

[https://newsadvance.com/news/local/here-for-a-reason-local-ice-skater-aims-to-inspire-with-her-story-of-overcoming/article\\_1fdd353f-a3ed-59ea-b8f9-d78e94cf38c3.html](https://newsadvance.com/news/local/here-for-a-reason-local-ice-skater-aims-to-inspire-with-her-story-of-overcoming/article_1fdd353f-a3ed-59ea-b8f9-d78e94cf38c3.html)

## 'Here for a reason': Local ice skater aims to inspire with her story of overcoming struggles of cystic fibrosis

Emily Brown  
Jul 18, 2020

---



Anna Johnson

Submitted

**I**n her 23 years, Anna Johnson hasn't ever had an issue identifying or pursuing goals.

After seeing figure skaters Michelle Kwan and Sarah Hughes compete in the Olympics in 2002, she knew she wanted to lace up her own pair of skates and step onto the ice to experience the activity herself.

“This is scary,” Johnson remembered thinking as a young girl. “I’m gonna learn how to do it.”

About a decade later, she was on the cusp of qualifying for nationals in solo ice dancing.

As a kid, if you told Johnson she couldn’t do something, “she definitely wanted to do it all the more,” her mom, Nancy Johnson, explained.

And when she was a teenager and continued to experience issues with her lungs and digestion — and after multiple doctors told her she was fine, only identifying and treating passing ailments — Anna Johnson set out to find a cause, some concrete reason for the multiple maladies.

One after the other, she knocked possible diagnoses off the list until only one remained: cystic fibrosis.

“I just remember sitting at my laptop with tears streaming down my face,” Johnson said, recalling the punch delivered by those two words.

Johnson, who spent much of her childhood in Appomattox and now lives part-time in Amherst, made yet another trip to the doctor, this time armed with new information.

Johnson relayed her research results to her doctor and asked to be tested for the genetic disease.

“She looked back at me and said, ‘I think you might be right,’” Johnson said.

Months later, as her health continued to deteriorate, Johnson officially found the answer that had eluded her and others for years.

Her hypothesis was right.

A 19-year-old at the time, Johnson was given the cystic fibrosis diagnosis normally handed down much earlier in life. According to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, of the more than 30,000 people in the United States with CF listed in the organization's registry in 2018, the average age at diagnosis was 4.2 years old.

As Anna and her family heard the news, there wasn't much time for reflection or reaction, Nancy Johnson recalled, because "we had reached a crisis point" with Anna's health.

And before things got better, they got worse — much worse.

## 'It was hell'

By the time her referral appointment at the University of Virginia Health System's Adult Cystic Fibrosis Clinic rolled around, Anna Johnson couldn't keep anything down. Immediately she was admitted to the hospital.

Johnson's particular form of CF is especially rare, she said, with only a handful of patients worldwide diagnosed with her genetic mutation. More than 2,500 mutations of the defective CF-causing gene have been described, according to the Johns Hopkins Cystic Fibrosis Center.

Lung issues that typically are most associated with CF patients affect her, but Johnson's cystic fibrosis led to severe problems in other organs at the time.

Inflammation in her pancreas turned into chronic pancreatitis. Her colon completely stopped working at one point, and she dealt with kidney and liver failure.

Treatments helped some, but solutions proved to be fleeting. An unexpectedly long hospital stay, which Johnson remembers as "probably one of the hardest things I've ever experienced," followed for an abdominal surgery.

The procedure, had it gone as planned, would have required a two-night stay. But she was there for two weeks and eventually endured four total surgeries.

Along the way, she contracted pneumonia, and part of her bowel started dying. Those days also brought with them unprecedented pain, Johnson said, no pain meds seemed to even touch.

“It was hell,” she said.

## Getting up

As an ice skater, Johnson has fallen multiple times. Bone disease, which, in hindsight, also seemed to be an effect of the cystic fibrosis, contributed to a broken sacrum years earlier.

