

# 2013 Iowa position breakdowns: Secondary

*\*This week, HawkeyeDrive.com presents an eight-part series of position breakdowns as the Iowa Hawkeyes continue preparing for the 2013 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*

At this time last year, the secondary was being regarded as the strength of Iowa's defense. But instead of living up to that billing, the Hawkeyes' defensive backs mightily struggled in 2012. Even with a corner like Micah Hyde, who was named the Big Ten's top defensive back last season and was the only Hawkeye player taken in the 2013 NFL Draft, this was a group that surrendered numerous big plays to opposing offenses.

A rather interesting change was made this offseason, however. Darrell Wilson, who served as Iowa's defensive backs coach last year after Phil Parker was promoted to defensive coordinator, left to take a similar coaching role at future Big Ten member Rutgers. Instead of looking outside the program like he did to fill his other assistant vacancies this year, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz made the decision to have Parker return to his old role of coaching the secondary while also remaining in charge of the entire defense.

Almost right away, there was a level of excitement among Iowa's current group of DBs, most of whom were brought on board when Parker was still their position coach. Junior safety Nico Law described Parker as "a perfectionist" and said he feels like a coach on the field because of the type of

small details Parker has him and the rest of the group focus on during meetings and practice.

“He has meant everything,” sophomore cornerback Jordan Lomax said. “He really forces you to use your brain a lot, to be more mentally smart on the field and he breaks it down in film study. ‘What are we looking at? What’s the formation? What’s the offense going to come out in so we can already predetermine what play they’re going to run?’

“He’s a real great coach when it comes to teaching us the game and he’ll slow it down, just so that we know the game.”

The most likely beneficiary of Parker’s return to coaching the secondary is senior free safety Tanner Miller. After having a productive sophomore campaign in 2011, Miller’s play took a very noticeable step back last year. This is something Miller himself has acknowledged this offseason and has used as motivation for 2013 being the most veteran defensive back the Hawkeyes have.

“I have a pretty good grasp on the system. It’s just a matter of taking it to the next level,” Miller said. “I’m just watching more film and making strides from last year. I have a pretty good idea what I’m doing and now it’s just a matter of taking on a leadership role and taking these younger guys along with me so we have quite a bit of depth.”

As for the rest of the group, the pieces appear to be in place at both corner spots. B.J. Lowery returns for his senior season and the feeling among a lot of his defensive teammates right now is he’s the one player most likely to have a breakout 2013 season, primarily because of the example he displayed to them throughout the entire offseason.

“He’s a great leader and he’s always giving 100 percent effort,” Law said. “He helps me. He’s a good cover guy, so if I mess up, he’s there.”

Replacing Hyde at the other corner spot is Lomax, who probably would've seen the field much sooner if not for injuries. Interestingly enough, Lomax was actually competing with Lowery to start opposite Hyde prior to last season, only to suffer a season-ending shoulder injury before the season even began. Because Lomax played as a true freshman in 2011, he was able to redshirt last season and still has three years of eligibility.

"I'm an aggressive corner," Lomax said. "I'm very physical. I like to be able to break down a play, recognize the formation and already predetermine what play the offense will run. I like to run with wide receivers, knock the ball down and get interceptions."

Strong safety is where the most noteworthy competition is taking place. Law and fellow junior safety John Lowdermilk were listed as co-starters throughout the entirety of spring practices and have continued competing during fall camp. Law started a handful of games at strong safety late last season and will most likely emerge as the starter before Iowa's opener against Northern Illinois, but nothing has been set in stone.

Until the Hawkeye secondary shows it can limit the number of big plays given up – something it was awful at in 2012 – the questions will remain. But as a whole, this group of defensive backs has a confidence about them and that appears to stem from having Parker working more extensively with them again.

"We're just a year older as a whole secondary," Miller said. "[Lack of] communication and everything like that, I think, is what primarily led to those big plays and I think being around each other for just another year is going to help get those things straightened out.

"That's just a thing that Coach Parker stresses a lot – communication and everybody being on the same page so we don't

have those breakdowns in coverage and things like that.”

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# 2013 Big Ten football previews: Wisconsin (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

After discussing [Penn State](#), [Illinois](#), [Purdue](#) and [Indiana](#), the next Big Ten team I will spend time focusing on is last year's Big Ten Championship Game winner, the Wisconsin Badgers. Iowa will play Wisconsin on Nov. 2 at Kinnick Stadium.

There honestly might not be a more fascinating Big Ten team entering this upcoming 2013 season than Wisconsin. On one hand, the Badgers went through a coaching overhaul as Bret Bielema bolted for Arkansas and Wisconsin ended up replacing him with former Utah State head coach Gary Andersen. But on the other hand, this is also a program coming off three straight Rose Bowl appearances. Even though the Badgers finished third in the Leaders Division last season, they went to the Big Ten Championship Game because both Ohio State and Penn State were ineligible for postseason play and proceeded to crush Nebraska 70-31 that evening in Indianapolis.

Do I think Wisconsin makes it back to Lucas Oil Stadium for a chance to three-peat its title game crown? No, I don't. But there are definitely some things about this team that lead me to believe it can be a contender in Andersen's first season.

The offense is now led by first-year offensive coordinator Andy Ludwig, who joined Andersen's staff after being an

assistant at San Diego State. While the coaching is different, many of the faces on this side of the football remain familiar.

Right now, the Badgers have a three-way competition taking place at quarterback between sophomore Joel Stave, sixth-year senior Curt Phillips, and junior college transfer Tanner McEvoy, who will be a redshirt sophomore. Stave took over at quarterback in late September for Danny O'Brien (who has since transferred) and suffered a season-ending injury just as he was beginning to solidify himself as Wisconsin's signal-caller. Phillips then came in and led the Badger offense during the season's final stretch, including the clobbering of Nebraska in the Big Ten Championship Game.

