John Mackey Award Names Iowa's DJ Vonnahme Week 9 Player of the Week

Vonnahme's Two-Touchdown Performance Helps Iowa Retain the Heartland Trophy; North Carolina's Jelani Thurman and USC Freshman Mark Bowman Earn Honorable Mention Recognition



November 3, 2026 — The John Mackey Award has named **Iowa tight end DJ Vonnahme** its Week 9 Player of the Week following a versatile two-touchdown performance in the Hawkeyes' commanding 30–0 victory over #25 Wisconsin. North Carolina's Jelani Thurman and USC freshman Mark Bowman have also earned Honorable Mention recognition for their outstanding performances.

The Week 9 selections mark the final weekly honors of the 2026 season as the John Mackey Award prepares to **announce its eight semifinalists on Wednesday, November 11**.

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

DJ Vonnahme | Iowa
5 Receptions | 54 Receiving Yards | 1 Receiving TD | 1 Rushing TD
Final: Iowa 30, No. 25 Wisconsin 0

Iowa tight end DJ Vonnahme delivered a complete performance in one of college football's most storied rivalries, helping the Hawkeyes secure a decisive 30–0 victory over No. 25 Wisconsin and retain possession of the Heartland Trophy.

In the 100th meeting between Iowa and Wisconsin, Vonnahme showcased his ability to impact the game in multiple ways. Vonnahme's performance demonstrated the value of a tight end who can contribute beyond the traditional passing game, creating scoring opportunities through his versatility and physicality.

With Iowa's convincing shutout victory, the Hawkeyes retained the Heartland Trophy and added another memorable chapter to the historic rivalry.

HONORABLE MENTION

Jelani Thurman | North Carolina
5 Receptions | 70 Receiving Yards | 2 Touchdowns

North Carolina tight end Jelani Thurman delivered an impressive performance, recording five receptions for 70 yards and two touchdowns.

Averaging 14.0 yards per reception, Thurman demonstrated his ability to create mismatches in the passing game while providing a reliable scoring threat. His two-touchdown performance highlighted the importance of the tight end position in finishing drives and creating offensive opportunities.

Mark Bowman | USC
3 Receptions | 79 Receiving Yards | 26.3 Yards Per Reception
Final: USC 30, No. 2 Ohio State 18

USC freshman tight end Mark Bowman delivered a breakout performance on one of college football's biggest stages, recording three receptions for 79 yards in the Trojans' impressive 30–18 victory over #2 Ohio State.

Bowman demonstrated his ability to stretch the field and create big plays against one of the nation's top-ranked opponents. His 70 yard catch and run was one of the best plays from a tight end all season.His contributions helped USC secure a signature victory and demonstrated the exciting young talent emerging at the position across college football.

THE ROAD TO THE JOHN MACKEY AWARD

With Week 9 marking the conclusion of the John Mackey Award's weekly recognition program, attention now turns toward identifying the nation's top tight ends.

Throughout the season, the John Mackey Award Selection Committee has evaluated players from across the country, considering not only statistical production but also blocking ability, versatility, consistency, leadership, and overall impact on team success.

The committee, chaired by College Football Hall of Famer, Don McPherson, brings together former NFL players, collegiate standouts, John Mackey Award winners, and prominent football broadcasters who understand the demands of playing the position at the highest levels.

Upcoming John Mackey Award Announcements:

- **Wednesday, November 11:** Eight Semifinalists Announced
- **Tuesday, November 24:** Three Finalists Announced

The announcement of the eight semifinalists will represent the next major step in determining who will potentially join the prestigious list of John Mackey Award winners.

ABOUT THE JOHN MACKEY AWARD

The **John Mackey Player of the Week** is an honor distinct from the annual John Mackey Award. The weekly honor was established in 2004 to draw attention to outstanding individual performances by tight ends throughout the college football season.

The Player of the Week recognition does not have a direct bearing on the final John Mackey Award selection process. The weekly honor will continue through the announcement of the eight John Mackey Award semifinalists.

The **John Mackey Award** was established in 2000 by the Nassau County Sports Commission and is presented annually to the tight end who performs at the highest level on and off the field.

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

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