

# When life throws you a curve ball



Taylor Phippin excels at softball despite having spina bifida

By Anthony Spaulding  
Staff Writer

SALISBURY — Softball is just an activity to most people, but to 15-year-old Taylor Phippin, it is a way of life.

"I think about it all the time," the rising Parkside High School junior said. "If we have a game that day, it's like that's all that's on my mind."

■ **HARD BALL:** Phippin started playing the Blue Jays past sport only a year ago, but she has traveled a long road to get where she is today.

"She was born with spina bifida," said Phippin's mother, Leslie. "She has no motion in her right leg, and she wears a brace that keeps her foot at a 90 degree angle so that she can walk with it."

The condition occurs in the first month of pregnancy, in which the baby's spinal cord does not completely close, according to the Spina Bifida Association. People with spina bifida could develop problems such as learning disabilities, bladder-control problems, depression, social and sexual issues, and even full or partial paralysis. Despite facing the most common permanently

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Taylor Phippin has played multiple positions in her two years with the Farmers Bank team, but she is used primarily as a pitcher and first baseman. See PHIPPIN, Page C5

## WIMBLEDON

### Venus Williams turns up the heat

### Burton isn't the fastest; instead, he is steadfast

disabling birth defect, Phippin wanted to continue her family's athletic tradition.

"I heard my dad played (softball), and my uncle was playing it since I was growing up," the 4-foot-8 Phippin said. "I got interested in playing it."

Phippin longed to play softball since she was 9 years old, but her mother shied away from the idea.

"Being the overprotective mother that I've been, because of not wanting her to be rejected, I didn't let her," Leslie said. "Last year, was the first year she has ever played."

In March 2007, Phippin tried out for the Wicomico Junior Girls Major I Softball League.

"I thought it was going to be a pretty good year, because the tryouts went pretty good," she said. "I was just hoping that I would get on a good team."

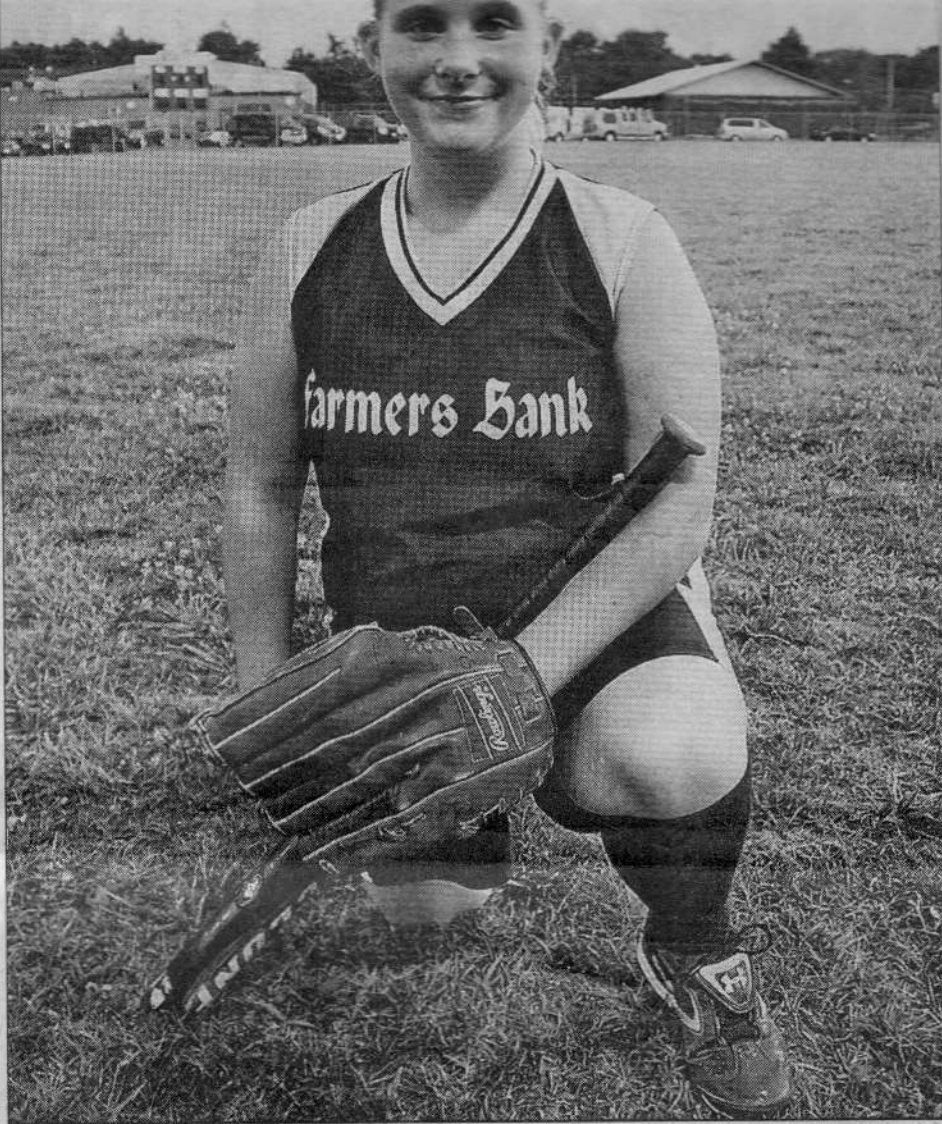
Fortunately for Taylor, she got drafted by the Farmers Bank team, one of the new teams in the league.