My inkling here is Stave emerges as the starter for Wisconsin when it opens its season, mainly because he did nothing to warrant losing the starting job prior to getting injured and Andersen could build the offense around Stave's strengths not just this season, but for the next two seasons as well.

Now the backfield is where the biggest loss from last year's squad lies, as Montee Ball has moved on and is now playing for the Denver Broncos. However, the Badgers do return two other running backs that were vital to their success in 2012. James White rushed for 806 yards and 12 touchdowns on 125 carries last season and enters his senior season as Wisconsin's top back. But right behind him is sophomore Melvin Gordon, who had 62 carries for 621 yards and three scores and became more involved in the offense late last year. Regardless of who the Badgers have back there, they can't really go wrong either way.

The receiving corps might actually be the strength of Wisconsin's offense in 2013 though. One of the Big Ten's top wideouts returns in senior Jared Abbrederis and the Badgers also bring back senior tight end Jacob Pedersen, who was first-team all-Big Ten in 2012 and earned the league's honor

as its best tight end, period. Abbrederis led Wisconsin with 837 yards receiving on 49 catches and hauled in five touchdowns in 2012. Meanwhile, Pedersen had 27 catches for 355 yards receiving and four scores. Two other names to watch here in 2013 will be sophomore receiver Jordan Frederick and senior tight end Brian Wozniak.

Wisconsin brings back three offensive linemen from last season, but the two departures were its two best linemen in 2012. Gone are consensus first-team all-Big Ten tackle Ricky Wagner and center Travis Frederick, who was a first round pick of the Dallas Cowboys. Senior Ryan Groy started 12 games at left guard last season, but moves over to left tackle to replace Wagner. Juniors Kyle Costigan and Rob Havenstein return to the right side of the line at guard and tackle, respectively. Right now, junior Dallas Lewallen is listed at left guard and redshirt freshman Dan Voltz takes over at center. As one might also imagine, every one of these linemen weighs over 300 pounds each.

Defensively, Dave Aranda takes over at defensive coordinator after following Andersen over to Wisconsin from Utah State, where he served the same role last season. The biggest adjustment here for the Badgers will be with transitioning to a 3-4 defense under Aranda.

The transition might be coming at a decent time though because all three of the projected starters along the defensive line are seniors and two of them – end Ethan Hemer and nose tackle Beau Allen – started all 14 of Wisconsin's games in 2012. The end opposite Hemer is Pat Muldoon, who started six of the 11 games he appeared in.

As for the linebacking corps, the bad news here is Mike Taylor and his 123 tackles from last year (second-most of any Big Ten defensive player) are gone. The good news though is Chris Borland returns for his senior season following a year where he compiled 104 tackles for the Badgers. Also returning in

2013 is senior Ethan Armstrong, who started all 14 games last year and like Borland will be inside. One of the likely names to watch on the outside will be senior Brendan Kelly, who had 28 tackles and led the Badgers with five sacks in 2012.

The secondary is where the cause for concern lies as the only returning starter from last year is senior free safety Dezman Southward, who comes off a season where he was fourth on the Badgers in tackles with 69 of them. This is where younger players will have to emerge for Wisconsin if it's going to continue being the marquee program it has been in the Big Ten these past few seasons.

Sophomore Drew Meyer will handle the punting duties again, while junior Kyle French currently has the edge as the Badgers' placekicker for 2013. Abbrederis will most likely be used on punt returns again, while Gordon could be involved on kickoff return along with junior Kenzel Doe, who split time with Abbrederis on punt returns and was among Wisconsin's kick returners last season.

Looking at the Badgers' schedule and the one non-conference game that jumps out is Sept. 14 at Arizona State, a prime time game on the road against a team who will be among those contending for the Pac-12 South crown in 2013. Interestingly, Wisconsin also has a non-conference game against BYU at Camp Randall Stadium in November and as a result, opens Big Ten play at home against Purdue one week earlier than anyone else. In fact, Wisconsin will be one of just five Big Ten teams playing league games in September and the only one of those five to have played two before the calendar turns to October.

The Badgers also have to play at Ohio State on Sept. 28, another prime time game on the road. Simply put, a lot will be revealed about Wisconsin by this point in the season. Wisconsin's schedule also features home games against Northwestern and Penn State and road trips against conference rivals Iowa and Minnesota.

Again, I believe the streak of Big Ten titles ends this year, but I would've felt that way even if Bielema hadn't left to coach Arkansas, so it's not an indictment of Andersen or his coaching. To me, Wisconsin is a solid team that will face a couple of huge obstacles in 2013. That being said, this is certainly a team that can win anywhere from 7-9 games this season.

#### **AUDIO:**

Gary Andersen, Wisconsin head coach – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Gary-Andersen-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Jared Abbrederis, Wisconsin wide receiver – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Jared-Abbrederis-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

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## **2013 Iowa position breakdowns: Linebackers**

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By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

The biggest strength of Iowa's defense entering the 2013 season is its linebacking corps and for good reason. Not only



are the Hawkeyes starting a trio of fourth-year seniors in James Morris, Christian Kirksey and Anthony Hitchens, but this is the second straight season these three guys will be out there together anchoring the defense.

Morris and Kirksey found themselves seeing the field regularly as sophomores in 2011, playing alongside then-senior linebacker Tyler Nielsen. At one point that season, Kirksey made the switch from the WILL position (weak-side) to the LEO spot (strong-side) and has played there ever since. As for Morris, he played at both the MIKE (middle) and WILL spots during his sophomore campaign and ended up settling at MIKE last year, allowing the Hawkeyes to make room for Hitchens.

In Iowa's defensive scheme, the most likely player to lead the entire team in tackles (barring significant injury, of course) is the WILL 'backer. Prior to any of these three guys taking the field, former linebacker Jeremiha Hunter was regularly leading the Hawkeyes in tackles while playing at the WILL position. Then in 2011, Kirksey and Morris split time there and the two of them ended up tying for the team-lead in tackles.

