

**OKLAHOMA SPORTS HALL OF FAME AND JIM THORPE ASSOCIATION
PROUDLY REVEAL THE PAYCOM JIM THORPE AWARD
2026 PRESEASON WATCH LIST**

OKLAHOMA CITY – Today, Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame (OSHOFF) and Jim Thorpe Association released the prestigious Paycom Jim Thorpe Award Preseason Watch List. This list includes 35 of the nation's best defensive backs, representing ten conferences and one independent university. The preseason watch list is selected by a screening committee whose members compile a list of up to 50 players based on previous performance in NCAA Division I college football and preseason All-America lists. This list is not final, and players who have outstanding seasons may be added to the semifinalists and finalists lists as the season progresses.

As the leader of the No. 1 defense in 2025, Ohio State University's Caleb Downs was the 2025 Paycom Jim Thorpe Award winner. Hoschton, Georgia, native Caleb Downs was the third Thorpe Award recipient from the Buckeyes, joining winners Malcolm Jenkins (2008) and Antoine Winfield (1998). The Dallas Cowboys selected Caleb Downs with the No. 11 overall pick in the first round of the 2026 NFL Draft.

The Thorpe Award's 2026 preseason candidates are revealed alphabetically by last name with university, position and class year noted.



PRESEASON WATCH LIST

PLAYER	UNIVERSITY	POSITION	CLASS
KJ BOLDEN	GEORGIA	SAFETY	JR
AUSTIN BRAWLEY	NEW MEXICO	SAFETY	SR
ZABIEN BROWN	ALABAMA	CORNERBACK	JR
MARIO EASTERLY	OLD DOMINION	SAFETY	SR
TRE'QUON FEGANS	JACKSONVILLE STATE	CORNERBACK	SR
AMARE FERRELL	INDIANA	SAFETY	SR
BRANDON FINNEY JR.	OREGON	CORNERBACK	SO
BRYCE FITZGERALD	MIAMI	SAFETY	SO
CHANCE GAMBLE	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	CORNERBACK	SR
BRENT GORDON JR.	LOUISIANA	CORNERBACK	SO
ELIJAH GREEN	TULSA	CORNERBACK	JR
BREVIN HAMBLIN	UTAH STATE	SAFETY	SR
ASHTON HAMPTON	CLEMSON	CORNERBACK	JR
SIMEON HARRIS	FRESNO STATE	CORNERBACK	SR
JYAIR HILL	MICHIGAN	CORNERBACK	SR
BRAY HUBBARD	ALABAMA	SAFETY	SR
JAMEL JOHNSON	TCU	SAFETY	SR
KELLEY JONES	MISSISSIPPI STATE	CORNERBACK	SR
ROGER JONES JR.	AIR FORCE	SAFETY	JR
EARL LITTLE	OHIO STATE	SAFETY	SR
JELANI McDONALD	TEXAS	SAFETY	SR
JADEN MICKEY	BOISE STATE	CORNERBACK	SR
LEONARD MOORE	NOTRE DAME	CORNERBACK	JR
CALEB NIX	JACKSONVILLE STATE	SAFETY	SR
CHRIS PEAL	SYRACUSE	CORNERBACK	SR
KOI PERICH	OREGON	SAFETY	JR
BRICE POLLOCK	TEXAS TECH	CORNERBACK	SR
ELLIS ROBINSON IV	GEORGIA	CORNERBACK	SO
FALETAU SATUALA	BYU	SAFETY	JR
KT SEAY	DELAWARE	SAFETY	SR
DAYTONE SMITH	MARSHALL	SAFETY	SR
SHAMIR STERLIN	FIU	SAFETY	SO
JACK TCHIENCHOU	TULANE	SAFETY	SR
DJ WALKER	OHIO	SAFETY	JR
ZACH WILLIAMS	TULSA	SAFETY	JR

