

# 2012 Big Ten football previews: Minnesota (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

After examining [Penn State](#), [Ohio State](#), [Indiana](#), [Illinois](#), [Purdue](#), [Wisconsin](#) and [Northwestern](#), we now shift our attention to the Minnesota Golden Gophers. Iowa plays its Homecoming Game against Minnesota at Kinnick Stadium on Sept. 29.

By no means is Minnesota a team that's going to compete for the Legends Division crown this year, but it's definitely a team on the rise entering Jerry Kill's second season as head coach.

The Golden Gophers went 3-9 in 2011, but managed to beat both Iowa and Illinois for the second consecutive year to account for their two victories in Big Ten play. Given the landscape of the conference and given the improvements that are typically made between the first and second years of coaching regimes, Minnesota might have a realistic opportunity to reach the six-win plateau this year and make its first bowl appearance since 2009.

One position of stability with this offense comes at quarterback with MarQueis Gray returning for his senior year. As a full-time quarterback his junior season, Gray threw for 1,495 yards, eight touchdowns and eight interceptions. He also rushed for 966 yards on 199 carries and had six touchdowns on the ground. Now that he's more comfortable in the Golden Gophers' offense, I expect his numbers across the board to be better this fall.

At running back, Minnesota will likely be using a rotation that features sophomore Donnell Kirkwood and junior James

Gillum, who transferred to Minnesota from Mississippi Gulf Coast Junior College. Playing at the JUCO level last year, Gillum rushed for 1,042 yards and nine touchdowns. Kirkwood appeared in all 12 of the Golden Gophers' games in 2011, rushing for 229 yards on 63 carries and posting three touchdowns.

The receiving corps took a big hit losing Da'Jon McKnight, who was far and away Minnesota's best wideout last season. McKnight had team highs of 51 catches, 760 yards receiving, and four touchdowns. No other receiver on the team even had 20 catches, 200 yards receiving and/or three touchdowns.

Senior Brandon Green is the most experienced wideout of the bunch, catching 15 passes for 190 yards and one touchdown. Junior Malcolm Moulton and sophomore Devin Crawford-Tufts are two receivers who could see playing time this fall, as well as freshman Andre McDonald, who was one of the top 2012 recruits from the state of Minnesota. Senior John Rabe will likely be the Golden Gophers' tight end this fall after catching four passes for 36 yards and two touchdowns as a junior.

Up front, Minnesota has a group of offensive linemen that could be fairly decent this fall. Junior Ed Olson returns at left tackle and his younger brother Tommy Olson is in contention to start right next to him at left guard. Two other names to keep an eye on along the line are sophomores Zac Epping and Caleb Bak. Epping started the last eight games at right guard while Bak started the last four contests of 2011 at left guard in place of Tommy Olson.

Along the defensive line, the Golden Gophers are experienced at both end spots. Sophomore Ben Perry started all 12 games last season at one of the D-end spots, while senior D.L. Wilhite started nine games at the other. Wilhite only posted 16 tackles, but was second on the team with three sacks. Perry recorded 15 tackles in 2011. Junior Ra'Shede Hageman has a good shot at being one of the starting defensive tackles after

recording 13 tackles last year as a reserve.

Minnesota's top two returning tacklers from last season – seniors Mike Rallis and Keanon Cooper – are both back to lead the linebacking corps in 2012. Rallis will once again take over the middle spot after recording 83 tackles as junior. Cooper will be one of the Golden Gophers playing on the outside following a season where he compiled 77 tackles in nine games. Senior Spencer Reeves is the favorite to command the other outside spot, filling the shoes of the late Gary Tinsley, who tragically died in April just over four months after playing his final game in a Minnesota uniform.

The secondary receives a huge boost this year with the return of senior cornerback Troy Stoudemire, who was granted a medical redshirt after only appearing in four games last season. Stoudemire had 24 tackles and two interceptions for the Golden Gophers prior to his season-ending broken arm injury. In 2010, he had 37 tackles, an interception, five pass break ups, two forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries. He also handled Minnesota's kickoff return duties and was highly regarded as the best return man in the entire Big Ten through the course of his career, so his return will be beneficial on multiple fronts.

Junior Brock Vereen also returns after recording 67 tackles and starting at cornerback in all 12 of Minnesota's games last year. However, Vereen has switched over to play safety this year, making senior Michael Carter a possibility to start at the other cornerback spot opposite Stoudemire. Sophomore Derrick Wells will likely start at safety alongside Vereen.

Minnesota has a battle going on at kicker between junior Chris Hawthorne and senior Jordan Wettstein. Hawthorne was the kicker for the first seven games and was 6-of-9 on field goal tries. Wettstein was a perfect 6-of-6 with field goals, which included a long of 51 yards that came in the regular season finale against Illinois. Both had nearly identical numbers

with kickoffs. Junior Dan Orseske returns to handle punting duties for the third consecutive season. In 2011, Orseske averaged 37 yards per punt and had 32 of his 57 punts either land inside the opponents' 20-yard line or fair caught.

The Golden Gophers' schedule features a slate of non-conference games that are all winnable, starting with a road trip to UNLV on Aug. 30 before playing three straight at home between New Hampshire, Western Michigan and Syracuse. Minnesota could conceivably be 4-0 when it enters Kinnick Stadium looking to win its third straight Floyd of Rosedale battle with Iowa. If the Golden Gophers are going to be a bowl team in 2012, wins in non-conference will be important to obtain.

Following that Big Ten opener against the Hawkeyes, Minnesota gets Northwestern and Purdue to visit TCF Bank Stadium in the month of October, with a road game at No. 12 Wisconsin sandwiched in-between. November will be brutal with a trip to Illinois, followed by Legends Division contests against No. 8 Michigan, at No. 17 Nebraska, and against No. 13 Michigan State to conclude the regular season.

I honestly don't think it's out of the realm of possibility that the Golden Gophers go 6-6 and play in something like the Little Caesars Bowl this season. If Minnesota can start 4-0, all it would need to do is win two games in Big Ten play, which is exactly what it did last season when it was considered one of the worst teams in the entire conference.

