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Ferrero claims Dubai as Safin quits

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Dubai - Juan Carlos Ferrero, the hero of Spain's Davis Cup triumph, captured the second ATP title of his short career when the top-seeded US Open champion Marat Safin quit halfway through the second set of the Dubai Open final.

Ferrero was leading by 6-2 and 3-1 when Safin, who pulled a back muscle while making a remarkable semifinal escape against Sweden's Thomas Johansson, decided the injury made it unwise to continue.

"I couldn't move from my bed this morning," said the Russian. "I did consider not playing, but that's not really the way to do things.

"I decided it would be nice to try, but also that if the match goes the wrong way I would stop. When it got to 3-1 there was no longer any chance of winning and the injury could have got worse.

"The money doesn't matter any more - whether it's \$130 000 or 160 000 or whatever. But my health is important. I am sorry for it, but these things happen."

It was clear from the outset that Safin, who was based near Valencia for six years, would find it difficult to overcome his friend and former sparring partner.

Safin was serving barely at half pace, and although he rallied spiritedly from the baseline he was soon trailing. Ferrero concentrated well in difficult circumstances, attempted nothing extravagant and broke Safin immediately and then again in the seventh game.

Safin made a big effort to win the opening game of the second set, and the crowd got behind him as recovered from two double faults to save three break points. But once Ferrero broke serve again two games later it signalled the end.

"It was difficult to win this tournament," said Ferrero, who had had to save three match points against the Slovakian Dominik Hrbaty in the semifinals.

"I knew he was injured, but I still had to approach the match in the same way. He was playing OK from the baseline and I felt I played well in the first set.

"This will help me. I played little this year before I came here and when I arrived I was playing so bad. But the first two matches gave me confidence. It is very important for me now to do well in the two American tournaments, Indian Wells and Miami."

Safin however said he was only "70 percent likely" to play in Indian Wells on Monday week. He will have the injury assessed at a hospital near his home in Monte Carlo and then decide.

There may though be a consolation. Safin may yet have done just enough by reaching his first final in six months to creep above Gustavo Kuerten to the top of next week's ATP entry list. - Sapa-AFP

