



LEARNING FROM THE TOPS



BY **MOLLY SORGE**
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JULIA TOPS approaches every challenge in life as if it were a 1.60-meter course. It's something her father, Jan Tops, Dutch Olympic gold medalist and founder of the Longines Global Champions Tour, taught her.



MY FATHER TAUGHT ME that even if you're cantering a pole on your own, you need to make sure you're making the effort to do it well," said Julia. "You shouldn't say, 'Oh, I was a little bit long, but that's okay.' You need to fix it. He's taught me that you have to give equal effort and attention to everything you do. You want to make sure that all elements of your training, and your life, are like that. It's hard to hold yourself to that level of discipline every time in everything you do, but that's what it takes to really succeed."

And with her parents' tutelage and her own drive, dedication, and discipline, Julia truly is succeeding.

THE FUNDAMENTALS

Julia, 20, was born in Switzerland to Jan and fellow international grand-prix rider Tani Zeidler, a former Canadian Show Jumping Team member. Julia grew up with her mother in Calgary, Canada, just down the road from the show-jumping epicenter of Spruce Meadows, and traveled to Jan's stable in Valkenswaard, the Netherlands, whenever she could.

Having clearly inherited her parents' competitive genes, Julia placed ninth in her first grand prix at the age of 13, the same year she became the youngest rider to win the CET Medal

Western Regional Final in Vancouver, British Columbia. She also represented Canada at the 2015 North American Junior and Young Rider Championships in Lexington, Kentucky.

Simultaneously, her parents taught her the importance of academics and of pursuing her education with the same discipline that she showed in the saddle. While the horses were always in the barn, Jan and Tani made sure Julia always maintained a nice balance of horses and academics; if she didn't do well in school, she didn't travel to compete.

"They wanted to see if I really wanted riding, not to do it simply because they did," said Julia. "My parents really value education."

While in her junior years, Julia was a student in the full international baccalaureate program at Calgary's Strathcona Tweedsmuir School. At the same time, she was in the Model United Nations, volunteered at a local food bank, and won the John S. Burns Family Trophy for outstanding dedication and work ethic.

Juggling education, extracurricular activities, and her equestrian endeavors made for a hectic schedule, but it helped Julia learn something that neither of her parents could teach her: just how much she truly loved riding and having horses as a part of her life.

"I think it was then that I realized that I couldn't imagine



my life without riding,” said Julia. “It was around that time that it really clicked that riding and competing was something that I wanted to continue to have as a big part of my life.”

CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH

Today, Julia’s hectic schedule hasn’t slowed down. In fact, it’s only increased. She is currently immersed in pursuing a double major in international relations and contemporary Asian studies at the University of Toronto Trinity College, while also serving as a compliance director for the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy’s G20 Research Group and a co-chair of summit studies for the G7 Research Group.

When school is not in session, Julia can be found spending time in the saddle and continuing to learn from both her mom in Calgary and her dad in Europe, as the two are her primary trainers.

“We’re cut from the same cloth, so it makes it easy,” said Julia of training with her dad, who has a similar detail-oriented, type-A personality. “He doesn’t put a lot of pressure on me because he knows that I naturally want to do extremely well, so I don’t need that external motivation. He tells me a detailed plan because he knows that’s what I like. And he’s always really calm at a show—we both are—which is really nice.

“He’ll tell you, ‘You did this part well, but you didn’t do this very well, and it might catch up to you later if you don’t fix it.’ He’s a forward thinker, and he never sugar-coats anything, which I love,” continued Julia.

“My parents’ advice complements each other well,” said Julia, whose top mount, India Blue ZF, is a homebred from her mom’s Zeidler Farm breeding program. “My mom has taught me that you have to be able to change your plan if you need to. Sometimes you have to go with your gut; you need to have



a plan, but you need to react to what’s happening. You can’t be rigid in the ring. It’s about being in the moment and making things work.”

Her parents’ guidance has given Julia a truly essential element to her riding: confidence.

“I trust [my dad] no matter what, so if he tells me to do this crazy inside turn, that’s what I’m going to do,” she said. “I’m not going to come out of the ring having not tried it! I feel like that kind of trust is something I have only ever had with my parents. That’s helped me be more competitive, and I’ve been able to be successful balancing school and riding because of my mom and dad. We’re really focused

and it’s fun, but I also respect my parents incredibly, so our dynamic works.

“Some people think it’s hard to train with your parents, but I feel honored to have their help,” Julia concluded.

FUTURE VISION

It’s not hard to see why Julia seeks to make a big impression on the world when both her parents are committed to the ongoing evolution of the sport. While the products of Tani’s breeding program are beginning to find success internationally, Jan’s innovation has pushed the envelope when it comes to the sport of show jumping.

“Since I was little, he’s always talked about changing the nature of our sport, and I think he’s done exactly that,” said Julia of her father’s creation of both the Longines Global Champions Tour and the team concept of the Global Champion League. “I can’t wait to see what he comes up with for the future. It’s really special to see him be able to fulfill what his vision was, because I think it has made a huge impact on all aspects of the sport—the riders, the sponsors, the owners. I’m super proud of him.”

There’s little doubt that her parents are just as proud of Julia’s accomplishments, whether they be in the classroom or the show ring, and anxiously watch as her bright future unfolds.

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