I expect the Golden Gophers to be better in 2012, mainly because I believe Kill is a far better head coach than his Minnesota predecessor. It might not show in the Big Ten standings, but this team is on the rise and should it find bowl eligibility this season, things might continue to get better in the years ahead.

**AUDIO:** [Minnesota QB MarQueis Gray](#)

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# 2012 Iowa position breakdowns: Special Teams

*\*This week, HawkeyeDrive.com presents an eight-part series of position breakdowns as the Iowa Hawkeyes continue preparing for the 2012 season. After previously focusing on [quarterbacks](#), [running backs](#), [wide receivers and tight ends](#), the [offensive line](#), [defensive line](#), [linebackers](#) and the [secondary](#), our eighth and final part examines the team's special teams.\**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

More times than not, special teams play tends to be what differentiates teams that win seven games per season from those that win 10 games and have a shot at playing in a BCS bowl game.

When Iowa went through its memorable 2009 season that concluded with a trip to the Orange Bowl, there were signature moments such as blocking a pair of field goals in seven seconds against UNI and Adrian Clayborn's blocked punt against Penn State that he returned for a go-ahead touchdown. In 2010, Iowa played horrendously on special teams in a loss to Arizona and then the season's signature moment came when Wisconsin executed a fake punt that wound up leading to the game-winning touchdown in a one-point Hawkeye loss.

Last year, Iowa found itself caught off guard when Minnesota executed an onside kick attempt for the second straight season against the Hawkeyes and eventually overcame a 11-point fourth-quarter deficit to beat Iowa, 22-21. The Hawkeyes also

had a fumble come on a kickoff return in the second quarter of last year's loss to Michigan State that was ensued by the Spartans scoring two touchdowns and taking a 31-7 halftime lead.

Looking ahead to 2012, one of the more interesting dynamics in play this season will be with kickoffs. All kickoffs now take place from the 35-yard line instead of the 30, and touchbacks now result in the return team getting the ball on its own 25-yard line instead of its own 20. Teams will still start on their own 20 however if a touchback occurs on a non-kickoff (i.e. punt, fumble out of the end zone, etc.).

"Our outlook on it is just to kick the ball as well as we can, both height and distance," junior kicker Mike Meyer said. "I think it'll probably bring more confidence up."

Meyer will likely handle all kicking duties again in 2012, including kickoffs, and confidence is something that could grow for him there this fall. As a sophomore, Meyer compiled 66 kickoffs, but only four of those were downed for touchbacks.

The Dubuque native made all 44 of his extra-point attempts in 2011, but was only 14-of-20 on field goals, including missing four of his last six attempts. Meyer said he has placed an emphasis this offseason on becoming more consistent from a variety of ranges. Of his 14 made field goals, only eight of them were from 30 yards or further.

"He's going into his third year now as a performer and we really expect him to be playing at a higher level," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said.

The biggest special teams question mark Iowa has entering this season is who handles punting duties. Senior John Wienke slowly made the transition from quarterback to punter last season and will handle holding duties on field goals and PATs regardless of who wins the punter competition.

But if Iowa's open practice on Aug. 18 is of any indication, true freshman Connor Kornbrath will likely be the team's punter the first time it lines up to punt in the season opener against Northern Illinois. During the scrimmage portion of that practice, Kornbrath handled all the punting duties.

Senior cornerback Micah Hyde is the favorite to continue lining up as Iowa's punt returner, a role he handled all of last season. Other names to watch for should anything happen to Hyde would include receivers Keenan Davis and Kevonte Martin-Manley, as well as junior cornerback B.J. Lowery. All four have practiced returning punts during open practices.

As for kickoff returns, Davis and Martin-Manley are among those with experience. Iowa needs to replace at least one return man with Jordan Bernstine – who returned 30 kickoffs last season – now playing in the NFL for the Washington Redskins. This is one area head coach Kirk Ferentz said during Iowa's Media Day could feature some true freshmen. If that ends up being the case, one name to watch could be wide receiver Maurice Fleming.

“Basically anybody that wants to do it and shows that they can do it is going to get an opportunity,” Ferentz said.

Prior history indicates that special teams will at some point this season dictate whether Iowa can realistically compete for a Big Ten crown or find itself finishing 7-5 again or perhaps worse. If the Hawkeyes are going to make any noise in 2012, it's an area that needs improvement.

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# 2012 Big Ten football previews: Northwestern (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

After previewing the Big Ten's Leaders Division consisting of [Penn State](#), [Ohio State](#), [Indiana](#), [Illinois](#), [Purdue](#) and [Wisconsin](#), our first look at the Legends Division features the Northwestern Wildcats. Iowa visits Ryan Field in Evanston, Ill., on Oct. 27.

Last season looked like it could be one of promise for Northwestern. A very experienced Wildcat team began the season 2-0 despite not having the services of quarterback Dan Persa. But an early season loss to Army snowballed into a five-game losing streak. Northwestern did manage to reel off four straight wins – including a 28-25 stunner at Nebraska – but would end up 6-7 after losing yet another bowl game, a 33-22 loss to Texas A&M in the 2011 Meineke Car Care Bowl of Texas.

As the Wildcats prepare to embark on their 2012 season, I have mixed feelings about this team, one that I thought could be a dark horse at this time last year. Some things about Northwestern have me thinking it can be a decent squad in a brutal Legends Division. But the more I think about it, the more I feel the Wildcats take a step back and find themselves in jeopardy of a fifth straight bowl appearance.

Northwestern has a quarterback in junior Kain Colter that should excite the Wildcat fan base. Colter started the first three games of last season while Persa continued to recover from his Achilles' injury and found himself throwing at least one pass in all but three contests in 2011. He completed 55-



of-82 pass attempts for 673 yards and tossed six touchdowns to only one interception.

