

VENUS BAGS 47TH TITLE

Wuhan

Venus Williams won her biggest title in five years at the Wuhan Open yesterday after Garbine Muguruza retired, making her the fifth player to pull out mid-match in the late-season tournament.

Williams took the first set and was three games up in the second when the Spaniard stopped play at 53 minutes, handing the American veteran the 47th title win of her career, and her first victory at a WTA Premier Five event since she beat Victoria Azarenka in 2010 in Dubai.

Wimbledon finalist Muguruza -- ranked world number eight, 16 places ahead of American veteran Williams -- had a tough semi-final against Germany's Angelique Kerber, winning in straight sets but falling during the closing tie break and injuring her ankle. But the 21-year-old said it was exhaustion not injury that made her pull out.

"It's a sad day I had to retire. Sometimes your body's not recovered," the 21-year-old said on court after the match.

Muguruza called her coach



Venus Williams (right) poses with the championship trophy next to runner-up Garbine Muguruza Sam Sumyk -- who was wearing a t-shirt bearing the phrase "It's not my fault" -- on court during the first set but no words of advice could change the slow pace of the match.

"I had my chances. But I knew with Venus, it's hard with her serve, with her shots, if

you're not 100 per cent," the Spaniard said.

Williams, who turned pro the year that Muguruza was born, was also struggling during the final with leg pain and had both of her thighs wrapped. But she said that experience gained during her

more than two-decade long career allowed her to put the injury out of her mind.

"By the time I'm on the court, I've blocked it (pain) out if I've decided I'm going to play. At that point I'm in the match and not anywhere else," Williams said.

Walking wounded

Williams had a gruelling semi-final the day before against her sister Serena's nemesis Roberta Vinci -- who beat Serena in the US Open semi-final, denying her a chance at the first calendar Grand Slam since 1988.

The title winner conceded that she would have had a tough match against Muguruza if her young opponent had been on form.

"I probably wouldn't have had many chances if you (Muguruza) had been feeling well," Williams said in an on court interview.

The 2006 women's final at the Australian Open was also won on a retirement, with German Justine Henin-Hardenne handing France's Amelie Mauresmo her first Grand Slam victory when she pulled out in the second set.

Novak Djokovic took his third consecutive title at last year's ATP World Tour Finals when Roger Federer withdrew hours before the match blaming his decision on pain and his age. (AFP)

Bale, Ramos fit to return

Madrid

Gareth Bale and Sergio Ramos look set to make their first appearance for Real Madrid since September 13 in today's derby away to Atletico Madrid after coach Rafael Benitez confirmed they will both be in his squad.

However, there isn't such good news for Benitez on James Rodriguez as the top scorer from the 2014 World Cup has suffered a knock that has delayed his comeback.

"The two have trained and will be in the squad," Benitez said yesterday.

"If they start or not we will decide tomorrow. I have spoken to Gareth and Sergio and they are both fine and excited to play.

"They have been cleared to play, but match-fitness is another thing. Even at less than 100 percent they are two very useful players for us."

Rodriguez hasn't featured since being injured whilst on international duty with Colombia last month, but had been called up for their World Cup qualifiers against Peru and Uruguay.

Coke go flat on Blatter



Sepp Blatter (File)

Lausanne

Sepp Blatter's arrival at football's world governing body FIFA coincided with the partnership with Coca-Cola but now the Atlanta-based soft drinks' giants are playing a significant role in the Swiss magnate's downfall.

Other top FIFA sponsors such as McDonald's, Visa and

Budweiser have also called for the controversial 79-year-old to step down immediately from his post as president of the scandal-tainted body and Coca-Cola's initiative now heaps the pressure on Blatter.

The global brand became one of the first major sponsors of the World Cup in 1974 when former president Joao

Havelange was in charge of a modest federation that comprised some ten employees and organised the World Cup, that has gone on to become the mega-event it is today, grossing billions of dollars.

FIFA and Coca-Cola extended their contract in 2005 and it will now run until at least 2022 for a fee that has not been disclosed.

Sports equipment manufacturers Adidas were also one of the early partners with FIFA but their support back in the 70's was limited to providing equipment with no financial aid.

Brazilian Havelange, who is now 99, and was in charge of FIFA, found just the man he was looking for, in the form of Longines employee Blatter who took up a role in public relations and was responsible for timing when he was just 38.

Nick Kyrgios out, Ferrer and Lopez in final showdown



David Ferrer returns a shot

Kuala Lumpur

Top seeds David Ferrer and Feliciano Lopez set up an all-Spanish affair in the final while volatile Australian Nick Kyrgios fell short of reaching his second professional final at the Malaysian Open yesterday.

Ferrer recovered from a set down to overcome Benjamin Becker from Germany 3-6, 6-2, 6-4 in a 125-minute battle.

"I needed to be more aggressive on the forehand and that worked for me in the second and third game," the world number eight told reporters.

"I have only played once before this tournament, but my fitness was good today and I hope to keep this consistency

on Sunday." Second seed Feliciano Lopez booked a berth in the final by defeating Kyrgios 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/5).

"The match was close and could have gone either way, but I'm proud of the way I played. I needed to be aggressive and was happy that my volleys and serves worked out well," said the 34-year-old Lopez.

Lopez also dismissed any talks of retirement.

"People have been asking me, when will you quit? I tell them I am not done yet, I take it one year at a time. As long as I stay healthy and can challenge the best in the world, I don't have a specific plan," he said.

Despite his defeat, Kyrgios is nonetheless eyeing a higher

ranking as he seeks to put this season's controversies behind.

The Australian, whose temper and crude on-court comments have earned him a "bad boy" image, kept his emotions in check in Malaysia.

The seventh seed hammered 13 aces but struggled with Lopez's deft dropshots and volleys.

"I was looking good today, but he came up with some ridiculous volleys today and you have to appreciate something like that," said Kyrgios, who applauded some of the Spaniard's return winners on court.

"It was a great game of tennis and he did enough to come away with the win."

Kyrgios made the quarterfinals at Wimbledon and the Australian Open this year, but his play has been overshadowed by his behaviour.



Nick Kyrgios

Olesen storms into Dunhill lead

St Andrews

Talented Danish 25-year-old Thorbjorn Olesen edged closer towards a third European Tour victory after a third round of seven-under 65 yesterday left him three shots clear at the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship.

The diminutive right-hander,

who hails from Fureso, some 20km outside Copenhagen, shook off a bogey at the par-four opening hole at St Andrews before reeling off eight birdies in a third straight round in the 60s.

Olesen finished in a tie for sixth at the 2013 Masters and tied for 12th at the 2012 British Open, his best results at a

major tournament. Germany's Florian Fritsch, looking for his maiden EPGA victory, is Olesen's closest pursuer and alone in second spot on 14-under following a bogey-free round at Kingsbarns that included an eagle, at the par-five third, and six birdies in a round of 64.