

Headline: University of Vermont lacrosse adopt a bundle of joy in Alison Pyle

By Michael J. Lewis

It is a sound unlike any other Meghan Cobb has ever heard.

It's the loud, happy and oh-so-loving giggle of 3-year-old Alison Pyle, who for the past two seasons has been the most popular "player" on the University of Vermont women's lacrosse team.

"It's just the best, I can't even describe it," Meghan says. "You have to hear it and see it to describe it. She's just the best, most joyful kid, and when she's around the team she's always laughing and giggling. We are, too."

Alison, who lives with baby sister Emily and parents Matt and Robin Pyle just a short walk from the UVM campus in Burlington, Vt., was a normal child until being diagnosed with a pilomyxoid astrocytoma, a softball sized brain tumor when she was 11 months old.

The little toddler would have to undergo more than a year of chemotherapy on the tumor, which cannot be operated on but is treatable.

Upon finishing her treatment around September, 2014, Alison was introduced to the Catamounts' lacrosse team. UVM coach Jennifer Johnson and her team had already been awesome FOJ supporters thanks to previously having adopted Molly and Megan Ardren, sisters who suffered from Chiara malformation and leukemia, respectively, in 2011. It was the Ardrens who connected the Pyles with Friends of Jaclyn.

"When we first met Alison, she was kind of amazed by everything," Coach Johnson says. "She had never seen ice, so when we took her to the rink on campus, she was amazed. She's just been such a wonderful kid to have around since Day 1."

Alison was officially adopted by UVM in the spring of 2015, and then-freshman Kim Arkell remembers how excited Alison was to get her own mini lacrosse stick.

"We gave her this tiny stick and when she comes to games she's always running around with it and it's so cute," Kim says. "She really seems like a totally normal kid when she's around us; she can throw the ball and she loves smacking hands with everyone on the team in the pre-game (huddle.)"

Despite being legally blind in one eye, Alison runs around behind the bench during games, and serves as a huge morale boost for the team.

"Any stress you had in your day before seeing her at practice, she gets rid of it," Meghan says. "She makes us realize we really don't have much to worry about."

The team has taken Alison apple-picking and helped with fundraisers for the Pyles to help defray medical costs, and when baby sister Emily was born last August, she became part of the team as well.

For Coach Johnson, having Alison around makes a tangible difference in the team's play.

"Our practices and games are sharper, I'm telling you, when she's around," she says. "Having her there maybe takes the edge off our players' mental struggles, and makes them looser."

Meghan says getting to know Alison's parents ("they're like the nicest people in the world") has made the team invested in Alison's health, and they've been thrilled that recent scans have come back clean.

"I love that I'll get to see her grow up!" exclaimed Kim, who just finished her sophomore year in Burlington. "She's going to be with us for a long time, and I'm so happy about that."



