

The coach in a sport mega-event: the construction of the Luiz Felipe Scolari persona at the 2014 World Cup

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Abstract

Mega-events are important spaces for the construction of narratives, influencing social, cultural, economic, political and technological aspects. In this article, we analyze how the newspaper “O Globo” narrated the career of Luiz Felipe Scolari, coach of the Brazilian national team, during the 2014 World Cup. The analysis considered editions from the day after the call-up, the day of the first game and the day after the semi-final against Germany. We focused on reports in which the Brazilian national team was the main topic, investigating how Scolari was represented. “O Globo”, as part of the largest media conglomerate in Brazil, plays an important role in the construction of identities linked to soccer. The results show that the newspaper’s assessment of the coach was directly influenced by the team’s performance: until the defeat to Germany, the stories were positive, but after the result, they all became negative, revealing a clear link between the result and the narrative.

Keywords: Mega-events, World Cup, Brazil 2014, Coaches.

1. Introduction

The transformation of the figure of the sports coach is intrinsically linked to the changes we have seen in the symbolism of Mega-Events. Once events that promoted diplomacy between nations, now, they have a huge media apparatus and are linked to geopolitical, cultural, economic and technological issues. The amateur origins of coaches, who managed equally amateur teams and athletes, have been transformed into a function that aims to organize (professional) teams and athletes for victory. Today, this role focuses on using technological tools to get the most of athletes, the focus isn’t only on physical performance, but also on psychological preparation. In this sense, we understand that these changes are aimed at the high performance of athletes and teams in Mega-Events. Being the coach of a world champion team, for example, means not only

sporting prestige, but also symbolic capital in other social environments. Due to the strength of the symbology of sport, coaches have come to be seen as leadership models and are even used in commercials.

Just as Griggs and Gibbons (2012) observed, a proximity of an English cultural identity present in the narratives about the coach of the “English team”, seeking a glorious past and a “golden era”, we observed that the narrative of the newspaper “O Globo” follows this line in understanding that the Brazilian national team should have this relationship with the past idealized as magical, in the expression known as “football-art” (Mostaro, 2017). For this connection with the past, the actions of coach Scolari should follow a certain pattern that is based, among other factors, on winning.

According to Vicente et al. (2010), the World Cup is an important moment to observe the national constructions made by the media, more specifically by newspapers. Also according to Vicente et al. (2010), in this competition the concepts of Anderson’s “imagined community” (1983), Hobsbawm’s “invented traditions” (1983) and a habitus desired by the characters who play in this event, both players and, in our case, the coaches, clearly emerge. In narrative constructions in Brazil, we also observe a reductionist construction, framing certain events in order to arouse a direct relationship with national identity and thus emotionally choose culprits, as Vicente et al. (2010) observed in the construction of an “us vs. them” invective in blaming Swedish manager, Sven-Göran Eriksson, for England’s failure to win the World Cup 2006. In the case of our analysis, Scolari would have been responsible for losing the World Cup at home. It is also important to point out that, according to Borges et al. (2022), there is a polarization in the discourse about coaches, specifically in the performance of foreign coaches in other nations, who oscillate between being instrumental in sports development and success, or stigmatized as unsuccessful mercenaries with no ties to the host country. In our case, Scolari isn’t a foreigner, but his narrative indicated this polarization and the discussion about his succession brought up the importance of the Brazilian national team being coached by a foreigner, showing how this character is intrinsically linked to global narratives about sport and national identities.

Using the methodology of Critical Analysis of Narratives (Motta, 2013), our article will specifically analyze how Luiz Felipe Scolari, coach of the Brazilian national team at the 2014 World Cup, was presented in the Brazilian newspaper “O Globo”. This methodology understands that no narrative is naïve and that the elaboration of each narrative dialogues with the context and social imaginary in which it is elaborated. In a scenario permeated by the idea of consumption and the exacerbation of emotions and images that the Mega-Event (Freitas et al., 2014) gives rise to, we will understand this significant change in the construction of the image of a coach taking part in a Mega-Event. The object and corpus were chosen because the country was hosting the competition, creating expectations that the team would win, which directly interfered with the coach’s responsibility for the team’s performance. Specifically, because the coach is from the host country, there is also the issue of the country’s image and brand being exalted at Mega-Events, further impacting on the construction of the coach’s persona. What would be the main changes in this construction of the coach in the newspaper after losing a World Cup at home? The results indicate a neoliberal vision that permeates sport, blaming the individual for failure and demanding an infinite surplus of victories, especially during Mega-Events.

