

# The hero's myth: an analysis from the newspaper Folha de S.Paulo discourse about Ronaldo's case in the 2009 Brazil's Cup

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## Abstract

This article's purpose is to analyze and discuss how the newspaper Folha de S.Paulo portrayed Ronaldo's image in articles published during the contest and after winning 2009 Brazil's Cup. Methodologically, this study is characterized as a historical research guided by the procedures of the history of the present time. The analysis material was constituted by the Folha de S.Paulo newspaper's sports section. We note that the paper elaborates its discourse through a protagonist role implicit in the athlete's history of achievements and failures, demonstrating Ronaldo as an established subject in the sports field and associating his image to a model for social representation.

KEY WORDS: Heroism; Press; Football; National culture.

## Introduction

The constant changes that permeate football throughout history place it currently in the context called sport spectacle<sup>1</sup>. Its reference as part of the national identity, which was divulged for years as a typical Brazilian characteristic, allowed for consolidating the sports area in its relation to the economic, political and social areas<sup>2</sup>.

Such structural changes in the way football is managed reworked the sporting culture, managed by marketing practices that we call cultural entertainment industry<sup>3</sup>. The identifying idea historically constructed from the "football country" nostalgic ideology is apparently used today as way to reach the imagination of the supporter who is permeated with passion for the club<sup>4</sup>.

In that sense, the sports press is established as the connection between the agents that are actually involved in the football practice, and the public that consumes the sport. It is through the media that information is disseminated and, together with the ideology implicit in each person, it influences how the society in which it is present forms its opinion<sup>5</sup>.

In a contemporary perspective, football as a product of cultural redefinition finds a behavior benchmark in the athlete, which brings the supporter closer to a reality he identifies himself

with and which he can begin to admire<sup>6</sup>. This is a result of the path that the hero goes through, overcoming obstacles, overcoming challenges and achieving objectives<sup>7</sup>.

The modern sports hero is then a social representation guided by the complex relations that rule football<sup>8-9</sup>. Allowing for the discourse to be elaborated (and re-elaborated) in order to influence how the sports consuming public forms their opinion<sup>10</sup>.

From an initial understanding of establishing the relationship between the heroism, media and football, we set the following problem: how did the newspaper Folha de São Paulo portrayed Ronaldo's image in articles published during the dispute and after winning the Brazil Cup 2009?

Football also assumed an important role as a scientific phenomenon, especially at a national level, with numerous power and social control relations, besides providing social representations that can influence different groups linked to sports<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, it is agreed that football collaborates in the understanding of Brazilian society in a broader context.

Given Ronaldo's representation in international football and his history permeated with achievements and failures, the purpose of this article is to analyze

and discuss how the newspaper Folha de S.Paulo portrayed the image of the hitherto athlete in articles

published during the dispute and after winning the 2009 Brazil Cup.

## Method

Methodologically, the present study is characterized as a historical research, based on the history of present time procedures, which is defined as an open history in which the author lives the time of his own study object<sup>11</sup>.

The analysis material (historical sources) was constituted by the sports section in a national impact newspaper, Folha de S.Paulo, considered to be one of largest circulation print and online media. This journal is available daily in newsagents, and also through monthly subscription and / or on the Internet at UOL news portal<sup>12</sup>.

The time frame for the study was set between the beginning of May, when the Sport Club Corinthians Paulista began the round of 16 phase of the competition against the Atlético Paranaense club, and the beginning of July, shortly after Corinthians won the championship, totaling 10 articles among cover stories, stories and

images. This choice of time frame was because Ronaldo's performance impact intensified during this period. We chose not to address the full competition period due to the need for a thorough analysis of the selected material, trying to eliminate the risk of superficial reflection. Finally we reiterate that the issue raised here is related to a larger research and is a byproduct of our master's dissertation concluded in 2013.

To mark the analysis of historical sources, we used the theoretical premises of CAMPBELL<sup>13</sup> regarding the hero myth theory, defined by the author as a cycle in which the hero candidate goes through the adventure threshold, facing challenges, overcoming obstacles and returning to the threshold, bringing his people the "elixir" of victory. We subdivided the analysis in two stages: we first analyzed the competition between the round of 16 stage to the semifinals, and later, the finals.

