

Rancho Mastatal Updates

June 2006

Another month gone by, another hot and saucy Rancho Mastatal newsletter coming your way. The relative tranquility that we've been experiencing as of late quickly became a thing of the past when TIBURÓN and the Center High School group arrived on June 20th. It's awesome to have Tom with us once again and a real pleasure to have yet another tremendous group from Center High in Mastatal.

This relationship began over three years ago when our good friend DENISE SHAFER (formerly SOBERALSKI), then a science teacher at Center located in the Seattle Center in downtown Seattle, with the help of Tiburón convinced her school board that a trip to the Ranch would be a nice and important addition to their already progressive curriculum. After receiving a positive response and helping to put the program together, she accompanied the initial crew to Mastatal in 2003. If you're reading this Denise, we love you and hope that you, Tony and Natasha are well.

All else at the Ranch these days is pretty status quo. Building, gardening, cooking, making soap and bread, attending community meetings, planning for future groups and projects, playing horseshoes and hoops, walking the rivers and in the woods and simply enjoying the best time of the year in Mastatal.

TYLER SEE has headed south to Ecuador to visit a friend that is currently serving in the Peace Corps there. We're already looking forward to see Tyler back in Mastatal in August and will certainly miss him immensely during his stay away. Aside from being a thriving carpenter, a fabulous cook, a skilled soccer player, an anchor in the community and an all-around superstar, he's been a major contributor to this newsletter for the past many weeks, heading up the [Fútbol Follies](#) and writing pieces for a number of other sections including the [Building Report](#) and the [Volunteer/Guest Gossip](#) in this month's newsletter. We'll miss your writing Tyler, and of course we'll be pining for your extraordinarily positive presence here again soon. "Ojo" in South America and let us know how the guinea pigs taste when you get a minute.

Alrighty then, guess we'll get right to it this week. For those of you up north, we trust that you're enjoying the unbeatable summer months. We'll be sneaking about the northeast in October and November and would love to see many of you then. Let us know where you'll be.



Timo and Tyler before the semis

And between now and then, register for the [Bioneers by the Bay](#) Conference taking place on the weekend of October 20 in Marion, MA. It promises to be an amazing event. We hope to see you there. It sounds as if there might be a mini-RM reunion taking place there.

This month's update includes:

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Lily's famous smile

RM Program News: Employee Party

As a way of expressing our gratitude to the employees of Rancho Mastatal for their incredible work, we host a small company get together each year for our workers and their families. We kicked off what we hope will become a yearly tradition last year with a trip to *Esterillos Oeste*, a relatively quiet beach about 1½ hours from Mastatal. We ate out, swam in the ocean, played soccer on the sand, and enjoyed one another's company for two beautiful days under the hot tropical sun. Tyler suggested that I consider writing about this topic in this month's newsletter as we had scheduled this year's event for June to July 13.

Due to circumstances outside of our control, we had to postpone our trip last minute.

Nevertheless, instead of trying to come up with another topic idea, I decided to forge ahead and take advantage to tell you a bit about the Ranch employees. As with our volunteers, the Ranch would simply not be the place that it is without our local workers. Their immeasurable contributions are evident around every corner and observed in every niche. Their local knowledge about everything from when to harvest wood to how to negotiate a better price for it saves the Ranch countless hours of work and an incalculable amount of resources. We are currently employing ten local people, making us the largest employer in the region. With that comes a bit of responsibility and a few stressful moments, but for the most part, we are one big, happy, albeit dysfunctional at times, family. Bridging the gap between cultures is no small feat, even after working and living in Latin America for numerous years. Nevertheless, somehow it all seems to work out here with days and weeks characterized by easy exchanges and new friendships commonly formed between our workers and the volunteers and guests to the Ranch.

We are so fortunate to have GILBERTH VINDAS, LILY PERZ, JUNIOR HERNANDEZ,

LAURA BADILLA, KATTIA HERNANDEZ, MARIO AZOFEIFA, ALEX HERNANDEZ, MAURICIO MORA, CHEPO HERNANDEZ and MARITZA MORA working day in and day out to make Rancho Mastatal the wonderful place that it is. For all of you that have visited Mastatal, you surely fully understand what I am referring to.

