

Tennis: Nadal topples Federer in Dubai

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Rafael Nadal broke down in tears after he beat Roger Federer in the final of the Dubai Open.

The 19-year-old Spaniard, playing only his second tournament in four months, won, 2-6, 6-4, 6-4, on Saturday, bringing an end to Federer's Open-era record of 56 consecutive hard-court match victories.

Nadal, who also beat Federer on his way to the French Open title last year, is still feeling his way back after a three-month absence caused by a foot injury.

He said his tears at the end of the two-hour Dubai final were a mark of relief as much as joy at his 13th career title.

He lay on his back, and then wept by the side of the court before paying tribute to the man who has been described as potentially the greatest player ever.

Nadal, seeded and ranked second, ended Federer's three-year reign as Dubai champion. Until Saturday, Federer was unbeaten in 2006 and had captured his two other tournaments in 2006 - the Australian Open and Doha Open.

"I think it is unbelievable to win against the best player in the world - perhaps the best in the history of the game," Nadal said. "It was also special because I was out of the game for more than three months. I cried because I was happy."

Nadal had made his return in Marseille two weeks ago, where he reached the semifinals.

Completely outplayed in the first set Saturday, Nadal changed his tactics in the second set.

"He was playing too well in the first set - very aggressive - I could do nothing," Nadal said. "In the second, I told myself just to hold my serve, and try and be aggressive on his serve and hopefully get a break."

"I also applied more topspin on my forehand," he added. "Once I won the second game after being 0-30 down, my confidence also went up."

Federer said he was happy with his game despite his loss.

"I think Nadal deserved to win because he played so consistent," the Swiss star said. "I started off really well, but sprayed a little toward the end. But I am very happy with my game right now. And hopefully I will pay him back soon."

Federer was sublime in the opening set, winning 6-2 in 28 minutes. He served well and went to the net successfully on several occasions.

Then Nadal advanced to the net in the second set, and his passing shots got by Federer.

Nadal made the crucial break in the ninth game, passing an advancing Federer, who had given the Spaniard three break points with two volleys in the net.

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In the third set, Nadal broke Federer in the first game, capitalizing with a backhand crosscourt shot on a deep volley.

Federer evened it in the fourth with a forehand down the line on the run. Nadal converted a break point in the ninth game, when Federer hit his forehand volley wide. Nadal then served for the match.

Nadia Petrova beat Amélie Mauresmo of France, the Australian Open champion, 6-3, 7-5, on Saturday to win the Qatar Open for the second WTA title of her career.

Beating the world's No.2 player, Petrova became the third Russian to win the Qatar title in six years. Anastasia Myskina has won twice, along with Maria Sharapova.

Playing mostly from the baseline, Petrova broke Mauresmo three times in the first set. Petrova, seeded second and ranked eighth, then broke in the 11th game of the second set and served out to win. Petrova improved to 2-4 against her French opponent.

The top-seeded Mauresmo, who has two other titles this year in addition to the Australian Open, trails only Kim Clijsters in the rankings. "It's been a great week for me," she said. "I think Nadia played a great match."

Lleyton Hewitt overcame a sluggish start to beat Paul Goldstein, 3-6, 6-1, 6-0, in the semifinals of the Tennis Channel Open in Las Vegas on Saturday, earning a chance to break a long title drought.

Hewitt, who has 25 career tournament titles, has not won one since Jan. 16, 2005, when he was victorious in his native Australia. Andy Murray of Britain beat him in the final of the SAP Open last month in San Jose, California.

Hewitt, ranked No.10 in the world, was to face fifth-seeded James Blake in the final on Sunday after the American beat Ivo Karlovic of Croatia, 7-6 (7-2), 6-1, in the other semifinal.

"Halfway through the second set I felt like I was dictating play and being the better player out there, and playing the kind of tennis that I wanted to play," said Hewitt, who won eight of 13 break points during the match. \$@