

Headline: Kean soccer and Ashley Torbic's relationship grows and grows

By Michael J. Lewis

Ashley Torbic was only 7 years old when she first met the Kean (N.J.) University women's soccer team.

And it was six years ago. So there are only a few things she clearly remembers about this momentous day in her life.

"I was really really short and they were really really tall," Ashley says with a big laugh. "I was terrified. But then they gave me a jersey and a ball and it went great."

Ashley has grown since then, her teammates have probably not grown as much (once we hit college, the height chart pretty much stays static), but the real growth has come in the relationships Ashley and her parents (Eric and Vicki) have made with the team.

One of Friends of Jaclyn's longest-term relationships, Kean and the Torbic family have enjoyed six years of games and almost exclusively positive medical news.

"It's been kind of amazing, because you see this group of college athletes and for them to care so much about her and what she's gone through, it was so unexpected," Vicki Torbic says. "She's gotten so many great relationships from the team."

Ashley's medical journey began when she was 4, when an endocrinologist noticed she had started developing breast tissue, a significant abnormality in a child so young. After more testing at the world-renowned Hackensack Medical Center in New Jersey, Ashley was diagnosed with a Juvenile Pilocytic Astrocytoma, located in the center of her brain.

After 18 months of grueling chemo (Ashley says she doesn't remember anything but "the playroom at the hospital), the tumor shrunk significantly.

Since the end of chemotherapy Ashley has had very few medical setbacks; she lost a pitch of hearing in her ear, and was also diagnosed with ADHD. But the tumor was remained stable, and last August Ashley was even told by a doctor that he couldn't see the tumor anymore.

"She's one of the great success stories," Eric says. "We know we're very very lucky about that."

The Torbics heard about FOJ from a mutual friend, and after reaching out they were paired with Kean, an NCAA Division III program. The Cougars and their coach, Brian Doherty, immediately made Ashley feel at home.

Players like Kristen Hager, Danielle Esposito and Carla Vitola hung out with Ashley after practices and always checked in with her before and after her MRI's.

Over the years the Cougars have done game nights playing video games with Ashley, and they've come to watch Ashley play soccer as well.

Last year's team gave Ashley an inspirational card thanking her for all she's done for them.

“I’ll talk to these girls the rest of my life,” Ashley says. “I can talk to them about anything; obviously I talk to them about different stuff now than when I was 7.

“They’ll always be my sisters.”