## Results and discussion

### The protagonist representation: some notes

In the news article "Corinthians tests power of reaction" of May 6, 2009, Paulo GALDIERI<sup>14</sup> from Folha de S.Paulo presented an illustration picturing Ronaldo in a meeting with actor Hugh Jackman - Wolverine - in which both are holding a T-shirt that reads, "I am indestructible." The meeting took place when Ronaldo had already overcome the uncertainties of his "new" recovery as an athlete, then portraying him as Corinthians's hope in the Brazil Cup's round of 16 match against Atlético Paranaense club team. This news article, along with the image, implicitly addresses the representation of such a national competition for the Corinthians's calendar and the athlete's responsibility facing the challenge, since the paper appears to be based on Ronaldo's image as the club's main reference in the fight for this national achievement.



Source: Folha de S.Paulo<sup>14</sup>.

FIGURE 1 - Ronaldo and actor Hugh Jackman.

In the ideal of the Hellenic Olympic Games, victory was related to overcoming their own limits, and not to defeating an opponent. However, with the development of modern sport, value shifted to the performance that wins the first place. Thus, overcoming the opponent has become more important than overcoming personal limits<sup>6</sup>.

The association of image and text assigns the sportsman the responsibility for success<sup>15</sup>. This strategy is justified because of the athlete's symbolic capital to the media, the fans and the sports field in general. The illustration prepares the discourse through the correlation of the "indestructible" hero and his own characteristics, revealing not only the ability to win, but also the ability to not to give up and rise again, building the social identity via the feeling of overcoming challenges through the sport<sup>7</sup>.

This reference that the athlete has become, in Corinthians sporting context, can be one of the reasons that justify the newspaper's choice to use Ronaldo as the protagonist of the news about the club. However, it is necessary to understand that the relation between history and memory affect Ronaldo's exposure by the newspaper, since his figure influences the notion of national identity, built<sup>16</sup> through a football culture focused on consumption, i.e. conveying the athlete's image aims to reach the reader that identifies itself with the guy who overcomes obstacles and who will represent the club in a considerably relevant challenge<sup>2</sup>.

In the article entitled "Ronaldo scores 2 and qualifies the Corinthians team" published by *Folha de S.Paulo* on May 7, 2009<sup>17</sup>, the paper emphasized that with the accomplishment of Corinthians qualification over Atlético Paranaense club in the round of 16 of the Brazil Cup, the lineman's had the main responsibility in this victory, because he had scored two goals and qualified the Corinthians team to the next stage in the competition.

In victory, the hero's mythicizing process appears to be natural, as the responsibility before accomplishing the feat was already resting with the one in which everyone focuses their expectations. The context in which the fact lies is exploited by the newspaper, in order to assign discourse representation<sup>18</sup>. This results in the development of the narrative through the sentimentality that football shows in a historical process, permeated by the beginning of sports journalism with chronicles until the present time characterized by the contemporary sporting spectacle<sup>8</sup>.

The attempt to assign representation to the discourse is a strategy that constantly uses Ronaldo's image to prepare the match scenario. With success or failure, the figure of the athlete that is consolidated in the sports field permeates the newspaper's analysis, due to the interest that media culture takes in adjusting itself to the consumption practices of the sport spectacle<sup>19</sup>.

Paulo GALDIERI<sup>17</sup> highlights in the news article: "Phenomenon shows himself to Brazil again", in *Folha de S.Paulo* on May 7, 2009, and this logic is confirmed in other instances, when the journal uses a nickname created by fans as homage to the club - "the almighty" - to describe the athlete. Portrayed as the "phenomenon" who returned to Brazil, the sportsman scored both goals who qualified Corinthians to the quarterfinals of the Brazil Cup, which was the team's priority in 2009, demonstrating how the sportsman's image can be used to benefit the newspaper sales from that ideal of sporting spectacle, using the athlete as protagonist in the cultural entertainment industry.

The expressions used in the news article to describe the event start from a strategy interconnected with the need to maintain this context of the Brazilian footballing identity through the show. The paper makes use of terms that affect the fan's imaginary through their passion, an exacerbated feeling of social identification that the heroic scenario prepared by the media creates when elaborating the discourse.

We understand that the newspaper builds the narrative from the context and from the ideology implicit in the discourse elaboration. Such an analysis makes it possible to understand that a fact's transmission through the media is drawn up according to each institution's interest<sup>20</sup>. Because of this, the sports journalism is characterized as means conducive to local ideological interests, presenting the addressed topic in different areas<sup>5</sup>.

The elaboration of the narrative that praises the heroic feat is well known according to the opportunities presented by social reality. The entertainment purpose is to take advantage of the context, using the facts to propagate information through the typical football sentimentality.

