



# **A 30,000 Foot View** with Julia Tops



*By Caroline Culbertson*

They say the best way to gain perspective is to travel the world. To experience living proof of this adage, have a conversation with Julia Tops.

Wise beyond her 19 years, this Canadian grand prix show jumper yearns to become well-rounded in the horse world and the real world. She's traveled the globe for lessons and competitions, all the while studying Mandarin and international relations at the University of Toronto.

Julia's got show jumping royalty in her blood, being the daughter of Canadian Show Jumping Team veteran Tani Zeidler and Dutch Olympic gold medalist and founder and president of the Longines Global Champions Tour, Jan Tops. While such a submersion in the sport could give any rider tunnel vision, Julia has a unique view on how to stay versatile, how to not get stuck in the equitation ring, and how she can leverage her sport to play a larger role for the good of humanity.

## **Not the Norm**

Even at a young age, Julia understood the importance of trying new things to broaden her experience in the sport. She didn't fall prey to the bound-for-life student and trainer syndrome. Julia has put that experience to use in the U25 Grand Prix classes and aboard her current horse, a homebred mare of Zeidler Farm named India Blue ZF, who she hopes to move up to the grand prix level this summer.



“Both my parents thought I could gain so much more training with a bunch of different people, and I am really thankful for that,” she said. “I’m the rider that I am today because I was able to gain little nuggets from everyone. It’s made me a very versatile rider and I feel like I can ride a variety of horses because of that.”

She agrees that sometimes, the tendency for young students to stay too long with one trainer can be detrimental but it depends on the rider's goals and the trainer's ability to develop them.

“To a certain extent, it can be a problem if you're wanting to progress in the sport. If you just want to have fun, I'm not saying you can't stay with someone for a long time,” Julia explained.

“When you're younger and growing up as a young rider I feel like you could learn so much more from

learn so much more from a diverse group of people. On the other hand, if you start training with McLain Ward, there would be no reason to leave.”

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**“People get so obsessed with winning every single medal final.”**

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Each of her trainers molded her in different ways, she says. Lauren Hough taught her “how to take the grace, elegance and precision from the equitation ring and place that into jumpers while being competitive.”

Eddie Macken gave her the confidence to make her own decisions on course. Her current trainer, Norman Dello Joio, is fine-tuning the machine, giving her “amazing, tiny, meticulous skills that are so necessary to jump the bigger jumps.”



**The Basics in a Shadbelly**



Like many young riders, Julia developed her position and eye for a distance in the hunter and equitation rings, but she never got caught up in chasing medal finals or viewed equitation as her end goal. After she won the CET Medal Western Regional Final in Vancouver, B.C., at age 13, she left the equitation ring to focus on the jumpers.

“McClain Ward and Beezie Madden and Laura Kraut... all of these people started in equitation and it's not by accident that they're

such smooth riders,” Julia said. “It definitely helps the transition to the jumpers, but you don’t have to commit until you’re 18 if you hate it. People get so obsessed with winning every single medal final.”



Nevertheless, it was time well spent, she says. Julia believes in the American

system of developing young riders in the hunter and equitation rings.

“That’s where you really learn the basics and learn to be precise and to find a distance every single time. Sure, in jumpers you want to get closer [to the base of the fence], but to find the rhythm and the pace and from 20 strides out see a distance - that’s something I still have today.”

## **Broad Horizons**

Through traveling the world for competitions,

show jumping exposed Julia to a completely different passion outside of riding, she explains. Now, she's hoping to turn that passion into a career.

"I'm double majoring in international relations and contemporary Asian Studies. I learned Mandarin last year, so I'm going to China to take a course this summer," Julia said. "I'm hoping to maybe do international development work in southeast Asia or maybe international law. I'm going to apply to both grad school and law

school and see what happens.”



She's a frequent flyer, jetting between her second year of studies at the University of Toronto to

wherever the horse shows take her. While it can be a challenge to balance the two areas of her life, her studies and future career are just as important to her as the horses.

“I do want to ride but I’m also such a nerd. I love school,” laughed Julia, who is also a rider ambassador for JustWorld International, a philanthropic organization that provides education and basic needs to children in developing countries. “I’ve always been so fascinated by the different cultures and history and I wanted to

learn so much more about it. I also did Model [United Nations] in high school and excelled in that and that really clinched it for me.”

While she stays committed to her competitive goals, she’s not letting horses block her view of everything else she can squeeze out of life.

“There’s so much more in the world and we can make a difference, especially because we’re a pretty affluent group of people if you look at the horse show world.” she

especially because we're a pretty affluent group of people if you look at the horse show world," she said. "There's so much more out there besides just horses."

**CREDITS**

