CHAIN REACTION FOR KOSSIE PUNTERS CLUB

A GROUP OF MATES FROM SCONE ARE 'CHAINED' TOGETHER FOR LIFE AFTER STRIKING THE JACKPOT BY WINNING A SLOT AND THE EVENTUAL KOSCIUSZKO SWEEPSTAKES

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It had to be a Scone horse. For a group of 10 mates from Scone, if they won a slot in The Kosciuszko they had to send a Scone-trained horse to Randwick.

They'd formed a punters club some eight years earlier as a way to catch up and finance some group ventures.

The Kosciuszko was only a young race at the time but, being punters, it was a case of they had to be in it to win it.

Nathan Lange, Shaun Trewin, Martin Feehan, Luke Bailey, Ben Clark, Scott Shan, Dom Moran, Stuart Sheldrake, Mark Sheedy and Rod Vaughn didn't realise it at the time but they would win a slot, choose

Kosciuszko slot holder winners: Nathan Lange, Shaun Trewin, Martin Feehan, Luke Bailey, jockey Zac Lloyd's partner Tia Verheyen (blue dress) with Ben Clark to her left, Scott Shan and Dom Moran. Obscured are Stuart Sheldrake, Mark Sheedy and Rod Vaughn

a horse called Chains Of Love and win a $2 million race on TAB Everest Day.

Ben Clark, 34, said they're a mixed bunch of locals. He's a boilermaker working for a company which contracts to the mines. There's stockbrokers, cattle agents and accountants among the group.

"My mate Shaun Trewin and I were sitting at The Cottage at Scone one day and we said 'everyone is getting married and having kids so why don't we start a punter's club so we can go on trips','' he said.

"Every year since we started we've been buying Kosciuszko tickets.

"We never thought we'd win, it was a shock. When we saw the draw we saw Scone TAB customer was the 14th slot draw. I put the phone away thinking 'what's the chances' then 15 minutes later we got the call."

Clark said they budgeted for 100 tickets ($500) in the Kosciuszko in 2026.

There was never any doubt where Clark and his group would go looking for their horse and he said they pinpointed Chains Of Love, partially because of her race record and because co-trainer Paul Messara was familiar to them.

"Scone's a small place, everybody knows everyone," he said.

"Everybody knows Paul, and we thought she was a decent filly. She trialled the day of the draw in Scone, and she had pretty good form.

"The experience they gave us on the journey was unbelievable."

One of the aspects of The Kosciuszko that owners and trainers statewide have embraced in its nine editions to date is making the slot winners, the people who bought the $5 tickets to win the right to choose a horse, feel like part of the team.

Chains Of Love (Zac Lloyd; black & yellow diamonds) gets the upper hand from Band Of Brothers (Nash Rawiller; lime colours) in the Kosciuszko at Royal Randwick

THE KOSCIUSZKO

Grinners are winners: Jockey Zac Lloyd with co-trainers Paul Messara & Leah Gavranich

Just as Messara and co-trainer Leah Gavranich did a year earlier in the lead up to Clear Thinking winning The Kosciuszko, Clark said they were treated as if they were part of the ownership.

"They sent audio and videos to keep us up to date the whole time, it was brilliant. They went beyond what we thought," he said.

"On the Thursday before we came down to Sydney we went out to the farm to look at the horse and have dinner.

"If it was somebody he didn't know Paul would do the same thing, that's how they are."

It was Clark's second TAB Everest Day, he and his wife made the trip down in 2025, but it was a very different day for him, his punters club group and their families.

As the race unfolded, and Zac Lloyd was trapped off the course on Chains Of Love, it added to the tension but when she stuck her head out to deny Band Of Brothers pandemonium broke out.

"I was nervous the whole week leading up to it. The build up to the day, the wanting the horse to do well, it was nerve racking," he said.

"When she came around the home corner and she was five wide I thought she was gone.

"To do what she did, she showed a lot of grit and fight, was unbelievable.

"There's plenty of footage getting around of us, there was plenty of excitement."

Talk of a tilt at The Kosciuszko was front and centre after Chains Of Love won a TAB Highway at Royal Randwick in June.

Messara sent her to Flemington for a Listed race, where she ran third, in early July before setting sights on Everest Day and the four-year-old had three trials leading into the race.

"We set her up for this race a long time ago and it is nice when a plan comes off," Messara said.

"She is a trouble-free mare, straight forward to train, but we have been patient with her, she is lightly raced with a lot of upside.

"We thought if we could set her for this race, she could run well. It's amazing with the run she had that she was able to win."

Some of the punter's club group have or do own shares in horses but Clark said he hasn't ventured into ownership just yet, though The Kosciuszko win may just change that.

What it will do for the group of 10 is ensure the club continues well into the future, and you can guarantee they will be part of the Kosciuszko many more times.

"A few of the guys have horses, it was spoken about so we will see if I go there," he said.

"It'll keep the club going for another 10 years. Money will go back into our punter's club and everyone will take some.

"We'll be buying tickets next year, hopefully we'll take another slot." ***RNSW***