

Julia Tops

If you're looking to catch up with Julia Tops this time of year, you're just as likely to find the young Canadian equestrian seated at a desk studying for class as you are to find her in the saddle. And you will need to be prepared to squeeze into her busy schedule.

Successfully Juggling School and Show Jumping

By Emily Riden/Jump Media

Canadian equestrian Julia Tops, 18, is a sophomore at the University of Toronto where she is part of a highly-competitive International Relations program.
Photo by Phil Crozier

While the 18-year-old may have riding in her blood – she is the daughter of Dutch Olympic gold medalist and Longines Global Champions Tour (LGCT) founder Jan Tops and Canadian show jumping team veteran Tani Zeidler - she also shares her parents' drive for success outside of the show ring. It's that drive for success that has gotten Tops to where she is today: juggling horse showing with her sophomore year at the University of Toronto, where she is part of a highly-competitive program specializing in International Relations.

Tops divided her summer between interning at ATCO, founded by the late Ron Southern of Spruce Meadows fame and now run by his daughter, Nancy Southern, and competing throughout Europe and North America on several mounts including Zamiro 16, acquired from fellow Canadian rider Kara Chad and India Blue ZF, the first product of her family's breeding program at Zeidler Farm in Calgary, AB.

Come September, Tops was back at the University of Toronto where her show ring accomplishments are known by only a few close friends. Instead, the majority of her fellow students know her as a member of the Delta Delta Delta sorority, or as the lead analyst for the G20 Research Group, dedicated to studying the compliance to goals put in place at the annual G20 Summit.

"When I'm at school, I'm friends with completely non-horse people," explained Tops. "The type of school I choose was for academics, not for riding, so I don't really know anyone who's in the horse world like me.

"You can sometimes get so encapsulated in the horse world," continued Tops. "It can be really nice to have non-horse people as friends to bring you back to reality in a sense."

The balance of horsey and non-horsey friends bears a striking resemblance to the balance that Tops has created between her equestrian and non-equestrian activities, but she will be the first to admit that it can be a difficult equilibrium to create.

"My biggest struggle is missing out on things or feeling like I'm not in either place enough," said Tops candidly. "I had to learn



Julia Tops competes with India Blue ZF (Mr. Blue x Calvados IV), the first product of her family's breeding program at Zeidler Farm. Photo by Sportfot

to prioritize. I went into my first year with the mentality of 'I love riding, and I'm going to leave at every opportunity I can to go ride.' I quickly learned that it's okay to enjoy your first year. Nothing is ever going to be like your first year of university again. I've made such great friendships, and I have great relationships with my professors. I joined a bunch of clubs. All of that really builds your character and, in the end, helps you be a better person mentally, and even with riding."

Tops continued, "I had come in with a plan to attend about five shows in Europe in my first semester, but physically I didn't find that possible. I found that I was doing a half-hearted job at both, and that's not my personality at all. I reorganized myself; I showed a little bit less but when I went, I was competitive. I was there to win. I found that way more rewarding than maybe going seven weekends and being stressed about 'I need to run home and study, I need to hand this in.' I learned to do both to the fullest extent that I could, just less often."

This year, Tops continues to give her greatest effort in both the class room and the show ring as she plans to travel from Toronto to Florida as frequently as possible to ride and compete at the Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF) in Wellington while simultaneously pursuing her goal of one day working in International Development or International Law. And while the frequent back-and-forth trips and both the competitive and academic demands could be draining for some, Tops wouldn't have it any other way.

"I love the balance," said Tops. "I have to work a little bit harder at school because I'm not there all the time and I need to get ahead. I need to be organized. I write drafts way in advance because if a paper is due the Monday after I get back from a show, it has to be edited and done before I even leave. It makes me be a little bit sharper for school.

"And for riding, the mental aspect and ability to focus is improved," concludes Tops. "They complement each other well. The balance has made me a more well-rounded person because it has brought both worlds together. It makes me love each a little bit more."



Julia Tops and Zamiro 16, one of the horses she will compete with this winter at the Winter Equestrian Festival. Photo by Sportfot