Lady Falcons Adopt Keira as Team Watergirl

Keira Jo Allsopp is blind in one eye and partially blind in the other. She has been battling a brain tumor since 2010. And she is only five years old. In early January, the Lady Falcon’s assistant coach, Jared Franklin, made contact with Keira’s family and the Lady Falcons adopted Keira as an honorary member of the team. Keira wears number 8 and cheers on her teammates whenever possible.

Judging by photos of Keira and her Lady Falcons, it’s difficult to say who has made the biggest impact on the other.

“I just feel like she’s my little sister. She just really lightens my world. She is so funny. We just laugh and laugh,” Falcon guard Anna Best, 18, said. “She inspires me.”

Kiera’s mother, Shelly Allsopp, calls the team adoption of Keira a blessing.

Allsopp said it’s rare when her redheaded daughter is not smiling… even before heading into any of the three, nine-hour surgeries she has undergone to remove part of the tumor. “Keira actually wakes up with a smile on her face. There wasn’t a day going through chemotherapy that she didn’t smile. She doesn’t let it bring her down,” Allsopp said.

In October of 2010 at the age of 3, Allsopp was diagnosed with a type of brain tumor called Pilocytic Astrocytoma Optic Glioma. It is located at the front of the brain encasing the pituitary gland and surrounding the optic nerves. 60% of the tumor has been surgically removed, but the remaining 40% is inoperable – but currently stable. She will continue MRI exams at least once every three months, probably for the rest of her life.

Keira’s bravery is one reason Assistant Coach Jared Franklin initiated the adoption, something he has done a number of times at other colleges he has worked. “It really puts things in perspective,” SIC assistant coach Jared Franklin said. “We may have lost a basketball game, but we didn’t lose the game of life.”

Keira is the Falcon’s first, but likely not the last as other SIC team sports have expressed interest in adopting their own young teammate. Franklin said the adoptions are for life. Her impact also can last a lifetime. “In 10 years (the players) probably won’t remember what our record was this year, but they’re never going to forget Keira,” said Franklin. Keira helps the Lady Falcons just as much as they do for Keira. “Having Keira around makes the ladies try hard and not give up,” Franklin said.

The Allsopp family, which resides in Franklin County, also includes parents Shelly and Adam, along with older sister Pressley (10) and brother, Holden (8). Franklin said it is important to include the entire family in activities whenever possible. The other night, he and some of the Lady Falcons went to watch Holden play in a basketball game. “They (the kids) really like going to the practices,” Shelly Allsopp said. “Keira has made really good friends with a couple of the players. They’ve gone out to eat with us and have gone to watch some softball and baseball games.”

SIC athletic director Jeremy Irlbeck couldn’t be happier in his first year at the college, to be a part of something he calls “bigger than any of us.”

“This is a great opportunity for us to give back to the community,” Irlbeck said. “It makes me feel good that we are doing something way bigger than us. Sometimes, we get caught up in doing things just for ourselves. I know the girls on our basketball team love Keira and so far this has been a good deal.