

# The Pupusa Prince Goes Home

By Karen Catchpole - January 29, 2013



Amadeo Gonzalez

It was already hot at 8 AM in **Metapan, El Salvador**, where a loose band of boys were following their coach onto a **soccer field**. There were smiles, a huddle, and a pep talk before the boys exploded into action at the first whistle. The team ultimately lost their match but **Coach Amadeo Gonzalez** (photo, right) was still smiling.

He has a lot to smile about.

Years ago, a teenaged Gonzalez fled the vicious civil war in his native El Salvador, leaving behind a coveted spot on the national soccer team—a team that went all the way to the World Cup two years later, without him. “I trained for four hours, six days a week for six years with the dream of going to the World Cup,” Gonzalez said, still a bit heartbroken by the opportunity that politics stole from him.

As his former team mates were gearing up to play on an international stage, Gonzalez was in San Francisco, working at the now-shuttered Levi’s factory that created the iconic brand of American jeans.

“When I got to San Francisco I didn’t wanted to play soccer,” Gonzalez remembers. “But one day in Dolores Park, I saw some guys playing and they asked me if wanted to join in because they needed one more.” He said yes and his skills got him gigs playing for several semi-professional local teams, enabling him to earn enough to quit the factory job he hated, and save enough to open a restaurant.



In 1987, Gonzalez opened **Balompie Café** (*balompie* is a combination of the Spanish words for “ball” and “foot” which was used instead of *fútbol*) in the Mission neighborhood of San Francisco - long before gentrification made this area hip. Twenty years later, Gonzalez opened a second *Balompie Café* in the Mission, solidifying his standing amongst the sizeable and growing El Salvadoran population in the city.

Soon, word spread and Gonzalez found himself introducng non-Salvadorans to some of his countrymen’s favorite dishes, including *yucca* with *chicharron* and perhaps the most iconic Salvadoran dish of all, the *pupusa*, a gooey, rich, steaming disc of ground rice or corn dough traditionally filled with beans, *lorroco* (an edible flower bud that tastes a bit like asparagus), cheese and *chicharron*. And, he did so with success.

The *pupusas* at Balompie were voted Best *Pupusa* by *SF Weekly* in 2009 and they ranked on *7X7* magazine’s list of “100 Things to Eat in San Francisco Before you Die” in 2009 and in 2010. Balompie’s *pupusas* have also made the San Francisco Chronicle’s “100 Top Bargain Bites” list every year since 2008.

Gonzalez's proudest moment, however, did not come in San Francisco. In 2009, he opened a third *Balompie* Café, this time in his hometown of Metapan, El Salvador. The restaurant is festooned with team photos and other memorabilia from his days on the national soccer team. The front of the restaurant faces the languid town square and the back literally abuts Metapan's well-groomed soccer field, providing a kind of private box for patrons who also want to watch local matches.



The location and the décor are a testament to the game—and the place—that Gonzalez loves. “El Salvador and soccer taught me to be strong and determined,” says Gonzalez, who credits his success to those very qualities. Now he’s determined to pass them on. Since deciding to spend between six and eight months a year in Metapan, Gonzalez has enough time to increase his coaching duties and he’s currently working with five levels of local teams, mentoring and feeding dozens of players from ages eight to 18.

Here, Gonzales shares a recipe, from his kitchen to yours.

#### **El Salvadoran Pupusas from *Balompie* Cafe**

- 3 ounces corn or rice flour
- 1 ounce grated Monterrey Jack cheese
- 1/2 ounce refried beans
- 1/2 ounce ground pork filling of your choice

**[Get the full recipe.](#)**