But then, and on the other occasions when she hit the ice, she got up.

That toughness translated to Johnson’s life outside the rink — where she had every reason to lie on the mat.

“She has never given up,” Nancy Johnson said. “She has always been incredibly resilient through all of this.”

Cystic fibrosis relegated Anna Johnson to a hospital bed for 150 days all told. During those stints, she turned that bed into a workspace, completing online college classes and obtaining both a bachelor’s degree and naturopathic doctor degree.

She completed finals online the same week she had surgery, entering elite company. According to the CF Foundation, in 2018, less than 7% of patients in the CF registry had obtained a master’s or doctoral-level degree.

Eventually, Johnson’s series of surgeries offered relief and got her on a path to better health, the path that was unfamiliar to Johnson in her earlier years. She still deals with the effects of CF, particularly hypoglycemia, chronic electrolyte imbalance and some breathing issues, but she’s in control of her health in a way she wasn’t before.

Within a few months of her discharge after surgeries last year, Johnson headed back to the place she loves, where she could process the emotional aftermath of the ordeal her body had endured.

“I just knew that even if I couldn’t really skate, just being out there would be really good for me,” she said.

“... It just took one time of me getting back out on the ice; I just knew that I was home.”

## ‘Here for a reason’

Megan Rowe, a fellow skater who had practiced at rinks in the region with Johnson in the past, followed Johnson’s story as it played out in real time on social media. During the months Rowe was forced to skate without her friend, she learned, from a distance, about Johnson’s intense struggles.

“To be honest, it sounded really bad,” Rowe said. “I did not expect that she was going to return to skating.”

Yet Johnson showed up again, with renewed vigor for the sport she loves, carrying with her a positivity that radiates.

As the two have continued to skate, Rowe has seen Johnson hold others up. Johnson coaches kids in the sport and plans to do so for the rest of her life. Rowe also has seen her advocate for skaters with disabilities in front of U.S. Figure Skating, the organization they’re both part of.

So when the group put out a call for nominees for its “Get Up” program, which designates ambassadors who’ve stood out in showing resolve in the face of significant challenges, Rowe knew exactly who she’d nominate.

“Out of everyone I know, everyone who skates, she does that more than anyone,” Rowe said of Johnson. “She makes me want to be a better person and skater. She has no idea how many [of my own] struggles her words or her presence have helped me through.”

Jordan Hoyt, a marketing manager with U.S. Figure Skating, said the organization received about 250 nominations this year. Through a “very emotional” process at headquarters, organization officials narrowed down the list. Johnson’s story slid through multiple rounds of painstaking edits until she was one of the final eight.

Her story, Hoyt said, is “so inspiring.”

Hoyt and her colleagues saw Johnson’s story come across their desks multiple times, as multiple people nominated Johnson to be an ambassador; Hoyt explained Johnson “definitely had one of the [highest amounts of] nominations.”

Johnson’s saga, like her programs on the ice, contains twists and turns. Good days, bad days, awful days, all filled with a whirlwind of feelings.

Hearing the news from the skating organization her story of perseverance would be proclaimed nationally went down as one of the better moments. It, like other days in her journey, came with its own set of emotions.

“I just cried,” Johnson said of her response.

Not everyone would be brave enough to get up or to continue trudging through such extraordinary struggles as Johnson has, Hoyt said, and not everyone would be courageous enough to share a story that includes such pain.

Johnson, though, has found beauty in her suffering. Struggles bring us “to our knees, to the end of ourselves and to the beginning of him,” she said, explaining how her journey has strengthened her faith in a God who “has me here for a reason.”

“This is not a mistake,” Johnson added. “[I want to] encourage people that no matter what life throws at you, you can use it, and you can get up from it. You can inspire countless people with your story.

“Just maybe, someone that is going through a really, really hard time in their own life and feels like they have to give up their dreams [can] read my story and see there is still hope. There is always hope.”

