



# Introducing baseball around the world one village at a time

**Children are playing baseball at the** base of a volcano in the heart of the jungle. In the village of Bongo, in Chiriqui, Panama, boys and girls ages 6 to 12 are swinging for the fences, rounding the bases and falling in love with America's pastime, thanks in large part to a relatively new outfit called More Than a Game.

"The hunger to play baseball is there, but there is nowhere to play in locations like Bongo," says Tim Fanning. "It's not an uncommon situation. The children want to play and learn the game, but they have no field, no equipment and no idea how to play."

Fanning is the head baseball coach at Glenwood High School in Phenix City, AL. He is

also the co-founder of More Than a Game. Established in 2010, Fanning and co-founder Marshall Murray formed the organization to serve communities using the vehicle they knew best: baseball. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization seeks to teach baseball to the next generation.

Not long after its formation, More Than a Game divided its efforts into two fronts. Murray's focus is local, planning youth baseball clinics and other community projects. Fanning's focus is global, aiming to bring baseball to those who haven't had the opportunity to play.

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"We're not going anywhere on the planet where there is something, some diamond, already established," Fanning says. "More Than a Game is about spreading the game of baseball to new places and people so we can give them the gift of baseball, which we hold so dear."

Bringing baseball to Bongo wasn't easy. It took two trips, the first of which came in the fall of 2012. A handful of More Than a Game volunteers traveled to Bongo and spent a week teaching children of two schools in the village how to play the game. In addition to educating them about the game, volunteers also outfitted the children with uniforms and equipment.

The children had now learned the game and looked the part, but still there was no baseball diamond—only jungle.

In a return trip to Bongo in July 2013, Fanning's team of volunteers, along with a group of local villagers, carved out a baseball diamond.

"We built the diamond in 10 days," Fanning said. "It wasn't easy, I can tell you that, but when we finished you could tell it was a source of pride for the entire community. That's what we're all about."

Corporate sponsorships from Turface Athletics, Warner's Athletic

Construction and Memphis Nets helped secure the materials needed to make the field construction a reality, Fanning says. A \$1,000 grant from Turface helped get equipment onsite to help construct the diamond and ensure it could be maintained in the future. Eight pallets of Turface MVP, two pallets of Turface Professional Mound Clay Red and two pallets of Red MoundMaster Blocks were used to create a sustainable, playable field. In some instances local materials were used in the construction, including fashioning foul poles and a backstop out of bamboo.

"More Than a Game is doing an incredible job spreading the game we love to new parts of the world," said Jeff Langner, brand manager for Turface Athletics. "To be able to say we're a small part of that effort is so rewarding for everyone in the Turface Athletics family."

Fanning says plans are already in the works to build a second diamond nearby and establish a league in the near future for the remote area of Panama.

"This is just the beginning for More Than a Game," Fanning says. "If we can build a diamond in a jungle, we can build a diamond just about anywhere." ■

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