2026

By Conference

AAC (3), ACC (3), Big 12 (3), Big Ten (5), CUSA (4), Independent (1), MAC (1), MW (2), Pac-12 (3), SEC (6), Sun Belt (4)

The **Paycom Jim Thorpe Award** is

awarded to the best defensive back in college football based on performance on the field, athletic ability and character. The award was established in 1986 and is named after history's greatest all-around athlete, Jim Thorpe. Thorpe excelled as a running back, passer and kicker on the offensive side of the ball, but also stood out as a defensive back. In addition to his legendary performance on the football field, Thorpe played professional baseball and won Olympic gold medals in the decathlon and pentathlon. The Paycom Jim Thorpe Award is universally accepted as one of the nation's top collegiate sports honors.



**NATIONAL
COLLEGE
FOOTBALL
AWARDS
ASSOCIATION**

The Paycom Jim Thorpe Award is a member of the National College Football Awards Association (NCFAA), which encompasses college football's most prestigious awards. The NCFAA's 25

awards have honored nearly 1,000 recipients since 1935. This season, 12 NCFAA awards will honor national players of the week each Tuesday.

Sixteen NCFAA members are unveiling preseason watch lists over a three-week period as the association spearheads a coordinated effort to promote each award's preseason candidates. Following is the remaining 2026 preseason watch list calendar:

Wed., Aug. 12: Paycom Jim Thorpe Award

Thu., Aug. 13: Butkus Award

Fri., Aug. 14: Ray Guy Award

Mon., Aug. 17: Walter Camp Award

Tue., Aug. 18: Doak Walker Award

Wed., Aug. 19: Biletnikoff Award

Thu., Aug. 20: Davey O'Brien Award

Fri., Aug. 21: Bednarik Award

For more information about the NCFAA and its award programs, visit [NCFAA.org](https://www.ncfaa.org) or follow on X at [@NCFAA](https://twitter.com/NCFAA) and Instagram [@TheNCFAA](https://www.instagram.com/TheNCFAA).

Paycom Jim Thorpe Award Important Dates

Wed., Aug. 12: Preseason watch list announced at 11 a.m. CDT/noon EDT

Tue., Oct. 27: Semifinalists announced at 11 a.m. CDT/noon EDT

A screening committee consisting of OSHOF members monitors all defensive backs throughout the season, including watch list players, and narrows the field to up to 15 semifinalists.

Tue., Nov. 24: Finalists announced at 11 a.m. CST/noon EST

The three finalists are submitted to a national panel of over 250 sports writers, sportscasters, former players and coaches who vote to determine the winner of the Paycom Jim Thorpe Award.

Fri., Dec. 11: Winner announced on *The Home Depot College Football Awards*

The winner will be announced on the ESPN live presentation of *The Home Depot College Football Awards* at 7 p.m. EST. Other recognized NCFAA awards announced include the Bednarik Award, Biletnikoff Award, Lou Groza Award, Ray Guy Award, Maxwell Award, Davey O'Brien Award, Outland Trophy, Doak Walker Award, Walter Camp Award and others.

Tue., Feb. 9, 2027: Paycom Jim Thorpe Award Banquet honoring the 2026 Winner in Oklahoma City

The official presentation of the Paycom Jim Thorpe Award takes place in Oklahoma City, following *The Home Depot College Football Awards*. The current winner and all former winners are invited each year to celebrate. Over 600 supporters attend the Paycom Jim Thorpe Award Banquet each year, including many celebrities and dignitaries.

For more information on the Paycom Jim Thorpe Award and past award recipients, please visit oklahomasportshalloffame.org.

Paycom Software, Inc. (NYSE: PAYC) ("Paycom"), a leading provider of comprehensive, cloud-based human capital management software, and the Jim

Thorpe Museum and Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame jointly announced in May 2017 an exclusive sponsorship of the Jim Thorpe Award. As a result, the accolade has been named the “Paycom Jim Thorpe Award.”



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