Reach Emily Brown at (434) 385-5529.

Emily Brown covers the Hillcats, ODAC and high school sports for The News & Advance. Reach her at (434) 385-5529.

[https://newsadvance.com/news/local/i-chose-him-he-chose-me/article\\_5a286012-6ebe-5007-9c43-c95182ba34af.html](https://newsadvance.com/news/local/i-chose-him-he-chose-me/article_5a286012-6ebe-5007-9c43-c95182ba34af.html)

## 'I chose him. He chose me.'

For Keith Gumpman and Sarah Mundy, love is the heartbeat of decades-long relationship

Emily Brown



Keith Gumpman and Sarah Mundy pose for a photo during a Night to Shine prom in Lynchburg on Friday, Feb. 7.

Emily Brown/The News & Advance

---

**L**ove can weather any storm. Keith Gumpman and Sarah Mundy are proof.

For the Lynchburg residents, love is the shared heartbeat that keeps their bond alive and well. For nearly 30 years, the two have experienced the bad and good times together, the lows and highs.

It all started in a home on Forest Hills Circle.

There, in the Horizon Behavioral Health group home, the two met. Gumpman, 57, who has Down syndrome, and Mundy, 59, who deals with mild mental challenges, were residents there.

The relationship was platonic at first, but over time, things began to change.

Gumpman, Mundy said, had an extra something that drew her to him.

“Every other guy, they didn’t have anything to do with me,” she said.

Gumpman treated her differently, she added, explaining how their bond began to form.

“I thought it’d be fun to go out on dates,” Mundy said before admitting just how infatuated she was with Gumpman.

Asked who was interested first, Mundy didn’t hesitate.

“Me,” she said, a smile betraying her happiness at the memories she created nearly three decades ago.

Like any other couple, the two had their go-to date ideas. The most frequent option, Mundy said, was going to the movies. “Jumanji,” the 1995 film, was Mundy’s favorite. Gumpman was a fan of “Batman.”

The two enjoyed each other’s company and appreciated the time they spent together. It wasn’t long before Mundy knew: “He was the right guy.”

Gumpman upped the ante on Feb. 14, Valentine’s Day 1993. He popped the question that day, offering a modest yet valuable item: a ring with a heart, which Mundy still shows off to anyone asking about their relationship.

“He bought it out of his own pocket,” Mundy said before Gumpman, listening from a few feet away, chimed in.

“Yep!” he said loud enough to fill the entire room, an obvious sign of the pride he has in being able to make that purchase so many years ago.

The two would be committed to each other forever. On May 27, 1993, nearly 27 years ago, they held a ceremony celebrating their love and promises to each other.

“I chose him,” Mundy said. “He chose me.”

## **‘Immediately fell in love’**

Gumpman and Mundy’s love story extends beyond each other.

The two have bounced around from place to place for years, living in group homes or the home of a sponsor and also living together by themselves for a period. For one reason or another, those living options did not work out. But a little over three years ago, the couple found a new place to stay, one filled with the opportunity for new experiences and new, valuable relationships for them.

Enter Wanda Sale, a Lynchburg resident who has worked with people with disabilities for years. As a “sponsor” with Links to Life, a Lynchburg-based organization that pairs in-home sponsors with people with disabilities, Sale heard about the couple needing a new home. She had chances to meet and talk with Mundy and Gumpman to see if they’d all be a good match.

“I immediately fell in love with them, and they immediately fell in love with me,” Sale said.

It was settled. Mundy and Gumpman would reside with Sale in her house, which quickly became their home, evidence of which can be found scattered about the single-level residence in a quiet neighborhood off Old Graves Mill Road.

On the front side of the house sit Gumpman and Mundy’s bedrooms, personalized by Sale and her husband, Stoney Jude, to suit the couple’s interests and needs.

