

Former TSU Tiger and NFL great Claude Humphrey was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame Saturday, Aug. 2, in Canton, Ohio. Below is the speech Humphrey gave during the ceremony:

Boy, Cheyenne, I didn't think you remembered all that stuff. Man, did I do all that? Thank you. Now, they told me that I only had ten minutes up here, but let me start off by telling you I've waited almost 30 years to get to this podium, so don't rush me, guys. I'm going to be here for a minute.

First of all, I want to thank God, my lord and savior, then I want to go on to thank my mother Miss Millie Ann Humphrey. You know, when I think of my mother, she's deceased now. But when I think of her, it was hard in the 50s to support a family, and my mother was the primary bread winner from our family. Some things that I remember about her was that when I went out and played football and I got hurt, she would stay up and rub me and just try to take care of me, knowing that she still had a nine hour workday in front of her. I tell you what, I love you, Mom. I love you very much. I want to thank her. My dad was in the home. He was not an absentee father. He was in the home. He had to work odds and end jobs to do his part, but he was there, and he gave me a lot of confidence. I'd like to thank my big sister who is here with me tonight. Guys, I tell you what, if you ever wanted a home cooked meal, boy, my sister can throw down. I tell you what, she cooks those turnip greens and corn bread and ham hocks better than anybody in Tennessee. My sister, Laura.

My brother, Charles Humphrey was my hero. My brother was the second fastest guy in Memphis, Tennessee. That was his claim to fame. I think that speed ran in our family, and I got a little bit of that from him. My middle sister, Omelia Walton, what a great sister she was. She bought me my first suit to go to the prom. You think back on these things, she's gone to be with the lord, but you think back on these things, man, I tell you what, it was all part of growing and preparing me for this day.

Then I want to take a minute and tell you about a great lady, my wife. Man, I tell you what, I met her when I was a junior in high school. She walked up to me and she said I want to introduce myself to you, and she did that. From then on I've had Sandra in my life till just a year and about 12 months ago when she subsided to ovarian cancer. She worked with me, man. I tell you what. All those years that I was a (indiscernible) for the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and I think it was four times. Every year my wife would work diligently. She'd call everybody and just talk to people and do everything she could to get me into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and it never worked. After every campaign, she and I would sit down and cry about it and hug each other. Just, you know what you do with your wife. We'd go out and get a meal or two. But my wife was a special person. She raised three daughters, and I tell you what. Over all the years, my daughters

have been probably the best kids in the world, and I have to say that. They told me to say that (laughing).

But, you know, they're good kids. My oldest daughter that you met, who presented me and did one **** of a job. Like I said, I didn't think she remembered that. My middle daughter, who is more of a...she took my wife's place after she passed. And she's the one that if you really need to do something or talk to me, you talk to her first. That's my middle daughter, Claudia. My baby girl, she came purely by accident. My wife and I we knew where babies came from (laughing). But it was such an enjoyable experience but anyway but anyway, she's been the love of our lives. My wife adored my baby daughter. She's Chandra Cheyenne, what a great kid.

Then there's my wingman, I call him. He's 12 years old. His name is Archie Robinson, Jr., and I tell you what, he is something to be admired. Every Sunday we get up and we go to early church services so we can go back and get some chicken wings and go back to sleep. That's my grandson, Archie. Archie would you stand for them, please. Let people see what a great young fella you are.

Then there was my in laws. I have to remember them because they were so great in our relationship. You know you can't have a good marriage and good family relationship without your in laws involved. And my in laws were just perfect. David Harold who was a minister, he married Sandra and I. And his wife Lucille, man, I talk about my sister's cooking, Miss Lucille could throw down.

I want to tell you how I got started in this game, because it's kind of interesting and it was purely by accident. I was out playing in the yard. My mother called me in and she said, Claude, I want you to go to the store and get me some baking powder and some cornmeal. I said, yes, ma'am. And she gave me the money. I took off and I crossed the campus of Lester High School in Memphis, Tennessee. Crossing the campus I noticed that there was a group of guys out there that were running around, tackling each other, falling down.

So I stopped to observe. When I finished, I said, hey, I'm running an errand. So I took off. One of the coaches called me. He said, Son, would you like to play? I said, yes, sir. But I'm on an errand for my mom. I've got to do this first. He said well, go do that. Ask your mom can you play football and come back. And I did. I took the meal and the baking powder home and I asked my mom. I said, mom, could I go out and play football?

She said, yeah, but you've got to remember now, when dinner's ready, we're not holding dinner for you so. If you don't get back in time, you don't eat. That's the way it was in our household.

I was a three sport athlete in high school. I played basketball. I played football, and I actually ran track. Lot of people don't believe this. But I ran the low hurdles in track. It was a great experience. Up until ten years ago I was a Tennessee record holder in the shot put. That was a great experience for me. My coaches at Lester High School, my coach who coached me in basketball, Jake Peacock, by the way, our basketball team was second place in the state tournament two years in a row. We had two high school All Americans on that basketball team. A guy by the name of Richard Jones, and another guy by the name of Charlie Parker. What great players they were. They were high school All Americans. They later went on to college. Charlie Parker played for Cincinnati here. Our basketball was something to be admired.