2. From Amateur Event to Mega-Event

Since the structuring of modern sport, following its practices has become an important ritual, linked to the expansion of capitalism and the new technologies that have shortened distances (Thompson, 1999). In this context, the affects, sounds and rhythms of sports practice were intertwined with a new sensory reordering that Modernity brought (Singer, 1995). Stadiums became spaces for urban stimuli and collective experiences. The mobilization of the masses around athletes and teams consolidated sport as a pillar of consumption, identity and representation in modern capitalist society. Thus, the search for sensory stimuli generated by sport has become a significant social, economic, political and technological event.

Sporting events have also become sites for disputing social narratives. The Modern Olympic Games, for example, arose to rescue values linked to amateurism and chivalry (Amaro, 2016). The exaltation of the nation and the sense of belonging promoted by the Games shaped the imagination of many countries, transforming the athletes' performance into intense preparation to raise the name of the nation they represent. The athletes' performance has come to symbolize, in the media, the success or failure of the nation.

In soccer, the first World Cup, held in Uruguay in 1930, followed the same logic, after a rupture between the IOC and FIFA. Mostaro (2019) points out that the Brazilian coach in the competition maintained the amateur characteristics of the sport in Brazil, with the doctor and former goalkeeper Pindaro de Carvalho being described as a "diplomatic representative", contrasting with the figure of Scolari in 2014.

Since Uruguay, the World Cup has become a global event full of national symbolism. As Crolley and Hand (2006) state, national identities are fluid and manifest themselves in specific scenarios; the World Cup is an arena where ideologies that connect country, culture and identity are produced and contested. This national culture, crystallized by the soccer team, is driven by the "media hysteria" surrounding the World Cup, which propagates narratives to engage the public and make them believe that the players represent an entire nation, its cultures and traditions (Helal, 2001). During this period, news coverage intensifies, using metaphors and emotive language to attract and entertain readers (Crolley & Hand, 2006).

Vicente et al. (2010) corroborate this view, stating that the World Cup reflects trends in the print media that globalize and commodify teams and sports stars, as in the case of Scolari in 2014. In this event, the media plays a crucial role in constructing, (de)constructing and reinforcing meanings, understandings and values that contribute to national identity (Whannel, 2008).

In Brazil, sporting competition has become a national ritual (Guedes, 1998), in which the idea of Brazil and what it means to be Brazilian is revisited at each event (Gastaldo, 2002). Heroes like Leônidas, in the 1938 World Cup, and myths like Gilberto Freyre's positive miscegenation (Mostaro & Helal, 2019), have shaped the national imagination. The 1950 defeat against Uruguay at the Maracanã was interpreted as a national defeat (Brinati, 2016), while the 1958, 1962 and 1970 victories were seen as redemption and exaltation of the country through soccer. The press constructed the image of the "country of soccer" (Helal, 2001), revealing disputes over narratives between social groups. According to Waag (2006), the myth of the coach, deeply rooted in soccer

culture, needs to be analyzed. The 7-1 defeat in 2014 shook up “art soccer”, showing the role of the coach between “heaven” and “hell”.

The World Cup Mega-Event will be the stage for these disputes and the climax of this character’s performance. Freitas et al. (2014) draw our attention to the interpretation that Mega-Events are important spectacles on the international stage and that they stir up narratives in the media before, during and after they take place. In this bombardment of information about this frame, the characters in evidence in this before, during and after deserve an analysis of how they were narrated in these contexts. This is close to the interpretation of (Crolley & Hand, 2006) the effusive media participation during the World Cups.