Now here's the concern: Among Wildcat players returning in 2012, Colter also has the most rushing and receiving yards. He proved to be versatile enough to 654 yards and nine touchdowns on the ground, as well as catch 43 passes for 466 yards and three receiving touchdowns. In other words, he accounted for 18 of Northwestern's touchdowns last year.

If there's a good thing here for the Wildcats, it's that Colter is the clear cut No. 1 quarterback and has worked as such throughout the offseason. But when your quarterback also has more rushing yards than any current running back and more receiving yards than any other wide receiver, that doesn't speak well to the depth of your entire offense.

Junior running back Mike Trumpy is coming off an ACL injury that caused him to miss Northwestern's last 10 games, while sophomore Treyvon Green is currently recovering from a chest injury. If either isn't ready for the Wildcats' opener, junior Venric Mark could be starting initially. Green had 362 yards rushing and four touchdowns last season, while Mark had 104 yards and one touchdown on the ground. The best case scenario would be if Trumpy could emerge, but regardless, fluidity at this position could be likely.

The receiving corps took a huge hit losing both Jeremy Ebert and Drake Dunsmore to graduation. Ebert led the team in receiving with 75 catches for 1,060 yards and 11 touchdowns, all of which were fourth or higher among all Big Ten wideouts. Dunsmore, who thrived in Northwestern's "super back" role, had 45 catches for 522 yards and six touchdowns en route to winning the conference's Kwalick-Clark Tight End of the Year award in 2011.

Senior wideout Demetrius Fields will fill the void left by Ebert after a 32-catch season that included 382 yards

receiving and three touchdowns, but who replaces Dunsmore at super back features intrigue. One other significant name to watch for is junior Kyle Prater, who has been deemed eligible for this season after transferring from USC. Prater was a highly-touted recruit in high school and if he's able to live up to his billing, it would be an enormous boost for Colter and this Wildcat offense.

Good news along the offensive line is that the entire left side features players who started every game in 2011 for Northwestern. Senior Patrick Ward started at right tackle the past two years, but switched over to left tackle in the offseason. Senior Brian Mulroe returns at left guard and sophomore Brandon Vitabile is back at center. For an area that had plenty of continuity last year, this is one that has promise if the right side of the line can get shored up.

The Wildcats return a pair of defensive ends that featured one starting in each game last season. Junior Tyler Scott started Northwestern's first six games at left end, while senior Quentin Williams started the last seven at right end. Both are expected to occupy those respective spots again. Meanwhile, senior Brian Arnfelt did get to start at defensive tackle in the bowl game against Texas A&M and junior Will Hampton made one start at defensive tackle against Eastern Illinois. If both start up front, Northwestern will have a veteran front four.

The strength of this defense comes in its linebacking corps, which is led by senior David Nwabuisi. He was third on the team with 84 tackles and made starts at both middle and outside spots. Junior Damien Proby had 60 tackles and took over the middle linebacker position halfway through the season for Nwabuisi. If both are starters, which is likely, Proby will remain in the middle and Nwabuisi on the outside. Sophomore Collin Ellis started nine games last year and is in competition for the third spot with fellow sophomore Chi Chi Ariguzo.

Northwestern lost first-team all-Big Ten safety Brian Peters and cornerback Jordan Mabin off last year's team, leaving two big questions at those spots. Sophomore safety Ibraheim Campbell had 100 tackles as a redshirt freshman last season, which led the entire team. Senior Demetrius Dugar looks to occupy one of the corner spots in 2012, while junior Davion Fleming is a likely candidate to replace Peters at safety alongside Campbell.

As far as special teams is concerned, the Wildcats return plenty of experience. Junior punter Brandon Williams tied for third in the Big Ten averaging 40.8 yards per punt last season, doing so on 52 attempts. Northwestern also brings back two kickers – senior Steve Flaherty and junior Jeff Budzien. Flaherty handled kickoff duties while Budzien was used for field goals and PATs. The return game features Mark, who had 915 yards on kickoff returns in 2011.

Northwestern is the only Big Ten team that plays three BCS opponents in the non-conference part of its season, opening with a game at Syracuse, followed by consecutive home games against Vanderbilt and Boston College. While all three are winnable contests, this will not be easy for the Wildcats. The home opener against Vanderbilt in particular will be telling as the Commodores were in the Liberty Bowl last year.

The Big Ten portion begins with Indiana at home and consecutive road trips to Penn State and Minnesota. It shouldn't be surprising if Northwestern enters its Oct. 20 home game against No. 17 Nebraska with a 7-0 record, but the odds of this actually happening are slim. It's not whether the Wildcats lose any of their first seven games, but how many of them they lose because they can't afford another early-season clunker like the one they had at Army in 2011.

Getting Nebraska and Iowa both at Ryan Field in late October helps, but Northwestern couldn't have a more brutal stretch to end the season, playing consecutive road games at No. 8

Michigan and No. 13 Michigan State, followed by its home finale against an Illinois squad who had won the last two head-to-head match-ups.

How the Wildcats start 2012 will be real indicative of how this season unfolds. The potential's there, but realistically speaking, this might prove to be a daunting season for head coach Pat Fitzgerald and his team.

**AUDIO:** [Northwestern QB Kain Colter](#)

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## 2012 Iowa position breakdowns: Secondary

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By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

Experience, energy, enthusiasm.

All three of these words begin with the letter 'e.' All three of these words could also be used to describe the Iowa secondary as the Hawkeyes prepare for their 2012 season opener against Northern Illinois.

Let's start with experience. Yes, this is a unit that saw Shaun Prater and Jordan Bernstine both get drafted by NFL

teams last spring. But returning this fall are two players that have become dependable on this Hawkeye defense.

First there's the most experienced member of this secondary, senior cornerback Micah Hyde. Unlike last year where he spent the entire offseason working at free safety only to play it twice before moving back to corner, Hyde has spent all of this year at his natural position and is considered one of the top cornerbacks in the entire conference.

Then there's the player who was the biggest beneficiary of Hyde's move back to corner, junior free safety Tanner Miller. Once he cracked the starting lineup, Miller remained on the field in 2011. He and Hyde tied for a team-high three interceptions, but Miller had the most memorable pick of the bunch – a 98-yard interception return for a touchdown in Iowa's 41-31 win over Northwestern back on Oct. 15.

