

Body in Colombia may be Miami-based drug lord

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BOGOTA, Colombia — Colombian police said Tuesday that they may have found the body of a Miami-based former drug lord and FBI informant who disappeared after he came home to watch the Copa America soccer tournament.

Police sources said the body, shot in the head and carrying one of the false identifications used by Julio Correa, was found several days ago near the northeastern city of Itagüí.

The body has not been positively identified.

Correa was a member of the notoriously violent Medellín

drug cartel in the 1980s, but began cooperating with the FBI in Miami in 1997 and recently married Colombian supermodel Natalia Paris.

"He provided very valuable assistance to the FBI," said his Miami lawyer, Joaquín Pérez.

"I would not be surprised if this is a matter of retaliation for his cooperation with the American authorities."

Correa was a top lieutenant of Medellín Cartel boss Pablo Escobar.

But he broke with Escobar in the late 1980s and joined a group, People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar (known as Los Pepes for short), that assassinated dozens of Escobar's

aides, relatives and lawyers.

Escobar was killed by police in a 1993 shootout in Medellín.

The cartel no longer exists but one of its members, Fabio Ochoa, is expected to be extradited to Miami within days.

Correa surrendered to U.S. authorities in Miami in 1997 and served three years in prison for drug trafficking and money laundering, a shortened sentence because of his cooperation with U.S. authorities.

His work became public when U.S. authorities arrested Baruch Vega, a Colombian-born Miami photographer who had brokered the surrender of several drug lords but was later accused of taking money from

them.

Col. Germán Jaramillo, head of Colombia's version of the FBI, said Correa returned to Colombia in late July for the Copa America, the hemisphere's top soccer tournament, using false documents provided by U.S. authorities.

Correa, mostly known by the aliases of Julio or Hugo Fierro, disappeared about Aug. 13, and his bullet-proof vehicle was found abandoned days later on an isolated road between Medellín and Itagüí.

Media reports said the body found in Itagüí carried a U.S. resident's card in the name of Carlos Julio Leño, another of the aliases that Correa used.