Then there was Coach Jake Peacock. Coach Peacock coached basketball and football. It was Herman O'Neil, a young fellow from Lincoln University, who had gotten his first coaching tenure at Lester, and he was a defensive lineman. He was a guard on offense and a defensive tackle on defense. Coach O'Neil one of the coaches in college. Coach O'Neil made me meaner than I needed to be to play football. So Coach O'Neil gets the credit for that.

I had a lot of scholarships and grants to go to college. First I visited Grambling. The legendary Coach Eddie Robinson. We spent a little time together. But I realized one thing. The only thing in Grambling is Grambling. But a lot of recruiters came to visit me my senior year, but none like John Merritt. John Merritt to me, John Merritt was the greatest coach in historic black college football. We lost a total of five games in four years. We lost two my freshman year, and then my '65 and '66 were historical black college National Championship. The one thing about Coach Merritt was in his recruiting of me, he came to my house. We lived in a shotgun house. I don't know if you know what a shotgun house is, but in a shotgun house you could stand on the front porch and look out through the back window. There is no divider between those rooms. We lived there.

Coach Merritt came to visit us, and the first thing he did was made me go outside and stand on the porch. But our house was not the very best when it rained we got out the buckets. So Coach Merritt told me to go stand on the porch as he talked to my parents and I stood there. Of course I could hear what he was saying. He was talking about how he was going to make me go to church every Sunday. How he was going to make sure that I got an education. He was going to buy me clothes. He was going to feed me well because he knew I was used to eating, so he was going to take care of me.

I stood there and I listened, and I said, hey, Coach Merritt, he got something on the ball. Just as he was finishing his presentation to my parents, he dropped down on his knees and he prayed. Man, I tell you what, that was it. It was all

over. Everybody that came to visit me, Nebraska, and Illinois, and all those schools came to visit me, after the presentation my mom, the first thing that came out of my mom's mouth was, hey, but that Coach Merritt, he's sure a nice guy. You're going to like Coach Merritt. He's going to take care of you. And he did. He took care of me.

Some of the coaches on our coaching staff were Coach Joe Gilliam, Sr. who has gone on to be with the lord. Coach Alvin Coleman, Sr., Coach J.C. Coffee who was my line coach. We called him Old Buddy. Now, Old Buddy came up to my waist about here. But Old Buddy knew football, and he was the reason that I ended up being an All American, because he taught me how to disengage, to engage, and disengage, to tackle, to run. Old Buddy was the primary reason I'm at this program today.

Then there was Shannon Little who was one of the people who recruited me. A guy by the name of Samuel Whitman, he was a coach there. It was a great time. People say that we were a large team. Now I only weighed 225 in college, but I had a roommate. His name was Tommy "Buster" Davis. Tommy Davis was from Lufkin, Texas. Tommy Davis, they said I was mean, I don't know who taught Tommy Davis to be mean, because he was one mean man. We called him dirty. After my career with Tennessee State, the pros came calling. There I was the third pick in the first round in the NFL draft.

How happy were Sandra and I? The Atlanta Falcons showed me people, let me tell you. There were hard times in Georgia, lots of turmoil. Things were not good racially, and I ended up going to Georgia. After training camp, we broke camp and I went to Atlanta. They put us in a hotel and left. We didn't know what to do. Now I've got an 18 year old wife and a small child, Cheyenne, and, hey, it was just tough. But I met a man who took me under his wing. His name was Herschel Harper. Now Herschel played for the Atlanta Jets of the old negro baseball league. He was a second baseman. What a great person he was. He and his wife Juanita, wow. They took us in and showed us where to go, where not to go. They talked to us about schools and all of that. I couldn't have made it had it not been for Herschel Harper in Atlanta.

My second year in Atlanta we got a new coach, and his name was Marion Campbell. Ladies and gentlemen, one of the finest men to ever walk on this earth. Marion Campbell took me under his wings and he told me, now, Claude, let me tell you something, you were rookie of the year all right. You had a good season, but, Son, those people at home studied and next year it won't be the same. You won't be running around blocking.

So he had coached the fearsome foursome. He had coached David Jones and Marilyn Olsen. And he remembered a lot of their techniques. So he began to

teach them to me. It wasn't hard because he was a good teacher. I caught on very quickly. That's why I ended up making all pro the next year and going to the Pro Bowl because of Coach Marion Campbell. Coach Campbell is sick now. He's having some health problems, and Coach, if you're listening, hey, I love you, man. Hey, you were very much a part of my life. You helped me get things turned around, and I appreciate it.

Then, in 1975, I got a knee injury. People projected that that was the end of my football career. That I wouldn't play anymore. I couldn't. I had torn a ligament, and I had torn both cartilages in my knee, and it was over for me. My football career was down the drain. But I worked hard and some of the people who worked with me was a guy by the name of Dr. James Funk. Dr. Funk was another little guy. He barely came up to my waist. But he did an outstanding job of reconstructive surgery, and he got me back out there. He told me, it's up to you where you go from here. Dr. James Funk, what a great surgeon, and what a great guy.