Last year, Hitchens emphatically followed down that same path. Not only were his 124 tackles in 2012 a team-high, but that mark was good enough to lead the entire Big Ten. He attributed part of that to the two guys he plays alongside, mainly because of the tone they set being leaders not just of the defense, but the entire team.

In fact, Hitchens said he spent most of this offseason trying to emulate Morris as much as possible.

"James helps me out a lot and I'm actually following him to become a better leader," Hitchens said. "The whole summer, he probably didn't realize it, but everything he did, I tried to match. Through the film room, breaking huddles, bringing it up. Stuff like that just to try and get better."

As for Morris, he compiled 113 tackles last year despite dealing with a groin injury that kept him from maximizing his potential as a junior. He has battled injuries for most of the last two seasons, but refuses to use them as an excuse.

What drives Morris is what he described as "The Pursuit of Perfection." For him, it's the single motivator for him making his game better each time out on the gridiron.

"There's always little things, whether it's your position in pass coverage or your pad level when you're making contact, or where you are when you're flowing on run plays, whether it's a run scheme or a gap scheme and fitting in the right place," Morris said. "I mean, there's a million little things that you're always focused on.

"But for me, when you go out there and you know you've had an issue or there's something that a coach said, 'Hey, we can fix this. This can help us,' you just sort of pick that one thing that day and try to improve upon that."

Then there's Kirksey. Playing at LEO has given him more responsibility, but that responsibility hasn't appeared to slow him down. Kirksey still managed to finish third on the team in tackles with 95 of them last year and he also managed to lead the Hawkeyes with four fumble recoveries and two interceptions, both of which he returned for touchdowns in games against Minnesota and Indiana.

When asked about where he has made his most improvement, Kirksey said it's simply a matter of gaining experience with each day he's on the field.

"As you get older, things tend to slow down and you tend to get more comfortable," Kirksey said. "My freshman year, I was so nervous. Now, I'm a little bit more relaxed."

Looking beyond these three seniors, this group of linebackers has depth. Quinton Alston started last season's game against

Michigan. Travis Perry saw plenty of game action late in the season. And players like Marcus Collins and Cole Fisher are competing for reps. This is also a group that now has two assistants overseeing them – LeVar Woods enters his second season coaching linebackers and he is now working alongside Jim Reid, who previously was Virginia’s defensive coordinator.

Reid has quickly bought into Iowa’s defensive philosophy and believes the leadership of players like Morris, Kirksey and Hitchens has rubbed off on the guys behind them as well.

“These guys are all in,” Reid said. “I watch our guys and sit right beside them. When [Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz] speaks, they are riveted on his every word. His every word is good, it’s positive and that’s what these guys portray.”

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## **2013 Big Ten football previews: Indiana (premium)**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

So far, we have previewed [Penn State](#), [Illinois](#) and [Purdue](#). The next Big Ten team we will examine is the Indiana Hoosiers. Iowa does not play Indiana in 2013.

When I look at Indiana, I see a team that should be good enough to reach a bowl game in Kevin Wilson’s third year at the coaching helm. This is a program that showed glimpses last season of maybe turning the corner under his guidance and with the amount of experience the Hoosiers return, this is easily the best team Wilson has assembled thus far over in

Bloomington.

Now in saying this, Indiana isn't a team I expect to be neck-and-neck with the likes of Wisconsin and Ohio State in the Leaders Division this season. But the confidence Wilson exudes has rubbed off on his players to the point where everyone has bought in unlike when he first arrived there in 2011.

One of the big questions with this team will be at quarterback. Last season, Tré Roberson started out as the guy before a torn ACL during the Hoosiers' game at UMass ended his 2012 campaign. From there, Indiana found itself rotating between Cameron Coffman and Nate Sudfeld. All three signal-callers are back in 2013 and assuming Roberson is fully healthy, I would be shocked if he isn't the starter because he's the most athletic of these quarterbacks and again, this was his job prior to his season-ending knee injury.

The backfield will be led by senior running back Stephen Houston. Last season, Houston led the Hoosiers in rushing with 749 yards on the ground and 12 touchdowns. Indiana has depth at the running back spot, but Houston's body of work suggests he'll be the top guy and stay that way barring injury.

Indiana will have options in the ground game, but the receiving corps is the unquestioned strength of this offense as all of its key playmakers return. Junior wideout Cody Latimer led the Hoosiers with 805 yards receiving on 51 catches and six touchdowns, while junior Shane Wynn posted a team-high 68 receptions for 660 yards and also had six TDs. Then there's senior Kofi Hughes, who is viewed as the leader of this group. Hughes had 649 yards receiving on 43 catches and three scores in 2012. Indiana also returns its top tight end in senior Ted Bolser, who caught 41 balls for 445 yards receiving and three touchdowns. These four guys were a huge reason why the Hoosiers had the top passing offense in the Big Ten last season and there's no reason to think they can't duplicate this in 2013.

Up front, the only player it lost from last year is center Will Matte (who also happens to be the only offensive starter Indiana lost, period). He also happened to be the Hoosiers' best lineman though. The likely replacement is junior Collin Rahrig, who played the final six games of 2012 at left guard. Returning at left guard is junior Bernard Taylor, who started the first six games. The other three spots are occupied by players who started all 12 games at their respective spots for Indiana – sophomore left tackle Jason Spriggs, sophomore right guard Dan Feeney and junior right tackle Peyton Eckert. This is still a relatively young group that gained a lot of game experience last season.

The offense looks solid. It's the defense where the biggest challenges remain. If there's good news for the Hoosiers, they return nine starters on this side of the football, including the entire back seven. This is also a defense though that was the worst in the Big Ten against the run in 2012, which has to improve if Indiana's going to take that next step.

Returning along the front four are the two D-ends – junior Ryan Phillis and sophomore Zack Shaw. These two ends combined for 63 tackles and five sacks in 2012. Inside is where younger guys will likely be stepping up to fill the voids left by Adam Replogle and Larry Black.

