

# 4/23/2014: Iowa spring football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the new opening on his coaching staff prior to his coordinators' press conferences on Wednesday, April 23, 2014, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The Wednesday afternoon during the Iowa Hawkeyes' final week of spring practice has traditionally been used as one of the few opportunities where both coordinators speak to the media. While this Wednesday was no different with Greg Davis and Phil Parker conducting press conferences, the biggest topic of discussion inside the Hayden Fry Football Complex had nothing to do with what either of them had said.

Last week, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz was left with an opening on his coaching staff following the announcement that recruiting coordinator Eric Johnson – who also served as a co-defensive line coach along with Reese Morgan and had spent all 15 previous seasons as a member of the Iowa staff – was

leaving to pursue a different career path. Hours after the news broke on April 19, [Johnson revealed via Twitter](#) he and his family are moving to Tennessee and that he will be running a Culver's in the town of Hendersonville.

Before either of his coordinators spoke Wednesday, Ferentz took the dais and fielded questions, the majority of which were about the coaching vacancy. He mentioned how there is "a high probability" that whoever fills Johnson's void would be designated the program's recruiting coordinator, but also made clear there was no immediate timetable in place to fill the vacancy.

For the time being, co-linebackers coach Jim Reid will assume the recruiting areas of St. Louis and Indianapolis that did belong to Johnson prior to his departure.

"The biggest thing is to make sure we have our areas covered," Ferentz said. "The other thing that has changed is now we are allowed to have nine guys on the road as opposed to seven. So what we have been doing in the past with seven guys, we still have eight available, so it's not like a big shift.

"If this were January or December, it would be a little bit different. But I think it's pretty easy and it allows us to be more methodical with the process and that's our plan right now."

For Ferentz, the biggest criteria isn't so much that the new assistant has an area of expertise as a recruiting coordinator, but that it is able to fit in right away with everyone and everything else already in place.

"We are just trying to get people that we really think are going to be great fits here, embrace our culture and feel comfortable working with our staff and our staff working with them," Ferentz said. "Then we can tailor the job description or they can learn whatever they have to learn on the run."



Iowa offensive coordinator Greg Davis gives his assessment of the Hawkeye offense through 12 spring practices during a press conference held Wednesday, April 23, 2014, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

### **Davis details assessment of offense**

As Davis begins his third season as Iowa's offensive coordinator, the system he brought with him from Texas appears to be firmly in place. One of the reasons why is the experience returning at the quarterback position with both starter Jake Rudock and back-up C.J. Beathard.

Davis said Wednesday he was pleased with the developments both signal-callers have made this spring. He mentioned how discussions have taken place about possibly rotating in Beathard for a series or two per game next fall to give him more experience. With that said however, there's no doubt in Davis' mind that Rudock has done enough to remain the Hawkeyes' starter.

"First of all, he has a great understanding of everything that's going on," Davis said of Rudock. "Nothing rattles him. He handles himself like a quarterback and he could make all the throws. He has just got more experience.

"We are very pleased with C.J., but we feel like at this

point, Jake is definitely the guy.”

As for other areas of the offense, Davis acknowledged his biggest concern being the depth along the offensive line, even though he said he likes the strides made this spring by the five starters up front. He also mentioned how his greatest emphasis is currently on improving scoring in the red zone, mainly practicing situations where Iowa might have 1st-and-Goal from the 7, 8 or 9-yard lines.

“We had nine 1st-and-Goals at the 7 to 9 and we scored five touchdowns,” Davis said, referencing back to 2013. “That’s not good enough.”

One of Iowa’s most reliable offensive players in goal-line situations last season was C.J. Fiedorowicz. With Fiedorowicz no longer in the picture, how the Hawkeyes use their tight ends – especially early in the season – could be a telltale sign.

Midway through the 2013 campaign, Davis began using what Iowa calls “13” personnel, where three tight ends are on the field at once. It’s a grouping Davis said with hindsight that he wishes he used earlier in the season whenever the backfield was empty and that he would like to continue using it in the 2014 offense.

Should the “13” grouping continue being used, the question then becomes whether Henry Krieger-Coble or George Kittle is used as that No. 3 tight end alongside senior Ray Hamilton and junior Jake Duzey.