"It's really priceless," defensive backs coach Darrell Wilson said of both players' veteran leadership. "Tanner's kind of the quiet leader. He just leads by example and makes sure everyone is doing the right thing. Micah is a little more vocal. Not overly vocal, but just enough. He's only going to say something when it's meant to be said."

While Hyde and Miller are sure bets to start, the secondary also features experience in its depth with players such as seniors Greg Castillo and Tom Donatell. Castillo started Iowa's first two games last season at corner before being benched following Hyde's move back to the position. Donatell returns to the secondary this season after temporarily switching over to linebacker and make two starts there against Northwestern and Indiana due to injuries.

Interestingly, both Castillo and Donatell have fathers who are NFL assistants – Greg's father Juan is the Philadelphia Eagles' defensive coordinator, while Tom's father Ed is the San Francisco 49ers' defensive backs coach.

“Those are two of the smartest kids on the team, to be honest,” Hyde said. “They know every position on the defense. Even though they only play strong safety and corner, they know what they’re supposed to do and that’s not a big surprise.”

As for the other two positions in the defensive backfield, one appears to be set while the other has a stiff competition ongoing. The position that appears set is at the corner opposite Hyde, as junior B.J. Lowery is projected to be the starter. Lowery missed the Hawkeyes’ Kid’s Day practice on Aug. 11 with an ankle sprain, but returned in time for the team’s second open practice Aug. 18 and worked with the first unit.

At strong safety, it appeared sophomore Nico Law would get the first crack at starting. However, Donatell has gotten the bulk of the reps with the first team defense during fall camp. The two have switched off between first and second units, but Parker hasn’t tipped his hand either way on which one will start in the season opener.

With younger players like Lowery, Law and redshirt freshman cornerback Torrey Campbell vying for playing time at nickel, that’s where the “energy” could be provided.

“Even from the spring, you can tell that they’ve been in the film room, they’ve been working on their footwork and things like that,” Miller said. “All of us have been working in the offseason and we’re getting better day in and day out.”

Overall, there seems to be an “enthusiasm” with this group, as it’s being regarded as the team’s biggest strength defensively. Part of the enthusiasm also comes from knowing that with what’s in place along the secondary, blitzing could be more frequent this fall.

“The way we can run, I think we’re very athletic back there,” Parker said of his secondary. “So it’s probably going to give us opportunities to put guys on islands a little bit more if

that's what we choose to do."

Those three e's – experience, energy and enthusiasm – make up why this group of defensive backs is one that could be fun for Iowa fans to watch in 2012.

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## **8/18/2012: Iowa football practice video**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The Iowa Hawkeyes made their final practice of fall camp open to the public at Kinnick Stadium on Saturday. Below are videos from the 11-on-11 portions, as well as post-practice interviews with defensive coordinator Phil Parker and offensive coordinator Greg Davis.

Two points of note: 1. The practice included simulated crowd noise throughout the entire scrimmage portion, so it would be wise to keep the volume to a minimum before viewing the three scrimmage videos. 2. Some of the video footage includes freshman running back Barkley Hill (No. 3 in the white jersey), who later injured his knee towards the very end of Saturday's practice.

**PHIL PARKER:**

**GREG DAVIS:**

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# 2012 Big Ten football previews: Wisconsin (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

After examining [Penn State](#), [Ohio State](#), [Indiana](#), [Illinois](#) and [Purdue](#), we now take time to discuss the upcoming 2012 season for last year's Big Ten champion, the 12th-ranked Wisconsin Badgers. Iowa will not play Wisconsin in 2012.

Look, I get the hype and understand why there's so much of it surrounding this Wisconsin football program right now. Two straight Big Ten crowns, two straight trips to Pasadena. Sure, the Badgers didn't win in either of those Rose Bowl appearances they've had the past two seasons, but they've proven to be the class of the Big Ten.

But this year, I'm not seeing it. I understand that with No. 18 Ohio State and Penn State having postseason bans that the Leaders Division is all but locked up for Wisconsin in 2012. However, I don't believe this Badger team will be elite – at least not as elite as the 2010 and 2011 squads were.

Wisconsin head coach Bret Bielema found himself hiring six new assistant coaches after a chunk of his staff from last season followed former offensive coordinator Paul Chryst to Pittsburgh, where Chryst is now the head coach. Of the six new assistants, four of them are on the offensive side of the ball including offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Matt Canada, who came over to Wisconsin after serving as an assistant at Northern Illinois last year.



The one spot Wisconsin doesn't have a new offensive assistant is with the running backs, which seems appropriate given the season Montee Ball had for the Badgers in 2011. A Heisman Trophy finalist, Ball tied Barry Sanders' all-time NCAA record of 39 all-purpose touchdowns last season – 33 of those 39 scores came on the ground – and surprised many by announcing he'd return for his senior year. Ball might not rush for as many touchdowns in 2012, but expect him to be the focal point of the Wisconsin offense once again.

Joining him in the backfield will be junior James White, who followed up his phenomenal freshman season in 2010 with 713 yards rushing and six touchdowns last year. This is undoubtedly the strength of the Wisconsin offense.

As for the biggest question mark, it comes at quarterback, where the Badgers are looking to fill the void left by Russell Wilson. After transferring from North Carolina State, Wilson lived up to the hype that came with him to Madison. He threw for 3,175 yards and 33 touchdowns to only four interceptions. He also rushed for 338 yards and six touchdowns and found himself picked in the third round of the 2012 NFL Draft by the Seattle Seahawks.

Right now, the Badgers have a 3-way battle going to see who will be quarterback between senior Curt Phillips, redshirt freshman Joel Stave and junior Danny O'Brien, who transferred from Maryland last year and was granted eligibility to play in 2012. Ultimately, I think O'Brien wins this job much like Wilson did at this time a year ago. Phillips winning the job would be quite a story since he has missed each of the last two seasons due to injury. Whoever does win this job though, I can safely say, won't bring the same dynamic Wilson brought to this team.