Affecting everyday sports, established from the media culture, has an impact on the football economy<sup>2</sup>. This being the newspaper's interest, Ronaldo's image will always be linked to the facts related to the club. When that is not enough, the media make use of the athlete's privacy to achieve the readers' attention through the hero's identifying figure and, at times, the villain's<sup>21</sup> figure.

Still on the news piece titled "Phenomenon shows himself up to Brazil again" Paulo GALDIERI<sup>17</sup> said in *Folha de S.Paulo* on May 7, 2009, that Ronaldo saved the team in another match by scoring two goals and eliminating Atlético Paranaense from the Brazil Cup. After the impact of the victory, the

newspaper defined the next possible opponents in the competition as candidates to stop the athlete and the team or candidates to become victims of the “phenomenon”, demonstrating thus the sportsman representativeness in the competitive process in which the club is.

In football narratives, the stories relate to disputes format. For example, the Brazil Cup is a competition characterized by direct confrontations, notable for the representation of confrontation, battle and challenge<sup>22</sup> - situations that permeate the heroic way and facilitate the development of a mythical scenario<sup>9</sup>, favoring the newspaper discourse from the facts development<sup>5</sup>.

In addition, the competition format allows for the construction of the narrative to take place primarily from overcoming or failing in a dispute. This organization further favors the creation of a scenario in which the story protagonist is the hero<sup>10</sup>. However, we should not consider the development of discourse strategies framed only by the characterization of the championship as direct battle, since the heroism seems to be also implicit in other manners in the narratives presented by the newspaper<sup>8</sup>.

We note the ongoing development of a narrative made spectacular, which is built from the context, reinforcing the praise for the athlete's feats. Paulo GALDIERI<sup>23</sup> in news piece titled: “Corinthians feels the star's weight”, on Folha de S.Paulo on May 13, 2009, said that before the match in the quarterfinals of the Brazil Cup against Fluminense team, eight out of the ten goals scored by Ronaldo for Corinthians changed the matches results, seeming to be looking again for reasons to establish the sportsman as a representative subject in the dispute.

The recognition of the athlete, who has the gift to play football, recalls the discussion about the talented hero who holds the technical resources in order to win the challenges<sup>20</sup>. However, it also blends with heroism characteristics with respect to courage at decisive moments, defining the athlete also as one who overcomes insurmountable obstacles<sup>13</sup>.

The newspaper strategy is not to assume a crystallized hero concept, because such discursive features are implicit in how facts are narrated. However, the construction of stories are elaborated and re-elaborated according to the ideology that is applied in that particular context where the facts happen<sup>24-25</sup>.

The newspaper does not care about how heroism will be portrayed in the news article, and therefore

does not establish a conceptual preference about the theory. Its interest is guided by praising Ronaldo's achievements, seeking to reach the public so that the cultural industry<sup>3</sup> fulfills the commercial needs of the sports area from identifying the individuals who are involved with the passion for football<sup>5</sup>.

It is in this sense that we understand why the construction of the news article is not based exclusively in the competitiveness levels of a dispute. The commercial need established by the football spectacle development requires the newspaper to create mechanisms to involve the supporters in the consumerism governing contemporary sports practices. In this sense, the athlete as an individual highlight collaborates in identifying the persons that are passionate for the club<sup>26</sup>.

Strengthening Ronaldo's positive image did not only mean comparing his achievements at that time with those in the past; but to also understanding the uniqueness of each fact in this neoliberal logic imposed by the commodification of sport, which takes advantage of the opportunities presented by the sports field when developing their narratives.

After the first of the Brazil Cup quarterfinals match which was against Fluminense, Paulo GALDIERI<sup>27</sup> in Folha de S.Paulo on May 14, 2009, said: “In the most relevant competition for the team in the year it returns to the elite and when Ronaldo spent a rare night sleepless.”

The symbolic capital and the representation in the national scene permeate a differentiating narrative, in the development of news pieces about the athlete<sup>19</sup>. When toning down the defeats and emphasizing the victories, the newspaper discourse is tied to politics issues that are implicit in the sports field and media culture<sup>8</sup> interests.

For the newspaper, maintaining the athlete's positive image in the sports field is valid, considering the fact that his symbolic capital ensures that his representativeness to the sports scene would not be affected by the performance analysis of a match.

The sportsman representation in football is consolidated, while the newspaper needs subjects crystallized in the contemporary sports scene, so that the readers take interest in the accounts presented by the media. Performance is important in the sense of praising, but it is not identified as the newspaper's only discursive strategy in using the athlete's image for developing the news pieces<sup>28</sup>.