“The more things that the tight ends can do and feel comfortable doing, the more that personnel grouping can be a part,” Davis said. “Henry has done a really good job. Henry has great ball skills and is, you know, comfortable moving around in motion, inserting himself. George still lacks some strength. It’s an area that he has to improve on, but he can stretch the field more than most tight ends in the country.

“So there’s a place for all of those guys to get in there.”

From a philosophical standpoint, Davis said the “perfect number” would be Iowa having a 55-45 run-pass ratio. With the passing game, the Hawkeyes currently have five redshirt freshmen competing for 1-2 spots in the receiver rotation. Of the bunch, Davis singled out Derrick Willies as having “a really good spring.” But someone not from that group that he also mentioned performing well right now is sophomore Matt VandeBerg, who was one of the few players to burn a redshirt last season as a true freshman.

“Matt is a guy that can play more than one spot,” Davis said. “When you’re playing with tempo and for the receivers to play in the run and pass game the way you want, you have to rotate some players in there.”



Iowa defensive coordinator Phil Parker gives his assessment of the Hawkeye defense through 12 spring practices during a press conference held Wednesday, April 23, 2014, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

### **Parker weighing defensive personnel options**

As a defensive coordinator, Parker has one thing in mind – finding the best 11 players to play. No matter the scheme

being used, having the right personnel remains his top priority.

When Iowa sticks to its base 4-3 look, most of the puzzle seems easy to solve. Parker said point blank senior linebacker Quinton Alston has the MIKE spot held down and he's comfortable with junior defensive end Drew Ott and senior defensive tackles Louis Trinca-Pasat and Carl Davis up front. Also included in that group would be sophomore cornerback Desmond King, who started 12 games as a true freshman last season after filling in for an injured Jordan Lomax.

Beyond those five players and spots, Parker has plenty of options. For that other end spot opposite Ott, there's a 3-way battle brewing with senior defensive end Mike Hardy currently atop the 2-deep. Competing with Hardy are juniors Riley McMin and Nate Meier. Like defensive line coach Reese Morgan did last week, Parker mentioned Meier as someone pushing for the opportunity to be used more on first and second down and not just as a situational end on third down like he was a season ago.

"One thing about Nate Meier is we know he's tough and he was a little bit underweight last year and learning the position a little bit," Parker said. "I think he has really gotten better playing blocks.

"I think Nate put on a little bit of extra weight, is a little bit more active. It's going to be a good battle."

In the linebacking corps, the likely favorites to start alongside Alston are sophomore Reggie Spearman at WILL and junior Travis Perry at LE0. But the linebacker that had Parker raving at the end of his press conference Wednesday was redshirt freshman Josey Jewell, who is now listed behind Perry as the No. 2 LE0 'backer.

"You just watch the film and you just watch the guys running around on tape and you see him tracking guys down," Parker

said. "Somewhere, he's going to have to fit in our system because when you give that much effort and you attack the football the way he does and make plays the way he has done, he's going to probably show up.

"Does he know everything right now? Not yet, but he still has a long way to go."

In the secondary, there's Lomax making the move over to free safety. Parker said Lomax still has a few areas of improvement to make in order to be what he wants as a safety, but also mentioned Lomax having the commander-like traits – being vocal and acting like an assistant on the field – he believes are needed to be a free safety.

With Lomax making that switch, the question becomes who starts at corner. Right now, the 2-deep lists sophomore Maurice Fleming and junior Sean Draper as co-starters. But Parker also said sophomore Greg Mabin is very much in the mix.

"He's a very tall, lengthy guy and he has made a lot of plays for us and he can run," Parker said. "He has not had very much playing time and he has not tackled very much, but he has made some progress there. It's going to be a challenge to figure out."

Then there's the matter of what does get used on third down. In the early part of last season, Parker wasn't afraid of using nickel defense. But during the second half of the season is when Iowa began incorporating its Raider package, which featured two additional linebackers, one of which lined up as a 3-4 defensive end.

Parker said he intends to continue using the Raider package, but that there might be different variations used in 2014. Which variations he uses will be based off his initial mindset of having the best 11 players on the field.