Gumpman's bedroom showcases a sports-centric theme. The comforter on his bed is all blue and emblazoned with a Duke University logo, his favorite team. A Duke lamp on his nightstand and Duke valance over the window show his fandom. On the windowsill is a display of NASCAR flags, a nod to Gumpman's affinity for racing.

Next door is Mundy's room, where she can sleep more comfortably in a recliner. The walls are all painted pink — Sale's "girliness" has rubbed off on Mundy a bit.

Her love for Scooby-Doo is on display, too, with a stuffed version of the character in a corner. Crafts Mundy has completed, such as decorated picture frames, are placed around the room, as well.

Behind the glass on those works of art are personal photos that tell part of Mundy and Gumpman's story. Elsewhere in the house, on the living area walls decorated with "family" motifs, Mundy and Gumpman show up again, their photos among the others of Sale and Jude's relatives.

"I consider them as my family now," Sale said. "[They've] completed us."

Sale and Jude, in fact, have made Mundy and Gumpman part of all their plans, including long trips.

In the past, they've enjoyed going to the beach and to tourist destinations around Tennessee, Sale said.

A trip to see the cherry blossoms in Washington, D.C., is on tap for the coming months, along with a journey to Florida, where they'll visit Disney World.

"I like to go on trips," Mundy said. "We like to travel. I don't like to be sitting at home not doing nothing."

The most memorable trip so far, Sale said, came about two years ago.

In the spring of 2018, the group sailed off to the Bahamas on one of the four cruises they've been on. This one was special, because it was a celebration of Gumpman and Mundy's 25th anniversary.

Before boarding the ship, the couple held a vow renewal ceremony at their church as a signal of their ongoing commitment to each other, no matter the circumstances.

## 'It's like a miracle'

It hasn't always been smooth sailing for Gumpman and Mundy. In their long relationship, they've had to endure more than most couples.

Health issues top the list of challenges they've walked through together.

Before moving in with Sale, the two lived at another sponsor's home when Gumpman encountered the biggest challenge of his life.

Gumpman, a former competitive weightlifter, fell down the stairs of the two-story house. Mundy found him at the bottom of the steps, his leg twisted under him. Gumpman had broken his neck.

"It was scary," Mundy said. "Sometimes I have nightmares [about it]."

Months in the hospital and rehab came after that.

Mundy visited him there, of course. Physical separation couldn't keep them from still holding on to each other.

"They waited it out and stuck it out and are still together," Sale said. "A lot of couples wouldn't be cool with all that."

Gumpman, who still wears a brace on his leg for support, had to work his way back to walking again. There was time in a wheelchair, followed by use of a walker for support, which he still uses when he's outside the house.

"It's like a miracle that he's even able to walk," Sale said.

Gumpman doesn't just walk now. At a recent prom night for people with special needs in Lynchburg, dressed in a white tuxedo and purple vest, he tore up the dance floor.

"I danced," he said. "I danced my heart out."

Mundy, too, has faced her share of challenges. Three years ago, she was 70 pounds heavier and had to take a slew of pills to keep her body functioning well.

Now, Sale said, she doesn't take any medication.

Mundy faced another health issue, too.

Five days a week for six weeks, Mundy took chemotherapy pills and underwent radiation to rid her body of cancer in her colon.

The treatment worked. She beat the disease.

"Yes I did!" she said during a recent weekday afternoon, now in remission for about two years.

Mundy wouldn't let cancer keep her and Gumpman apart, either.

## **'They inspire me'**

Today, challenges and disabilities don't define them and certainly don't slow them down.

In addition to the day services they attend, which help them manage some of the extra needs they have, the two participate in a number of other activities.

Outside the house, they are part of an exchange club, which allows them to experience different activities like bowling or community service projects.

Mundy particularly enjoys the opportunity to give back to the community by ringing the Salvation Army bell in front of stores around Christmastime. She and Gumpman also create encouraging cards or notes to deliver to first responders as a form of gratitude.

