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Sidebar Assignment

ATLANTA – While the Falcons dropped into a tie for third place in the NFC South after a loss to the Bucs on Sunday, the NFL mourns the death of Falcons Hall of Famer Claude Humphrey.

Humphrey, a fearsome defensive end who made his name with 10 years of service to the Falcons, passed away at the age of 77 on Friday the Pro Football Hall of Fame announced on Saturday.

“His humble spirit guided him on and off the field,” Pro Football Hall of Fame President Jim Porter said about Humphrey. “Our thoughts and prayers are with Claude's family during this difficult time. The Hall of Fame will forever guard his legacy. The Hall of Fame flag will be flown at half-staff in Claude's memory.”

Humphrey was selected third by the Falcons in the 1968 NFL draft and earned NFL defensive rookie of the year honors for that year. He earned All-NFL or All-Pro eight times and All-NFC seven times in his ten-year tenure with the Falcons. He also made the Pro Bowl six times. He spent the last three years of his career with the Philadelphia Eagles and made it to the Super Bowl with them in 1980 before retiring in 1981.

Humphrey recorded double-digit sacks in nine of his 13 seasons and totaled 140 in his career. Even more impressive is that Humphrey’s sacks were just considered tackles until 1982, so he was on another level as a pass rusher. Humphrey also played a pivotal role in the 1977 Falcons defense that limited opponents to 129 points, the fewest points allowed by a team in a 14-game season in history. He also made the Pro Bowl team that year with the famous “Grits Blitz” defense.

“One of the best things about him was his winning attitude,” said longtime Falcons linebacker Greg Brezina. “He was a team player and, of course, he’s probably one of the best defensive ends that there was out there. It’s just a shame he played so long with a team that didn’t win much. He didn’t get the recognition.”

Brezina has a point because it took 33 years for Humphrey to be inducted into the Hall of Fame, which finally happened in 2014. Humphrey was also awarded the honor of being placed into the Falcons Ring of Honor in 2008, the team’s own version of a team’s Hall of Fame.

“Claude made an indelible impression on so many from Memphis to the Falcons and across the NFL with his leadership and tenacious approach on the field,” Falcons’ owner and chairman Arthur M. Blank said. “His Falcons legacy was cemented as a forever memory with induction into our Ring of Honor and he will be greatly missed. May he rest in peace.”