

College Sport

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Young United pair pursue lofty targets

LIAM HYSLOP

Two of Wellington's best young footballers are setting their sights high as they chase their professional football dream.

Maya Hahn and Maggie Jenkins, who both play for the Wellington United W-League team, recently starred for the New Zealand under-16 team at the Oceania Championships.

Hahn was named Most Valuable Player, while Jenkins slotted nine goals in five games as New Zealand cruised to the title, booking their spot at next year's Under-17 World Cup in Uruguay.

If they both make the squad for that tournament it will be Jenkins' second World Cup, after playing in Jordan at last year's under-17 tournament. The pair both said they want to use next year's tournament as a springboard to bigger and better things.

Hahn, a product of the Ole Football Academy, has already committed to study and play at the University of Oregon from 2019.

That seems a long way off, but Hahn said she was actually quite late in committing to a United States university.

"They recruit really early over there. They already had seven players committed for my year before I did."

The big long-term goal would be to play both professionally and for the Football Ferns - the full women's national team.

Hahn, 16, already got a taste of a



Maya Hahn, left, takes on two players while playing for Wellington United this season while, right, Maggie Jenkins shows off some of her skills.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL WELSH

professional environment in 2014 when Ole helped facilitate a visit to Germany powerhouse club Bayern Munich. She trained with their women's under-17 team and said the dream would be to play for a club like that, which would be made easier for her given she

holds a German passport through her father.

"That's the ultimate goal, to go professional and Germany being one of the best football countries in the world, men's and women's, and I've got a German passport, so it would be a good option for the

future," Hahn said.

Jenkins, 16, has also set her sights on the playing professionally, taking inspiration from the bevy of Football Ferns now playing overseas, including the likes of Katie Rood at Italian heavyweights Juventus.

"The Football Ferns sometimes send their players over on pro contracts, so that would be another idea of mine to maybe go over to Europe, or America, or anywhere on a pro contract really," she told Newstalk ZB.

Both players predominantly

spent the early years of their careers playing in boys' teams, but made the transition to senior women's football this year.

Jenkins said the biggest change was the increased physicality.

"There are quite a lot of physically challenging games,

"That's the ultimate goal, to go professional."

Maya Hahn

especially for us coming into this big women's league. It's a huge step up physically and the skill level is quite good, so we had to play our best every game."

Hahn echoed that sentiment, adding it was also a big change in style.

"I've mainly played with boys for most of my life, so it was about adapting to the women's game.

"It's probably not as fast-paced as the boys, so I had to adapt to playing against big, strong, physical opponents."

As for the under-16 tournament in Samoa, New Zealand won all five of their games by at least six goals, including a 17-1 win over Tahiti.

Hahn said even though the opposition weren't that strong, it was a good learning experience being in a national team setup for the first time, as well as experiencing playing in the Pacific Islands.

"It was really different. The heat was a big factor. It was quite hard to get used to, especially at the start, the first training was really hard.

"The games weren't the most challenging, but playing with the best players from around New Zealand and being able to win the tournament was really fun."

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