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Tyler Johnson caps historic career with big afternoon in Outback Bowl

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5-6 minutes

Johnson set multiple personal and program records in his final game with the Gophers.



[Kamaan Richards](#)

Gophers Wide Receiver Tyler Johnson receives a pass in the endzone at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida on Wednesday, Jan. 1. Minnesota holds a 24-17 lead over Auburn

heading into the third quarter of the Outback Bowl. (Kamaan Richards / Minnesota Daily)

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The ascension of Minnesota football this season coincided with a potent passing attack that featured two first-team All-Big Ten receivers in Tyler Johnson and Rashod Bateman. In the Outback Bowl against Auburn on New Year's Day, it was the senior, Johnson, who stole the show and cemented his legacy as the most decorated receiver in program history.

With 12 receptions for 204 yards and a pair of touchdowns, Johnson was named the Outback Bowls' Most Valuable Player in the 31-24 victory. Playing his final game in maroon and gold, he torched the Tigers' secondary to help the Gophers improve to 11-2 on the season.

"It was my last chance to go out there and give everything I got," Johnson said. "One last chance to represent not only myself but my family and my community. One last chance at the school that I decided to take my talents to about four years ago."

Entering the game, a pair of program records were well within reach for Johnson. He needed 19 receiving yards to surpass Eric Decker's record 3,119 and one receiving touchdown to better Ron Johnson's mark of 32.

It did not take long for Johnson to pass Decker. Quarterback Tanner Morgan connected with Johnson on Minnesota's second drive for a gain of 17 yards. Later in the first quarter, two plays after Auburn muffed a punt to give Minnesota favorable field position, Johnson reeled in another 17-yard catch, placing him

firmly atop the program's all-time receiving yards list.

"He's going to leave here the greatest receiver in the history of the University of Minnesota," head coach P.J. Fleck said. "That's no disrespect to Ron Johnson, I think Ron would back me up, I think Eric Decker would back me up, I think [Tyler Johnson] has proven whether it's yards or receptions or touchdowns, he's the ultimate receiver here."

On the snap after Johnson set the record, running back Mohamed Ibrahim gashed the Tigers defense for a 16-yard touchdown run tying the game, 10-10. With time winding down in the first half and the score tied at 17, Johnson again played a pivotal role in a Minnesota scoring drive.

Morgan connected with Johnson across the middle of the field, gaining 29 yards and putting the Gophers in position to take the lead before halftime. One play after a nine-yard reception by Johnson set up Minnesota at the Auburn two-yard line, Morgan found him again. This time, Johnson reached up with one hand and snagged the pass, tapping his toe in bounds, inches from the end line.

"I was hoping I landed in bounds," Johnson said. "I knew I just had to go up and make a play. Credit to [wide receivers coach Matt Simon] for calling that play, it's one we were preparing for in every situation."

The spectacular grab was Johnson's 32nd career receiving score, setting him apart from Ron Johnson, with whom Tyler entered the game tied on the all-time leader board.

"People say big-time players make big-time plays in big-time games," Fleck said. "He had 12 receptions for 204 yards and two

touchdowns, and everybody is going to look at that game.”

Finishing the afternoon with 12 receptions, Johnson totaled 10 or more catches in a game for the second time this season. He also surpassed 100 receiving yards for the seventh time this season.

With the game tied once again in the fourth quarter, it was Johnson again who made the big play, breaking away from his defender for a 73-yard touchdown reception with 10:26 remaining to make the score 31-24. That touchdown was his 13th of the season, breaking the team record for most in a season, a mark Johnson himself set in 2018.

“Coach Simon saw something that he liked,” Johnson said of his second score. “It was on the offensive line to give Tanner some time and they did their job with that and then it was on me to create separation and the rest is history.”

Johnson truly saved his best for last. One last Johnson reception on the game’s final drive set new career single-game highs for receptions and receiving yards (204). Johnson will now focus on preparing for the next chapter of his football career in the NFL after wrapping up his college career with 213 receptions for 3,305 yards and 33 touchdowns.

“He was one of the best receivers to ever play for us,” Morgan said of Johnson. “It’s remarkable and I can’t wait to see him do it in the NFL. He’s an elite receiver and he’s going to be making plays on Sunday next year.”