Still according to Mostaro (2019), the 1970 World Cup, the first to be broadcast via satellite to the whole world and which marked the idea of the “country of soccer”, saw a great deal of praise for coach Zagallo. In three newspapers analyzed from the day of the national team’s debut until a week after the end of the World Cup (22 days), Mostaro (2019) found 625 articles about the national team. 207 of them talked about Zagallo, which accounted for 33 percent of all the articles about the national team. By way of comparison, in the first eight competitions, this was the relation between news about the national team and news about the coach, following the methodology of analyzing three newspapers in each competition: 1930 (90/18), 1934 (57/11), 1938 (256/71), 1950 (176/47), 1954 (152/45), 1958 (401/85), 1962 (377/51), 1966 (217/42).

According to Mostaro (2019), in 1970’s World Cup, Zagallo establishes in the narratives, with more intensity, the technocratic vision (Herbert Chapman’s model of “organizing victory”) as an immediate reference to the concept of coach, as someone who will use available techniques and tools to “produce” victories. Inaugurating the desired profile for future competitions, in which the relationship between economics and sport will become more intrinsic. This will help us understand what is expected of a soccer coach at a World Cup and how elements of each country’s cultural identity will be used when narrating the coaches of these teams.

3. The Technician Between Capital and Labor

In the previous section, we showed how the coach played a quasi-diplomatic role in the events and how, with the change of the competition to a Mega-Event, the 1970 World Cup interfered with the amount of news about this character. In this section, we will emphasize how, in Brazil, the coach is part of this historical process of transforming events into Mega-Events, creating the fundamental bases for analyzing the narrative about Scolari.

In Brazil the growing social mobilization around sport, which encouraged more and more people to go to the stadiums, considerably increased the clubs’ income. These events and this popular mobilization came to be seen as big business. Winning went beyond the accumulation of symbolic sporting capital and led to an increase in the coffers of the clubs, which began not only to count on the young elite and amateurs in their clubs, but also to invite athletes considered technically better to join their team. With this reconfiguration, poor and black players received offers to change clubs. The equation was relatively simple: the more money, the more quality players, the more wins, the more people interested in the matches and, consequently, the more money...

This apparent economic simplicity of soccer faced conflicts between amateurism and professionalism. Amateurism was defended by sectors that saw soccer as a noble spirit, practiced for “pleasure”, a distinction from the “impure” athletes paid to play. Those in favor of professionalism saw the sport as a business that generated jobs and profits, attracting more and more fans. The national elite faced the dilemma of accepting capital and losing the “aristocratic essence” of sport, or maintaining their distinction and rejecting capital. The Brazilian decision followed the English model (Lever, 1983): the elite accepted professional players in exchange for retaining administrative control of soccer, including the choice of coaches. Holt (1989) notes that this professionalization limited the players’ negotiating power. de Melo et al. (2013) point out that amateurism exploited the players, and Santos (1981) sees this issue as a class struggle, where the bourgeois feared the rise of the proletarians in soccer.

We argue that the professionalization of the players, while maintaining the amateurism of the managers, transformed the figure of the coach. As Wagg (1984) points out, they acted as intermediaries between capital (the club) and labour (the players), being responsible for “organizing the team for victory” (Carter, 2006). In the event of defeats, they were held responsible, preserving the managerial structure. We believe that social interactions shape roles in Mega-Events, which are closely linked to the advance of capitalism. These events are rituals of great financial circulation, which emphasize ideologies of “winners” and “losers”. Neoliberal institutions create competitive scenarios and disseminate the valorization of performance, shaping subjectivity and promoting consumption and entrepreneurship as central goals (Laval, 2020). Since the 1970s, with neoliberalism (Dardot & Laval, 2014), establishing capitalist morality as a reference for daily interactions has become essential to consolidate “correct” actions in the social imaginary.