"It's my duty to help out other people in need of help," she said.

Individually, they have plenty of their own interests, too.

Gumpman is learning sign language and has the goal of learning to read. He and the rest of his family go over flashcards from time to time to encourage him in that endeavor.

**"I danced," Keith Gumpman said. "I danced my heart out."**

In addition to being a sports fan, Gumpman also likes to play the guitar and board games, and when Sale's grandchildren visit, he's always the one to interact with them.

Mundy likes to play the keyboard and is a "social butterfly," Sale said. Mundy becomes friends with people she meets in person instantly, and she enjoys social networking, too.

Some of her other time is dedicated to writing. She wants to write an essay or book about her life and Gumpman's, including the challenges the two have overcome. She also pays attention to politics, and writes out her thoughts in letters to the president.

"Most of us, we wouldn't do that," Sale said of Mundy's dedication to being an engaged citizen. "They inspire me."

Jude, Sale's husband, says he also is inspired by his adopted family members.

After watching Mundy, all dressed up in her long, purple dress, enjoy a carefree night with friends at the prom and seeing Gumpman forget the physical limitation of a walker while he moved to the beat of the music blaring from speakers a few feet in front of him, Jude beamed with pride. If only the rest of the world could display the joy Gumpman and Mundy do, "we would be so much better off," he said.

"No matter what comes along," Jude said, "they've still got a smile."

## A smile for every occasion

Those smiles are the foundation.

Sometimes, the expression is a signal of happiness. Happiness at the chances they get to go out together, for example. Like the times they go on dates.

Applebee's is their favorite spot. Less formal dining options such as Burger King and Wendy's are also good, along with a dessert place such as Dairy Queen.

Sometimes, their smiles are the only possible response to the fun they have with each other.

On nights they don't go out, Gumpman and Mundy are content to enjoy each other's company at the house. One of their favorite pastimes there is playing Nintendo Wii together. One hundred pin bowling is their game of choice.

"I can't help if I win even if I'm not trying to win," Mundy said with a laugh. "I'm always getting strikes all the time."

Gumpman, though, is the competitor in the house — with evidence of that spirit showing up as he yells, or "coaches," while watching Duke play basketball — and won't let his other half get away with a Wii win without poking a little fun.

One recent afternoon, Mundy won their Wii bowling match by a comfortable margin as Gumpman set a new scoring record for himself.

Still, Gumpman wasn't content with the performance, sticking his tongue out at Mundy after seeing she'd come out on top.

Mundy only smiled. Gumpman's drive to be victorious in the small things is part of what makes their relationship so special.

Decades after they first committed to spend their lives with each other, Gumpman and Mundy still share a romantic spark.

As Sale curled Mundy's newly dyed blonde hair ahead of an evening out recently, Gumpman watched, then couldn't help but exclaim his approval.

“Oooooh! Hot Lips!” he said. The expression, Gumpman’s favorite nickname for Mundy, has been part of their relationship for years.

**“He’s my partner,” Sarah Mundy said. “Always.”**

Mundy, of course, let a wide smile spread across her face.

Sometimes, though, her smile and Gumpman’s are more subdued. No date night or big event, no funny interaction is responsible in this case.

Though no laughs accompany the look, and though they’re not flashing any teeth, the subtle response, as the sides of their lips curl slightly, is noticeable. This small smile is simply a sign of contentment.

As Gumpman sat at the kitchen bar and filled hollowed-out peppers for dinner one night, Mundy stood next to him. She didn’t need to get her hands dirty to be involved in the preparation. Her presence was enough for Gumpman, who looked up at Mundy, smiled, then gently laid his head on her shoulder.

Encapsulated in the moment are the tenderness and kindness the two share. Those virtues, along with patience and communication, are the expressions of the thing they’ve shared since the 1990s: love.

When Gumpman gets a little agitated, Mundy knows exactly what to do to help him calm down.