The linebacking corps appears set at two spots for sure. Senior Griffen Dahlstrom is coming off a season where he posted 48 tackles and he current sits atop the depth chart at strong-side backer. The middle spot is held down by junior David Cooper, who was second on the Hoosiers in tackles with 86 of them last year. The weak-side spot is where there's competition between senior Jacarri Alexander and junior Chase Hoobler.

In the secondary, the leader of this group is senior strong safety Greg Heban, who led the Hoosiers with 91 tackles and three interceptions in 2012. The free safety spot is currently

occupied by junior Mark Murphy, who was fourth on the team with 70 tackles during his sophomore campaign. The corners are expected to be senior Antonio Marshall and junior Brian Williams. Marshall had a pair of picks last season, while Williams was the lone defensive back to start every game and posted a team-high eight pass break ups.

Sophomore Erich Toth returns as Indiana's punter after taking over the spot midway through the 2012 season. Placekicking duties are held down by senior Mitch Ewald, who was 42-of-43 on PAT attempts and 15-of-20 on field goal tries last year. Wynn and fellow junior wideout Nick Stoner are currently competing for punt returning duties, while Indiana looks to have sophomore running back Tevin Coleman lead the charge on kickoff returns again following a season where he averaged 23.6 yards per return and housed one in a game against Northwestern.

On top of all the experience Indiana brings back in all three phases, the Hoosiers have eight home games (yes, eight) in 2013, including all four of their non-conference games against Indiana State, Navy (who beat Indiana last season), Bowling Green and Missouri. With the Big Ten opener also at home against Penn State, that's the first five games of the season being played at Memorial Stadium. Throw in contests against Minnesota, Illinois and Purdue, and Indiana should be able to reach six wins just on games played in its own backyard.

The Hoosiers will need to take advantage of that home cooking, too. Because even though they only play four times away from Bloomington, the road slate is brutal. It features a pair of back-to-backs. The first is in October with consecutive trips to Michigan State and Michigan. Then in November, Indiana plays two straight road contests against Wisconsin and Ohio State.

Bottom line, this is a team that should win enough games to become bowl-eligible and there's potential to do as well as

8-4 if the defense makes enough improvements to complement what should be a potent Hoosier offense and if Indiana can make the most of those eight home games. The right guy's in charge and there are enough pieces in place. Now it's a matter of can Indiana take that next step in 2013.

**AUDIO:**

Kevin Wilson, Indiana head coach  
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Kevin-Wilson-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Mitch Ewald, Indiana kicker  
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Mitch-Ewald-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

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# Hawkeyes in the NFL: 2013 Preseason Week Two

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

The second week of the 2013 NFL preseason begins Thursday evening. As of Wednesday, there are currently 35 former Iowa football players listed on NFL rosters. Of note, former Iowa tight end Dallas Clark reached an agreement on a deal with the Baltimore Ravens last weekend and former offensive tackle Bryan Bulaga, a member of the Green Bay Packers, will miss the entire 2013 season after tearing his ACL prior to the Packers' first preseason game last week. It should be noted Green Bay has not placed Bulaga on injured reserve (IR) yet.

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 televisions stations in Iowa carrying preseason games of three Midwest teams – the Minnesota Vikings, Kansas City Chiefs and Green Bay Packers.

In addition, there are also six nationally televised preseason games this week including the Aug. 18 contest on Fox between the Indianapolis Colts and New York Giants. Pat Angerer is the lone Hawkeye on the Colts, while the Giants have a pair of former Hawkeyes in Brandon Myers and Tyler Sash.

#### **Thursday, Aug. 15:**

Atlanta at Baltimore, 6:30 p.m. – **Falcons:** Jonathan Babineaux; **Ravens:** Dallas Clark, Marshal Yanda

Detroit at Cleveland, 6:30 p.m. – **Lions:** Riley Reiff, Amari Spivey

Carolina at Philadelphia, 6:30 p.m. – **Panthers:** Colin Cole, Charles Godfrey; **Eagles:** Bradley Fletcher, Matt Tobin, Julian Vandervelde

San Diego at Chicago, 7 p.m. (ESPN)

#### **Friday, Aug. 16:**

Minnesota at Buffalo, 6 p.m. – **Vikings:** Christian Ballard, Chad Greenway, Seth Olsen, James Vandenberg; **Bills:** Scott Chandler

**\*TV stations in Iowa carrying Vikings/Bills:** KGAN-DT 2.1 (Eastern Iowa); WHBF-DT 4.1 (Quad Cities); KCCI-DT2 8.2 (Des Moines); KPTH-DT2 44.2 (Sioux City); KTTC-CW 10.2 (Mason City/Austin/Rochester); KSFY-DT 13.1 (NW Iowa/Sioux Falls); WKBT-DT 8.1 (NE Iowa/La Crosse)

San Francisco at Kansas City, 7 p.m. – **Chiefs:** Greg Castillo, Tony Moeaki, Ricky Stanzi



**\*TV stations in Iowa carrying 49ers/Chiefs:** KDSM-DT 17.1 (Des Moines);KTV0-DT2 33.2 (Ottumwa/Kirksville)

Tampa Bay at New England, 7 p.m. (FOX; tape delay at 11 p.m. CT on KDSM-TV in Des Moines) – **Buccaneers:** Adrian Clayborn; **Patriots:** A.J. Edds, Jeff Tarpinian, Markus Zusevics

Oakland at New Orleans, 7 p.m.

**Saturday, Aug. 17:**

Dallas at Arizona, 3:30 p.m. (NFL Network)

Tennessee at Cincinnati, 6 p.m. – **Titans:** Shonn Greene, Karl Klug; **Bengals:** Shaun Prater

Jacksonville at NY Jets, 6:30 p.m. (NFL Network) – **Jaguars:** Allen Reisner

Miami at Houston, 7 p.m. – **Dolphins:** Keenan Davis, Marvin McNutt

Green Bay at St. Louis, 7 p.m. – **Packers:** Mike Daniels, Micah Hyde, Bryan Bulaga

**\*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 (NE Iowa/La Crosse)

Denver at Seattle, 9 p.m.