Then there was the Tarheels, and Dr. Funk was the mini healer, and this guy, Dr. Charlie Harrison was the tall healer. Charlie Harrison saved my life, because after the surgery, being immobile so long, I had blood clots, and Dr. Harrison stepped in and he saved my life. If Dr. Harrison is here today, I'd like to recognize him. Would you stand, sir? Wherever you are. I owe my life to you. And I appreciate everything that you did for me. The best thing that ever happened to the Atlanta Falcons was we got a coach named Jerry Glanville. Some of you might know Jerry. Jerry's a **** of a guy. Jerry came in and he put in a lot of different defenses. And most of them were for everybody up on the line of scrimmage and go after the quarterback. That's what the defense was. As he was putting it in, I was saying to myself, am I supposed to believe this guy? Here's a guy that's leaving tickets for Elvis Presley and Elvis is dead.

How much do I trust this guy? But in the end the Atlanta Falcons ended up being the fifth best defense in NFL history, and the defense was called the Grits Blitz in Atlanta. During the off season, I worked in Nashville, and I would go back to Nashville every year during the off season. I worked for the Metro Board Parks and Recreation there. Now there wasn't a lot of money involved. It was just that I love kids. I love being around them, and what the Nashville Parks and Recreation did was allowed me to travel over the entire city to all the different centers and visit wherever they had problems, that's where I ended up. I tell you what, it was a great experience. Sometimes now when I'm in Nashville, I'll see some of the kids that I work with, and they'll come up and tell me, Coach, I appreciate everything you did for me. That's a great feeling for me.

I retired in 1978 from the Atlanta Falcons. One day I was sitting at my locker and

I just felt like we weren't going anyplace. So I left the Falcons football team. Nobody messed with me. Nobody did anything to me. I just left. I was following mine, more or less. I worked for a radio station in Atlanta called WAOK. I had the Claude Humphrey Show. And at the Claude Humphrey Show, you interview the most valuable player of the game. Now get this, we only won five games. Where are those most valuable players coming from? But we worked it out. We worked it out. I had a good experience. Some of the guys in Atlanta that I played with and I can't stand here because like I said, they told me I only had ten minutes. I can't stand here and mention all of them.

But my first year in Atlanta my roommate was a guy by the name of Kenny Reeves. Kenny taught me what it was like to be a pro football player. He helped me to get everything in line.

Then there was Jeff Van Note who is a good friend who is here with me today. There was Rolland Lawrence, John Zook, and my favorite player of all time, Jim Mitchell.

Now this guy holds a special place in my football career. His name was George Kunz. And George and I used to have battles that rival Muhammad Ali and George Foreman in practice. George and I hit it up after all those practices going to the Pro Bowl. What a great experience that was.

Then came the Philadelphia Eagles. I got traded to the Eagles. I met a man that had better work ethics than I did. I marveled at the way he went about his job. His name is Coach **** Vermeil. ****, would you stand? Let the people see you. This man worked tirelessly to take a football team that perhaps may not have been a great football team, but he had a bunch of young guys who really got into what he was preaching, and we ended up going to a Super Bowl. Coach Vermeil and I are still good friends. We talk occasionally. Coach and his wife Carol ended up being just great friends to me. I appreciate Coach.

When I got to Philadelphia, man, what a nice young team. Those guys accepted me. They brought me in. They were like sponges. They wanted to know what it was that I had been doing to get to All-Pro or make All-Pro. But in the morning before practice we would have meeting together, **** Harrison, Carl Hariston, Charlie Johnson, Ken Clark. We would go in those meetings and that was before the coach got there. Man, what great work we got in.

I got special recognition for president Dr. Glenda Glover, and you saw Tennessee State's band "Too Tall" Jones, "Too Tall" will be standing before you one day here. And I want to give special recognition to the president and owner of the Atlanta Falcons, Mr. Arthur Blank. Now Mr. Blank I especially want to thank Mr. Blank because Mr. Blank is a major contributor to the Historically Black

College Hall of Fame. What a great job that he's done with that, helping keep black football alive. Mr. Blank, I appreciate it, and a lot of these guys will be seeing you.

So I really thank you. Thomas Dimitroff, the general manager down there, Thomas has done a great job. I want to thank him. I want to thank Kareen Irvin, and special thanks to the Leonard Tose family who was the owner of the Philadelphia Eagles while I was there. Mr. Tose was a great guy, and I just want to remember him as I go along.

I want to pay special recognition to the sports writers. The people who wrote something. I know you had a hard time because most of you guys weren't even alive when I played. So I know you worked hard to get me in, and I do appreciate it. My church that AJ and I attend, Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, pastor, and the Reverend, and First Lady Miss Frankie Shields. Thank you guys for being in my corner and staying with me. The Springdale Checker Club, and especially you Hall of Famers who I think I've bored long enough.

I want to say in closing thank you all for coming and listening to my story. May God bless each and every one of you all.