In this sense, the national identity in dispute during a Mega-Event is, unique, win. Not following what is expected can destroy the representation of a given individual. As Goffman says: “the audience appreciates the fact that the show has a director, and will probably consider him more responsible than the other actors for the success of the show” (Goffman, 2007, p. 95). In the representation of a nation at a World Cup, that director would be the soccer coach. More specifically, in sport, our character gains strength within the capitalist logic by having the following function: in the same way that factory owners tried to create tools to make their symbolic goods faster, more perfectly and more beautifully, the coach would be entrusted with this task in soccer. He would be “competent” if he managed to invent new tools with the aim of: being efficient, standardizing, measuring and moving towards progress (Postman, 1994, p. 51). This progress would be the team’s victory.

These changes in the social imaginary that neoliberalism induces will be reflected in the desired profile for football coaches. Thus, our article comes close to the interpretations of Vicent et al. (2010), mainly by understanding that this desired profile can be defined in Elias’ (1991) terms as “codes of being”. They would be a combination that articulates, in a complex way, imaginaries, memories and invented traditions that circulate in the subconscious and that can be activated by narratives that exalt national identity in a process that mixes different layers of individual and collective belonging and that reflect in this signification of national identity. As Vicente et al. (2010) reinforce, these different layers create the complex “network” of a person’s “code of being” and mean that they see their world through intersections of individual and collective lenses

or “I/we” identities, to produce national identity. In the neoliberal scenario that our article investigates, in addition to the formation of and pressures on the definition of national identity by local and national newspapers, there are also the transnational tensions imposed by globalisation. Hill (2009) interprets this tension as a tendency towards growing interdependence between new world markets and the diffusion of new ideas, technologies, products and resources that are reflected in new “codes of being” that threaten to subject this multiculturalism and national cultures to a global monoculture, which, in our interpretation, is strongly supported by neoliberal values.

In the increasingly global and media-driven World Cup Mega-Event, the pressures on national cultures increase the tensions placed on national identities (Harris, 2006). In other words, the coaches who were subject to the demands of a national identity linked to football, in the case of Brazil after 1970, to playing football-art (Mostaro, 2017), are now under pressure to collect victories and demonstrate practices associated with the neoliberal culture of managing victories in the arena of narrative dispute that is the World Cup. Following Wagg’s suggestion (2006), we can see that the effectiveness of football managers (coaches) has become the main factor in explaining the outcome of important matches - in our case, the World Cup. For better or worse, they have become mythical figures and world celebrities

4. Our “Tactical Map”

The social construction of the coach is recent, as Stephen Wagg (2006) points out, having emerged over the last 50 years. The modern myth of the “soccer manager” is seen as having a “magic wand” to win or a “rotten finger” to lose, with the media narrative oscillating between “heaven” and “hell”. The coach is seen as responsible for the interactions on the pitch, directly impacting the result, even without entering the field.

We observe the narrative of the newspaper “O Globo” about the coach of the national team at the 2014 World Cup, Luiz Felipe Scolari. This competition brought up some important points that were taken into account in our choice. It was the second time the country had hosted the event, 64 years after the 1950 World Cup. The 1950 World Cup carries an important symbolic charge in the national imagination because of the defeat that was considered “tragic”. Overcoming the “trauma” would be one of the tasks set by the newspapers for this coach. The national team, the biggest winners in the history of the Mega-Event with five titles (1958, 1962, 1970, 1994 and 2002) should have the competence to win playing at home. In the World Cup social frame, the role of representing the Brazilian national team had a very clear obligation: to be champions.

To decipher the movements of this character, our methodology combines content analysis and narrative analysis. Content analysis maps the intentions and actions of journalistic narratives in a specific context. With it, we identified qualitative associations between national team coaches and the number of reports. We chose the newspaper “O Globo”, part of the relevant media conglomerate Organizações Globo, which has covered the World Cup since 1930 and played a significant political role, supporting the 1964 civil-military coup (Fernandes, 2019; Soares, 2018; Cabral, 2022).

