



Maria gives Marlon his second chance



MARLON Dolendo has made many sacrifices in his life as a jockey but nothing will compare to what his sister Maria will forgo today.

At Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Maria will donate a kidney to her older brother in a bid to save his life and hopefully one day resurrect his riding career.

For the past six months the popular Port Macquarie-based jockey, 39, has relied on dialysis to keep his body functioning. His kidneys are shot, completely dysfunctional and doctors are struggling to find a reason why.

The only way forward is a transplant and his 35-year-old sister was the first to put her hand up to offer her own.

"I am very grateful for what Maria is doing for my life," Marlon said.

"She is giving me another chance, we are a very close family and I will never be able

to thank her enough."

Close family they certainly are. When doctors realised both his kidneys were only 13 per cent functional — and declining — Maria wasn't the only one to offer hers.

His two brothers were next in line, both willing to fly over from the Philippines if their sister wasn't a suitable match.

No one is yet to put their finger on why both kidneys have failed. He tips the scales at 48kg and has never had to diet to make weight.

He has never taken diuretics and never been one to spend hours on end in a sauna.

Dolendo didn't even have a clue that his vital organs were even a problem. He thought he was suffering from a severe bout of the flu until he returned home from the races at Port Macquarie on December 13 last year and doctors informed him he should have been dead.

"One day at Taree, he had to get the clerk of the course to help him bring the horse back to scale," close friend Garry Giles said.

"It is something that Marlon deeply regrets. He is very sorry that he was never diagnosed earlier because he could have hurt one of his good mates out on the track."

Dolendo is expected to remain at RPA for two weeks and may have to stay in Sydney for a further three months for continual testing to determine the success of the transplant. He is keen to eventually make a return to the saddle and doctors are not ruling it out either.

Racing NSW and the National Jockeys Trust, especially Natalie Tipping and Louise Betts, have played a big role in helping Dolendo and his family, with the pair organising for his aunty to be flown out from the Philippines to

care for his three children while he is in Sydney.

Dolendo has always been regarded as a superb horseman, ever since Randwick trainer and his first master Pat Webster first spotted him.

"I remember walking in to the old trainers hut in the middle of Randwick and Marlon was standing there with another little bloke who had piercings and tattoos everywhere," Webster said.

"I asked Marlon if he had ever ridden a horse. He said to me 'no, only water buffalo'.

"I took him on and sent the other kid up to my brother-in-law (Jim Lee).

Dolendo's first ride was aboard Trigrove for Webster in 1992.

He spent time as an apprentice for Tommy Smith before moving to Brisbane and then settling at Port Macquarie.



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Strong bond: Marlon Dolendo with his sister Maria; riding a winner at Doomben in 1995; and celebrating with Gai Waterhouse in 1996

Main picture: Nathan Edwards