

Future national football player who “plays” on streets

He once attended a football school in Senayan, but little Ilham eventually “fell” into the streets and now drives for Metromini.

About ten years ago when Ilham was in a kindergarten, his teacher asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up. At that time, most of his friends said they wanted to be a doctor, pilot or police officer – even the president.

“Now it’s your turn, Ilham,” said the teacher, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” Ilham was quiet for a moment. He only knew one type of men’s job – his dad’s job – as a driver. “I want to be a driver,” he answered firmly.

The whole class laughed at him but he didn’t know what so funny about his answer. Now that he is a Metromini driver, he can laugh about it.

“I guess my dream came true. I am a driver now,” said Ilham to Beritasatu.com some time ago, laughing.

His fate as a driver is related to his childhood experience with his father. His father often took Ilham when driving his bus along the Blok M – Pasar Minggu route. He sat in the front seat and enjoyed watching the streets go by. “That is how I know this area very well,” he said.

Although his initial experience driving for Metromini came from his father, he never asked him to be a driver. He began driving as a way to avoid school; he dropped out of school last year because he didn’t like one of his teachers at Pelopor Vocational School.

After leaving school, he was jobless so he eventually went to the streets. He hung out at bus stations and met some drivers, and eventually and joined them as a conductor.

Despite his young age, it was not difficult for him to become a substitute driver. At first, Ilham was only playing around as a conductor, but then slowly he learned how to drive a bus and earned the trust of official drivers, and eventually became a driver – without a license or even an ID.

Usually, substitute drivers work at night when official drivers need rests, and Metromini must continue to operate to reach their target income in order to pay the bus owner. Ilham, however, doesn’t only work nights. Since he is out of school, he also drives the bus in the morning from 10am to 3pm. “When I’m not too tired, I will drive again from 7pm to midnight,” he said.

As a substitute driver, Ilham can make up to Rp.240.000 a day but he will not enjoy all of it. Half must be paid to the official driver while the other half is for him to share with his conductor. He usually spends his money on small things and cigarettes, and sets some aside to pay for repairs to his broken motorcycle.

Ilham admitted that his parents do not know about his job. One time, his father, now a taxi driver, caught him driving the bus and was furious. “Dad doesn’t want me to risk my life on the streets. My parents want me to go back to school and become a successful person.”

When he was in the 4th grade, Ilham joined a football school in Senayan where for two years he trained to be a future national football player. He was among the best players of his school – the senior players were often jealous of his football skills.

Unfortunately, his potential ended when he started smoking and become short of breath while playing; Ilham can no longer play a long game. “If I didn’t start smoking, I could be like Andik (a national football player),” he chuckles. Unlike Andik, who plays on the football field, Ilham has to “play” on the streets.

However, Ilham doesn’t want to be substitute driver all his life. He asserted his willingness to return to school. He wants to prove to his parents that he is still able to participate in school after taking one year off. “Next year, I want to go back to school,” he stated.

Asked what comes next, Ilham went silent. It took him several minutes to answer that question. While driving and smoking, he answered, “I don’t know what I am going to be.”

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