bay, 6:30 p.m. – **Buccaneers:** Adrian Clayborn (#94), Brandon Myers (#82)

Atlanta at Houston, 7 p.m. – **Falcons:** Pat Angerer (#44), Jonathan Babineaux (#95); **Texans:** Conor Bofelli (#66), James Ferentz (#78), C.J. Fiedorowicz (#87), Jeff Tarpinian (#52)

Arizona at Minnesota, 7:30 p.m. – **Vikings:** Chad Greenway (#52), Shaun Prater (#27), Allen Reisner (#87)

***TV stations in Iowa carrying Cardinals/Vikings:** KGAN-DT 2.1 (*Eastern Iowa*); WHBF-DT 4.1 (*Quad Cities*); KCCI-DT 8.1 (*Des Moines*); KPTH-DT 44.1 (*Sioux City*); KTTC-CW 10.2 (*Mason City/Austin/Rochester*); KSFY-DT 13.1 (*Northwest Iowa/Sioux Falls*); WKBT-DT 8.1 (*Northeast Iowa/La Crosse*); KETV-DT 7.1 (*Council Bluffs/Omaha*)

Sunday, Aug. 17:

Denver at San Francisco, 3 p.m. (**NFL Network**)

Kansas City at Carolina, 7 p.m. (FOX) – **Panthers:** Colin Cole (#91), Charles Godfrey (#30), Marvin McNutt (#15)

Monday, Aug. 18:

Cleveland at Washington, 7 p.m. (ESPN) – **Browns:** Christian Kirksey (#58); **Redskins:** Adam Gettis (#73)

****All times listed are Central Standard Time***

2014 Iowa position breakdowns: Special Teams

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](#), the [offensive line](#), [defensive line](#), [linebackers](#) and the [secondary](#), our eighth and final part examines the Hawkeyes' special teams.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Last year, Iowa went through a significant coaching transition when it came to special teams. When running backs coach Chris White was brought onto Kirk Ferentz's coaching staff, he and co-linebackers coach LeVar Woods were teamed up to oversee the team's third phase. More than ever before, time was being spent during practice focusing on all aspects of special teams.

As a whole, there was a mixed bag. Early in the season, there

was a game against Western Michigan where Kevonte Martin-Manley returned two consecutive punts for touchdowns and part of his success in that game was Iowa game-planning for the rugby-style punting employed by the Broncos. But this was sandwiched between games that featured opposing teams executing fake punts, onside kick attempts and long kickoff returns.

But the improvement began showing as the season progressed. Against Nebraska, Iowa was prepared for the fake punt and stopped one for the first time since 2009. In the Outback Bowl against LSU, the Hawkeyes got a 96-yard kickoff return from Jordan Cotton that led to a fourth-quarter touchdown that had kept Iowa's hopes alive.

"Towards the end of the year, I thought we were playing at a pretty high level in both the return units and coverage units," White said.

Now there's another transition taking place with special teams, except it's with player personnel this time around. After having Casey Kreiter as a long snapper for three seasons, those duties are now being held by redshirt freshman Tyler Kluver. After having four seasons of Mike Meyer being a fairly reliable placekicker, the Hawkeyes will likely be turning toward junior Marshall Koehn handling those duties in 2014.

Sitting behind Meyer the last few seasons, Koehn's big takeaways from watching him kick were his poise and mental approach. Those things, along with consistency, are the areas he's currently attempting to apply most to his kicking game.

"I'm just trying to prove that I can handle the pressure because we get put through different situations all through practice and if I miss a kick, I can come back and make another one," Koehn said. "I'm just trying to prove that I can be consistent enough and I think that's what the coaches are

looking for.”

At punter, Connor Kornbrath returns for his junior season. But after having a sophomore campaign labeled “inconsistent” by both White and head coach Kirk Ferentz, one where Kornbrath averaged 40 yards per punt, Iowa brought in junior college transfer Dillon Kidd to compete with Kornbrath this offseason.

As for the return game, the one thing most likely to remain the same is Martin-Manley entering his senior year as Iowa’s top punt returner. He had the game against Western Michigan, but he also had a costly muffed punt against LSU in the Outback Bowl as well. Martin-Manley believes the job is his unless told otherwise.

“I feel comfortable and I feel like it’s just another opportunity for the ball to get in my hands and another opportunity to make plays,” Martin-Manley said. “Coach Ferentz stresses special teams a lot. Even in our pre-camp meeting, he said special teams has to be an edge for us, so we’re probably going to do that this year again.”

Kickoff return is a quasi-question mark. Cotton is gone after handling the majority of kickoff return duties in 2013, but late in the season, Iowa began using running back Jordan Canzeri as a second return man. Now Canzeri is listed on the 2-deep as the Hawkeyes’ top kick returner, but the question is for how long.

Entering his junior year, Canzeri is now an even more integral part to Iowa’s ground game. Depending on how much more he’s utilized at running back, Canzeri may or may not remain Plan A on kickoff return.