Conservation Update: Mental Gymnastics

Conserving one's mind can be a delicate exercise while juggling the daily activities at the Ranch and in Mastatal. Between all the building, gardening, administering, teaching, managing, greeting, bidding farewell, gaming, volunteering and community work going on, it can all get a bit overwhelming at times. Couple that with the slowed-down Latino pace, ranchero music at the pulp past midnight, the sometimes heavy rain and an occasional Imperial too many and the brain can get pretty taxed in this seemingly tranquil and scenic place we call home.



Rog and Tom

The definition of stress takes on a new meaning in rural Latin America. One is forced to accept the fact that things may not get done in a "timely" manner. The solution? Well, easy. Forget about it for a while and move on to something else. That's of course if you want to maintain your sanity. Don't forget about it and watch your blood pressure rise like Pico's red rocket on a hot summer night. It takes practice for us Americans so accustomed to getting what we want when we want it. In the age of the Internet you can have a brand new computer delivered to your door from one day to the next. Here in Mastatal the mail's delivered on a motorcycle every few weeks. And no, the mail delivery person wouldn't be able to handle your Gateway box, even if you could get Gateway to ship it to Mastatal.

So, where I am going with all of this? Quite frankly I'm not sure. Perhaps I'm just trying to convey the hope that we can all live the *pura vida* with a bit of patience, love, and a big heart. In this short life that we are blessed with, it's important to do good work, laugh a lot and maintain a balanced mind while working through the maze of this ever more complicated world in which we live. Let's not forget to enjoy the ride, laugh at ourselves, and make others laugh whenever possible. In the end it allows us to be better people, do enhanced work and live a less stressful life; all leading to a healthier and longer ride on this big bus we call Earth. Our judges score for this entry: 2.5. Doh!



Geoff playing with poo

Building Report: Choza Creeps Along

TIMO and ROBIN (well, mostly Robin) are counting down the days to their big move into La Choza. With plenty of experience in construction delays since building Leo's house, they have practiced some serious patience and will be all the more satisfied when it actually does happen. The current status is as follows.

ROBIN and crew have completed the final limewash on all the plastered walls, inside and out. The living area wooden floor has been cleaned, sanded and finished – looking beautiful. The bedroom earthen floor is dry and awaiting its final infill/smear. All the rock,

wooden and bamboo surfaces are cleaned up, the tin can moons are painted gold, and the doors and shutter are varnished and installed. GILBERT and ALEX are getting the electricity hooked up, while JUNIOR and CHEPO have put together a nice little path bordered by living fences at the entrance to the house (soon to be enhanced by a greeting gate designed and constructed by a current intern). TIMO has all but completed the new bed of pilón and cristóbal, and TYLER recently finished a sink/countertop/shelving unit for the living area. With more furniture projects on the way, as well as some trim work and a little more patience, Robin could be making her nest in the very near future.

In other building news, the classroom floor is down and a manure smear has been applied to the wattle/daub and cob entrance. Still waiting on a couple of walls to partition off the main room. Over at the Hankey, work has been cut back a bunch, though there's almost always someone there every day. CARACA has finished switching in some transparent roof panels while taking advantage of his time in the sun to paint all the zinc up there. The manure team has been keeping an eye on the cob walls and patching where necessary. In addition, JUNIOR and CHEPO have started to prepare some "caña brava" for the ceilings. A number of volunteers also recently revamped the bus stop bench (for the second time), removing the cracked plaster and opting for a new manure smear as the final coat. Time will tell how it resists the anxious feet of local schoolkids.

As for the Choza, keep your ears to the cob floor for news of the grand opening.

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Fourth of July Extravaganza

It's not often that holidays, US or tico, get a proper celebration at the Ranch. Such was the impetus behind carving out a full day to honor Independence Day. All involved were quite excited for the festivities - even ROBERT, the one Brit currently residing at the Ranch, was psyched to stomp on his ancestors' colonial failure. There were participants of all sizes and ages, from 7 yr.-old girls to 70 yr.-old men. And so, after a monster flapjack breakfast, all gathered on the front porch for the day's schedule.

