

# ALL IN THE FAMILY

## The Escobars' passion for polo transcends generations

By Michele Meyer | Photography by Nick Mele

Shot on location at Santa Clarita Farm, Wellington

Dreams can come true. Just ask brothers Nico and Lucas Escobar, who not only rode side by side in the XII Federation of International Polo (FIP) World Polo Championship, but they did so in their hometown of Wellington.

After conquering defending champs Argentina during the semi-finals—with Nico scoring the winning goal in overtime—the underdog USA team dueled ferociously with Spain for the gold. Lucas played “lights-out polo,” while Nico was the team’s “goal-scoring machine,” with six total, remarked Global Polo TV’s Toby Wayman.

But with 30 seconds to go, Spain tied the match at 10-10, forcing the game into sudden-death overtime. Spain then scored from 80 yards out. Team USA had come within a horse’s hair of winning it all.

“It’s harder to lose by one goal than six, but I got over it,” says Nico. “I was so happy to make the finals.”

“They played so well and with such

heart,” says their mother, Georgette. “It was an epic team that made history. Never had the finals been played by two sets of siblings.” (The others were the Escobars’ longtime friends Hope and Agustin Arellano.)

As brothers who have played together since they could sit on a horse and hold a mallet, Nico and Lucas, now 22 and 20, respectively, instinctively know where each other is on the field. Their talent and tenacity have made Nico a 5-goaler and Lucas a 4-goaler, with a 10-goal handicap being the sport’s absolute top.

“It’s total dedication,” says Lucas. “Every decision I make is impacted by polo.”

Indeed, just two hours after the final match on November 6, Nico jetted off to Argentina. Lucas followed the next day. They remained there through early December to practice and learn from the world’s best players. “Argentina is where you really improve yourself,” Nico says.

As sons of former 8-goaler Luis



BROTHERS NICO (SITTING) AND LUCAS ESCOBAR ARE RATED AT 5 GOALS AND 4 GOALS, RESPECTIVELY.





“Polo is our life. They want to be at the top, and we will do everything in our power to get them there.” —Georgette Escobar



LUCAS AND NICO REPRESENTED THE UNITED STATES DURING THE XII FIP WORLD POLO CHAMPIONSHIP, HELD AT THE NATIONAL POLO CENTER - WELLINGTON THIS PAST FALL.

Escobar and grandsons of Francisco Escobar, who opened Wellington's Santa Clara Polo Club in 1984, the brothers inherited their obsession. "It's in their DNA," Georgette says.

Born in Costa Rica, Luis settled in Wellington at age 17 to play professionally. Three years later, he met Georgette. Their sons grew up following Luis' polo seasons, from Santa Barbara to England to Argentina. Nico and Lukie, as his family calls him, dragged pint-size mallets while they learned to crawl. As they got older, those tiny mallets grew too, and they'd often play foot polo with each

other and their friends—something they continue to do to this day, their mother says.

"They've been surrounded by horses and polo since they were born," explains Luis, who now runs the Santa Clara Polo Club. "They had toy mallets and pony pillows in their cribs and were on horses before they could walk."

"Polo is our life," Georgette says. "They want to be at the top, and we will do everything in our power to get them there."

Yet even with such fierce dedication, Luis has made riding and polo fun for his sons. "If





they're not having fun, you're going about it the wrong way," he says.

By the time Nico and Lucas were 6, their father was letting them ride and gallop without a lead line. "The sense of freedom and synergy, just me and the horse, is the feeling that keeps me playing polo," Lucas says.

"Riding is therapeutic," Nico continues. "You feel the wind on your face and forget any problems."

While their dad is their hero, their joy has been playing together as brothers. "Nico always took me under his wing and looked out for me," Lucas says. "We're best friends and teammates for life."

"We're always together," Nico says. "He's one of the funniest guys I know and the person I trust most in this world."

While both brothers stand 6 feet tall, their parents point out that they have their own unique skills. Nico is calm, mellow, and quiet, "taking after his father," says Georgette. He has an innate talent, superb hand-eye coordination, and "a great feel for the horses," Luis adds.

"You have to keep a cool head," Nico says. "When things are tight, stay with the basics: Go to the mallet and hit the ball."

Lucas is polo's version of a worker bee, his mother notes. "He'll open doors for his team, while taking someone else out of play."

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Riding is therapeutic. You feel the wind on your face and forget any problems.” —Nico Escobar

When not on the polo field, the brothers lift weights and play soccer, basketball, and stickball. They often end their days with a soak in their jacuzzi. "While it's great for your body, we also sit and crack jokes," Nico says. "Polo is just a game. You've got to be happy."

The brothers also use their downtime to watch matches and study players' moves and horses. They replay videos of their dad's peak performances, too. "He could crush the ball," Nico says.

Lucas describes his dad as his "main teacher in the sport and in my life. I ask him and my grandfather not just about polo but anything. They give me perspective, confidence, and amazing advice."

But admiration aside, Lucas does savor beating his dad in practice. "If he wins, he sees it as a teaching moment. If I win, it's a great feeling because I'll have caught him by surprise."

Practice isn't the only time that it's Escobar versus Escobar. When the brothers play against each other—as they did in the Gauntlet of Polo Gold Cup semi-finals in 2021—it's hard on Georgette. "I stayed home," she recalls. "It was so emotional. Lukie ended up winning."

"Nico hates it, but he gets over it pretty quickly," Lucas says of besting his brother. "By the time we get home, everything's fine. Family comes first."

Otherwise, Georgette is there—and she's probably the loudest person on the field, clanging bells and beating drums, Nico says. "I love her support. She's also the best mom ever. I can talk about anything with her."

"My role is being their No. 1 fan," Georgette says. "I'm the loudest girl in polo. I cheer my heart out."

Her husband says she runs a cheerleading section of 50 to 70 people, and she was in full form at the FIP World Polo Championship. "It's customary in other countries to make a lot of noise," Luis says. "She took care of that for Team USA."

The Escobar brothers make their own noise by playing in a rock band, with Lucas on guitar and Nico on drums. They practice in band-mate and former polo player Tenzin Tognini's home, in a now sound-proof converted garage. Prior to the renovation, a neighbor complained about the noise and aptly named the group The Local Burdens.

On the polo field, however, they're anything but a burden—especially when playing together.

"We definitely turned heads and proved ourselves by beating Argentina," Lucas says of the FIP World Polo Championship. "They were the favorites, and we left everything on the field. Overtime is anyone's game. One lucky bounce can determine who wins. We got lucky against Argentina, and Spain got lucky against us."

"Welcome to my bleeding ulcer," Luis says of that game against Spain. "Watching them play isn't as easy as when I was playing. But I'm ready for it. This is their time." ◀◀

WHEN NOT PLAYING POLO OR TRAINING, THE ESCOBAR BROTHERS PLAY MUSIC, WITH NICO ON DRUMS AND LUCAS ON GUITAR.