**Sunday, Aug. 18:**

Indianapolis at NY Giants, 6 p.m. (FOX) – **Colts:** Pat Angerer; **Giants:** Brandon Myers, Tyler Sash

**Monday, Aug. 19:**

Pittsburgh at Washington, 7 p.m. (ESPN) – **Redskins:** Adam Gettis

*\*All times listed are Central Standard Time*

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# 2013 Iowa position breakdowns: Defensive Line

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By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

If there's a reason to believe Iowa will get better production out of its defensive line in 2013 as opposed to last season, that reason is experience.

But the talk about this group's experience goes beyond the cumulative number of games played for two significant reasons. First, there's Reese Morgan, who enters his second year coaching the Hawkeyes' D-line after previously coaching on the other side of the trenches for Iowa. That means a second year of him stressing fundamentals and technique to his players, which they all to a T said was the most noticeable difference when he took over coaching them last season.

Which leads to the second and perhaps more important point. For all the issues Iowa had with its front four in 2012, the players that provided the bulk of whatever bright spots there were are a year older, a year wiser and healthier than before.

“There’s a better chemistry amongst the D-linemen and with the defensive unit as a whole,” senior defensive end Dominic Alvis said. “We have a lot of guys who have played with each other, who have on-field experience, know what it’s like to be in a critical situation, know how to communicate. That’s huge.”

The two most veteran linemen returning are Alvis – who Morgan called “the most consistent” player right now – and junior defensive tackle Louis Trinca-Pasat and both are as healthy as they’ve ever been. A torn ACL late in the 2011 season didn’t keep Alvis from playing last year, but it hampered the amount of time he got to practice prior to that opener at Soldier Field against Northern Illinois. As for Trinca-Pasat, he revealed back in the spring that he played all of 2012 with a torn rotator cuff, an injury he said took place in 2011 before he became the fixture he is today along Iowa’s front four.

As for who starts alongside them, the likely candidates are junior defensive tackle Carl Davis and sophomore defensive end Drew Ott. After underwhelming for the majority of his first two seasons, the light came on for Davis last spring. Morgan described Davis during Iowa’s Media Day last week as “a conceptual learner” that has become more committed to working on little things and providing more effort. As a result, Davis now finds himself in a position where he could prove vital to the Hawkeyes’ success.

“I think Carl is playing a lot more confident,” Morgan said. “I think he understands where he is supposed to fit in his role, how he fits into the bigger picture.”

Then there’s Ott, who saw his redshirt get burned during Iowa’s game at Northwestern last season and from that point forward was heavily involved in the Hawkeyes’ D-line rotation. In giving his assessment of Ott, Morgan mentioned how the Nebraska native has been “a steady climber” that takes meticulous notes during position and team meetings.

“I really like Drew,” Alvis said. “He’s tough, he’s smart. He has progressed faster than anyone projected him to. I think he’s going to do big things this year.”

For the third straight year, heavy rotation is expected and the good news for Iowa this time around is there’s enough talent in place for the Hawkeyes to go 8-9 players deep along the defensive line. Sophomore defensive tackle Darian Cooper will see plenty of reps in 2013, but appears to be the odd man out in terms of starters with Davis’ emergence.

Two other names to watch inside are redshirt freshman Jaleel Johnson and junior Mike Hardy, who is also in the mix for playing time at one of the end spots behind either Alvis or Ott. On the outside, the players worth keeping an eye on are sophomore Riley McMinn and redshirt freshman Faith Ekakitie, who was originally brought in as a tackle, but began working at end this past spring.

“Just having those guys who can step up and you don’t have to worry about them, that’s huge,” Alvis said. “It develops more of a competitiveness in practice.”

In terms of age, Iowa’s defensive line is young. But with the actual amount of experience returning along both the first and second string units, there’s reason for optimism with this group in 2013.

“I think we have some guys that realistically have an opportunity to help us a little bit,” Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said.

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# 2013 Big Ten football previews: Purdue (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

After examining [Penn State](#) and [Illinois](#), the next Big Ten team we will preview is the Purdue Boilermakers. Iowa will visit Ross-Ade Stadium in West Lafayette, Ind., on Nov. 9.

I look at Purdue and see a bright future ahead with Darrell Hazell now in charge of the program. But a heavy emphasis needs to be placed on the word “future” because that’s really what it’s about with the Boilermakers. Yes, Purdue has been to bowl games the last two seasons, but what Hazell’s about to take on in West Lafayette is a rebuild.

This is a program that had an opportunity last season to make its presence felt in the Big Ten’s Leaders Division with Ohio State and Penn State dealing with postseason bans and couldn’t capitalize. The failure to do so is what ultimately cost Danny Hope his job and now Hazell, who previously coached at Kent State for two seasons and before that was the receivers coach for Jim Tressel at Ohio State, has the task of rebranding the identity into something that could behoove the Boilermakers once they’re members of the new West Division next season.

Offensively is where Purdue has the biggest makeover taking place. For starters, it has a new offensive coordinator in John Shoop, who was most recently in the same position at North Carolina. If the name sounds familiar, it’s because Shoop also had a stint as the Chicago Bears’ offensive coordinator under then-head coach Dick Jauron.

If there’s good news here, it’s that there seems to be stability at quarterback for the first time in awhile. Hope

had developed a reputation for playing multiple QBs in games. Hazell is committed right now to one guy as the starter – senior Rob Henry. Henry made a name for himself in 2010 when he led the Boilermakers in both passing and rushing as a redshirt freshman and was set to become the next big-time Purdue signal-caller before an ACL injury sidelined him for all of 2011. He saw the field in 11 games last season, but found himself behind both Caleb TerBush and Robert Marve. Now Henry's the guy again.

