

Rutgers women's lacrosse has big fans in Camiolo family By Michael J. Lewis

It was a crisp fall day in October, 2008, when sisters Genna and Rosie Camiolo met a whole bunch of strangers who were more than a decade older than them. They were members of the Rutgers women's lacrosse team, a group of girls who only knew they'd soon be spending a lot of time with a girl (Genna) who had had a rough go of it in life so far.

Diagnosed at age 2, and first experiencing symptoms at age 6, Genna suffered from a multi-focal low-grade glioma, and like her sister Rosie, had been diagnosed with neurofibromatosis, a genetic condition which causes diffuse tumors. (Rosie and her older brother Andrew both have the condition but have never experienced any symptoms).

Everyone was a little nervously excited at the first meeting, Genna and Rosie's mom, Kristin, recalled. But very soon, Genna began talking to Faith Richards, one of the Scarlet Knight players.

Faith had had experience with brain tumors, unfortunately; she told Genna that her dad, Bradley Richards had died of that dreaded illness six years earlier.

Genna and Faith quickly bonded, and the team gave the girls signed team T-shirts. It made Genna feel really special.

"They were so nice and so welcoming to me, right from the start," said Genna, now 17. "They right away started texting me and calling me and sending me cards."

Seven years later, one of the longest Friends of Jaclyn team/athlete relationships is still going strong. Dozens of Scarlet Knights have cycled through the lacrosse program, but No. 1 fans Genna (an official FOJ adoptee) and Rosie (who has been "unofficially" adopted by the team), are still a big part of the team.

When Genna had some setbacks in 8th grade, having to go back into treatment, the Rutgers players were there, offering support, visiting the Philadelphia hospital Genna was in, and calling to check in.

Hollie DiMuro and coach Laura Brand-Sias were particularly helpful, Kristin Camiolo recalled, but all of them "are our big sisters," Genna said.

"It's hard to say what our life would be like without FOJ, because they're so much a part of our lives at Rutgers," Kristin said. "We'd be missing a lot, and we'd be missing those relationships. To be able to root for *our* team, and know that they're our team, is something so special."

When she's feeling down, about anything, Genna, who lives in Warren Township, N.J., reaches out to her Rutgers sisters. They talk about "normal stuff," not "sick stuff."

Kristin said that when Genna was going through rough times, the players "upped their game."

“It’s so much harder going through treatment as a teenager which Genna was last time, as opposed to when she was just a little kid,” Kristin said. “When one of the (Rutgers) calls would call or text, it was an instant bright moment for Genna. She would brighten up and remember she has 20 best friends on that team.”

Rosie, too, has loved her relationship with Rutgers; she said she’s never felt left out by the attention her family has had to give to Genna’s illness, and that “going to the games is so much fun.”

Genna’s looking forward to graduating high school next year, and going to college to get an early childhood education degree, and work with special needs kids.

But her relationship with Rutgers figures to go on for a long time.

“It’s heartwarming to know there are so many people out there who have your kids’ back,” Kristin said, a beaming smile dancing across her face. “Those Rutgers girls have given us so much, and are so special to us. We love them all.”