



*Julia Tops is especially proud to compete with India Blue ZF, the first product of her family's Zeidler Farm breeding program.*

## Young Guns! Profiling Julia Tops

*By Emily Riden*

Like most 18 year olds involved in sport at a high level, there is a fine balance between pursuing competitive goals and devoting enough time to studies. For Julia Tops of Calgary, AB, the balancing act is becoming easier to manage as she continues her university education while also following her passion for international show jumping competition.



*Phil Crozier*

*Julia Tops is striking a balance between university life and international show jumping.*

In show jumping circles, the name Tops is highly-recognizable thanks to Dutch Olympic gold medalist Jan Tops, founder of the Longines Global Champions Tour. With Jan as her father and Canadian Show Jumping Team veteran Tani Zeidler as her mother, it is no surprise that Tops has followed in her parents' footsteps, leading her directly to the stables.

As a junior, Tops competed in the hunter, jumper and equitation divisions, breaking out in 2011 with her victory in the CET Medal Western Regional Final at the BCHJA Fall Finale in Vancouver. Since then, the young rider has earned numerous victories and top finishes at shows across North America and Europe.

This summer, Tops is showing on the Longines Global Champions Tour (LGCT) with several mounts including Zero, recently purchased from Jessica Springsteen; several young horses bred and owned by her father and business partner, Kamal Bahamdan; and India Blue ZF, a ten-year-old mare that is the first product of her family's Zeidler Farm breeding program.

"It's our first homebred, and she's had amazing results," said Tops of the Dutch Warmblood mare (Mr. Blue x Calvados IV). "I'm also looking right now for a grand prix horse that I can step up and jump 1.50m-1.60m, but everyone is looking for that, so they're not easy to find!"

While Tops has already enjoyed success in the show ring, her goals, aspirations and accomplishments are not limited to those in the saddle. A First Class Honours graduate from Calgary's Strathcona Tweedsmuir School, Tops has just completed her freshman year at Trinity College at the University of Toronto where she was accepted into a competitive, 25-student program for International Relations.

Outside of both the show ring and the classroom, Tops is a lead analyst for the G20 Research Group, dedicated to studying countries' compliance to goals set



*Julia Tops and Zero competing at the Longines Global Champions Tour in Chantilly, France.*

in place at the annual G20 Summit. She is also a member of the Delta Delta Delta sorority, a JustWorld International rider ambassador, a Kingsland-sponsored rider, and an avid reader, counting Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* and Margaret MacMillan's *History's People: Personalities of the Past* among her recent favourites.

It's quite a lot for a young rider to balance, but it is something that Tops is learning how to manage, primarily through her own trial and error.

"I went in to my first year with the mentality of 'I love riding, and I'm going to leave at every opportunity I can to ride' but I quickly learned that it's okay to enjoy your first year," said Tops. "Nothing is going to be like your first year of university ever again."

"My biggest struggle is missing out on things or feeling like I'm not in either place enough," Tops continued. "You have to learn to prioritize. I'll likely still feel like I'm missing out a little bit, but it's about finding a balance."

Tops is putting that balance into practice this summer as she maintains many of her responsibilities, including the G20 Research Group, while traveling to shows across Europe. And while she is quick to name many things that she loves about riding and competing in Europe, her favorite horse shows will always be back home in Canada.

"I love Spruce Meadows, mostly because I grew up there and also because I think it's a great venue run by an amazing family," said Tops. "It's like you're showing in a famous grass ring no matter which division you choose to ride in. That was really nice growing up, and it still is now. I also really like Thunderbird in Canada. It's kind of quaint so it's not as hectic as, say, Florida."

Tops will return to the University of Toronto this fall to continue pursuing her degree with the goal of one day working in international development or international law for an organization such as the United Nations.

"I love the balance; I don't know it any other way," confirms Tops of her parallel competitive and educational pursuits. "It makes me love each a little bit more. 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 go to 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," said Tops. "In university, you're often taking difficult, three-hour exams which are mentally very exhausting. I find it's similar to riding in that way. They complement each other well. The balance has made me a well-rounded person because it has really brought both worlds together."

Pursuing two paths and excelling at both is no easy feat, but Julia Tops has made it a priority to enjoy the best of both worlds.