The biggest playmaker Purdue will have in 2013 is junior running back Akeem Hunt. He played behind Akeem Shavers all of last season, but still managed to be the Boilermakers' second leading rusher with 335 yards on 42 carries and two touchdowns. His versatility as a return guy last season allowed Hunt to lead Purdue in all-purpose yards, so he's more than capable of creating big plays for an offense that will need them.

As far as the passing game is concerned, there isn't a whole lot (at least on paper). The one notable returnee is senior wideout Gary Bush, who hauled in seven touchdown receptions but was fourth in receiving yards behind a trio of players who accounted for a combined 13 touchdown grabs in 2012. The Boilermakers will have a young receiving corps and combined with more of an effort to run the ball, a player worth keeping an eye on here is senior tight end Gabe Holmes, who had 25 receptions for 158 yards and two touchdowns a year ago.

Up front, Purdue has plenty of experience to build off of. The one major hole at center is likely to be filled by sophomore Robert Kugler, who started the last seven games of last season at right guard. The two tackle spots are currently being held down by a pair of fifth-year seniors in Kevin Pamphile and Justin Kitchens, both of whom started nine games each between the left and right side. Senior Devin Smith is moving over to left guard and the one spot remaining up in the air is right guard.

Greg Hudson is now the defensive coordinator at Purdue and much like Hazell, he has coaching ties to the Big Ten having previously served as Minnesota's defensive coordinator for five seasons under Glen Mason. The group most likely to benefit from this change is the linebacking corps, which returns a solid trio of senior Will Lucas (who was second on the team in tackles last season) and juniors Joe Gilliam and Sean Robinson.

The bigger story with the defense though is along the defensive line. Purdue has had the fortune of having players such as Ryan Kerrigan and Kawann Short manning that front four. While the loss of Short can't be overstated, the Boilermakers have a pair of D-linemen returning in 2013 that both have potential to be that next breakout player. Senior defensive tackle Bruce Gaston will command more respect inside following a year where he had 28 tackles, while junior Ryan Russell looks to build off a sophomore campaign that consisted of 37 tackles and four sacks.

As for the secondary, this group is probably the strength now of Purdue's defense. Once again, it's led by senior cornerback Ricardo Allen, who is regarded as one of the top corners in the entire conference. The Boilermakers also return a pair of safeties that started every game last season in juniors Landon Feichter and Taylor Richards. Feichter led Purdue with 80 tackles and four interceptions while Richards had six pass break ups. The corner spot opposite Allen will likely be held down by sophomore Frankie Williams, who led the Boilermakers with nine pass break ups in 2012 and will likely be used this season not only as a corner, but as the team's top punt returner.

On special teams, Purdue returns senior punter Cody Webster, who had 70 punts for an average of 42.3 yards per punt that was third in the Big Ten. A pair of sophomores – Paul Griggs and Sam McCartney– continue to battle it out for placekicking duties. In addition to Williams, the names to watch in the

return game are Hunt (again) and junior Raheem Mostert, who will likely have a bigger role there this season with Hunt now starting at running back.

The schedule this season does Hazell and the Boilermakers zero favors. Non-conference play consists of a road opener at Cincinnati and home games against Notre Dame and Northern Illinois, both of whom played in BCS bowl games last season. Sandwiched in-between that pair of games at Ross-Ade Stadium is a trip to Wisconsin, and then the next three Big Ten games after that are against Nebraska at home, at Michigan State and against Ohio State at home. There's also road trips to Penn State and Indiana during the month of November.

Again, I think Purdue made a solid hire in Hazell and over time, I believe it's a move that will pay off for the Boilermakers. But between the coaching overhaul, the facelift being done to the offense and the schedule, this is going to take time and Purdue fans are going to have to show some patience here because 2013 might not lead to anything more than a 4-8 record.

#### **AUDIO:**

Darrell Hazell, Purdue head coach  
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Darrell-Hazell-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Ricardo Allen, Purdue cornerback  
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Ricardo-Allen-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

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# 2013 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 2013 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*

The best way to summarize Iowa's offensive line a season ago would be to cut 2012 directly in half. In the season's first half, one that saw the Hawkeyes at 4-2 and even sitting at 2-0 in the Big Ten following a double overtime win at Michigan State, the offensive line played a huge part in that success.

When Iowa beat Northern Illinois, the go-ahead touchdown came on an audible that ended up being a perfectly executed run play with Damon Bullock finding the end zone. During the Hawkeyes' 31-13 thrashing of Minnesota in their Big Ten opener, the offensive line was opening up enormous holes for Mark Weisman and giving the passing game enough time for a flea-flicker to be flawless.

Then came the second half of the season, one that saw Iowa lose all of its final six contests. The losing began on an October night at Kinnick Stadium where the Hawkeyes not only got embarrassed by Penn State, but saw two starting offensive linemen – left tackle Brandon Scherff and right guard Andrew Donnal – suffer season-ending injuries over a four-play span in the first quarter. Once the offensive line was decimated, the entire Iowa offense looked discombobulated.

Mentioning these injuries isn't to excuse Iowa's offensive ineptness during the final weeks of the season and the returning starters up front would tell you as much. But with a team that historically relies on winning those battles in the trenches, not being at full strength most of last season can't go ignored.

"It was challenging, but nobody really dropped their head," Scherff said. "They always kept their head up and I always tried to do the best I could with helping people out during practice and what not. We're going to try to be the best team we could be this coming season."

This year, the offensive line has a slightly new look to it as James Ferentz and Matt Tobin have both moved on. But if Iowa can manage to stay relatively healthy up front, there's enough in place for this group to be a strength in 2013.

The most notable areas of strength are on the outside. On the right side of the line, senior offensive tackle Van Sloten returns after being the only lineman last season to start every game in one spot for the Hawkeyes. Fully recovered from a broken bone in his leg, Scherff returns at left tackle feeling as healthy as he had been prior to that injury.