"You have to adapt," Parker said. "The package is still going

to be there. It's just what personnel grouping is it going to be. Is it going to be four linebackers on the field or five linebackers like we had last year? Is it going to be five DBs on the field, still have three linebackers, or four linebackers on the field and two defensive linemen?

"The thing that's going to be the challenge is to see what way we are going to go."

**TRANSCRIPTS (courtesy of UI Sports Info.):**

[Kirk Ferentz/Greg Davis/Phil Parker \(4/23/2014\)](#)

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## **4/23/2014: Iowa player audio with photos (premium)**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – On Wednesday, six members of the Iowa football team spoke to the local media to discuss how things have gone with only three spring practices remaining.

Below is audio from four of the six players who spoke – senior defensive end Mike Hardy, junior quarterback Jake Rudock, sophomore cornerback Maurice Fleming and senior offensive tackle Brandon Scherff:





Mike Hardy, April 23, 2014

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Mike-Hardy-4232014.mp3>



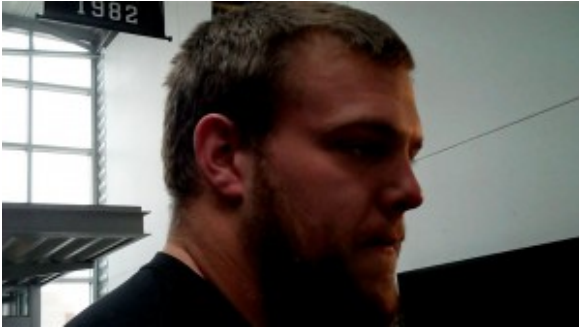
Jake Rudock, April 23, 2014

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Jake-Rudock-4232014.mp3>



Maurice Fleming, April 23, 2014

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Maurice-Fleming-4232014.mp3>



Brandon Scherff, April 23,  
2014

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Brandon-Scherff-4232014.mp3>

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## **2014 Iowa spring football 2-deep (as of 4/23/2014)**

### **OFFENSE:**

WR 4 Smith, 18 Willies

LT 68 Scherff, 75 Boettger

LG 79 Welsh, 52 Myers

C 63 Blythe, 57 Gaul/58 Simmons

RG 65 Walsh, 74 Keppy

RT 78 Donnal, 64 Croston/73 Ward

TE , 82 Hamilton, 87 Duzey

WR 11 Martin-Manley, 89 VandeBerg

WR 17 Hillyer, 22 Powell

QB 15 Rudock, 16 Beathard

RB Weisman/33 Canzeri, 5 Bullock/29 Daniels, Jr.

FB 38 Cox, 42 Plewa

**DEFENSE:**

DE 95 Ott, 34 Meier

DT 71 Davis, 97 Cooper

DT 90 Trinca-Pasat, 67 Johnson/56 Ekakitie

DE 98 Hardy, 94 McMinn

OLB 39 Perry. 43 Jewell

MLB 52 Alston, 50 Gilson/47 Kenny

WLB 6 Spearman, 36 Fisher/47 Kenny

LCB 28 Fleming/7 Draper, 13 Mabin

SS 37 Lowdermilk, 21 Law

FS 27 Lomax, 12 Gair

RCB 14 King, 2 Rucker

**SPECIAL TEAMS:**

P 98 Kornbrath, 16 Kidd

PK 1 Koehn/93 Haffer

LS 97 Kluver

PR 11 Martin-Manley

KR 33 Canzeri

HOLDER 98 Kornbrath

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# 2014 Spring Football position breakdowns: Special Teams (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

With a new look to special teams in 2013 under running backs coach Chris White and co-linebackers coach LeVar Woods, there were some ups and downs for the Iowa Hawkeyes in football's third phase. The pluses included having a reliable senior kicker in Mike Meyer and wideout Kevonte Martin-Manley had a game against Western Michigan where he returned two punts for touchdowns.

But there were also minuses last season. There were two instances where opposing teams were able to execute fake punts (although Iowa did stop a fake punt attempt by Nebraska late in the year) and it led to head coach Kirk Ferentz wondering allowed whether the Hawkeyes should even bother returning punts. Also, Iowa had issues with kickoff coverage during the early part of the season that did ultimately iron out.