We analyzed “O Globo” from the time the national team was called up until the day after the semi-final against Germany in 2014, totaling five days of analysis. We considered the reports on the Brazilian national team and investigated the role of the coach, counting how many times he was mentioned in the reports and classifying these mentions as positive, negative or neutral (Feres & Sassara, 2016). Positive refers to the praising representation of the coach; neutral when it doesn’t change the narrative; and negative when it causes ruptures that blame the coach.

The second element of the methodology is the analysis of the narratives. According to Ricoeur (2010), the narrative is an interpretative tool that highlights the action of the subject in the production of meaning. Motta (2013) emphasizes that narrative creates worlds, and in this space of soccer disputes, newspapers classify characters who are relevant to social groups.

5. “Shame, Embarrassment, Humiliation”

The first day of analysis was May 7th, a crucial moment in the formation of the representation of the coach during the World Cup. By calling up the players, Scolari is presented as decisive, as evidenced by the cover of “O Globo”, which read: “Felipão’s 23”. This discursive construction reinforces Scolari’s responsibility for the national team. The report was considered positive, highlighting a photo of the smiling coach and stating: “There were no surprises, no disputes”. In a Brazilian soccer context, achieving a popular consensus on the squad is positive news. The narrative uses elements from the last World Cup that Scolari coached to emphasize his success: “Now he has taken to the streets and has been greeted” (“O Globo”, 05/08/2014, p .1).

The analysis continues with a description of the players’ grades, in which Scolari is called “boss” (“O Globo”, 08/05/2014, p.2). The supposed lack of experience of the squad is contextualized with memories of the 1970 and 2002 World Cups, which also had a similar number of debutants. These references seek to reactivate past achievements and create a relationship with the 2014 national team. Of the eight pages of the Sports section, seven stories talked about the national team and mentioned Felipão, four of them neutral and two positive, with no critical representations. The titles for the coach varied between “Felipão”, “boss” and “family”, all maintaining a positive narrative.

On the national team’s debut on June 12th, 2014, we found five articles focused on the national team, three of which focused on the coach, who was referred to as “Felipão” in all of them. These figures reinforce the coach’s significance in the current context of Mega-Events. He has more mentions than the national team’s main player, Neymar, reinforcing what Wagg (2006) pointed out about the coach becoming a media celebrity. Both took part in the press conference before the games, and one article highlighted Scolari’s phrase: “It’s our World Cup!” The portrait of the coach was positive, characterized as “a well of tranquility”.

Nothing like the irritable, tense character of 12 years ago, when the Brazilian team made their debut in the 2002 World Cup against Turkey (“O Globo”, 06/12/2014, p. 4). These assertions show the narrative nuances surrounding coaches throughout the World Cups. If, in 2002, we can suggest that he was represented, until he won the title, as an angry person with no patience for the press, this time the representation is shaped on a different level.

On page five, the newspaper takes a look back at the national team's career, from the time they were eliminated in the 2010 World Cup by the Netherlands in the quarterfinals to the last game before the opening match. After considering the team's performance poor under Mano Menezes, the previous coach, the narrative highlights that the turnpoint in the team's self-esteem came with Scolari:

The pressure was immense and seeing a World Cup played at home with a young team on the horizon was a terrifying scenario. The CBF turned to the last two world champions: Luiz Felipe Scolari as coach and Carlos Alberto Parreira as coordinator. [...] Then came June 30, 2013 and the consecrating 3-0 victory over mighty Spain, in a crazed Maracanã. The national team had regained international respect and popular passion. Felipão had subsequently appealed for public support. He had succeeded. It wouldn't be Brazil if peace didn't suffer a scratch from then until the World Cup. In Morumbi a week ago, the friendly against Serbia was met with boos and applause. Strictly speaking, much more applause than booing. Today, fate will be at stake ("O Globo", 06/12/2014, p. 5).

This excerpt illustrates the pendulum of the press' analysis of the national team and the coach's notoriety as being responsible for the results. The idea of describing the "rebirth" of the national team as an "enchantment", as well as affirming the recovery of "respect" and "passion" is motivated by a positive result. We suggest that the pressure on the coach is essentially defined by the result obtained on the pitch.