"We're looking to get back to where we were," Van Sloten said at Big Ten Media Days last month. "Those moments that were great last year, we're looking to have that game after game this year."

It gets more interesting at the inside positions, however. Senior Conor Boffeli appears to be holding down the left guard spot after starting Iowa's final three games of last season at that position and getting the bulk of the first-team reps there during spring practice. The most heated competition right now is at right guard. Sophomore Jordan Walsh currently sits atop the 2-deep, but Donnal remains in the mix to reclaim the spot on the line he had prior to injuring his knee against

Penn State.

Then there's center, which is now occupied by sophomore Austin Blythe. The Williamsburg native started the majority of last season at right guard and now finds himself at the spot he originally worked at upon first joining the Iowa program as a true freshman in 2011. He feels prepared thanks in large part to playing behind and alongside Ferentz the last two years.

"Any questions I had, I was able to ask him and he'd give me a straight answer and it helped me progress as a center," Blythe said. "This year, I'm just trying to build on it, get the repetitions I need and be a better center."

Three other names to keep an eye on in terms of providing depth up front are senior Nolan MacMillan and redshirt freshmen Ryan Ward and Mitch Keppy. Ward and Keppy are both listed at 6-5 and just under 300 pounds. MacMillan has started at various points in his career, but has also been injury-plagued and has been limited in practices thus far.

The players believe the cohesion is in place to become what Blythe described as a "tougher, more physical" offensive line in 2013. The depth and experience are all there. Barring injuries, the potential is there for this to be a more solid group. But it also boils down to what the coaches and players have all harped on this offseason – consistency.

"We have the makings to have a good line," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said. "I'm optimistic, but we need to continue to develop players and we need our guys that have played to continue to get better."

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# 2013 Big Ten football previews: Illinois (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

After looking at [Penn State](#) on Sunday, we turn our attention to previewing the upcoming season for the Illinois Fighting Illini. Iowa does not play Illinois in 2013.

The first year of the Tim Beckman era at Illinois proved to be a complete disaster as the Fighting Illini, a team that had won two consecutive bowl games prior to 2012, went just 2-10 last season. The road schedule proved as brutal as it looked with Illinois not winning a single game away from Champaign, but there were also some disastrous performances inside Memorial Stadium as well in games that at this time a year ago looked winnable on paper.

While 2013 doesn't appear it'll be that much better, there's a little reason for optimism that the Fighting Illini will at least be better than 2-10 in 2013. I have to admit there are times where I hear Beckman speak and immediately find myself reminded of former Minnesota coach Tim Brewster, who coincidentally was a tight end for Illinois back in the 1980s. But there's one major difference – Beckman has at least shown in the past he can win as a Division-I coach. The talk of him being on the hot seat is unwarranted right now because it isn't as though his predecessor at Illinois left him much to work with and it should be pointed out that he has since hired a new offensive coordinator in former Western Michigan head coach Bill Cubit.

One thing Beckman stressed at Big Ten Media Days last month is that he has seniors who are committed as leaders on this team, and it starts with Fighting Illini quarterback Nathan

Scheelhaase. Illinois has depth at this position, but the starting job is Scheelhaase's to lose. That he only threw four touchdown passes in 10 games last season has to be a major concern, but unlike his back-up Reilly O'Toole, Scheelhaase is a threat on the ground. He had the second-most carries and was third in rushing yards for Illinois in 2012 and his four rushing TDs were a team-high.

But the best offensive player right now is a junior in running back Donovan Young. As a sophomore, he led Illinois in rushing with 571 yards on the ground and he also led the team with 38 receptions. This illustrates the issues Illinois had on offense last year because his production as a back diminished as the season wore on and quite honestly, a running back shouldn't be your receptions leader. The good news for the Fighting Illini here is that not only does Young return, but so does sophomore running back Josh Ferguson, who was second in rushing.

The receiving corps will be led by a pair of senior wideouts in Ryan Lankford and Spencer Harris. Lankford is the better of the two as he led Illinois with 469 receiving yards and five touchdown catches. Harris had 21 catches for 252 yards and two touchdowns. Assuming both at the very least put up similar numbers to last season, the Fighting Illini are still going to need some younger receivers to elevate their game in 2013 in order for the passing game to not remain in a stagnant funk.

Perhaps the biggest question mark though with Illinois' offense is up front. While three members of last season's offensive line return, the two that are gone were the Fighting Illini's best and they also happened to play the two most important positions on the line – left tackle and center. Junior Simon Cvijanovic spent most of last season at right tackle and makes the switch over to the left side. Junior Michael Heitz started 11 games at left guard last season while sophomore Ted Karras – great nephew of Iowa legend Alex Karras – was the only member of the O-Line to start all 12 games in

2012.

Defensively, the front four is a major concern as Illinois loses three starters from last year, including Akeem Spence and Michael Buchanan. The one returnee along the D-Line is senior Tim Kynard, who only started six of the 11 games he appeared in and compiled just 18 tackles last season. Junior Houston Bates makes the switch this year from linebacker to the D-End spot opposite Kynard. How Bates performs moving closer to the line of scrimmage will be intriguing to watch.

The linebacking corps is undoubtedly the Fighting Illini defense's strength entering 2013. Sophomore middle linebacker Mason Monheim returns after leading Illinois with 86 tackles in 2012. Also returning is another senior Beckman will rely heavily on this year in linebacker Jonathan Brown, who had an enormous season in 2011 before being hampered with injuries last year and having a huge drop-off statistically, going from 108 tackles two years ago to just 59 tackles last season.

Like the defensive line, Illinois' secondary only returns one starter in strong safety Earnest Thomas, who had 69 tackles in 2012. A name to likely emerge at one of the corner spots is sophomore Eaton Spence, who had 16 tackles as a freshman and actually started games last year against Wisconsin and Michigan. Beyond that, this is a very young group that opposing offenses will look to test early on.