The receiving corps no longer features Nick Toon, who had team-highs of 64 receptions and 10 touchdowns as a senior. Two returning players whose roles will elevate in the passing game

are junior wideout Jared Abbrederis and junior tight end Jacob Pedersen, both of whom had eight touchdown catches last year. Abbrederis caught 55 passes for a team-high 933 yards receiving, both of which lead all returning conference wideouts. Pedersen compiled 30 receptions for 356 yards. Wisconsin will need to find a second receiver to complement both of these guys.

Up front, the Badgers continue to live up to their billing with offensive linemen that all weigh over 300 pounds. The best of the bunch this year is senior Ricky Wagner, who will be playing at left tackle in 2012. Wagner made the watch list this summer for the Outland Trophy and looks to follow in the footsteps of Bielema-era left tackles like Joe Thomas and Gabe Carimi. However, Wisconsin lost three starting linemen off last year's squad including center Peter Konz and guard Kevin Zietler, both of whom were picked in the first two rounds of the NFL Draft. Junior Travis Frederick started 13 games last season and will make the move to center to replace Konz, leaving questions at both the guard spots and right tackle.

The defensive line returns a pair of experienced players in senior Brendan Kelly and junior Ethan Hemer. Two names to watch for as far as who joins them along the front four are junior defensive tackle Beau Allen and junior D-end David Gilbert. Allen appeared in all 14 games last year and was second on the team with four sacks. Gilbert had three sacks playing in just four games.

If there's a strength on this defense, it comes in the linebacking corps. The Big Ten's top two leading tacklers in 2011 both return for the Badgers – senior outside linebacker Mike Taylor and junior middle linebacker Chris Borland. Taylor led the conference with 150 tackles, while Borland was second with 143 tackles, 19 of which were for a loss of yardage. Together, this duo combined for 4.5 sacks, four interceptions, eight forced fumbles, eight pass break ups and Taylor had a pair of fumble recoveries.

Wisconsin returns senior safety Shelton Johnson and senior cornerback Marcus Cromartie, but needs to find replacements for safety Aaron Henry and cornerback Antonio Fenelus. Johnson had 54 tackles, four pass break ups and four interceptions while Cromartie comes off a season where he had 47 tackles and three pass break ups. A name that will likely emerge in Henry's place is junior Dezmen Southward, who had 35 tackles in 2011.

On special teams, the Badgers will have both a new punter and new kicker in 2012. While it remains to be seen who will handle punting duties for Wisconsin, sophomore Kyle French is expected to handle kicking duties this fall. French was 3-of-5 on field goal tries as a freshman and had four kickoffs that averaged 56.8 yards per kick. The return game is set however with Abbrederis, who led the Big Ten last year with an average of 15.8 yards per punt return.

Wisconsin should be 4-0 entering its Big Ten opener at No. 17 Nebraska on Sept. 29. Playing at Oregon State could be challenging, and the Badgers do play a Utah State squad that went bowling last year, but neither have enough to pull off upsets. While many will talk about that Nebraska game, the one that will pretty much decide whether the Badgers should just already be crowned Leaders Division champions comes Oct. 13 at Purdue. Wisconsin has won each of the last six meetings it has had with the Boilermakers, but Purdue seems to be the one challenge among eligible teams in the division and the game's not at Camp Randall Stadium.

The Badgers wouldn't play No. 8 Michigan unless they meet in the Big Ten title game and they have the luxury of its Big Ten Championship rematch with No. 13 Michigan State being at home after playing the Spartans each of the past two seasons in East Lansing, Mich.

However, if Wisconsin does find itself on its way to Indianapolis by the time it plays its last two games against

Ohio State and Penn State, both games could be prove more difficult than anticipated. The Buckeyes could realistically enter Camp Randall Stadium with a 10-0 record despite being ineligible for postseason play. As for that game at Penn State, it's the Nittany Lions' last regular season game. While Penn State doesn't have the firepower offensively to hang with Wisconsin, that game is essentially the Nittany Lions' bowl game and I would expect them to come out swinging from the start, no matter the circumstance.

Can the Badgers win the Big Ten again and make it a Pasadena three-peat? Sure. Will they? I have my doubts, but who knows? Maybe Wisconsin doesn't take that step back I foresee it taking in 2012.

**AUDIO:** [Wisconsin RB Montee Ball](#)

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## **2012 Big Ten football previews: Purdue (premium)**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

After discussing [Penn State](#), [Ohio State](#), [Indiana](#) and [Illinois](#), the next Big Ten team I will spend time focusing on is the Purdue Boilermakers. Iowa will play Purdue on Nov. 10 at Kinnick Stadium.

If there's one team that perfectly fits the "dark horse" label in the Big Ten this upcoming season, it's the Purdue Boilermakers. Coming off a seven-win campaign capped off by beating Western Michigan 37-32 in the 2011 Little Caesars

Bowl, it seems clear to me that fourth-year head coach Danny Hope has this team heading in the right direction.

Add in the fact that neither Ohio State nor Penn State can participate in any postseason play this season and this might be as good an opportunity as Purdue will have at winning the Leaders Division and playing down the road in Indianapolis at the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 1.

This team has a boatload of starters returning on both sides of the football and perhaps the most intrigue, once again, comes at the quarterback position. Hope made clear at Big Ten Media Day last month that senior Caleb TerBush would be the starting signal-caller. At this time last season, TerBush was third behind both Rob Henry and Robert Marve, only to find himself starting all 13 of Purdue's games in 2011 after Henry tore his ACL and Marve missed the first two games of the season.

When Marve was healthy, both he and TerBush were frequently used in the Boilermaker offense. TerBush completed 61 percent of his passes for 1,905 yards and threw 13 touchdowns to six interceptions, while Marve threw for 633 yards in 10 games and had four touchdowns to five picks. Marve was granted a sixth year of eligibility by the NCAA this offseason, turning what looked to be a two-quarterback carousel this year with Henry returning to now a three-quarterback carousel. TerBush will start, but don't be shocked if either Marve or Henry gets used from time to time.