Entering 2014, certain aspects need to be addressed. First and foremost, the Hawkeyes need to settle on a kicker. Marshall Koehn looks to be the likely replacement for the outgoing Meyer, but he finds himself competing with Alden Haffer, a junior college transfer who has a powerful leg. Adding to this is Iowa having a new long snapper in Tyler Culver, who replaces the outgoing Casey Kreiter.

As for punting, Connor Kornbrath got the opportunity to handle

punting full-time last season, but his play was termed "inconsistent" by both Ferentz and White. Kornbrath is now competing against a junior college transfer in Dillon Kidd and there may not be an answer here until the first week of the season whether Kornbrath remains the starting punter.

In the return game, look for Martin-Manley to remain the team's top punt returner. Yes, he had a costly muffed punt against LSU in the Outback Bowl, but he also has the trust of the coaching staff in terms of when to return a punt and when to just let the ball hit the turf and roll. There may also be instances where two punt returners are on the field and in those instances, sophomore receiver Riley McCarron will likely be back there again.

The bigger question though when it comes to returns is who is back deep on kickoffs. When Jordan Cotton wasn't the lone returner, he was joined by running back Jordan Canzeri and for now, Canzeri looks to be the top kickoff returner. But should Canzeri become a bigger part of the Hawkeye offense in 2014, it wouldn't be worth risking injury with him on special teams.

With that in mind, this is where one of the redshirt freshmen receivers Iowa has at its disposal could see the field. Derrick Mitchell, Jr., has been a part of the return rotation on punts this spring and with his speed, this could be his niche until he further develops as a wideout. Another possibility could be Maurice Fleming in the event he gets beat out at corner by Sean Draper. Either way, the possibilities seem endless right now.

The last thing is kickoff coverage, which again, improved over the course of the season last year. This is normally where younger players not seeing the field on offense or defense make their marks and Iowa will continue to need more of that in order to be successful in 2014.

For now, the questions are there. But there's still plenty of

time for the Hawkeyes to find answers.

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# Johnson leaves football staff

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

Eric Johnson has left the Iowa football program to pursue opportunities outside of football, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz announced in a release issued by the UI Saturday morning.

Johnson first joined Ferentz's staff as a graduate assistant in 1999 when Ferentz first replaced former Iowa coach Hayden Fry. From there, Johnson held numerous titles during his 15-year tenure as a Hawkeye assistant, including recruiting coordinator for the past 10 years. Johnson was a co-defensive line coach alongside Reese Morgan since 2012 and before that coached tight ends and linebackers between 2003-2011.

"I know Eric and his family have given this decision great attention and thought and we all wish them the best as they move forward," Ferentz said in a statement.

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# 2014 Spring Football position breakdowns: Secondary (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

With defensive coordinator Phil Parker opting to also take on his old title of defensive backs coach last season, there was improvement in the way Iowa's secondary played in 2013. Some of that improvement came from players expected to lead the way. This group also saw a true freshman rise up into arguably one of the Hawkeyes' better defensive players now entering 2014.

The big story this spring has been the position change done by junior Jordan Lomax. Before getting injured in Iowa's season opener last year, he was the player expected to fill the void left by Micah Hyde. Following that injury, Lomax saw Desmond King permanently take what was once his starting spot at cornerback opposite B.J. Lowery.

With Lowery gone, one figured Lomax would just start opposite King at corner this coming fall. Except the decision was made to have Lomax move over to free safety and fill the void left by the outgoing Tanner Miller. Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said he envisions this being a long-term move, but that was also the same school of thought with Hyde when he moved to free safety in the spring of 2011, only to move back to corner after two games.

Because of this, there's now a competition at corner opposite King at corner between junior Sean Draper and sophomore Maurice Fleming. Draper has a slight edge because he has more playing experience, primarily as the nickel whenever Parker

used that formation. But Draper also saw himself benched after giving up a long touchdown pass while playing nickel against Michigan State. Not only was he not on the field again on defense in 2013, but Iowa abandoned the nickel completely in favor of the Raider package.