Justin DuVernois returns as the Fighting Illini's punter after booming 73 punts in 2012 for a net average of 41.9 yards, good for fourth in the Big Ten among punters, while Taylor Zalewski will handle place-kicking duties after going 4-of-7 on field goal tries last season. Illinois has sophomore defensive back V'Angelo Bentley listed as its top return man for 2013 after Ferguson led the Fighting Illini with 19 kickoff returns.

Now looking at the schedule, Illinois has a pair of challenging non-conference games at home against Cincinnati

and the following week at Soldier Field in Chicago against a Pac-12 up-and-comer in Washington. These two games will give a strong indication as to how much better Illinois will be this fall because once again, the Big Ten slate is tough. The month of October features a challenging trifecta of playing at Nebraska, followed by consecutive home games against Wisconsin in prime time and then against Michigan State. The month of November features consecutive road games at Penn State and Indiana, as well as home games against Ohio State and Northwestern, both of whom clobbered the Fighting Illini last season.

I don't foresee Illinois going to a bowl game simply because the schedule's tough and there are certain areas that just seem to be too much of an unknown. I do expect the Fighting Illini though to perform better in Beckman's second season and it shouldn't surprise if they make some of these teams they play late in the season sweat a little more than they'd like.

#### **AUDIO:**

Tim Beckman, Illinois head coach  
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Tim-Beckman-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Tim Kynard, Illinois defensive end  
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Tim-Kynard-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

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**2013 Iowa position**

# breakdowns : Wide Receivers/Tight Ends

*\*This week, HawkeyeDrive.com presents an eight-part series of position breakdowns as the Iowa Hawkeyes continue preparing for the 2013 season. After previously focusing on [quarterbacks](#) and [running backs](#), our third part examines the team's group of wide receivers and tight ends.\**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

The quarterback situation is easily the biggest question mark surrounding the Iowa offense entering 2013. But when looking beyond that, the next major question with this group is how involved both the wide receivers and tight ends become for the Hawkeyes this fall.

If there's a good and bad with Iowa's group of playmakers, the good would be the amount of experience returning at the tight end spot as four of the returnees all were used heavily throughout the course of 2012. But the amount in which C.J. Fiedorowicz, Ray Hamilton, Jake Duzey and Henry Krieger-Coble were all used last season didn't necessarily translate in major production, as evidence by Iowa's offense being anemic last year and the Hawkeyes ending up with a 4-8 record.

Fiedorowicz is the most recognized of the bunch following a junior campaign where he hauled in 45 receptions for 433 yards and one touchdown. But 18 of those 45 catches, including the one score, came during Iowa's last three games. Meanwhile, Hamilton only caught two passes last year, Duzey had three catches, and all four of Krieger-Coble's receptions – including his lone touchdown of the season – came in the last two games of last season. Considering how the tight ends accounted for less than a quarter of Iowa's receptions last



season, it's fair to suggest the group was somewhat underutilized.

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz has mentioned looking to get all four tight ends, plus redshirt freshman George Kittle, involved more in 2013. If the tight end production does increase, one reason why might be having graduate assistant D.J. Hernandez coaching the tight end group this season.

"When we have our individual drills, he works a lot on that move off the line, getting off the line fast," Fiedorowicz said. "He has concentrated a lot on that because that was a big struggle for us the last few years. Catching the ball, that starts with getting off the ball.

"We're working on a lot of things in practice and hopefully it will pay off."

Then there's the current receiving corps, which is a question mark for good reason. The plus for Iowa is the return of junior wideout Kevonte Martin-Manley, who led the Hawkeyes in receiving with 52 catches for 571 yards. But a lot of that was done with Martin-Manley playing the slot, and the only other returnee with noteworthy stats is senior Jordan Cotton, who had 172 yards receiving on 12 catches. Both Martin-Manley and Cotton had just one touchdown each in 2012 and both scoring plays came during the month of September.

If Iowa's passing game is going to improve in 2013, this is an area where one of those "stories" Ferentz talks about needing to happen, well, needs to happen for the Hawkeyes. Given the task to help improve the production from the Hawkeyes' receivers is Bobby Kennedy, who replaced Erik Campbell as the position coach this offseason. Kennedy previously served as an assistant at Colorado for two years, but before that was the receivers coach at Texas for seven years while the Longhorns' offensive coordinator was Greg Davis, who enters his second season overseeing Iowa's offense.

"We've got a young group, but what I've been impressed about with these guys is they want to learn," Kennedy said. "They come ready every day in terms of meetings and the practice and they want to be good."

"It's a process of, 'Are we green and growing or ripe and running?' I think we're green and growing. We're not a finished product. It's going to take awhile."

One player that might be worth keeping an eye on early is sophomore wideout Tevaun Smith. Appearing in nine games as a true freshman last season, Smith caught three passes for 31 yards and the number of reps he was given with the first-string offense increased over the course of the year. Right now, he is listed alongside Martin-Manley as Iowa's No. 1 wideouts during fall camp.

"I think I've gained a lot more knowledge of the game from last year," Smith said. "I was able to understand the offense more and I was able to read defenses. That has definitely helped throughout the past year."

There are three other receivers who might be needed to elevate their games for the Hawkeyes in 2013 – senior Don Shumpert, sophomore Jacob Hillyer and junior college transfer Damond Powell. The addition of Powell could prove to potentially pay huge dividends. Playing at Snow Community College in Utah last season, Powell had 41 receptions for 1,231 yards and 14 touchdowns.

"We wouldn't typically recruit a junior college player unless we felt they had that opportunity, so that motivated us there," Ferentz said in regard to how early Powell could see the field in 2013.

Whether it's the tight ends carrying the bulk of the passing game or the receivers, one thing is certain. Unless players from either group emerge from the get-go and can stay consistent with production, the passing offense will continue

to be perceived as a weakness holding the Hawkeyes back.