At running back, Purdue hopes to have senior Ralph Bolden healthy by its season opener on Sept. 1. Bolden, who was the Boilermakers' leading rusher last season with 674 yards and six touchdowns on 148 carries, tore his ACL in early December, three weeks before Purdue played in the Little Caesars Bowl. If Bolden can't go, the Boilermakers also bring back senior Akeem Shavers and sophomore Akeem Hunt, who were the team's second and third leading rushers one year ago.

The receiving corps lost Justin Siller, who led the Boilermakers with 50 catches last season. However, senior Antavian Edison, junior O.J. Ross and sophomore Gary Bush all return to lead this group in 2012. Edison posted a team-high 584 yards receiving on 44 catches, while Ross had 33 receptions for 356 yards and Bush 29 catches for 210 yards. All three tied for a team-high three touchdown catches in 2011. Purdue also has a pair of tight ends in senior Crosby Wright and junior Gabe Holmes. Wright had 16 catches for 223 yards and a pair of touchdowns, while Holmes caught 11 passes for 133 yards and had one score.

The Boilermakers have experience returning on the offensive line, but it's the one group that has the biggest question mark surrounding it on offense. The two most experienced are a pair of seniors – center Rick Schmeig and guard Peters Drey. Junior Justin Kitchens will likely play at one of the tackle spots. The name to keep an eye on though is sophomore Devin Smith, who could wind up emerging as the left tackle.

Headlining the defense up front is senior defensive tackle Kawann Short, who was first-team all-Big Ten last season and is arguably the best defensive tackle in the entire conference entering this season. As a junior, Short compiled 54 tackles, 17 of which were for a loss of yardage, as well as 6.5 sacks. Listed at 6-3, 310 pounds, this guy clogs up the middle and could very easily post better numbers in 2012. Two other defensive linemen worth noting are junior defensive tackle Bruce Gaston and sophomore defensive end Ryan Russell. Gaston had 30 tackles and four sacks, while Russell recorded 33 tackles.

The linebacking corps lost leading tackler Joe Holland, but returns its second and third-leading tacklers from last season – senior Dwayne Beckford and junior Will Lucas. Beckford recorded 91 tackles and looks to command the middle linebacker spot this fall, while Lucas had 82 tackles and will be on the outside.

In the secondary, Purdue features a solid duo of corners in junior Ricardo Allen and senior Josh Johnson. While Johnson led the team with nine pass break ups, Allen is the one considered to be one of the Big Ten's best. After a breakout freshman campaign in 2010, Allen recorded 81 tackles and led the Boilermakers with three interceptions.

Special teams might be where Purdue has its biggest question mark though with Carson Wiggs no longer around. Not only did Wiggs handle both the punting and kicking duties for the Boilermakers, but he was also regarded as one of the overall team leaders. Last year, Wiggs was 19-of-25 on field goal attempts with four of those misses coming from beyond 40 yards. He also had 71 kickoffs and had 17 of his 23 punts land inside the opponents' 20-yard line. Eventually, the punting duties were handed over to Cody Webster, who will be a sophomore. Webster averaged 42.9 yards per punt on 45 attempts and landed 11 of them inside the 20.

The game to note is Purdue's second game of the season – Sept. 8 at Notre Dame – as it might be a strong indicator of whether or not the Boilermakers take that next step in 2012. Should Purdue record its first win over the Fighting Irish in South Bend since 2004, it should enter Big Ten play with a 4-0 record.

While the month of October is brutal on paper, it's also what makes this season look so opportunistic for the Boilermakers. Their first two Big Ten games are both at Ross-Ade Stadium against Michigan and Wisconsin in consecutive weeks. Win either or both of those games – especially the Oct. 13 contest against the Badgers – and Purdue's chances of winning the Leaders Division would skyrocket dramatically. It would also well-equip the Boilermakers for the ensuing five-game stretch that features four games away from West Lafayette.

I'm not saying Purdue will dethrone Wisconsin in the Leaders, but this is one team no one in the Big Ten should sleep on.

This is easily Hope's most talented squad since he became head coach and it's a team that, at the very least, should find itself playing in a decent bowl game this winter if it can reach 7-8 wins.

**AUDIO:** [Purdue DT Kawann Short](#)

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## 2012 Iowa position breakdowns: Linebackers

*\*This week, HawkeyeDrive.com presents an eight-part series of position breakdowns as the Iowa Hawkeyes continue preparing for the 2012 season. After previously focusing on [quarterbacks](#), [running backs](#), [wide receivers and tight ends](#), the [offensive line](#) and [defensive line](#) our sixth part examines the team's corps of linebackers.\**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

Two years ago, Christian Kirksey, James Morris and Anthony Hitchens went through their first fall camps as true freshmen. At this point in time, Hitchens was listed as a running back, only to later move over to safety and then eventually move again to linebacker last season. Meanwhile, Kirksey and Morris both knew they'd be linebackers but were behind the likes of Tyler Nielsen and Jeff Tarpinian on the depth chart.

Now, this trio of juniors makes up the anchor of the Hawkeye linebacking corps, and perhaps the entire Iowa defense for that matter.

"I remember walking first practice our freshman year, I looked



at James like, 'Yo, we're in college now. This is like the big leagues, you know,'" Kirksey said. "I remember we used to get yelled at in practice. We just took it all in.

"On the field, we have a good bond. Off the field, we have an even bigger bond."

Morris has started for the better part of two seasons, while Kirksey was the lone Iowa linebacker to start every game in 2011 – the first seven at WILL and the last six at LE0. Morris switched over to WILL after returning from an ankle injury that caused him to miss the Hawkeyes' 45-24 win over Indiana. Both linebackers finished with 110 tackles last season.

Now in more a leadership role, Morris said it's a matter of moving on to what he called "the next phase" – being able to play well cohesively.

