

# Basketball Is Life

Zeke Fagan

Hello, or should I say Howdy everyone! I suppose I should introduce myself. My name is Zeke. I'm from Houston Texas and I'm currently the ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) of several schools in the local area, with the main one being Imabari North High School. If you could describe me in three things, it would be a basketball, a Golden Retriever and a BBQ brisket. Today, I want to talk about one of those things: basketball, the greatest sport that was ever created (that's not hyperbole). Basketball is one of the greatest loves in my life, and I want to talk a little about how it has given me a way to interact with the local community.

Of course, as a lover of basketball, one of the first things that I did once I came to Imabari was visit Imabari North's basketball club. Since then, I have been an active participant in my teams' basketball practices, as well as an active, rabid fan at all of their games. Through this, I've gotten to know the members of the basketball team well, and as a bonus gotten the chance to practice basketball as much as I want. Through cheering at their games, I've also gotten the chance to meet with the families of the team members. Because of this, I've gotten a better view of my students, their personalities and the backgrounds that they come from, as well as someone to chat with about the NBA. Also, I've had the pleasure of experiencing the highs of victory, but also the lows of defeat, including the sadness of when the third years inevitably play their final game. All things said, the time that I've spent with my basketball clubs is something that I will always treasure and I will never forget and that I wouldn't trade for anything.

Wow, I got a little emotional there for a moment \*deeply inhales, then exhales\*. Okay! An important thing that all ALTs must keep in mind is their position as an international member of the community. I personally think it's important to get involved with the local community in order to foster cultural exchange. And as lover of basketball, I need to hoop. So when I discovered that there was a local basketball club that I could join, I immediately jumped at the chance. I will admit I didn't completely know what to expect when I first joined the group, and I'm sure they didn't either. In fact, they probably still don't. But still, throughout the past 10 months or so of being involved with IBC (Imabari Basketball Club) I've been able to form friendships with many different people in the local community, from office workers to Filipino fabrication apprentices to college students. This has been really important for me, because as an ALT, it's very easy to get caught in a routine of going to work and then going straight home. This insulated bubble can be a very isolating, so having that connection to the local community is truly a blessing.

Another amazing opportunity that I've had along the same lines is participating in the 3x3 basketball tournaments. For those who don't know, 3x3 is basketball played using teams of 3 people instead of the normal number of 5. It's played using only a half court and the official women's size basketball. The pace can be a lot faster, since both teams use the same half court, and the time that you have to shoot the ball is shorter than in a regular basketball game. Several times a year, there are 3x3 basketball tournaments held in Matsuyama. I have been participating in them since last year with a few other ALTs. Many people come from all over Ehime to attend these tournaments, so I've gotten the chance to talk to people from many different places and different walks of life. It's also given me a chance to play a different kind of basketball, which has been a fun and interesting opportunity for me.



When I really think about it, for me, basketball isn't just a sport. It's something I can go to when I'm at my lowest moments, a way to lift myself up when I'm feeling down. It's something to help me cope with the daily stress of life as well as the more serious problems that periodically come up. Thankfully, the people I've met through it are some absolutely wonderful people in the world, and they've played no small part in getting me through some tough times, whether they know it or not. For that I will always be grateful. I'd like to finish by citing an ancient basketball proverb that has never let me down. Ball is love, ball is life. Now I'm starting to sound like a Golden Retriever.