There are the little actions, too, that show how they serve one another, like the times Mundy carries Gumpman’s coffee for him to give him a better chance at stability while he walks.

When struggles arise between them, or they face challenges outside the safety of their family home, they’re ready to “talk it out” or work through issues in favor of getting to the other side together.

“Give each other a chance,” Mundy said of what’s helped them to this point.

Gumpman and Mundy have decided nothing will stand in the way of their commitment to each other. Not a broken neck and the ensuing months they had to spend apart. Not cancer. No mental or physical challenges will come between them.

“He’s my partner,” Mundy said. “Always.”

Emily Brown covers the Hillcats, ODAC and high school sports for The News & Advance. Reach her at (434) 385-5529.

[https://newsadvance.com/news/local/uls-todd-olsen-stepped-into-the-unknown-but-in-epidemiology-and-womens-soccer-realized-a/article\\_91b54366-7e45-5dbb-ac38-f62c02d53c48.html](https://newsadvance.com/news/local/uls-todd-olsen-stepped-into-the-unknown-but-in-epidemiology-and-womens-soccer-realized-a/article_91b54366-7e45-5dbb-ac38-f62c02d53c48.html)

## **UL's Todd Olsen stepped into the unknown, but in epidemiology and women's soccer realized a dream**

Emily Brown  
Nov 9, 2020



University of Lynchburg women's soccer coach Todd Olsen leads practice at Shellenberger Field on Thursday, Oct. 15, 2020.

Kendall Warner/The News & Advance

**T**odd Olsen wanted to teach and coach. The dream, he said, was always to work with elementary students as a physical education instructor and to lead high school teams.

After securing a master's degree from Loughborough University in England, it seemed he'd soon be on his way to meeting that goal, a job at a private school lying just in front of him. Soon, though, another door opened — and Olsen found himself in a place he never could've predicted, surrounded with more doors waiting to swing wide.

"Put on a jacket and tie and come down right now for an interview," Olsen recalled his sister saying during a fateful phone call three decades ago.

Olsen, back in his home state of Pennsylvania, did as she asked and made his way to the University of Pittsburgh for the screening process that changed the trajectory of his career. Hired immediately as a research assistant on the school's investigation into injuries in young kids and adolescents via a National Institutes of Health grant, Olsen had the chance to add a few more letters behind his name.

A master's in public health and doctorate in epidemiology earned at Pitt set Olsen up for the work he'd always hoped to do. In 1994, at a school a couple states south, he found the chance to teach and coach, albeit in areas unknown to him years before.

"I love him," Shelby Marcellino, a freshman at the University of Lynchburg, said of Olsen, her professor. "I think he's great."

Marcellino described Olsen outside the doors of UL's Snidow Chapel after a health class wrapped up in mid- October, this session focused on nutrition. In the minutes before, Olsen watched his students give presentations on health issues facing adolescents and young adults, talked about the importance of proper diet and engaged with the group — the members of which filled pews in a socially distanced manner.

Olsen wanted to hear their thoughts on the issues of smoking and vaping among young people. Later, they conversed about complex carbohydrates, trans fats and fruits and vegetables.

"I hate Brussels sprouts," Olsen leveled with the class. "They should've never been planted."

But other, tastier vegetables fill out his diet, he added. His students could do the same.

"I appreciate that he asks our opinion on things, too," Marcellino said, "that he respects us like that."

That's one of the reasons the freshman with a health promotions minor values her professor. He's easy to understand, too, she noted, and "really does want you to succeed."

Marcellino's class is one of many Olsen's been responsible for over his 20-plus years at what is now University of Lynchburg but was Lynchburg College when he started. He's taught at the undergrad, graduate and doctorate level, his understanding of epidemiology equipping him as an expert on multiple health-related subjects.

"I'm passionate about teaching," Olsen said.

So back in the '90s, it made sense for him to pursue the opportunity that presented itself at LC.

