

John Mackey Award Brings Player-Driven Football Evaluation to 2026 Selection Process



Accomplished former players, Mackey Award winners, Super Bowl champions and active football broadcasters bring multiple generations and perspectives to the evaluation of college football's most complete tight end

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Baltimore, MD — August 2026 — The John Mackey Award is bringing a distinctive philosophy to the selection of college football's most outstanding tight end in 2026: **football players evaluated by football people.**

The Award's selection process is led by a 12-member committee whose collective experience spans generations, positions and levels of the game. The group includes former NFL players, John Mackey Award winners, Super Bowl champions, All-Americans, coaches, executives and broadcasters who remain actively connected to football today. **Different eras. Different positions. Different perspectives. One standard.**

The 2026 John Mackey Award Selection Committee is chaired by **Don McPherson** and includes:

Jake Butt • Brian Mitchell • Greg Jones • Jake Marsh • Noah Eagle • Nick O'Leary • Dallas Clark • Aaron Taylor • Jarvis Johnson • Adam Breneman • Owen Daniels

THE COMMITTEE BY THE NUMBERS

12 Committee Members | **639+** NFL Games Played | **47+** NFL Seasons

7 NFL Draft Picks | **4** Superbowl Champions | **3** Mackey Award Winners

Committee members also remain active across today's football landscape, including broadcasting and analysis on **ESPN, CBS and Big Ten Network.**

More Than Stats. It's About Impact.

The tight end position is one of football's most difficult to evaluate through statistics alone.

A complete tight end may be asked to block a defensive end on one snap, identify a defensive adjustment on the next, protect his quarterback, create space for a teammate, line up in the slot or backfield and then become a primary receiving target.

Many of those contributions never appear in a traditional box score.

The John Mackey Award's player-driven process is designed to recognize them.

“Our goal is to identify the most complete tight end in college football, and that requires looking beyond a stat sheet,” said Benjamin Hazel, Executive Director of the John Mackey Award. “The people on this committee understand the details that impact winning but don’t always show up in the numbers. My grandfather’s legacy was built on revolutionizing the tight end position and expanding what it could mean to an offense. Our process honors his legacy by recognizing the players who bring that same versatility, impact, and commitment to winning.”

The committee evaluates candidates through a broader football lens that considers **performance, leadership, character, competitiveness, football intelligence, versatility and the intangible qualities that separate exceptional players.**

Statistics remain an important part of that evaluation. They simply do not tell the entire story.

Different Positions. Different Perspectives.

The committee was intentionally constructed to provide more than one perspective on tight end play.

The result is a committee capable of asking a more important question than simply **“What were his numbers?”**

How did he affect the football game?

Multiple Generations. One Standard.

The committee also represents different eras of football.

That distinction is particularly important for an award bearing the name of **Pro Football Hall of Famer John Mackey**, whose combination of size, speed, toughness and receiving ability helped redefine the tight end position.

As football has evolved, so has the position.

Modern tight ends can operate in-line, from the slot, out wide or out of the backfield. Some are featured receivers. Others create their greatest value through blocking, versatility, matchup advantages and the ability to execute multiple responsibilities within the same offense.

By bringing together football experience from different generations, the committee can appreciate the evolution of the position without losing sight of the qualities that have always defined elite tight end play.

Mackey Winners Selecting the Next Mackey Winner

Perhaps the clearest example of the Award's player-driven philosophy is the presence of three former recipients on the committee.

Dallas Clark (Iowa - 2002), Nick O'Leary (Florida St. - 2014) and Jake Butt (Michigan - 2016) each know what it means to be recognized as the nation's outstanding collegiate tight end.

Now, they have a voice in determining who joins them.

Their experience creates a direct connection between generations of Mackey Award winners and gives current candidates the benefit of being evaluated by players who have already reached the standard the Award represents.

Connected to Football Today

While the committee carries decades of playing experience, it is not simply a collection of former players looking back at the game.

Many members remain actively involved in football through broadcasting, analysis, coaching, business and media.

Committee members can be seen and heard across platforms including **ESPN, CBS and Big Ten Network**, providing the Award with evaluators who are regularly watching college and professional football and studying how the game continues to change.

That combination of **past experience and current involvement** is central to the Award's focus.

About the John Mackey Award

Established in 2000, the **John Mackey Award** annually recognizes the most outstanding tight end in college football while preserving the legacy of Pro Football Hall of Famer John Mackey.

The Award is a proud member of the **National College Football Awards Association (NCFAA)** which encompasses 25 of the most prestigious awards in college football, dating back to 1935.

Recognizing Excellence. Inspiring the Future.

For more information about the Award, its Selection Committee, and other announcements visit **mackeyaward.com** and follow **@themackeyaward** on Instagram and X.