Assuming Draper is the guy, his development is vital. Not just for himself in terms of playing time, but also for Iowa because how he plays at corner will ultimately determine whether or not the Hawkeyes keep Lomax at free safety.

The other thing Lomax's move to free safety does is (at least more than likely) ensure that senior John Lowdermilk will remain the starter at strong safety, a position he started every game at last season after beating out Nico Law for the No. 1 spot. Had Lomax stayed at corner, it may have opened up the possibility of Lowdermilk moving over to free safety and Law starting at strong safety. In the event Lomax does move to corner, this is something to possibly keep an eye on.

Then there's King, the one obvious certainty with this unit after the way he played as a true freshman. An argument could be made that opposing offenses would rather attack him than Lowery, but nevertheless, King held his own when he saw the field last season. Now that he gets this spring to work on his game, there's no reason to think he might elevate himself into the conversation of being one of the Big Ten's top corners for the next few years to come.

Other defensive backs that will remain part of the conversation beyond this spring are Anthony Gair, Greg Mabin and Malik Rucker, a redshirt freshman who managed to crack the spring 2-deep. Along with Fleming, these are the next group of guys that would be behind the players most likely starting in the secondary when Iowa plays Northern Iowa on Aug. 30.

A lot remains to be seen with this group, but like the linebackers, they too would benefit immensely from stout play



along the defensive line. It will be interesting to see how much more (or less) aggressive Parker is with his scheme defensively in 2014 because of what he has at his disposal with this secondary.

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## **2014 Spring Football position breakdowns : Linebackers (premium)**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

In 2013, it was the linebacking corps that was counted on to not only lead the Iowa Hawkeye defense, but the entire football team. There was good reason for this as it consisted of a senior trio that all had their best individual seasons last year.

This group is different now though. Gone are James Morris, Christian Kirksey and Anthony Hitchens and make no mistake, all three losses are big. Two of them were team captains and all three made critical plays for the Hawkeyes throughout the course of 2013.

But even with these absences, the coaching done by both Jim Reid and LeVar Woods would suggest not all is doom and gloom with a group consisting of three entirely new starters.

Anchoring down the middle is senior Quinton Alston, who is the most experienced of the three projected starters. Alston started a game in 2012 against Michigan in place of an injured Morris and got to see the field more frequently last season

when Iowa began using its Raider package.

For all the limited experience Alston has, he's the most likely defensive player outside of defensive tackles Louis Trinca-Pasat and Carl Davis to emerge as a leader on this defense in 2014. Two facets of Alston's game that Reid said excited him were the confidence he started to show once he saw more playing time and the dedication he has shown in the film room this offseason and making sure everyone knows where to line up.

The other player Reid said he is excited for is sophomore Reggie Spearman, who will be filling the void at WILL left by Hitchens. Like Alston, Spearman also saw the field as part of the Hawkeyes' Raider look, but did so lined up as a defensive end and in a 3-point stance. The potential with Spearman is high, but what will be interesting to see unfold between now and late August is how he adjusts to being straight up while playing more snaps.

As for LEO, junior Travis Perry will have enormous shoes to fill in replacing Kirksey, a player Woods believes changed the way Iowa should use LEO 'backers moving forward. Perry saw playing time on defense during the Hawkeyes' game against Nebraska in 2012, but has mainly been used on special teams during his career. Now he's being asked to replace a three-year starter who also had a knack for finding the ball and taking it away from opposing offenses.

Something else to watch with this group will be depth. Redshirt freshman John Kenny is a player who could end up playing that role Alston played in the Raider last season and ultimately become his replacement at MIKE in 2015. Another player to potentially keep an eye on in this group is junior Cole Fisher. He might not ever start for the Hawkeyes, but his name has consistently been featured on Iowa's 2-deeps over the past couple of seasons and he would be the next man in if anything happened to either Perry or Spearman.

This group might not play at the same level last year's trio did. But with that in mind, the potential is there for it to be decent, especially if the defensive line in front of it is able to meet its capabilities.