"Just with having a better understanding of the defense as a whole and how I fit into it," Morris said about where he believes he has improved over the course of the past two seasons. "Also, how other positions, how we work together to play good defense. I think when you understand that, you're able to play faster."

As Iowa enters the 2012 season, Morris is moving back to the MIKE position he had been accustomed to playing before hurting his ankle while Kirksey remains at LE0 and Hitchens takes over duties at the WILL spot. Hitchens appeared in eight games for the Hawkeyes last season, compiling 25 tackles.

The linebacking corps has also found itself getting acclimated to its new position coach, former Iowa linebacker LeVar Woods. After serving an Administrative Assistant role in the program for the majority of the past four seasons, Woods was named the interim defensive line coach prior to last year's Insight Bowl after Rick Kaczinski left to become an assistant at Nebraska. Now he finds himself in a permanent role at his alma mater coaching the very position he played.

One facet Woods has emphasized heavily since taking over is teaching the linebackers to be visual learners through the film they watch together, using a telestrator he refers to as 'The Rocketship.'

"Like John Madden, I can draw lines and circles and do all these crazy things with it," Woods said. "But I think kids are visual. I know myself, as a learner, I'm a visual learner. I like to see things. I like to see it develop and watch it so then I can pick it up quicker.

"As much as I can use PowerPoint or video or use 'The Rocketship,' I think that helps kids out."

Last season, this was as injury-plagued a group of players as there was on the entire team. It wasn't quite like 2010, where the Hawkeyes wound up using eight different starting combinations throughout that season, but depth was depleted to the point where Tom Donatell moved up from the secondary in order to start two games at the LEO position while both Morris and Nielsen dealt with injuries.

With younger players like sophomores Quinton Alston and Marcus Collins and redshirt freshmen Cole Fisher and Travis Perry progressing, the Hawkeyes are optimistic about the depth they hope to have at linebacker in the event injuries remain an ongoing issue.

"I feel good about our depth right now," Morris said. "I think the guys down on the depth chart are eager and talented. They want to do well. They get better every day.

"We just need to keep working and keep grinding, keep trying to fix our mistakes and hopefully play mistake-free football."

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz also reiterated that like last season, he won't be afraid to shuffle linebackers at various spots if he deems it necessary to do so.

“We have some guys with good position flexibility and ultimately we’ll try to get our best three out there and have Plan A and Plan B in case you have to make a move after that,” Ferentz said.

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## 2012 Big Ten football previews: Illinois (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

So far, we have previewed [Penn State](#), [Ohio State](#) and [Indiana](#). The next Big Ten team we will examine is the Illinois Fighting Illini. Iowa does not play Illinois in 2012.

There are some things to feel good about if you’re an Illinois fan. The Fighting Illini are coming off their second straight bowl win and this year’s roster does feature some talent on both sides of the football.

I just don’t know how much better Illinois will be in 2012 though. Yes, Ron Zook was fired – a move that had to be made after the Fighting Illini started last season 6-0 only to lose their final six regular season games. Yes, Tim Beckham comes to Illinois after serving as the head coach at Toledo, where he had a pretty decent coaching tenure.

But by the same token, this is the same team that saw four players get picked in the first two rounds of the NFL Draft last spring and let’s face it, there’s some rebuilding aspects in play.

It appears junior Nathan Scheelhaase will get the chance to

redeem himself as Illinois' starting quarterback this fall. He started all 13 of the Fighting Illini's games last season, but saw his playing time at quarterback get diminished during their six-game losing streak in favor of sophomore Reilly O'Toole.

Scheelhaase accounted for 19 of Illinois' touchdowns (13 passing, six rushing), throwing for 2,110 yards and rushing for another 624 yards, which led the team. He also threw eight interceptions. O'Toole appeared in a total of 10 games and threw for 270 yards with one touchdown and four interceptions. Expect Scheelhaase to be used more frequently again, but if he does start struggling as the season progresses, at least Beckman knows he has an experienced back-up.

At running back, Illinois might see itself relying on a redshirt freshman early on in Josh Ferguson, who appeared in three games last season before suffering a season-ending hamstring injury. Sophomore running back Donovan Young did rush for 451 yards and six touchdowns on 87 carries as a freshman, but battled with injuries during the spring. Young started one game last season and had one 100-yard rushing performance that came against Western Michigan, who Illinois coincidentally opens 2012 with.

The Fighting Illini lost their most valuable offensive weapon from last year in wide receiver A.J. Jenkins, who decided to forego his senior year for the NFL Draft and was a first-round pick of the San Francisco 49ers. Jenkins led the Big Ten with 90 catches and he also compiled 1,276 yards receiving and eight touchdowns. To put this into perspective, junior Spencer Harris – who was Illinois' second-leading receiver last season – had 26 catches for 226 receiving yards and only one touchdown. If the Fighting Illini are going to be successful on offense, they'll need playmakers to step up in both the backfield and receiving corps.

Up front, Illinois has a pair of seniors that are moving

around. Graham Pocic, who has started every game the past two seasons at center, has been working at guard during fall camp. Hugh Thornton, who started 10 games at guard last year, has moved over to left tackle. Junior Jake Feldmeyer is likely to take over at center with Pocic moving, and sophomores Michael Heitz and Simon Cvijanovic look to figure into the O-line equation as well.

Now the defensive side of the ball – specifically the front seven – is what should excite Fighting Illini fans in 2012. Although this team no longer has defensive end Whitney Mercilus, who led the Big Ten with 16 sacks last season and was a first-round pick of the Houston Texans, the D-line features a big-time duo with junior defensive tackle Akeem Spence and senior defensive end Michael Buchanan. Spence started all 13 of Illinois' games last year and recorded 69 tackles, while Buchanan had 64 tackles (13.5 tackles for loss) and was second to Mercilus with 7.5 sacks, good for fourth in the Big Ten.

The linebacking corps lost a pair of starters off last year's squad, but the one returnee might be the most important player in this entire Fighting Illini defense. Junior middle linebacker Jonathan Brown led Illinois with 108 tackles and also compiled six sacks and two fumble recoveries. With Spence, Buchanan and Brown all in the front seven, this defense will be one of the stingiest in the entire conference.

