

Premier Division

Hampstead just fall short as Magpies soar ahead

Conference East round-up

■ by Will Moulton

CAPTAIN Annebeth Wijtenburg was left cursing Lady Luck as Hampstead and Westminster were unable to prevent Harleston Magpies from pulling away towards the top of the table.

Hosts **Harleston Magpies** are now four points clear of **Hampstead and Westminster** in third place following a 2-1 victory over them at Shotford Heath.

The Magpies did most of the damage in the opening ten minutes as the visitors struggled to handle their high press and Maria Andrews dispatched a penalty corner expertly to give the hosts the lead.

That was in the eighth minute and just seconds later Elizabeth Clymer capitalised on a turnover in possession and slotted home from the edge of the D to double the home side's lead.

But Hampstead did not allow their heads to drop and got themselves back in the game after 44 minutes through Hayley Turner's rebound effort.

The visitors then had the ball in the back of the net three times but all three were controversially chalked off, leaving skipper Wijtenburg left to wonder what could have been.

"We're very disappointed that we lost," she said. "They got two early goals and that hit us hard, especially the first one which got our heads down but we changed in the second half and I think we could have got the win.

"We had three goals disallowed so we had a bit of tough time with the umpires.

"The second half we put a lot of pressure on them and we had a lot of opportunities so the goal which should have stood could have made a difference.

"In the end though we were two-nil down already and we shouldn't have let them get into that position but I think

in terms of chances and opportunities we should have at least got a draw.

"They came out with a good high press, put a lot of pressure on our centre midfielders and that's how they scored their first goal."

However, there were some positives to take from the narrow defeat with Wijtenburg delighted with the character her side showed.

And she believes that Hampstead and Westminster are good enough to finish in the top three still this season.

"It was really down to hard luck this weekend and I'm confident in saying we should be in the top three, but we need to get the results to do that," she added.

"We definitely turned it around a lot. It's easy to get your heads down when you go two down so early but I think the team deserves big credit for fighting back and for keeping our heads.

"We want to continue to challenge for the title but it will be pretty tough now.

"We are always aiming to finish as high as possible in the league and even though the number one spot might be tough to get to, we still want to show that we are good enough to be in the top three."

In the only other game to survive the weather, **Chelmsford** inflicted **West Herts'** tenth defeat of the season as they pulled five points clear of eighth-place **Southgate** with a 2-1 home win.

The game was level at the interval but Kate Robinson broke the deadlock five minutes into the second half and Collette Ager doubled their lead shortly afterwards as the hosts seized control of the game.

West Herts grabbed a consolation goal in the final minute through Miranda Hall, but it was too little too late and they remain second-from-bottom.

Cambridge City v Wimbledon, Southgate v Northampton Saints and St Albans v Sevenoaks were postponed due to snow.

Wimbledon lead the way, three points ahead of Sevenoaks.