In this sense, it is important to emphasize that if Mega-events become places where victorious representations are exalted in the neoliberal context, the coach would be the specialist who brings efficiency and objectivity, with technical calculations on decisions during a game. The representative and symbol of this doctrine that places this efficiency and mastery of calculation as the guide to everyday interactions (Postman, 1994). The coach will be charged with the efficiency of indicating the best decisions for the players and their choices, which must always be satisfactory and lead to victory. In this way, Felipão would be the ideal manager to win the hexacampeonato.

With the 3-1 win over Croatia, the newspaper's Sports section has ten pages. Five articles were about the national team. Only one was about the coach, which we considered positive. Three highlighted the performances of Neymar and Oscar and one the controversial penalty awarded by Japanese referee Yuichi Nishimura. The coach received a seven from the newspaper. Referred to as "Felipão", his representation in the narrative is associated with the team's maturity and praise for Oscar: "During the game, Felipão squawked, complained about the referee and practically didn't sit down. In the post-match press conference, Felipão was calm, serene and, above all, relieved. After all, the nerves of his young team had been tested. And they passed" ("O Globo", 06/13/2014, p. 5).

The team drew 0-0 with Mexico in the second round and then beat Cameroon 4-1 to qualify top of their group. In the round of 16, the team beat Chile on penalties and progressed to the quarter-finals. They beat Colombia 2-1 to qualify for the semi-finals. Despite this, the narrative highlighted Neymar's lower back injury, which ruled him out of the World Cup. The days before the match against Germany were focused on finding alternatives to Neymar's departure. Once again, the decision rests with the coach. How to set up the team without our main player? According to the intrigue in the narrative, one wrong move in the line-up could cost us elimination and the blame would immediately fall on Scolari.

On July 8th, 2014, the front page of the newspaper highlighted the mystery of the coach's announcement of Neymar's replacement: "Without Neymar, Felipão hides the game". On the 12 pages of the Sports section, five articles talked about the national team. Of these five, four featured Felipão and one dealt with Neymar (highlighting his sponsors' publicity surrounding his departure from the World Cup). Of the four that talked about Felipão, we considered all to be neutral and followed the theme of the coach's decision to set the starting line-up. It is worth noting that in the upper section of six of the newspaper's twelve pages we find predictions from journalists, artists and politicians for the match: of the thirty opinions, none believed in the team's elimination.

The stadium popularly known as Mineirão was the scene of the biggest defeat ever suffered by the national team in its almost 100-year history. After 28 minutes of play, Germany were leading 5-0. The final score was a ruthless 7-1. Such a scoreline would be a break in the representation of the national team as "best in the world", widely disseminated by narratives over the decades and which has always served as a "remedy" for World Cup defeats (Gastaldo, 2002).

The front page of "O Globo" features a word that refers to the well-known "Maracanazo", now with a derivation that alludes to the torturers of 2014: "Mineiratzen". Other words in the narrative try to summarize the meanings that the defeat caused to one of the most widespread national symbols: the national team. "Shame, embarrassment, humiliation".

The narrative on page three recalls the 1950 defeat and redefines it as honorable, compared to the context of the 7-1. By "rereading" the narrative of 1950, the journalistic narrative is removed from the status of vexation, since the symbolism of the 7-1 becomes more empathic than the 2-1 loss to Uruguay in 1950. In addition, the same report points to a loss in soccer's national identity and the need to think more about its organization and control. On page six, the questions continue along the same lines and focus the analysis on the lack of management by the coach who hasn't "modernized".

On page 4, the article highlights coach Felipão's press conference. According to the narrative his responses show a coach disconnected from the reality on the pitch, raising questions about the tactical backwardness of national coaches. Blaming Felipão for the defeat intensified, and one article compared the 1950 defeat to the "humiliation" of 7-1, characterizing the 2014 team as "Felipão's team". Of the 16 pages of the Sports section, eight articles dealt with the national team, with three focusing negatively on Felipão, which marks a change in the narrative. This new representation suggests that he was mainly responsible for the defeat, showing a relationship between the result and the perception that national soccer is lagging behind European soccer.