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## 4/16/2014: Iowa spring football notebook



Iowa offensive line coach Brian Ferentz discusses the Hawkeyes' offensive line situation during a press conference held Wednesday, April 16, 2014, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – There's nothing secretive about the importance senior left tackle Brandon Scherff has on the 2014 version of the Iowa Hawkeyes. Following a similar path to former Iowa left tackles such as Robert Gallery, Bryan Bulaga

and Riley Reiff (all of whom were NFL first round draft picks), Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz didn't hesitate calling him the Hawkeyes' biggest recruit of 2014 shortly after Scherff opted to return for his senior year.

On Wednesday, Iowa offensive line coach Brian Ferentz got to speak publicly about Scherff and didn't mince any words while doing so. Like he would about any of his offensive linemen, the younger Ferentz mentioned areas of Scherff's game where he could improve. After doing that however, he made perfectly clear what he thinks of his top lineman.

"If this guy doesn't get recognized for what he is moving forward, I think it would be a real travesty," Brian Ferentz said. "There's not a better offensive lineman in college football. That's my opinion and I think you guys know after two years, I don't say things like that lightly."

Ferentz then added after watching various SEC offensive linemen while preparing for last season's Outback Bowl against LSU, he felt Scherff stacked up with every single one of them.

"In my estimation, he was certainly one of the best football players in the country last year," Ferentz said. I don't know if he deserved or received the proper recognition for that. I would expect him to this year. If he doesn't, I don't know what people are watching or what they value or what's important."



Iowa defensive line coach Reese Morgan discusses the

Hawkeyes' front four during a press conference held Wednesday, April 16, 2014, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

### **"Prideful Simplicity"**

While Brian Ferentz was speaking, defensive line coach Reese Morgan entered the Hayden Fry Football Complex auditorium. Waiting to conduct a press conference of his own Wednesday, Morgan sat down and observed Ferentz taking questions.

One of the questions asked to Ferentz while Morgan was present had to do with Morgan and his impact on the Iowa program since becoming an assistant in 2000. As he spoke about the man who was his offensive line coach while playing for the Hawkeyes, Ferentz mentioned Morgan's role in recruiting. He brought up how Morgan was the lead recruiter for many of the past Hawkeyes to play for his dad that came in unheralded and not only managed to leave their marks on Iowa, but in the NFL as well.

He also mentioned the role Morgan played in recruiting some current Hawkeyes, including Scherff, sophomore wideout Matt VandeBerg and redshirt freshman offensive lineman Boone Myers.

"You're not going to find a guy who's more Iowa than Coach Morgan. You're just not," Ferentz said. "Humble, hard-working and he has a saying – he believes in 'prideful simplicity.'

Morgan joked that the phrase was something he got from a book or just randomly wrote on a white board one day. He even said mantras like "prideful simplicity" sound overrated to him. Yet in saying all of that, he also didn't completely dismiss the credence of that message.

"I think as teachers, our job is to keep things as simple as possible," Morgan said. "Everybody has got a job to do and

yeah, we [the defensive line] want to make a tackle. But if we take care of our technique, that's going to free up our linebackers. That's going to help our cornerbacks.

"When we get that opportunity, we take advantage of it."

### **Ferentz discusses social media**

One obvious difference between Brian Ferentz and his father comes with social media. Brian joked Wednesday how if Kirk had a Twitter account, he would never be the one tweeting from it. Meanwhile, Brian (along with assistants Chris White and Bobby Kennedy) tends to use it more frequently for recruiting purposes.

But there have also been instances when Brian has used Twitter to express certain viewpoints. Just before Iowa played Wisconsin last November, he posted a tweet critical of the game day experience at Kinnick Stadium. Last week, he used it to express disappointment after another media outlet accidentally used a picture of former wide receivers coach Erik Campbell to accompany a story about current linebackers coach LeVar Woods.

When asked about his social media use, Brian Ferentz didn't shy away and also didn't hold any regrets.

"As far as my tweet last year, what I tweeted was exactly what I meant. I had a pretty good understanding of what might happen and I shared that information publicly," Ferentz said. "I don't tweet about politics. I don't tweet about other things like that. I made a comment about something that I thought was relevant.

"Has it improved? We'll find out when we get to August."

