

Julia Tops: How I'm Balancing Being Serious About School With My Dreams Of Riding Professionally

by Editorial Staff / NF Insider

Published on January 10, 2019



By Emily Riden/Jump Media

When you're in university, it's inevitable for your calendar to get pretty crowded with classes, social life, and extracurriculars. Imagine adding competing at the CSI2* level to that schedule, and you see why 21-year-old Julia Tops has become adept at multitasking.

Julia is a successful Canadian show jumper currently competing at the CSI2* level throughout Europe while also completing her final year at the University of Toronto, Trinity College, where she is double-majoring in International Relations and Contemporary Asian Studies. Julia has also been accepted into a one-year Master's Program for Development Studies at the London School of Economics. She's also working as a co-chair for the G7 Research Group (dedicated to tracking and publishing compliance to goals put in place at the annual G7 Summit), Compliance Director of the G20 Research Group, and serving as a sister in the university's chapter of Delta Delta Delta.

While Julia says that she is no expert – and that learning to strike the balance between school and riding has been an ever-evolving process – she has picked up a few time-management tips throughout high school and her four years of university.



1. Value your education. "My parents really value education so I went to a normal, private school, and my studies came first. If I did well enough in school, I could ride and compete," says Julia, the daughter of Canadian Show Jumping Team veteran Tani Zeidler, of Zeidler Farm in Calgary, Alberta, and Jan Tops, Dutch Olympic team gold medalist and founder of the Longines Global Champions Tour.



2. Prioritize. "My biggest struggle is missing out on things or feeling like I'm not in either place enough," Julia says, whose horses are currently kept in the Netherlands at her father's Stal Tops while she attends school in Canada. "You have to learn to prioritize. You'll likely still feel like you're missing out a little bit or you're not doing something to the full extent at some points, but it's about finding a balance."

For current students, it's important to identify what is most important at the time. One week that may mean missing out on a horse show where you really wanted to compete because of exams, and another week, it may mean competing in a prestigious horse show while making arrangements to take your assignments and missed classes on the road. It's a give and take, and it is all about recognizing what's important to prioritize at the particular moment so that you can be successful in both areas.



3. Be realistic – and willing to sacrifice. With the give and take of prioritizing comes the acknowledgment that some sacrifices will have to be made. For Julia, that has meant maintaining a high level of competitiveness at the CSI2* level, but not pushing beyond that level.

