



GOAL-DEN GIRL



CAPTAIN: Alicia Schwarzenbach (front, holding the ball) with her Oakham School teammates

At the young age of 16, talented Alicia Schwarzenbach has already achieved her dream of becoming a professional football player.

Oakham School pupil Alicia plays for Leicester City Women's Football Club in the Midlands Division One. Now she just needs to worry about fitting in her studying, music lessons, volunteer work and captaining the Oakham School's girls' team.

Alicia began training with Leicester City in November.

She said: "I think I have always wanted to play professional football, but I also want to go to university and get a degree."

Alicia said she would like to keep playing football at the highest level possible.

"Playing for Leicester has really pushed me to be better," she said. "Because it's at such a high level, I feel like I've really improved since I

SAMANTHA FISHER meets a talented footballer who, at the tender age of 16, has joined the ranks of Leicester City Women's Football Club

started there. It is a nice, fast pace and as you play with people who are a lot stronger and faster than you, you improve.

"Recently I have been playing matches with the first team. We have had a really good season - we were very close to being promoted."

Alicia led Oakham School to glory in this year's Independent Schools Football Association National Championship.

"We played teams from all

over the country," said Alicia, who has been kicking a football since she was five years old. "It is kind of like a FA Cup, you have to win every match to get through to the next round."

"Oakham had never got past the second round "I like football mainly because it is such a team sport. You get to know your teammates really well and they become your closest friends. Even when you lose, you lose as a team."

"I like that it requires skill and fitness. You have to be able to run fast for a long time. You really don't know what the match is going to be like. I find that exciting. It is a lot of fun."

Although both her parents grew up in England, Alicia has lived in many different countries since she was young including Switzerland, Denmark and America. She was living in Switzerland before starting at Oakham School last September. Her

family has moved with her dad's work.

Perhaps surprisingly that it was Alicia's time in America from the age of 11 to 13 that cemented her love of football.

Alicia said: "During the autumn term we would play every day after school. I definitely improved."

Although women's football is gaining ground here, Alicia reckons we can learn something from America democratic sporting culture.

She said: "A lot of girls who play football find it quite hard, especially as in England it has become frowned upon to play."

"When I was in America, more girls played than boys.



PICTURE: RWT PHOTOGRAPHY

ON THE BALL: Alicia in action

You come to England and it's small number. It is annoying when people say that it a boys' sport and ask why I play football.

"But I will not stop because of a few people who make comments."

"At the same time, a lot of people support it. It is becoming popular especially with the women's World Cup this summer. There will be a lot of hype about it."

"It is the fast-growing sport in England and it is great more girls are playing. There is a lot of friendship, and hard work involved. It is a team sport."