**MONTGOMERY NATIVE HONORED BY CAMELLIA BOWL**

**By Tim Gayle**

**Staff Writer**

**MONTGOMERY -** Johnny Davis had a hard time putting his latest award in perspective, so he took the time to write down his thoughts, and then used it as the opening statement in his speech at the Alabama Legend luncheon on Friday afternoon.

“It’s a great honor for me to be here today,” he said. “First of all, I’d like to thank Mayor Todd Strange, (Montgomery County) Commissioner Elton Dean and the Camellia Bowl committee for inviting Johnny Davis back to his hometown. The kid that that grew up in Star Alley was known as Ozzie Newsome’s roommate, Joe Montana’s fullback and Ricky Bell’s blocker, but today he’s known as Johnny Davis, the legend.”

Davis, 62, was honored by the Raycom Media Camellia Bowl as the fifth recipient of its “Alabama Legend” award and was the featured speaker at the Friday luncheon at the Renaissance Hotel & Spa that included city and county officials and both head coaches as well as the players of Eastern Michigan and Georgia Southern, who will compete in the Camellia Bowl on Saturday afternoon at Cramton Bowl.

For Davis, it was a long journey as the youngest son in a family of 12 who excelled at football from an early age, but felt he was often overlooked as a fullback in Paul “Bear” Bryant’s wishbone offense at Alabama in the 1970s despite a 10-year career in the National Football League.

Davis was honored earlier this year with his induction into the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame and was the first-ever Montgomerian selected as an “Alabama Legend” after Bobby Bowden, Pat Dye, Woodrow Lowe and Gene Stallings.

“This honor means a lot,” Davis said moments before taking the stage for the event. “I grew up here and it’s good to honor your hometown guy. So this is one of the greatest honors ever. It’s a blessing.”

Davis, a resident of Cliffside Park, N.J., was a team captain and All-American at Sidney Lanier in 1973 after rushing for 1,152 yards on 250 carries. He played fullback for Bryant from 1974-77 and was labeled by Bryant as “the best fullback I’ve ever coached.”

Statistics back up that claim. More than 40 years later, he ranks fifth in yards per carry in a season with 6.67 in 1975, trailing only halfback Bobby Marlow (1950) when he set the record. Today, he ranks behind Marlow, current Crimson Tide tailback Damien Harris (2017 and 2016) and tailback Kerry Goode (1983).

He is sixth in career yards per carry at 5.64, ranking behind Marlow and a quartet of Nick Saban-coached tailbacks: Derrick Henry, Trent Richardson, T.J. Yeldon and Mark Ingram.

Davis was drafted in the second round by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1978 and played three years for the Bucs before he was traded to the San Francisco 49ers in 1981. He only played one year with the 49ers but it was a memorable one as the team won Super Bowl XVI. He was traded to Cleveland the following year and spent the remainder of his 10-year career with the Browns.

“I played at Lanier over 40 years ago,” said Davis, now 62. “It’s like they say in church, he may not come when you want him, but he’s right on time, even if he’s 10 years later. I’m just thankful they thought about me for this honor.”

His 23-minute speech followed his career in football, relying heavily on lessons he learned from Bryant over the years.

“I fumbled on my first college carry,” he recalled. “I went over and Coach Bryant told me, ‘Do you know where you are? Nobody fumbles at Alabama.’ I didn’t fumble again. My thing is, when you get knocked down, you’ve got to get back up.”