“If I’m being asked to do more and be put in more positions and I have a lot of weight on my shoulders, it just means having more trust in my hands,” Canzeri said. “It’s something that I’m glad to have and I’m willing to do whatever I can.”

Should the decision be made at any point during the season to take Canzeri off kickoff return because he's playing that big of a role in Iowa's offense, younger players will likely emerge for the Hawkeyes. White immediately referenced a pair of redshirt freshmen running backs as likely replacements should this scenario unfold.

"[Canzeri's] not going to carry it 40 times a game, he's not geared that way, but I would still feel comfortable putting him there," White said. "But I'm really excited to see [Akrum] Wadley and Jonathan Parker get their hands on a ball on a kickoff return."

2014 Big Ten football previews: Michigan State (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

After discussing [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#) and [Ohio State](#), the next team I will spend time focusing on is last year's Big Ten and Rose Bowl champion, the Michigan State Spartans. Iowa does not play Michigan State in 2014.

Last season began with uncertainty in East Lansing. Michigan State won its opener over Western Michigan 26-13, but looked lackluster in doing so. It took four games for head coach Mark Dantonio to finally settle on a starting quarterback, but once he did, the Spartans began a historic 10-game run.

Michigan State won all nine of its games against Big Ten

competition – including the championship game against Ohio State – by double-figures, the first team in conference history to do so. To top it off, the Spartans played in their first Rose Bowl in 26 years and defeated defending Rose Bowl champion Stanford in that game, 24-20. Last season might not have been the best in Michigan State history, but it was one where the most was accomplished.

As the Spartans prepare for 2014, there's still enough in place that winning a second consecutive Big Ten title is plausible.

At quarterback, Connor Cook returns for his junior year after he won the job outright and allowed the Michigan State offense to ignite. Cook completed 58.7 percent of his passes for 2,755 yards and had 22 touchdowns to only six interceptions. Against Ohio State in the Big Ten Championship Game, he threw for 304 yards and three touchdowns. Given some of the playmakers he'll have at his disposal in 2014, his numbers should go up.

The Spartans return their top running back in senior Jeremy Langford, who led the Big Ten with 18 rushing touchdowns last season while also compiling 1,422 yards on 292 carries. They also return their No. 2 back in senior Nick Hill, who had 67 carries for 344 yards and one touchdown. Langford is the bell cow, but depth shouldn't be a major concern here.

One of the most encouraging signs for Michigan State in 2014 should be its receiving corps, as it just might be the best group of wideouts Dantonio has had as he enters his eighth season as head coach. This group did lose Bennie Fowler, who led the Spartans in receiving yards and touchdown catches. However, there are as many as five receivers opposing defenses will have to account for.

The best of the bunch is senior Tony Lippett, who led Michigan State with 44 catches and had just nine fewer receiving yards than Fowler with 613 of them. He also caught the winning

touchdown in the Rose Bowl win over Stanford. Finishing one catch and 100 yards shy of Lippett was Macgarrett Kings, who will be a junior. Senior wideout Keith Mumphrey will likely have a bigger role in 2014 with Fowler gone and two other receivers to watch are juniors Aaron Burbridge and DeAnthony Arnett. Michigan State also brings back sophomore tight end Josiah Price, who had 17 catches for 210 yards and four touchdowns last season.

Up front is where the questions surrounding this offense lie. The only two starters returning are sophomore left tackle Jack Conklin and junior center Jack Allen. Senior Travis Jackson is currently projected to start at left guard, while senior guard Connor Kruse and junior tackle Donovan Clark make up the right side of the line.

Defensively, the Spartans lost six starters from what was by far the Big Ten's best defense in 2013. But they also managed to keep defensive coordinator Pat Narduzzi around after he was offered the head-coaching job at Connecticut last winter. Michigan State has consistently been one of the league's top defenses under his watch and there's no reason for that to change in 2014 with elite players on all three levels.

After being named the Big Ten's top defensive lineman last season, junior defensive end Shilique Calhoun returns this fall looking to build off a year where he recorded 37 tackles and team-highs of 7.5 sacks and four fumble recoveries. The Spartans also bring back senior defensive end Marcus Rush, but have voids to fill inside. Junior Damon Knox will likely start at one of the two spots after making two starts at defensive tackle last season.

The linebacking corps took the biggest hit with leading tackler Denicos Allen and Max Bullough no longer around. But returning is senior Taiwan Jones, who recorded 67 tackles in 2013 and is capable of playing any of the three linebacker spots. Juniors Darien Harris and Ed Davis are the likely

candidates to replace Allen and Bullough to make up Michigan State's 2014 group.

In the secondary, the Spartans lost Jim Thorpe Award winner Darqueze Dennard, who was a first-round pick of the Cincinnati Bengals last spring. But this group has consistently reloaded under Dantonio and Narduzzi and will be led by senior free safety Kurtis Drummond, who tied Dennard for a team-high four interceptions last season and is also Michigan State's top returning tackler after recording 91 of them. Also returning is junior Trae Waynes, who had three interceptions in 2013.

