Who could have guessed that the young woman in the Eagles uniform, standing poised for action in left field or swatting softballs toward the fence, would – in just five short years – trade the traction of cleats for the elegance of heels, and the clunkiness of a crimson helmet for the glitter of a beauty queen’s crown? Going from the first-string softball team at Bridgewater College to the top of the Mrs. Colorado Pageant? **No problem, when you’ve got a can-do attitude.**

*by Charles Culbertson*

In May of 2007, Tiffany Weaver Sawyer was crowned winner of the Mrs. Colorado Pageant. Photos courtesy of Tiffany Weaver Sawyer, ’02
That’s exactly what Tiffany Weaver Sawyer did, though. In 2007, this former first-string softball player for the Eagles and 2002 business administration graduate shed the final vestiges of her tomboyishness when she captured the title of Mrs. Colorado. But if images of the same young woman roughing it around the outfield and gliding down the runway of a beauty pageant seem too much of a dichotomy, just remember: it was the same competitive spirit that got her to both of those places.

“I’ve always been involved in sports, hence my passion for competition,” said Sawyer, a native of Grottoes, Va. “I began playing softball just as soon as I was old enough to hold a glove and bat. I was a real tomboy, essentially the son my father never had.”

At Spotswood High School, Sawyer was so good she played on a traveling Junior Olympic softball team. During many of her important high-school games, she had a visitor – Donnie Fulk, BC’s coach for women’s softball and assistant soccer coach. Fulk, who had played ball as a kid with Sawyer’s father, would stand along the fence at these games and call out to her:

“Hey, Tiffany, when are you gonna come play ball for me at Bridgewater?”

He did it so often that, when the time came for her to choose a college, she picked Bridgewater. Here, she said, she could get a good education, stay fairly close to home and, of course, play softball.

“Tiffany was a great all-around ball player,” said Fulk. “She was a good hitter and base runner, and a tremendous outfielder. She loved to play the game, and it showed in everything she did.”

Softball, however, wasn’t her only outlet for a competitive spirit. In 2000, a friend encouraged her to enter a beauty pageant, and it was here, she said, that her competitive spirit “really kicked in.”
“I began competing in Miss America preliminaries, winning awards like best in swimsuit and most ad-page sales, but it wasn’t until 2001 that I won my first state title as Miss Virginia Association of Fairs.”

After graduation in 2002, Sawyer hung up her cleats and landed a job in human resources at pharmaceutical giant Merck and Co. Inc., in Elkton, Va. One Saturday night in November 2003, she attended a Lonestar concert in Richmond, Va. During the intermission, she noticed a handsome, dark-haired man standing in the crowd.

“I couldn’t take my eyes off him,” she said. “It’s very unlike me to approach a complete stranger, a good looking one at that, but with a little prompting from my Aunt Donna, I did. Two months later, Nathan and I were engaged, and eight months later we were married.”

When her husband, who was a captain in the U.S. Army, received word that he was to be stationed at Fort Carson, Colo., Sawyer applied for a pharmaceutical sales rep’s job with Merck in Colorado Springs, and got it. Just two months after they were married, however, the captain was deployed to the Middle East for a year – “leaving me,” noted Sawyer, “in a new state, on a new job, in a new house, with only our Shih Tzu puppy, Grizzly, to keep me company.”
In 2005, Sawyer entered the Mrs. Colorado Pageant as a way to make new friends and to “stay focused on a goal” until her husband’s safe return. When she was named first runner-up that year, her goals were met and, she admitted, “I was hooked.” She tried again the following year, and placed third runner-up.

After that 2006 competition, Sawyer felt she needed an additional project to work on. While mowing the yard one evening, the idea came to her to start a pageant for children. But, she said, this wouldn’t be your typical kiddie beauty contest. It would be called the Miss Patriotic Colorado Pageant, and would be a way to raise money for the Children of Fallen Soldiers Relief Fund – “an organization,” she said, “that provides support and college funds to the children of families whose parent has paid the ultimate price for our freedom.”

While working on getting the Miss Patriotic Colorado Pageant up and running, Sawyer prepared herself for one more run at the Mrs. Colorado title. In May of 2007, on Mother’s Day weekend, that preparation paid off.

“The third time really is a charm,” she said. “When I heard my name called as the new Mrs. Colorado, I felt excitement, unspeakable joy and, most of all, relief. My dream of capturing the Colorado crown was a reality.”

Even more than that, her dream of establishing a pageant to benefit the children of servicemen killed in the line of duty also became a reality. Just one month before the Mrs. Colorado contest, the first Miss Patriotic Colorado Pageant was held and raised $3,000 for the Children of Fallen Soldiers Relief Fund.

From Aug. 22 through Sept. 6, 2007, Sawyer competed in the Mrs. America contest in Tucson, Ariz., where she placed in the judges’ original choice for the top 10.

The future for this highly competitive spirit will depend a great deal on when and where she and her husband – known as “Captain Colorado” to his men – are stationed. There’s a family to consider, of course, but also some time just to enjoy life. She and the captain recently spent two weeks in Ireland where they attended his brother’s wedding, and toured the coastlines and castles.

Wherever she goes or whatever she does, Sawyer said she wants to serve as an inspiration for others who might be thinking of taking on a challenge, be it a softball game, a beauty pageant or the daily adventure of life itself.

“I want to be that person who gives you the little push to try something new, the one who gives you the encouragement to reach deep down inside and say, ‘I can do it!’”

Charles Culbertson is director of media relations at Bridgewater College and editor of Bridgewater magazine.