Illinois will feature three seniors in its secondary, with the most notable being cornerback Terry Hawthorne. Last season, Hawthorne recorded 60 tackles and led the Fighting Illini with three interceptions and eight pass break-ups. Free safety Supo Sanni started 11 games in 2011 and finished the year with 49 tackles.

On special teams, Illinois brings back sophomore punter Justin DuVernois after he had 53 punts and averaged 38.3 yards per punt last season. However, it will need to find a replacement

at placekicker in Derek Dimke, who made 10-of-12 field goals his senior season and also handled the team's kickoff duties.

Last year, Illinois had a very favorable schedule. This year, it's almost the exact opposite. There's only one road game during non-conference play, but it's at Arizona State, has a late kickoff start time, and the Sun Devils will be looking for revenge after losing to the Fighting Illini last season in Champaign.

Highlighting Illinois' Big Ten slate are road games during consecutive weeks in early October against Wisconsin and Michigan, two of the teams being favored by many to win the conference in 2012. Also included is a road contest at Ohio State on Nov. 3, the very team that started the Fighting Illini's 2011 tailspin.

While the road games are brutal however, the seven contests Illinois has at Memorial Stadium are all winnable games. The toughest one might be the home finale against Purdue on Nov. 17.

I won't be surprised if Illinois does win 7-8 games this season simply because it has the defense in place to do so. But I also wouldn't be shocked if this team takes a step back, primarily because of the uncertainty that exists across the offensive side of the ball.

**AUDIO:** [Illinois QB Nathan Scheelhaase](#)

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**2012**                      **Iowa**                      **position**

# breakdowns: Defensive Line

*\*This week, HawkeyeDrive.com presents an eight-part series of position breakdowns as the Iowa Hawkeyes continue preparing for the 2012 season. After previously focusing on [quarterbacks](#), [running backs](#), [wide receivers and tight ends](#), and the [offensive line](#), our fifth part examines the team's defensive line.\**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

Entering the 2012 season, Iowa's two biggest question marks are at running back and along the defensive line.

The reasoning for the D-line – at least at this moment – is valid. No Hawkeye unit has gone through more transition in the past year. It began in late December, one week before Iowa played Oklahoma in the 2011 Insight Bowl. After five seasons as the defensive line coach, Rick Kaczenski left to take the same job on Bo Pelini's staff at Nebraska. As a result, LeVar Woods – now the Hawkeyes' linebackers coach – filled Kaczenski's position in an interim role for that bowl game.

When Iowa was ready to name a permanent D-line coach, head coach Kirk Ferentz stayed in-house by asking Reese Morgan to switch over after coaching the offensive line for nine seasons.

"He's definitely a teacher," redshirt freshman defensive tackle Darian Cooper said. "He definitely works with you. He's very technically sound. He's the type of guy that in the film room, he's going to make sure that you understand the defense whole-heartedly before you step on the field."

The Hawkeyes find themselves looking to fill at least two major voids up front left by Broderick Binns and Mike Daniels,

who was a fourth-round choice of the Green Bay Packers in the 2012 NFL Draft. Last year's group also featured two other seniors in Thomas Nardo and Lebron Daniel, both of whom started alongside Binns and Daniels in the Insight Bowl.

If there is good news with this group, it's that depth is slowly becoming a strength with a couple of players making their returns to the gridiron prior to fall camp starting last week. Junior defensive end Dominic Alvis returns from a season-ending knee injury that occurred in Iowa's 24-16 win over Michigan back on Nov. 5, while sophomore defensive tackle Carl Davis (6-5, 310 pounds) missed all of spring practice following knee surgery after last season.

Prior to his injury, Alvis was making a name for himself with 30 tackles and 1.5 sacks, both of which were team-highs among defensive linemen who are back this season.

"I'm rusty, but every day is just dedicated to getting better than I was yesterday," Alvis said during the team's Media Day on Aug. 6. "That's my attitude going forward."

The player whose progress Ferentz has been most pleased by this offseason has been that of sophomore Louis Trinca-Pasat, a Chicago native who is currently listed as one of the Hawkeyes' first-string defensive tackles. Trinca-Pasat is listed at 6-3, 270 pounds. Ferentz said during Big Ten Media Days last month how Trinca-Pasat went from uncertain about whether he wanted to continue playing football altogether to someone who made significant strides during the spring and summer.

"He went from being that guy, to a guy who was just out there, basically a body from the bowl preparation, to being a guy that's maybe one of the most important players on the team in March and April," Ferentz said. "He hasn't played a game yet, but I really have reason to think he's going to play well in the years forward."



At the other end position opposite Alvis is an ongoing battle between a pair of seniors – Steve Bigach and Joe Gaglione. Both players have had reps with the first-string defense in practice during fall camp. Bigach has slightly more playing experience, making starts in five games last season at both end and tackle.

Then there's a group of underclassmen that could find themselves wreaking havoc for the Iowa defense this fall. Among the names from this group to watch is Cooper, who is vying for a spot as one of the tackles and a player Morgan said would eventually see the field in 2012. Others include redshirt freshmen Riley McMinn, Dean Tsopanides and Melvin Spears, all of whom have been working as defensive ends during both spring practice and currently in fall camp.

Among true freshmen, two names to be aware of are a pair of defensive tackles, Faith Ekakitie and Jaleel Johnson. Ekakitie comes in listed at 6-3, 275 pounds, while Johnson is currently listed at 6-4, 300 pounds.

If this group can find leadership akin to what Iowa has had in recent years past along its front four, the defensive line might be a group that exceeds the expectations of many on the outside. The question isn't about depth, but whether the four guys who are out there against Northern Illinois and beyond can hold their own over the course of a 12-game season.

"It's no secret that we have, I guess you can say a target on our back," Bigach said. "When you're an athlete and you get put in that situation, you got to love it.

"If we continue to improve, hopefully we can put a good unit out there."