



From the Hill to the Gridiron: Syracuse Ties Continue to Shape the Legacy of the John Mackey Award

Baltimore, MD. (August 1, 2026) — More than six decades after John Mackey emerged from Syracuse University to redefine the tight end position in football, the university's influence continues to be woven into the fabric of the award that bears his name.

As the John Mackey Award enters its 26th season recognizing the nation's most outstanding collegiate tight end, a remarkable connection has emerged among many of the people entrusted with preserving Mackey's legacy.

At the heart of that connection is **Sylvia Mackey**, John's widow and a Syracuse alumna, who met John while the two were students at Syracuse University. Together, they built a lifelong partnership that extended far beyond football, becoming advocates for former players and helping inspire lasting change in the game.

Joining Sylvia in carrying forward John's legacy is **Selection Committee Chairman Don McPherson**, one of Syracuse's most accomplished quarterbacks and the visionary who helped create the John Mackey Award in 2000. A standout quarterback for the Orange from 1984–1987, McPherson led Syracuse to an undefeated regular season in 1987 and a No. 4 national ranking while earning unanimous First-Team All-American honors and finishing second in the Heisman Trophy voting. He was also honored with the Maxwell Award as the nation's outstanding collegiate football player and the Davey O'Brien Award as the country's top quarterback.

Following his playing career, McPherson became a nationally respected educator, author, and advocate for leadership, character development, and social change.

McPherson has spent decades championing excellence both on and off the field, making him a fitting steward for an award that recognizes not only elite play, but leadership, character, sportsmanship, and academic achievement.

The Syracuse connection extends even further.

Committee members **Jake Marsh** and **Noah Eagle**, two of college football's rising broadcast voices, are both graduates of Syracuse University's prestigious S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. Their careers reflect Syracuse's longstanding reputation for producing many of the nation's premier sports broadcasters, and today they help select the nation's most outstanding collegiate tight end.

While each committee member brings a unique background and perspective, their shared Syracuse roots underscore the lasting impact one university has had on the game of football and the people committed to honoring one of its greatest legends.

“For us, this isn't simply about recognizing the best tight end in college football,” said Executive Director **Ben Hazel**. “It's about preserving John Mackey's legacy and celebrating

the qualities that made him extraordinary. It's special to see so many people connected through Syracuse continuing that mission together."

John Mackey remains one of the most influential figures in football history. A pioneer at the tight end position, Pro Football Hall of Famer, and leader of the NFL Players Association, Mackey changed the game both on and off the field. He is widely credited with transforming the tight end into a dynamic receiving threat while also fighting for players' rights throughout his career.

Today, the John Mackey Award Selection Committee is composed of former players, media members, and football leaders from across the country. Yet the enduring Syracuse connection serves as a reminder that Mackey's story began on the campus where he first met Sylvia, launched a Hall of Fame career, and inspired a legacy that continues to shape college football generations later.

As the next season unfolds, the award remains committed to recognizing the nation's premier tight end—one who embodies the excellence, leadership, and character that John Mackey represented throughout his life.

Media Contact

For media inquiries, interview requests, or additional information about the John Mackey Award, please contact media@mackeyaward.com.

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