

The Best of Both Worlds:

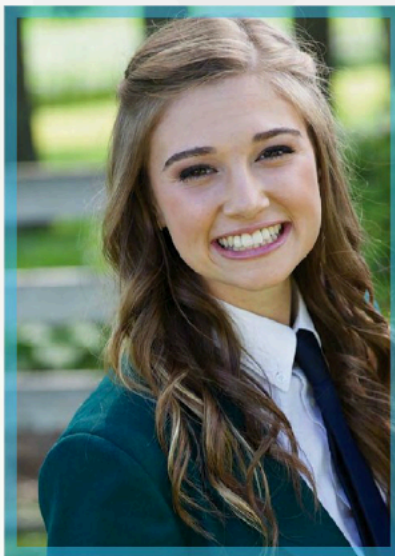
Successfully Balancing School and Riding with Julia Tops

Ask many young equestrians how they like to spend their free time when not riding and competing, and they're likely to mention hanging out with friends or spending time at the gym.

Now ask 18-year-old Julia Tops. Instead of hearing about her favorite hangout, you'll learn about her role as a lead analyst for the G20 Research Group, dedicated to studying compliance to goals put in place at the annual G20 Summit. Not many teenagers could even tell you what the G20 Summit is, let alone tell you which countries are complying.

After she's beautifully articulated on her past year's work researching gender policy compliance in various countries and her time spent studying government files and reports, Tops may next mention her love for reading. Among her favorite recent reads are History's People: Personalities of the Past by Margaret MacMillan, which offers an in-depth look at how world leaders and their individual characteristics have shaped our history, as well as Lawrence Hill's The Book of Negroes.

Tops is not one to boast about her impressive accomplishments but ask a bit more, and you'll learn that the University of Toronto student is part of competitive, 25-person



program dedicated to studying International Relations and is also minoring in Contemporary Asian Studies. She's also a member of the Delta Delta Delta sorority, a JustWorld International rider ambassador, a Kingsland-sponsored rider, and, of course, a highly competitive young equestrian.

Tops has spent the summer successfully competing throughout Europe, including on the Longines Global Champions Tour, founded by her father and Dutch Olympic gold medalist, Jan Tops. Among Julia's current mounts are Zamiro 16, recently acquired from Kara Chad, and several young horses bred and owned by her father and and business partner, Kamal Bahamdan. She also has a soft spot for India Blue ZF, the first product of her

family's breeding program at Zeidler Farm, headed by her mother and Canadian Show Jumping Team veteran, Tani Zeidler.

And while the soon-to-be second year college student makes doing it all seem effortless and easy, she is the first to admit that it is a difficult balance to strike. She has, however, picked up a few tips that have made it easier, and she shared three of them with us.

1) Be open to enjoying your first year.

"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.' 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.

You don't need to have a really rigid plan. 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 and study, I need to hand this in.' I learned to do both to the fullest extent that I could, just less often.

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. I'm the type of person that puts so much pressure on myself to do what I think is supposed to be done, but in my first year and in relaxing my plan, I don't regret the choices I made along the way."

2) Prioritize what's important to you.

"My biggest struggle is missing out on things or feeling like I'm not in either place enough. 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 instance, I will go riding one weekend while my friends take a trip to a lake cabin. So I'm missing out on spending time with them and enjoying that friendship, that

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college experience. But then another weekend I have an exam, and I can't ride in a grand prix that I really want to ride in. Either way, it often feels like a bit of a give and take. At that point, you really just have to prioritize. This year, we had a banquet for the teachers and alumni at school, and that lined up with a weekend that I was supposed to go to Florida. I ended up not going to Florida and staying for the banquet because, to me, that was really important. Another time, going to Florida for a particular week was important to me, so I talked to my professors and missed class. It was more just a matter of prioritizing what was important in both places."

3) Seek the benefits in both worlds.

"Once you've set your priorities and found a balance, see the benefits in having both. I love the balance. I don't know it any other way. 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 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. 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."

Tops will continue to put her own advice into practice as she returns to the University of Toronto this fall. With her background in International Relations, she hopes to one day work in International Development or in International Law for an organization such as the United Nations. As for her riding, it's clear that Tops will find a way to balance her priorities. ■ BY EMILY RIDEN



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