"I went to the tryout and I saw her at the tryout," Farmers Bank coach Ed Godfrey said. "I could see the enthusiasm. I could see the desire. I could see the hustle right away, and I kind of knew I wanted to get her on my team. I was just glad to get her."

Phippin has played multiple positions in her two years on the team, but Godfrey and assistant coach George Vogelsang primarily use her as a pitcher and a first baseman.

"She has played every position well," Vogelsang said. "She shows the smarts of a good player and she doesn't need a lot of instruction."

Taylor got some playing time at both positions Thursday night in a 18-5 rout of the Quantico Creek Builders in the final round of the Major I playoffs at Harmon Field. She pitched 2 1/3 innings, giving up one earned run on one hit while striking out two batters. At first base, she made two put-



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outs, and made three plate appearances, walking all three times. When most players get walked, they take their time going to the base. For Phippin, she runs as hard as she can.

"Yeah, it's just hustle," Phippin said. "(The coaches) tell me to hustle, so I do."

The league has allowed her to have a courtesy runner to fill in for her if she gets on base.

Godfrey feels she does more than just play well on the field.

"She's an inspirational contributor," he said. "She contributes just by coming out here every night, just by walking out to that mound, getting into the batter's box, taking her hacks and just being a part of the team."

In addition, he has seen

his team come to like Phippin for who she is.

"I think when the other girls see how positive she is and how successful she is, I think the girls feed off that," Godfrey said. "I think it's just a good thing for the girls."

Leslie feels her daughter has accomplished so much in so little time.

"Now I know why she wanted to play so bad, because she is pretty good at it," she said. "If she could run, she'd be scary."

Taylor realized she could not have done this without a few people.

"My mom has been helping me play catch and my dad helps me hit and all that," Phippin said. "(The teammates) have been very helpful. They cheer me on and all

that, even if I don't do good."

Taylor has learned one important piece of advice throughout this whole experience.

"Never quit and do whatever you can that you think you can do," Taylor said, "because I have achieved it."

Phippin and Farmers Bank will play in the championship round against the undefeated DSC Dragons on Monday at the Henry S. Parker Complex. Farmers Bank would have to beat the Dragons twice to win the title, because it is a double-elimination tournament.

"I hope we really win," Phippin said. "We were the closest ones that beat them until the last inning. We are going to get them this time."

ranked Rafael Nadal charged into the first round with a 7-6 (3) 6-3 win over Niels Kiefer in fading light at Centre Court.

Nadal is bidding to become the first since Bjorn Borg in 1975 to consecutively win the French Open, Wimbledon, and the U.S. Open. He was ranked No. 1 when he won the first set at 5-1 in the match. Two games later, Nadal held at 1-0 close it out.

The 25-year-old Martinez Sanchez never won a Grand Slam singles match until he came out of her depth in the first set against the time major winner, the left-hander, who repeatedly with an angled drop shot and volley won the drop volleys in the second set.

"It was a great victory," Williams said. "The first set was working for her baseline. I was impressed with her when she changed gears and made it competitive in the second set."

The Spaniard moved from 3-1 down to 5-4 on serve. He double-faulted on the point to give Williams the lead. Williams won with 33 winners as 10 unforced errors and six double-faults.

She had previously in her matches against British opponent Centre Court in the first set earlier against Cavaday and 7-5 in the first set. Anne Keothavong.

Williams face 18-year-old Alisa Klebanov is into the second round in her Wimbledon debut after a 6-2 Sugiyama. Jankovic is the best-ranked of the women in the upset. Ivanovic and Maria S.