The other noteworthy off-field topic asked of him Wednesday had to do with his job status. Last February, NFL.com reporter Gil Brandt tweeted that Ferentz was likely to leave his

father's Iowa staff and become the Houston Texans' offensive line coach. This came shortly after the Texans hired former Penn State coach Bill O'Brien, who was one of Ferentz's colleagues while serving on Bill Belichick's coaching staff in New England.

Sensing that the question would be asked Wednesday, Ferentz wasted no time responding once the word "NFL" came from a reporter's mouth.

"I never made a public comment and the reason was very simple. There was no need to make a public comment," Ferentz said. "I'm the offensive line coach of the University of Iowa and I'm very happy to be the offensive line coach of the University of Iowa. I have a great job."

### **Which D-lineman follows paths of Trinca-Pasat, Davis?**

Since Morgan took over coaching the defensive line in 2012, one of the positives with his group has been a different player each season maturity before his eyes, as well as everyone else's eyes. Two seasons ago, it was Louis Trinca-Pasat, a player Kirk Ferentz said before the 2012 season once considered leaving during the team's prep for the 2011 Insight Bowl against Oklahoma. Last season, it was Carl Davis, a player Morgan said was immature before last spring when he began to take on more of a leadership role among the entire team.

Now, Trinca-Pasat and Davis are not only the faces of Iowa's defensive line, but of the entire defense. So with that in mind, the question becomes who's the next D-lineman to follow that path?

When asked about this Wednesday, Morgan seemed willing to lump every one of his position players into that category. But just as he was about to simply list off names, Morgan spoke glowingly about junior defensive end Nate Meier, a player who doesn't have any starting experience and isn't even listed as

a starter right now on Iowa's spring 2-deep.

But even without that starting experience, Meier did get his opportunity to see the field last season whenever Iowa employed its Raider package and used him and linebacker Reggie Spearman as the two D-ends.

"I would say that Nate Meier is a tough son of a gun," Morgan said. "He's really doing things where he's a 235-240 pound guy taking on a 300-pound tackle and I think he has demonstrated to us that he can be an every down guy.

"He might be a guy that's kind of in that category."

At the moment, the most heated competition along the defensive line is at the end spot opposite junior Drew Ott. Meier is among the candidates for that spot – as are senior Mike Hardy and junior Riley McMinn – and Morgan said Meier "has earned the trust and confidence" of the coaching staff.

Morgan also added that while seven defensive linemen (including Meier) made up the rotation up front last season, there are currently as many as 11 players this spring vying to be part of that rotation in 2014.

"These guys have an opportunity to get on the field and be successful," Morgan said. "But they have to demonstrate it in practice situations, scrimmage situations."

**TRANSCRIPTS (courtesy of UI Sports Info.):**

[Brian Ferentz/Reese Morgan \(4/16/2014\)](#)

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# 2014 Spring Football position breakdowns: Defensive Line (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

Much like Iowa's linebacking corps was considered the leaders of the Hawkeye defense last season, the same can be said about its front four entering 2014.

Coaches always talk about how everything starts up front on both sides of the football and while the defensive line does have some questions that need to be answered between now and late August, there's security at the two tackle spots. Carl Davis and Louis Trinca-Pasat both enter their senior seasons and both played instrumental roles in Iowa's 2013 turnaround.

Davis was a player who improved before everyone's eyes last spring and his maturity showed on the field last year. As for Trinca-Pasat, he only continued down the path he started in 2012 and didn't have an injured shoulder hampering him in 2013. As long as these two stay healthy, they will be counted on to pave the way like Mitch King and Matt Kroul did in 2008 playing at those two tackle spots.

Much like the situation facing the Hawkeyes' offensive line however, development will prove essential in 2014 at those two spots held by Davis and Trinca-Pasat. Junior Darian Cooper has been a consistent part of the rotation and is the most likely defensive tackle to take that next step in becoming a leader for the group in 2015.

Two other players to possibly watch are a pair of sophomores who came to Iowa highly touted – Jaleel Johnson and Faith

Ekakitie. At defensive tackle specifically, Johnson is probably more likely to see the field because of his size. But Ekakitie has versatility that could allow him to see more snaps.

