

Feeble attack is exposed without Taylor

WITH defeats by London University and Hounslow turning an eagerly-awaited weekend into a depressing wake, Hampstead have been forced to face the unpalatable fact that their current forward line just isn't sharp enough to challenge for London League honours.

Having collected only a single point from their last three games, Hampstead have now slipped from fifth to halfway down the 26-club table. And unless there is sudden reversal of current form, Hampstead's fading dream of finishing in the top four will be even dimmer after tomorrow's trip to Spencer.

Although Spencer were knocked off the top by Saturday's 4-1 defeat to Southgate, they remain one of the strongest clubs in the league, particularly on their own Wandsworth ground.

Unfortunately, with their Derbyshire and Midlands left wing Bill Taylor still unable to return from the Scottish business trip that has forced him to miss the last four matches, Hampstead can make only minor adjustments to the forward line that has failed so dismally of late.

After Saturday's totally unexpected 2-1 defeat at London University had been followed by the 3-0 disappointment at home to Hounslow, Hampstead manager Nick Coleman was left to reflect on the hole that Taylor's absence has left in his side.

"There is no doubt that we miss Bill dreadfully", he mourned. "There really is no adequate replacement for him. It's not Adrian Rice's fault that we have had to play him out of position on the left wing. With Mike Laven injured, we are short of forwards who can score or run at defenders."

"It was certainly a pretty dismal weekend. We've gone back a bit. Nobody played well against London University. But there was certainly plenty of motivation against Hounslow. We were really psyched up, played to instructions and we found out that Richard Chapman is our most effective player at left midfield.

"We have gone off the boil, but we

are now holding a second training session every Wednesday and I would not rule out the possibility of us challenging for a place in the top four".

At London University's Mottspur Park ground, Hampstead paid the price for treating the game as a warm-up for the more testing encounter with Hounslow the next day.

But while bitterly disappointed by their failure to crack a side they expected to beat easily, Hampstead did not concede a goal until five minutes before the end.

The deadlock was finally broken when Hampstead goalkeeper Steve Pennington blotted his otherwise immaculate copybook by mis-kicking a clearance straight to Scott, who accepted the gift with alacrity.

Two minutes later, the students doubled their lead, right-wing Norman Borrett failing to cut out a long corner cross which skipper Cairns slammed through Pennington's legs. Right on time centre-half Dave Dixon broke through down the right to smash in a belated consolation goal.

Hampstead looked capable of redeeming themselves on Sunday when Hounslow's international-packed five-man forward line was well contained in the first half by a defence reinforced by skipper Viji Vijendran at sweeper.

But ten minutes after the interval, Hounslow's Harvinder Sibia, who played for Hampstead three years ago, upset his old club's plans with a penalty stroke awarded against Stewart Waugh, whose knee had deflected a short corner shot.

Hampstead would have equalised immediately but for England indoor goalkeeper Brightwell, who stopped Brian Guest's shot brilliantly after Borrett and Geoff Smith had worked an opening down the right.

But five minutes later, Hounslow effectively clinched the game through Middlesex forward Kulbir, who broke through as Hampstead awaited the whistle for a blatant offside.

Quarter of an hour from the end, Hounslow skipper Ian Barrett put the lid on Hampstead's blackest weekend of the season by cracking the third goal from an unmarked position at the top of the circle.



● RICHARD CHAPMAN, whose form was the one bright spot of a gloomy Hampstead weekend, is dispossessed against Hounslow on Sunday.