There were to be two teams of 8 competing in a morning's worth of relays, carnival games and, of course, a monster whiffleball session. Members of UNCLE SAM'S UNDIES and LADY LIBERTY'S LACE headed over to the newly groomed sandlot at the Choza for the opening ceremony and first activities. Competition began with two relay races – the classic spoon and egg, and a water-jug-filling-with-a-leaky-cup race. The Undies and Lace split

victories here, setting the standard for a close match-up all morning long. Next was the inaugural horseshoe toss in the new pit. That's right - official distance, backboards and actual sand. In three games among novice and experienced shoe throwers, the Lace came away with 2 to give themselves the slight advantage. It was time to switch venues, and so all gathered their stools and headed for Jeanne's Junkyard for the next two events.

In a much-anticipated event, MATEO and JACK teamed up to toss their egg the longest distance – about halfway down Jeanne's driveway. Other participants also made it far, while some were quickly left with egg on their shorts, but in the end it was that Undies duo that conquered the egg toss. Then, in a highly unexpected event, 5 participants from each squad gathered around the circle of stools for Cold Water Musical Chairs. With one less chair than humans, he/she that fails to find a seat when the music stops must dunk their bum in the bucket of ice water in the center. Style points are rightfully deducted for causing excessive spillage or opting for the head dunk instead of a refreshed culo. People started to get into it after some hesitation, but in the end it was seven year-old STASIA who occupied the last stool, leveling the scorecard in anticipation of the wiff wiff showdown.

Once all the rules and regulations were out of the way, we were live at the Litterbox for nine full innings, sponsored by Imperial and Picaronas. Despite a strong lineup, the Undies quickly found themselves trailing the Lace 7-0. After the dust cleared and the usually good-natured trash talking had ceased, it was a 11-5 victory for the Lace, who were awarded with beers and lunch on behalf of the Undies.

The afternoon was devoted to watching Germany lose to Italy in the last two minutes of extra time,



Norman the king

and prepping the evening's pizza party. The die-hard freedom lovers even managed to squeeze in another wiff game on the field of dreams before the rains came to visit late in the afternoon. Overall a solid day of Americana shared among friends, with only one complaint – no PBR on tap.



*One of the vets taking care of one our town's dogs
photo by Tim O'Hara*

Community Facts/Stories: Castration Clinic

A collaborative effort between the McKee Project, a non-profit organization working towards animal health in Latin America, and the [Mastate Charitable Foundation](#) (MCF) brought two veterinarians and their assistants to Mastatal for a grand day of removing testicles and ovaries from our local feline and canine populations. After all was said and done we succeeded in neutering and spaying forty animals!!!!

It was a pretty wonderful and gratifying effort for everyone involved and a huge success, though I must admit that I didn't poll any of the local cats and dogs. The success of this year's campaign already has us talking about doing it again next year as more than a few animals escaped the scalpel of our gregarious vet friends. In our modest estimation this project, dollar for dollar compared to other projects, has one of the most significant and positive impacts in our local communities. By fixing our local pets and reducing the resident cat and dog population we are decreasing the number of starving dogs in our streets while

lessening the probability of pet-transported sicknesses in our towns. It's an event that we will strive to repeat as many times as necessary. Let us know if you'd like to help out in any way.



Timo whinin about a bad call

F?tbol Follies: Starting to Find the Rhythm

The Costa Rican government declared June 9th a national holiday for all public workers. Rancho Mastatal likewise postponed its operations for the morning, everyone gathering around the TV to watch "la Sele" take on this year's World Cup host. Despite an explosive start from the Germans, Costa Rica held their own and scored the only 2 goals against Jens Lehmann leading up to the semifinals. While the national squad then proceeded to lose the next two matches and come home utterly defeated, Los Galacticos were ready to sequester some Mundial mojo in the month of June.

