

Dillion's Spring Training Trip

BY CARRIE DIETZ

Spring training with the Baltimore Orioles was a home run in the eyes of one Urbana 4-year-old who headed to Florida last month to watch the team play ball.

Dillion Papier's neighbors pitched in to send the family to spring training to watch his favorite sport. Dillion is one in 500 people living with Type C Niemann Pick Disease, an extremely rare and fatal form of the genetic disease.

To Dillion, it was a trip of a lifetime.

"We went to batting practice first, and he was so excited," said Dillion Papier's mom, Darrile. "Brian Roberts came over and talked with him and was really sweet with him. Some players feel uncomfortable talking with kids they don't know, but he was wonderful."

By the end of the first day, Darrile Papier said Dillion knew everyone in the park. "He knew the staff, the guys doing the score boards, the people working at the concessions — he just walks up to people and introduces himself," she said.

Dillion had his heart set on meeting the umpires, for whom he has a special affection. So when he was invited to meet at the mound before the first of two games he attended and walk away with the team's starting line-up paperwork, he was all smiles.

The starting line-up document is among the plethora of things Dillion brought back



Dillion Papier with Baltimore Orioles' Brian Roberts.

Photo: Darrile Papier

home with him including a signed baseball bat and a signed umpire's hat. (According to Darrile Papier, the umps were very flattered by the attention.)

It seems truly, though, that Dillion is statistically unique. On the last day at the park, Dillion was hit by a fly ball that bounced off the backboards. Although emergency personnel arrived on the scene promptly and he was a bit surprised by the incident, Dillion took the whole thing in stride.

Back home again, Dillion is gearing up for baseball season and has been attending practices with dad Mark Papier, who coaches baseball at Thomas Johnson High School.

The Papiers also decided they'd like to make spring training an annual trip. Look out, Florida, they'll be back!