

## **Headline: “Amazing Abby” makes big impression with Albany team**

By Michael J. Lewis

Most Friends of Jaclyn adoptions follow a familiar pattern: The team is excited, while the child is nervous, shy and a little scared of suddenly having 20 or 30 college students paying attention to them.

Then there was the adoption of Abby Sayles by the University at Albany (N.Y.) women’s soccer team. When 5-year-old Abby met her future best friends at their annual banquet this past April, there was no shyness whatsoever.

“She walked right over to us and said ‘I’m going to sit with my team!’” recalled Caitlin Paltsios, a Great Danes junior. “After a minute or two I thought she was the sweetest, nicest, loudest little girl I’d ever met!”

Abby, who was diagnosed with pre-B Cell ALL leukemia as a 3-year-old, doesn’t do “shy,” and soon endeared herself to her new friends.

“I just ran up to them because I knew they would be nice,” Abby said. “It was so much fun!”

Then again, maybe Abby isn’t shy because she’s used to being in the spotlight: In 2015 a video of Abby “marrying” her favorite nurse at Albany Medical Center, Matt Hickling, went viral and was seen all over the world.

“Abby is an unusual kid,” her mom, Renee Sayles, said with a laugh. “She’ll wake up from her chemo and the sedation and just start dancing when she gets out of bed. She’s always been an ‘up’ kid.”

Abby’s spunk is all the more impressive considering how much she’s had to go through in her short life. She’s undergone chemo every 85 days for a year, and has endured 19 spinal taps.

But happily Abby’s cancer is currently in remission, and when Albany coach Caitlin Cucchiella heard her team had been chosen to adopt Abby, she was very excited.

“I told our team that our job is to support this little girl no matter what, and do whatever we could to make her smile,” Caitlin said. “Little did I know that she’s the one always making us smile. She just exudes so much energy and is so full of sunshine, she’s so much fun to be around.”

So far Abby and her little sister Zoey have gotten to attend an Albany soccer spring game, where Abby got to run on the field afterwards, and had an ice cream party with the team.

They've also FaceTimed with several players like Paltsios, who says the team can't wait to do more.

"We can't wait until August when we're all back at school and the season starts," Paltsios said. "I miss her already."

Renee says the team has been exactly what Abby had been hoping for, and she points to Cucchiella and her team as an inspiration.

"The girls on the team are inspiring; they're such strong, confident and kind women," Renee says. "They're so active and welcoming, that they're perfect role models for Abby."