We understand that, in football, maintaining a regular performance contributes to a positive context in which the sportsman is a protagonist. However,



as a historically recognized athlete, Ronaldo is portrayed even when he did not play. Folha de S.Paulo highlighted in the news piece: "Without Ronaldo, Corinthians replaces quality with force" on May 27, 2009<sup>29</sup>, that the lineman's absence in the first semifinal match due to a calf injury meant the team was below strength, which surprised the team's technical staff and, consequently, even changed the way the team played, changing the idea of a 'technical' football for a 'rougher' style.

After the match at Maracana stadium, Paulo GALDIERI and Sergio RANGEL<sup>30</sup> once again covered the athlete's absence in a news article titled: "Without Ronaldo, Corinthians misses the mark and ties" in Folha de S.Paulo on May 28, 2009, which state that, without the lineman's presence, Corinthians wasted chances and drew the first match against Regatas Vasco da Gama club. The story also portrayed that Corinthians team went to Rio de Janeiro trying to prove its decisive power without Ronaldo, but failed.

Ronaldo's inability to play plus the fact that even without playing the player's image is portrayed in the news reveals how the newspaper is able to switch discursive strategies in developing the narrative. How this scenario is built, explaining the idea of a correlation between the athlete's absence and fact that Corinthians failed in the offensive part, demonstrates the intention of bringing the supporter closer to the sportsman, keeping in view the explanation that the hero was what was missing for the match outcome to be different.

The narrative relates, once again, to the issue of the gift for the football practice<sup>20</sup>. In portraying that Corinthians lacked effectiveness in the absence of Ronaldo, we realize that the talent needed for the team to succeed in the offensive plays was awarded to the lineman. The hero, as the one responsible for taking the team to victory<sup>13</sup>, can also be identified in the article at issue, since, according to the newspaper, Corinthians club could not be decisive in the absence of the sportsman, raising questions as to what is the possible team's efficiency when Ronaldo is not in the field.

This logic that matches and compares allows us to understand how the newspaper tries to justify the result through building a narrative that consolidates the hero to the public and the sports field<sup>15</sup>. This context demonstrates the constant search for resources to re-elaborate the discursive strategies and maintain the process of news shaping through the image of sportspeople recognized by contemporary society<sup>10</sup>.

## **Heroism and mythicizing: consolidation through conquest**

According to MULLER<sup>22</sup> this hero's ability to present definitive solutions guides the trust imposed by the surround subjects. Thus, Corinthians supposed dependence on the athlete does not appear to be strictly technical, but it also relates to the representation built by Ronaldo's sports career.

Carolina ARAUJO and Paulo GALDIERI<sup>31</sup> highlight in the article: "Ronaldo overcomes flu, shines in the nick of time and settles" in Folha de S.Paulo on June 18, 2009, that after recovering from the calf injury and overcoming weak performances in the quarterfinals and in the second semi-final match, the athlete was again praised by the newspaper for scoring a goal in the first match of the finals against Sport Club Internacional, thus demonstrating how narratives are permeated by emerging facts.

As the newspaper is considered a breeding ground for the development of a mythical scene - which affects the supporter's imagination through identification with the victory, with the feeling of struggle, dedication and courage<sup>9</sup> - the possibility of making use of the opportunities that the context presents is crystallized. This narrative establishes a discourse based on praising the overcoming of obstacles, which differs from other forms of approach according to which a re-elaboration of the discourse is necessary, in accordance with the moment in focus<sup>5</sup>.

So, the paper follows the logic of using the myth's symbolism to impact contemporary society, using narratives that match sporting victory to the subjects' social reality. Thus there is a continuing process in which the sports field becomes dependent on the media culture, which, through spreading the protagonist's image, benefits other national economy sectors, strengthening the logic of the sport spectacle based on consumerism<sup>32</sup>.

In the same news piece, Carolina ARAUJO and Paulo GALDIERI<sup>31</sup> also said that the athlete did not play a brilliant match, that he had little participation and did not show his genius plays. However, also according to the newspaper, Ronaldo was decisive and took Corinthians closer to the Brazil Cup title.

The narrative exposes heroism permeated by the athlete's decisive potential. In this case, the technical quality, the talent and the gift for the sport practice do not matter. What is interesting is the angle of overcoming, courage and persistence<sup>13,22</sup>, since these characteristics were shown to be compatible with

Ronaldo's image to be portrayed in that moment by the newspaper itself.