It was, after all, his dream to teach. And this move south to Virginia from Pennsylvania offered the other half of the vision, too — coaching.

"That's what I wanted," Olsen said. "... That's why I accepted the position [at the school]."

Olsen took over the women's soccer program ahead of the 1994 season. He's been at the helm ever since.

As was the case when he was hired on at Pittsburgh as a research assistant and worked toward a doctorate in epidemiology, the women's soccer position at the school wasn't one Olsen initially would have planned for himself. Initially, he said, he applied to coach Lynchburg's men's team.

Instead, he was given the reins to an athletic group he was unfamiliar with: a women's squad.

But if records and trophies, or the testimonies of current players, are any indication, he found his way and plenty of success.

During a mid-October practice, players said their coach is one who “can handle” women. Someone who understands how to encourage and how to get the best out of players.

“I really appreciate the way he motivates us,” said Katie Poplardo, a sophomore on this year’s team. “When he gives a talk, honestly, afterward you’re like, ‘Wow, that makes me want to work 10 times harder.’”

The coach is the right combination of supportive and assertive, players say. Outside practices, players can go to their coach for advice, or just to talk. And on game days, they take cues from a leader who has proven himself over the years.

He’s coached 19 teams to appearances in the NCAA Division III tournament, and he owns 16 Old Dominion Athletic Conference championships. His 2014 team represented the pinnacle when it matched the national record for most wins in a season (27) en route to a national championship, for which Olsen also was named national coach of the year.

Olsen’s program is a perennial powerhouse in the area and nation and consistently one of the school’s best athletic teams, accomplishments that perhaps can be attributed to Olsen’s ability to communicate effectively.

“If I have a gift, it’s as a teacher,” Olsen said, “and that’s why I’ve been more successful as a coach.”

And his ability to teach — and his expertise in epidemiology — and coach, he added, has led to yet more opened doors for Olsen and students who’ve come through the school.

He’s led teams on multiple service trips abroad to Central and South America and Africa. Using a soccer ball, they can get a foot in the door in communities in need. And with his epidemiology background, Olsen and his traveling teams have been able to advance programs dealing with public health issues.

There probably aren't a whole lot of soccer coach/epidemiologists out there, Olsen said, thinking back to those first trips abroad when he realized the uniqueness of his background and combination of abilities.

Coaching and teaching amid the coronavirus pandemic, of course, has only heightened his awareness of his distinctive qualities.

Being away from his soccer players and the field, and away from students and the classroom, until recently proved especially hard for Olsen, who thrives on personal interaction.

As an epidemiologist, Olsen said it's also been difficult to see the pandemic play out on the news, where things seem to have turned too political, in his opinion.

"What is the truth?" Olsen said of the question he's found himself asking. "As a scientist that's ultimately what you want."

But there have been advantages, too.

Olsen and the UL women's coaching staff have adapted in their recruiting attempts, pivoting to virtual platforms and learning new, advantageous methods along the way.

In their return to practices, players said they're able to trust Olsen amid a period of heightened safeguards, because they know he knows what he's talking about as an epidemiologist.

The pandemic also has provided a learning opportunity for students unlike any Olsen's ever employed.

"It's been so neat to teach while this is happening," he said, adding an alternate name for his classes in 2020 might be "epidemiology live." "... This is the best case study we're ever going to see. ... It's really fascinating to follow it."

There's a personal benefit for Olsen in the pandemic, too.

“For years when I told someone I’m an epidemiologist, they’d say, ‘Oh, I have a rash on my arm.’ Nope. That’s a dermatologist. People truly didn’t know what it was,” Olsen said. “Now, everybody knows what I am.”

Ultimately, the epidemiologist is optimistic about where the pandemic could be headed.

“Are we going to get a vaccine? Are we going to have therapeutics?” Olsen said.

“Absolutely.

“As soon as you get either of those, this ends. ... I truly think we’re going to be fine.”