On special teams, senior punter Mike Sadler and sophomore kicker Michael Geiger both return. Sadler is arguably the league's top punter entering 2014, while Geiger made all but one of his field goal attempts in 2013. The Spartans also bring back Kings and sophomore R.J. Shelton as return men.

Looking at the schedule, one game sticks out from the rest – Sept. 6 at Oregon. With the Ducks considered the Pac-12 favorite and with this game being played at Autzen Stadium, this is the toughest non-conference game Michigan State has played in years and possibly the toughest under Dantonio. Regardless of whether or not the Spartans win the Big Ten, this game could have an enormous say as to whether or not Michigan State can realistically compete for a spot in the new College Football Playoff.

As for the Big Ten schedule, the Spartans have an incredible home slate. They open league play Oct. 4 against Nebraska and get Michigan at home for the second straight season on Oct. 25. There's also that rematch with Ohio State on Nov. 8 that should likely decide who wins the Big Ten East (and possibly even the Big Ten, period). Indiana, Maryland and Penn State will all be tough road challenges, but none that Michigan State shouldn't be favored in.

This is a different Spartan squad, but Michigan State remains

the team to beat in this conference entering 2014. The Spartans aren't without flaws, but enough is in place for this to be the expectation among those in East Lansing.

AUDIO:

Michigan State defensive end Shilique Calhoun –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Shilique-Calhoun-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

2014 Iowa position breakdowns: Secondary

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](#), the [offensive line](#), [defensive line](#) and [linebackers](#), our seventh part examines the team's secondary.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

In looking at Iowa's last line of defense, there's a mixed bag of encouragement and concern.

The encouragement comes from having two returning starters (and really three returning starters when one considers junior Jordan Lomax), one of whom burst on the scene as a true freshman and now might be the best defensive back on the Hawkeye roster. The concern is depth and while it may not be as major a concern here as it might be with the linebackers,

Iowa's in a position where it can ill-afford to lose anyone in its secondary.

At this time last fall, Desmond King was an unknown commodity. In the season opener against Northern Illinois, his redshirt got burned when the coaches threw him in there to replace Lomax, who had injured his hamstring. From that point forward, King became a staple in Iowa's secondary. Now as he eases into his sophomore campaign having already solidified himself as the Hawkeyes' top corner, King looks to have an even bigger impact in 2014.

"There's more room for me to improve," King said. "Right now, I'm working on my speed. We have more receivers in this conference and dominant speed is the key for cornerback."

Iowa also brings back senior strong safety John Lowdermilk, who won a heated competition for the spot last season, held his own as the starter and secured the job again this fall. Lowdermilk is the Hawkeyes' returning leading tackler after compiling 78 of them in 2013.

"We're really counting on him," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said. "Players have to do things within their own personality. But the way he plays, his attitude and his effort on the practice field, etc., all those things are going to help make him be a logical leader on the defense that he needs to be. He needs to accept that."

King and Lowdermilk are two definite answers in the defensive backfield. Lomax would be the third, but here's where questions haven't been answered yet. The decision was made this spring to move Lomax from corner to free safety, which is something Iowa had done just three years prior with then-junior Micah Hyde.

At the moment, Hyde is the starting free safety for the Green Bay Packers. The irony there is Hyde's stint as the Hawkeyes' free safety lasted two games before he was moved back to

corner out of necessity, which then paved the way for Tanner Miller. Now fast forward to 2014 and the question with Lomax is similar. It's not if Lomax is capable of playing free safety – he is, just like Hyde was – but if defensive coordinator Phil Parker will be able to keep him there beyond the first few games.

As for the second corner spot opposite King, the obvious question here is who emerges as the replacement to B.J. Lowery. It's currently a competition between sophomore Maurice Fleming and junior Sean Draper, with sophomore Greg Mabin being a long shot despite receiving high praise from Parker back in the spring.

Of the three, Draper has played the most defensive snaps as he has been used in Iowa's nickel and dime packages the past two seasons. But Iowa completely abandoned the nickel last season after a loss to Michigan State where Draper was beat badly over the middle and received an earful on the sidelines shortly thereafter.

Then there's the depth. This group took a hit in June when senior Nico Law – who lost the No. 1 strong safety spot to Lowdermilk in 2013, but was being talked about as seeing the field – left the program. Sophomore Anthony Gair is listed behind Lomax at free safety, but the spots behind both King and Lowdermilk are currently filled by redshirt freshmen Malik Rucker and Kevin Ward respectively on Iowa's 2-deep.

If significant injuries are avoided and that second corner spot is solidified by someone not named Lomax, then Iowa's secondary is capable of being a productive unit in 2014. If any one thing goes awry though, there could also be trouble.

"We obviously have to prove ourselves," Lowdermilk said. "Talking's not going to prove a whole lot. You have to go out there and prove you can play and the only way you can do that is to go out there and perform on Saturdays."