Once again though, the biggest questions concerning this group are at defensive end. Now given that junior Drew Ott started 12 games in 2013, there's no reason to think he won't remain a starter at his end spot. But it's the spot vacated by the outgoing Dominic Alvis where the competition is fierce.

On one hand, there's senior Mike Hardy. When Alvis was dealing with back issues last season, Hardy finally got his opportunity as the next man in and made the most of it. Right now, it appears to be his spot to lose. Two others who are going to push him – and Ott, for that matter – are Riley McMinn and Nate Meier.

McMinn has frequently appeared on the 2-deep, but has also dealt with injuries throughout his career, so how much of a push he makes will be determined by his health. As for Meier, he originally moved from running back to linebacker, then got his chance at seeing the field as a defensive end when Iowa ran its Raider package late last season.

If the Hawkeyes ran a 3-4 look more frequently, Meier would probably be out there more. But in a 4-3, his snaps probably won't be as frequent next season. One thing to keep in mind is if Hardy does win the job, McMinn and Meier will simply be competing for that spot again in 2015.

Regardless of how everything shakes out at the end spots though, two things are certain. One is with Reese Morgan coaching these guys, fundamentals are still going to be stressed and if Iowa sticks with the rotation it has used since 2011, knowing the basics will play a role in how much some of these reserves see the field. The other thing, again, is the leadership. Just with the presences of Davis and

Trinca-Pasat, this is the group that will be counted on in 2014 as far as how good the Hawkeyes will actually be.

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## **2014 Spring Football position breakdowns: Offensive Line (premium)**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

Assessing Iowa's offensive line right now is actually more difficult than it would appear. On one hand, it's a group that does return plenty of experience from previous years. But on the other hand, the importance of player development here is probably being understated.

Let's start with the one thing going for the Hawkeyes, which is left tackle Brandon Scherff deciding to return for his senior season. Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz called Scherff "his biggest recruit" following Scherff's decision not to leave early for the NFL and there's good reason. One look at the entire Hawkeye roster and it's clear that Scherff is not only the best player on this team, but perhaps its most important player as well. His presence alone answers some of the concerns that may exist with this unit.

Iowa also has the luxury of returning two other starters in juniors Austin Blythe and Jordan Walsh. After spending most of his playing time at guard as a redshirt freshman, Blythe transitioned back to the center position he was originally brought in to play last year and held down the starting spot.

Besides Scherff playing left tackle, Blythe remaining at center is one of the safest bets.

As for Walsh, he started at right guard last year and played the majority of the snaps there, rotating most of the season with Andrew Donnal. Walsh now has the opportunity to hold this position down for good and the question with him is stamina. Can Walsh handle playing 15-20 additional reps per game than he had before?

The two spots that needed to be filled were right tackle and left guard with Brett Van Sloten and Conor Boffeli both graduating. Ferentz made clear at the start of the spring period he wants to play Donnal (who is a senior) at tackle, a position he always foresaw him playing.

Donnal, like Scherff, suffered a season-ending injury against Penn State in 2012. Unlike Scherff however, Donnal's recovery was more of a challenge, which may have played a role in him not playing as many snaps in 2013. Now that he's the guy filling a major void up front left by Van Sloten, his durability will be critical.

The other major factor with Donnal starting at right tackle is both tackles are seniors. Right now, Cole Croston and Ryan Ward – the guys currently behind both seniors on the 2-deep – don't yet look like players who can just come in and take over in the event either Scherff or Donnal gets hurt this fall. This is where development will be critical for offensive line coach Brian Ferentz.

As for left guard, this is the one spot that might be most up for grabs. Right now, redshirt freshman Sean Welsh appears to be the guy who starts. If he does, having experienced players like Scherff and Blythe on each side of him should help with his transition. Eric Simmons is another player to potentially watch here, as he'll be entering his senior season this fall. At this moment, it appears to be Welsh's spot to lose,

depending on how much he develops into the left guard role between now and fall camp.

The good thing for Brian Ferentz is he has depth to work with, more so inside than outside. If Scherff and Donnal both manage to stay healthy this fall, this is an O-line that should get better week-to-week over the course of the 2014 season. Whatever concerns exist are valid however and again, development (across the board, really) will be essential in whether Iowa can successfully build off an 8-5 campaign.