

# Small Town, Big World: For the Love of the Game

By Britt Bensen-Steele

I remember when it happened. We were out tooling around on our motorbike through the narrow streets of Ubud, Bali when suddenly, Larry hits the brakes and points off to the right.

There is a school and a big concrete pad out front. He points again, and on the end I see a pseudo-basketball hoop, and one kid with a basketball. We park our motorbike and quickly realize we have come upon a bunch of Balinese teenagers shooting some hoops.

We walk up to the edge of the court, keeping a respectful distance to observe. We see them. They see us. They keep playing. After a few minutes, a ball bounces off a shoe and veers toward Larry. He picks up the ball, and bounces it a few times. He steps closer. He works his way in to shoot the ball, showing the kids that he knows a little about basketball.

It doesn't take long for them to see he can make a free throw. They start smiling, sending the ball his way, and gesturing for him to shoot again. The more baskets he makes, the more they smile and pass him the ball. One boy singles himself out and speaks. "Michael Jordan!!" All the boys laugh. Larry laughs. A tall smiley boy puts his palm on his own chest and says, "Name: BonBon." Larry puts his hand on his own chest and says, "Larry."

This day marked the beginning of Larry teaching a group of Balinese boys how to shoot, and navigating his way through an explanation to BonBon that he wanted to talk to someone about replacing the backboard, hoop and nets for the school. BonBon nods in understanding and takes off on his motorbike. He returns with a teacher on the back of his motorbike, who speaks only a slight bit more English. Larry does his best to explain, again, his intention.



The teacher gets on his cell phone and within 15 minutes or so, ten adult men, including the "head master," the English Teacher to help with English, and a couple graduates of the school, are standing with Larry, staring up at the hoop, rambling mostly in Balinese, and exchanging a few bits of broken English of "how much it cost?"

They settle on an amount they think it will cost to fulfill Larry's proposition. Larry hands them cash. One man folds it and puts in his pocket. We head back to our rental and explain to our caretaker

what had just transpired. We get the impression from the caretaker that maybe we'll never see the money again, nor the new equipment. We drive by for a few days, and see no evidence of new equipment.

About a week later, Larry, on a solo mission, heads over to the school grounds and finds a court full of boys playing with the new backboard, hoop and net. Larry pulls up and the boys are all smiles. He waves as he walks onto the court, and BonBon yells, "Hello Larry!" and throws him the ball.

Larry still hears from BonBon by email. He is married and has a child. He still asks Larry about camp in America and tells him the village is happy with the equipment.

Never doubt, gestures of the heart last a long, long time. (BonBon is the one in the black t-shirt.)

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