6. Conclusion

We start from the idea that through framing, choices, angles and communicational discourse that it is possible to make an idea common to society and regulate the social meaning of certain representations. No narrative is naïve; it fulfills a certain purpose, constructing and distributing roles to each character in an individualized way. We understand that the chosen newspaper developed its narrative as if it were part of the team. After all, in a competition like the World Cup, Brazilian identity is at stake, and the newspapers forge their narratives based on this identity, since it is what attracts the attention and excitement of the fans in this Mega-Event that can be

considered a simulacrum of a “duel between nations”. This association was confirmed by analyzing the content of the reports. The number of positive and neutral articles outnumbered the negative ones during the call-up period, the preparation period and during Brazil’s victories. As a member of Organizações Globo, which owns the rights to broadcast the competition, it is pertinent that the newspaper encourages optimism about the national team. Especially if we consider the amounts invested in acquiring the television rights to cover this Mega-Event. The narrative is shaped within this context, choosing actions that contribute to the representation, since the newspaper is part of the “party”.

We noticed that, with the defeat, the criticism in “O Globo” became more pronounced and the news considered negative became the focus. Of course, we didn’t expect praise for Scolari’s work after the unusual scoreline for a match between teams with such tradition. However, by playing the role of mediator of the social imaginary about soccer, the press is once again reinforcing the “common sense” of blaming the coach for the adverse results. In the neoliberal logic that the coach has assumed since the 2000s, the coach is a fragile side of the representation, and will be removed because will be easily changed, while the central structure that moves national soccer remains, trying at all costs to preserve the hegemonic representation, avoiding deep damage, which would incite a reorganization of the social structure of CBF.

Our work is in dialogue with Carter’s research (2006), which suggests that football managers are part of today’s celebrity culture. They are emblematic figures that the public believes have magical powers: “the public face of their clubs who somehow possess mystical powers” (Carter, 2006, p. 1). Our contribution is important because it highlights how the so-called “football country” approaches the coach during a World Cup set against the backdrop of Mega-Events.

The results obtained on the representation of Felipão in the newspaper “O Globo” are in line with Carter’s conclusion: “Yet the job of a football manager is a paradox. Few occupations are as volatile or as pressurised, and failure ultimately results in the sack” (Carter, 2006, p. 1). This paradox can be seen in the exaltation of Scolari before the defeat, as he is, according to our analysis, a representative of the nation and of Brazilian identities that are placed in the arena of disputed narratives that is a World Cup. In the neoliberal scenario of Mega-Events, this performance is cultural identity and also consumption and results. With defeat, the coach is immediately blamed and removed from this representation, as a strategy to avoid hurting this identity and save the representation. The nation lost, but it was the fault of an individual and not the collective. The identity needs to remain intact and saved. Something similar can be found in the analysis of England’s 2006 World Cup defeat, where Vicent et al. (2010) point out that although the players were not immune to criticism, Swedish coach Eriksson was largely blamed for the narratives, which were based on negative Swedish stereotypes and were impregnated with xenophobia. In other words, the coach who would be glorified if he won, was angered if he lost, because he was the element that tarnished the mythical past of the two teams, who didn’t play according to the “invented traditions” and, in the case of Brazil, tarnished the football-art and the Brazilian tradition in the World Cup, so emphasized by the national press.

In addition to this stain on identity, his being a media celebrity also suggests interpretations that were not seen between the 1930 and 1970 World Cups (Mostaro, 2019). The sudden change from positive to negative news after the defeat points to a congruence with Wagg’s work (2006). There is an element of hatred in the veneration that ordinary people devote to celebrities, a hatred

resulting from the social and emotional subordination that celebrity culture entails. Scolari became a celebrity during the 2002 World Cup when he won the tournament for Brazil. In 2014 he shared with Neymar the role of poster boy and celebrity for the brands sponsoring the World Cup in Brazil. He becomes a celebrity and associates his image with certain products and services. What had previously been an important marketing move, by linking the brand to a possible world champion, resulted in all the advertising featuring Scolari being withdrawn after the 7-1 defeat. There is no nation-selection relationship here, but rather a consumer-victory relationship. The brands immediately tried to disassociate themselves from the coach who, in the event of victory, would be exalted to the extreme in order to exalt the brands as well.