With San Miguel and Salitrales hot on its tail, Mastatal would have to approach every game from here on out as do or die. First up was Zapatón on Saint Michael's pitch. Los Amarillos came roaring out of the gates, scoring in the first ten minutes off TYLER's booming lefty boot. But it didn't take long for Zapatón to equalize, thereby establishing the tone for a hard-fought match from whistle to whistle. Indeed, the ref (Anulfo from San Vicente) had plenty of action that day, dishing out yellow cards left and right, calling two penalty kicks, and ejecting three players late in the second half, including ALEX for arguing. CARACA extended the yellowshirts lead to 3-1 in the second with a beautiful free kick off the top post. The ensuing downpour nearly washed away Mastatal's victory march, as Zapatón capitalized on mental lapses and a growing belligerence towards Anulfo to score two quickies (including one penalty). It was at this point that attitudes began to turn sour, but luckily for the galactic warriors, CARLOS CUSUCO brought his A- game that day, and sneaked in the winning goal past the Zapatón keeper – his second of the day. A huge confidence booster for Mastatal, this win put them in good standing with only two more games to go. In other action, San Miguel pulled off a late goal to draw with San Vicente, 3-3.

With a 1-4-2 record and 5 points, Zapatón couldn't have felt too great coming off the field in San Miguel. Two of their top players had red cards for the next match and any practical hope of making the semifinals was all but swept away at this point. Yet the news of their withdrawal from the campeonato still didn't sit right with many of the Galactico players. Mastatal and Zapatón have always been great neighbors and friends on and off the pitch, much more so than San Vicente or even San Miguel, and you just never like to see a team's chances end that way. Alas, the rumors were true, and there were now 5 teams remaining, only one of which would be eliminated for the semifinals.

After a bye week in which Salitrales defeated San Vicente 1-0 in the only local action, Mastatal borrowed the latter's facilities as its own field had long been declared out of commission. For San Vicente, it was win or go home (which they'd pretty much do anyway), as a tie or loss would mean their elimination. For Mastatal, it was a matter of maintaining momentum and unifying the squad into a championship-caliber machine. With ALEX on the bench and JUAN LUIS on the disabled list, JUNIOR filled in the sweeper position with confidence and skill, along with the help of a new 2-stopper system of TIMO and CESAR. The Galactico defense was even further altered by the presence of RONALD in the net. Surprising, yes, but the man put together quite a performance, making several key saves to keep the score at 2-0 through most of the game. Late in the second half, though, a few shaky substitutions, a dangerous foul in the backfield and two San Vicente goals temporarily had the Galacticos rattled. But with a quick surge up front, a Mastatal cross from the left found the outstretched taco of GREIVIN BADILLA, who sealed the victory with quite possibly the most gratifying goal to date for the yellowshirts. Good thing the cleats he had borrowed from the Ranch were half a size too big.

With that, the semifinals were set, but the last week of opening round play would continue as scheduled, setting up a Mastatal- Guarumal showdown in Tufares. In a game that held no official significance other than good practice and a chance to hand Guarumal their first loss, Los Galacticos came out sluggish, giving up 2 quick goals through the hands of RONALD. Trying to recompose, Mastatal worked hard and eventually CARACA put one away, only to witness his opponent's retort minutes later. The Guarumal greenies kept their momentum going early in the second half,

extending their lead to 4-1. But confidence was surprisingly not lost on Los Galacticos, especially after PABLO converted a penalty kick to bring them two goals away. Positive energy kept Mastatal pressuring up front, which eventually lead to a 4-4 tie and a reason to celebrate. They had given the "top" team a run for their money, and were now one game away from the finals.

Though some of the World Cup games didn't go our way (i.e. Argentina- Germany), Los Galacticos were determined to move on, one game at a time. Surely, the behemoths of Salitrales would be no walk in the park, but if the last three games were any indication, Mastatal was ready for action. From here on out, it was sure to be como Gollo – solo bueno.

Final Standings After Opening Round

TEAM W L T POINTS

Guarumal* 7 0 2 24

Mastatal* 5 4 1 16

San Miguel* 2 3 4 13

Salitrales* 3 3 3 12

San Vicente 1 4 4 7

Zapatón 1 4 2 5 (withdrew)

*qualify for semifinals

Inspirational Impressions

That best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love.

—William Wordsworth

Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey

