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John Mackey Changed the Game. Sylvia Mackey Changed How Football Cares. Now Their Legacy Lives on Through the John Mackey Award

The woman who helped transform NFL player advocacy now leads the next chapter of college football's premier tight end honor.

Baltimore, MD — July 31st, 2026 — Few people have influenced the game of football without ever taking a snap.

For more than two decades, **Sylvia Mackey** has been one of football's most respected advocates, turning personal tragedy into meaningful change for players and their families. Through the **John Mackey Fund**, the nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving John Mackey's legacy, Sylvia Mackey is helping lead the next chapter of one of college football's most prestigious honors—the John Mackey Award.

The John Mackey Fund announced today that Sylvia Mackey will assume an active leadership role in overseeing the award as the organization launches a renewed vision centered on excellence, leadership, and service at the tight end position.

Following the passing of her husband, Pro Football Hall of Famer John Mackey, Sylvia became a leading advocate for retired NFL players, helping elevate national conversations surrounding player health, dementia, disability benefits, long-term care, and concussion awareness. Her work contributed to a broader movement that changed how football supports its former players.

Throughout her advocacy, Sylvia has served on numerous boards and nonprofit organizations focused on player health, football safety, Alzheimer's awareness, and retired player support. Her dedication has been recognized throughout the football community, including the creation of the **Sylvia Mackey Woman of the Year Award**, presented by the **Gridiron Greats Assistance Fund** to honor women whose leadership and service have made a lasting impact on the game.

"My mission has always been to carry forward John's vision," said Sylvia Mackey. "He believed football was about more than winning games. It was about leadership, character, and leaving the game better than you found it. The John Mackey Award gives us the opportunity to celebrate those values in the next generation of young men."

John Mackey revolutionized the tight end position through his combination of size, athleticism, and versatility, forever changing offensive football. His greatest impact,

however, extended beyond the field as his battle with dementia helped bring national attention to the long-term health challenges facing retired athletes.

Standing beside him throughout that journey was Sylvia Mackey, whose advocacy transformed John's legacy into lasting action. Today, that mission continues through the John Mackey Fund.

The Fund serves as the steward of John Mackey's legacy through football, education, philanthropy, and community engagement. In addition to overseeing the John Mackey Award, the organization supports initiatives that reflect John's commitment to leadership, service, and creating opportunities for future generations.

The John Mackey Fund is a family-led nonprofit organization, with Sylvia Mackey working alongside John Mackey's daughters, **Lisa Mackey Hazel** and **Laura Mackey Nattans**, to ensure that John's values remain at the center of every initiative.

"As we look toward the future, it is fitting that the people who knew my grandfather best continue to help guide his legacy," said **Benjamin Hazel, Executive Director** of the John Mackey Award and grandson. "My grandmother has dedicated her life to improving football for players and their families. Together with my mom and aunt, the Mackey family is ensuring that the John Mackey Award represents more than athletic achievement—it represents the character, leadership, and service that defined John Mackey's life."

The John Mackey Fund also extends its heartfelt gratitude to **Jerry Mackey**, John Mackey's nephew, whose vision, leadership, and unwavering dedication guided the John Mackey Award through its first 25 years. Under his stewardship, the award grew into one of college football's most respected honors, recognizing generations of outstanding collegiate tight ends while preserving John Mackey's legacy. As the award enters its 26th season, the Mackey family is honored to build upon the strong foundation Jerry established and continue that tradition for future generations.

The revitalized John Mackey Award will expand its national presence through enhanced storytelling, digital engagement, and a distinguished selection committee featuring former players, coaches, and nationally recognized media members. While honoring the nation's premier collegiate tight end remains its highest achievement, the award will continue celebrating the qualities John Mackey valued most: integrity, leadership, and making a positive impact beyond the football field.

As college football enters a new era, the John Mackey Fund is ensuring that one of the sport's most meaningful legacies continues to inspire future generations—not only through excellence on Saturdays, but through leadership for a lifetime.

About the John Mackey Fund

The John Mackey Fund is the nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the life, legacy, and values of Pro Football Hall of Famer John Mackey. Through philanthropy, education, player advocacy, and the administration of the John Mackey Award, the Fund promotes leadership, character, service, and excellence in football and beyond.

About the John Mackey Award

Presented annually to the nation's most outstanding collegiate tight end, the John Mackey Award recognizes student-athletes who demonstrate exceptional performance, leadership, character, and a commitment to the values exemplified by John Mackey. Established in 2000 and named in honor of Pro Football Hall of Famer John Mackey—widely regarded as one of the greatest tight ends in football history—the award celebrates the collegiate tight end who best embodies excellence on the field, outstanding sportsmanship, and exemplary character.

The John Mackey Award is proud to be a member of the National College Football Awards Association (NCFAA), joining college football's most prestigious honors in recognizing and celebrating excellence across the sport.

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