

## Mel Booth in Sri Lanka



### **Sports writer returns to disaster-hit country to help change lives**

**By Mel Booth, Huddersfield Daily Examiner**

**Huddersfield Daily Examiner chief soccer writer [and Scholes CC stalwart] Mel Booth and his wife Carol, both regular visitors to Sri Lanka, have returned to the tsunami-hit country to help one of the devastated villages. With local donations of £3,190 in their pocket, they set out to find a community which they could meaningfully help. Here, Mel tells of their journey...**

It will take years for Sri Lanka and its people to recover from the tsunami.

The Indian Ocean paradise is no stranger to tragedy, with more than 60,000 people being killed over two decades of bloody civil war.

But the events of December 26 last year claimed half that number in just a few hours as giant waves swept ashore around most of the coastline.

Families were traumatised — left to grieve for loved ones who've never been seen since. Many had their homes, possessions and livelihoods destroyed as well, only adding to the torture.

We have made many friends in Sri Lanka in ten years of holiday visits and felt compelled to help.

So we decided to raise some money and travel out there, although we were shocked on our arrival.

The road to Galle is one we know well.

Colourful, spectacular and crammed with humanity — bustling communities between vibrant towns.

At least that's how it used to be.

Since the tsunami, the outlook has changed immensely and survivors are facing a daily battle to rebuild their lives.

A journey down the west coast takes you through one devastated village after another — each desperately in need of help.

Our task was to identify a community we could meaningfully help with £3,190.

The cash included money from Holmspun at Thongsbridge and generous four-figure donations from Shelley Village Community Association and from Jules Hobson and Tracy Bird, of Uppershong who, like ourselves, were left wondering what to do when the main aid agencies closed down their appeal.

Our friend E. G. Mahinda Lal (nicknamed Siggys) knew of a village at Kosgoda, near the famous turtle hatchery, where 52 families totalling 230 people had lost just about everything in the disaster.

He took us to meet two women from the village — Sunanda and Chandrika — to discuss what were the most important needs of the people.

While they were 'fortunate' to have wooden shelters rather than tents, most families had little else.

Seven of the poorest families — including 20 children — had nothing but their clothes and some food to last a few days.

For these families, we were advised to buy beds with mattresses and mosquito nets, cupboards in which to put clothes and any belongings, some chairs, buckets, cooking pots, plates, cups and utensils.

They also needed torches (no electricity), thermos flasks to keep hot water and two of the families needed cookers with gas bottles.

Siggys advised us to get the best quality possible so that if their homes were ever rebuilt in the next few years, they would have decent things to take with them. Cheap items don't last long in this steamy climate.

He also felt it best to buy as locally as possible, to cut down on transport costs from Colombo, and we knew we could find what we needed in our base village of Aluthgama, about 10km away.