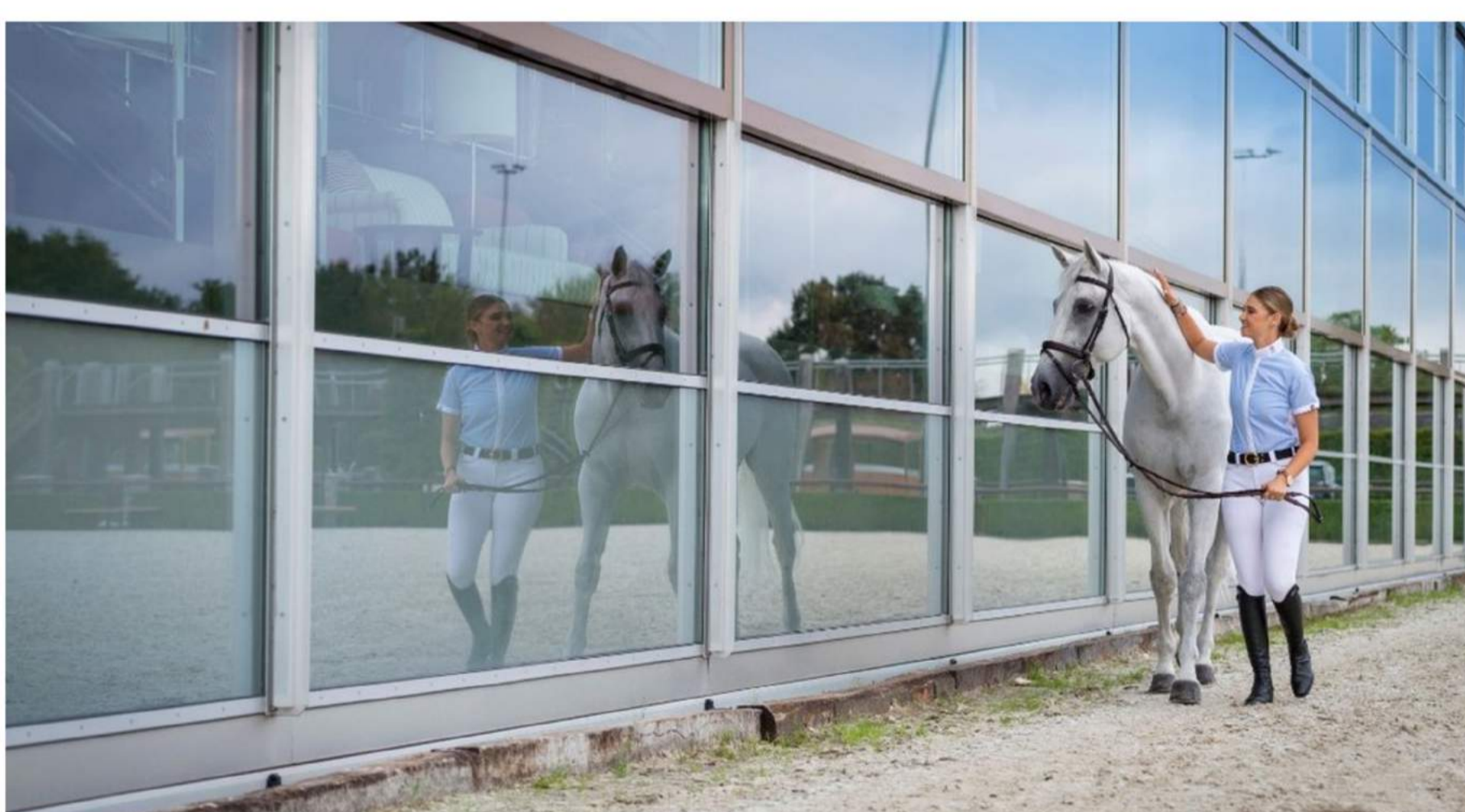
"I never wanted to jump more than in a two-star while I was in university because I take my studies very seriously. I'm going to Trinity College, which is a competitive program within the University of Toronto, so that I can get a quality education. I think competing at two-star is really a small price to pay for that. I'm really happy with maintaining my current level until I graduate, and then I'm going to see where I go from there," Julia says. "I had come in with a plan to attend about five shows in Europe in the first semester of my first year, 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 that myself; I showed a little bit less but when I went, I was competitive. I was there to win. I found that far more rewarding than maybe showing seven weekends and being stressed about, 'I need to run and study, I need to hand this in.' I learned to do both to the fullest extent that I could, just less often."



4. Find ways that riding and school can be mutually beneficial. "Once you've set your priorities and found a balance, see the benefits in having both. 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. It makes me be a little bit sharper for school. And for riding, the mental aspect and ability to focus is improved. In university, you're often taking three-hour exams, which are mentally exhausting. I find it's similar to riding that way. They complement each other well. The balance has made me a more well-rounded person because it has brought both worlds together. You can also get encapsulated in the horse world, and it's really nice to have non-horse people as friends to kind of bring you back to reality."



5. Let yourself enjoy school (and life). With so much to juggle, it's easy to get caught up in the back-and-forth and the constant struggle to fit it all in – and to do it all well – but at the end of the day, it's also important to take time to enjoy your college years while you can. "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. Don't put as much pressure on yourself the first year because you're just starting to figure everything out. Everything is totally new. Just be open to that first-year experience and then make a plan from there."



"Do not be completely set in your ways is my biggest advice," Julia concludes. "I'm the type of person who puts so much pressure on myself to do what I think is supposed to be done, but in relaxing my plan in my first year, I don't regret the choices I made along the way."

Photos by Amd Bronkhorst.

TAGS:



Written by Editorial Staff

Brought to you by a pack of horse-crazy creatives across North America... and all of their rescue pets.