As Wagg (2006) points out, the emotionally volatile nature of celebrity culture is particularly evident in the myth of the football manager and this is what we found in our corpus. Belief in a coach's talents quickly dissipates in the event of defeat. The coach who could have been competent becomes discredited. Exactly what happened in the case of the adverts that were seen in the newspapers until the day of the match and disappeared the next day. Here Wagg's conclusion (2006) becomes clear: both celebrity and football coaching are socially constructed phenomena; both represent, in a real sense, a substitution for democracy and both can be quickly destroyed by removing, metaphorically or symbolically, the accessories that surround them.

Football culture has created the myth of the football manager because he serves the interests of all the parties involved: administrators, club owners, the media, players, ex-players and aspiring technocrats. And this paradigm is useful because, at any moment in the life of an important team, the explanation for that team's performance can be reduced to a single determining factor: the work of its coach. This is exactly what we concluded when analysing the newspaper's representation of Scolari. Of course, we don't want to conclude that Scolari has no quality, what we want to emphasise is, following Wagg's conception (2006), that in the current discourse, guided by the results, the analysis of the defeat has the coach as the only locus, as if he were a social actor outside of any context. All other factors and structural nuances, although not entirely ignored, are minimized.

In short, defending the collective identity, the "imagined community" and "invented tradition" of the Brazilian national team is "throwing the coach to the lions". By changing one part, the collective identity is preserved, the blame falls on a single individual, saving this identity, this imaginary of the "country of soccer", which, if lost, would destroy the entire representation that underpins media constructions about Brazil's participation and expectations in a World Cup.

After the 2014 defeat, the frisson about changes in national soccer was present in the media narratives after the competition. Among the many arguments put forward for a "rescue" of the "best in the world" imaginary, the choice of a foreign coach to "revolutionize" national soccer tactically was among the most intensely debated, evidencing what Borges, Rosado and Oliveira (2022) have already indicated. Spain's Pepe Guardiola, successful at Barcelona, was mentioned as "the" person for such a "challenge", since his name is associated with talented teams, set up to play offensively and with a touch of the ball. The CBF announced the return of Dunga, the coach who had previously led the national team from 2006 to 2010. Debates about the "modernization" of national soccer cooled down, and Dunga's first positive results in charge of the national team relegated the debate and criticism to the background.

A few months after taking over, Dunga failed to achieve the expected victories and was sacked. The neoliberal logic returns: the coach who doesn't fulfill his role of "win, win, win" is the one who fails at infinite optimization in all spheres of life. Like Scolari, he would be a "failure" in the face of the world's excessive competition.

Coach Tite took over and led the national team at the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. The negative news only came after the defeat in 2022, largely because the coach symbolized, as Mostaro and De Marchi (2001) pointed out, an authentic representative of the neoliberal game. The Brazilian national team will arrive at the 2026 World Cup having gone 24 years without a title, intensely emptying the representation of "best in the world". In the World Megavento, the Brazilian team "didn't wear the shirt" of victory, "tarnishing its representation", but electing the coach as the culprit for this failure, individualizing such results, reinforcing a negative approach to this character in the narratives about these events, leaving the structure of the entity unchanged.

This article is intended to stimulate further research into this important figure in soccer and Mega-Events: the coach. How is he narrated in other nations? What is his share of the blame in defeat and glory in victory? Is the coach a disposable piece in the game of representations, something unique to Brazil, or has it become a global standard? Is this neoliberal doctrine present in the narratives of other sporting events? These questions can guide future research on this subject and confirm the importance of the study presented here on how Mega-Events rework the profiles and expectations of the characters who are part of this event.

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