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Dillon Papier, right, will throw out the ceremonial first pitch to Orioles second baseman Brian Roberts at today's Bowie Baysox game. Dillon has Type C Niemann-Pick disease, and the Papiers return to Bowie today for the seventh annual fundraiser to benefit the National Niemann-Pick Disease Foundation.

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URBANA — Dillon Papier's life is baseball, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

His love of baseball — particularly the Baltimore Orioles — helps the Frederick County resident cope with a rare terminal disease. Just nine years old, Dillon is one of approximately 500 known cases of Type C Niemann-Pick disease (NPC).

"He lives and breathes baseball," Dillon's mother, Darrile Papier said in a phone interview. "If we're not watching

baseball or playing baseball in the house, we're talking about baseball."

Papier was first diagnosed at three years old. Patients with the disease are not able to properly metabolize cholesterol within the cell. Excessive amounts of cholesterol accumulate in the liver and spleen, while excessive amounts of other lipids accumulate in the brain.

The symptoms of this disease include an enlarged spleen and liver, clumsiness and loss of muscle control, deterioration of speech, seizures, and progressive neurological and intellectual decline. The disease is always fatal.

In 2007, Dillon got the opportunity to be a special guest during spring

training with the Baltimore Orioles. It was his first real vacation outside of visits to doctors' offices and hospitals and has since turned into an annual trip.

During that inaugural trip, Orioles second baseman Brian Roberts began to form a special friendship with Dillon. That bond has continued to develop between Roberts and the Papiers over the last five years. Roberts even wears a wristband with "Dillon's Fight" on it as a tribute to Dillon.

"You can tell, he's just so very kid-friendly," Darrile said. "He has a good

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Dillon

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time every time they are together. He always has his focus on Dillon."

"Dillon has been an inspiration to me since we first met. You see a kid who, unfortunately, doesn't have the physical skills a lot of us were blessed with, but he loves life as much as any kid I've ever seen," Roberts said in a statement to the News-Post.

Roberts caught up with Dylan earlier in the week in Bowie, where the second baseman is currently on a rehab assignment with the Orioles' Class AA affiliate. Roberts has been on the disabled list for over a year, sidelined from a lingering concussion.

After he departed from

Monday's game, Roberts met with Dillon privately by the Baysox clubhouse, which is restricted. During their visit, he asked Roberts for a special request.

"Will you catch for me?" Dillon said.

Roberts agreed, and he will catch Dillon's first pitch today when the Papiers return to Bowie for their seventh annual fundraiser to benefit the National Niemann-Pick Disease Foundation.

In addition to the Baysox fundraiser, the Papiers have also participated in an annual fundraiser with the Frederick Keys. Darrile Papier said that a date has not been finalized yet for a fundraiser with the Keys this year. The Papiers also hold a charity golf tournament, which is in

its sixth year and set for September 21.

"His family is working hard to find a cure and we want to be a part of that in any way we can. The relationship he has with the Baysox is very special," Roberts said.

In addition to Roberts, current Orioles second baseman Robert Andino has a bond with Dillon. When Dave Trembley was managing the Orioles, Dillon was going over the starting lineup with Trembley during a visit in 2009 and requested Andino to play shortstop. Trembley declined, but a few nights later, Andino was inserted into the lineup and ended up hitting a home run.

When the Papiers arrived at spring training this year, Dillon was asked which play-

er he wanted to see since Roberts was not around the Sarasota complex much. Dillon went with Andino, whom he had befriended.

"When Andino came out to see Dillon, he goes, 'My favorite fan' and handed him a bat with pine tar on it," Darrile said. "Dillon didn't like that one, so Andino gave him another bat, balls and even one of those black Under Armour shirts."

Dillon currently participates in an Urbana baseball league in the U10 division. With a coach throwing to him, Dillon gets to hit at the start of an inning and runs the bases. He also gets to play in the field with a coach next to him. Dillon's latest ambition is pitching, so he has been allowed to throw under supervision.

Despite all of the attention that Dillon has received from the Orioles, Darrile is grateful for all of the time that players such as Roberts and Andino have spent with her son over the years.

"You don't ever hear the story of the positives of what these guys do," Darrile said. "They are all very caring. Everyone with the Orioles has been wonderful."

Dillon's fight for a cure continues. With help from the National Institutes of Health and Johnson & Johnson, there is hope that a FDA-approved clinical trial will begin this fall to provide additional research in stabilizing the effects of NPC.

For more information on Dillon's story and NPC, visit www.dillonsfight.org.