This analysis corroborates what we had previously reflected. The strategies for the news development are linked to the context presented by the situation as well as to the media culture ideology. Such features functionally correlate to the implicit commercial interests in the entertainment industry logic<sup>33</sup>.

In the news article: "Ronaldo tries to fill the gap in his résumé," published in *Folha de S.Paulo* on July 1, 2009, Paulo GALDIERI<sup>34</sup> reflects on the possibility of Ronaldo winning the first national championship in Brazil, stating that the athlete would try for his first title in his homeland, accomplishing something unprecedented in his football career. This headline shows the mythical character that a possible achievement would impact in the athlete's image, consolidating himself even more the Brazilian sports scene.

The heroic path is permeated by challenges that aim to prove that the candidate for the position can really perform it. Such battles consist in demonstrating if the athlete is up to the task, if he can withstand the dangers and if he will have knowledge, courage and ability to overcome the unknown, making the journey an important part of life<sup>9</sup>.

The news piece shows the symbolic significance for a possible achievement by the athlete. Expressions such as "seek", "conquer" and "try" are terms that enable an analysis from the use of the player's image as a protagonist in building journalistic context<sup>10</sup>.

The narrative was drawn from the opportunity to use the fact that the athlete has not won a national competition, in order to acclaim the hero's figure for accomplishing a so far unprecedented feat. Such a strategy would provide an even greater public identification with the athlete, reaching business objectives proposed by the media culture<sup>32</sup>.

Therefore the hero embodies the figure with which many subjects identify, and he is considered an ideal human being, who is not only accepted, for example, by a majority, but also appears as a defender of our own cause. We sympathize with his battles, his fears and sufferings; with his victories and defeats; and finally, with his struggle for survival<sup>22</sup>.

According to *Folha de S.Paulo*<sup>35</sup>, in the news titled "Ronaldo 'fills gap in résumé' and wins first national title in Brazil", published on 1 July 2009, after winning the Brazil Cup the athlete completed the curriculum with an unprecedented title in his career, confirming the hypothesis launched in the previous day news.

The athlete's image linked to the heroic figure that overcame personal challenges and returned to football at a competitive level is the typical narrative used by the media to praise and consolidate a sportsman<sup>28</sup>. Keeping the mythical figure in evidence in a moment that is celebrating the victory became the traditional discourse strategy that permeates the information transmission, combining with the media interests that are in line with the sports field<sup>15</sup>.

Victory is then considered an important component in building stories that focus on a heroic scenario. Feelings such as grief and passion lead to the supporter's identification with athletes acclaimed by consolidated careers in spectacle football, which is guided by the consumption practice of the entertainment cultural industry.

According to the initial goal to analyze and discuss how the *Folha de S.Paulo* portrayed Ronaldo in the dispute period and after winning the Brazil Cup, we note that due to the sportsman representation in the international sports scene, the newspaper elaborates the discourse of prominence implicit in the athlete's history of achievements and failures.

In an attempt to lay the ground for the news shown, they use the athlete's image to build the matches narrative. Demonstrating that Ronaldo is characterized as a consolidated subject in the sports field because his career displays heroic characteristics, recalling the victories, defeats, overcoming adverse times and return to the achievements.

Such features fitted in the athlete's profile allow the newspaper to associate his image as a social representation model of an individual who does not give up the challenges, overcomes his own limits and wins battles in sport and in life. This identification brings the hero closer to the other subjects' reality, as they start to admire him for the symbolic understanding that they are rising above the same cycle of struggles, difficulties, achievements and failures, in other words, for empathy.

It is possible to notice that the news building allows for an analysis from the heroic battle victories and defeats, however, the relation of the facts to the mythical cycle does not occur intentionally. The athlete's image is associated to the facts linked to the club, making himself the protagonist because his symbolic capital allows the speech to be directed.

We understand that the newspaper praises the athlete's achievements during and after conquering the competition, using his social identification as a way to impact the readers. However, this discourse is being constructed according to what

is immediate, that is, at times it praises Ronaldo, other times it criticizes him, however, whenever possible it describes the facts using this sportsman representation.

Finally, we emphasize that the narratives development are linked to political issues such as

the ideological conception of the newspaper and of the writers. The account of the facts is in accordance with what the author's subjectivity can reveal to the reader, influencing opinion building and developing narratives typically linked to the historical context of the cultural entertainment industry.

## Resumo

O mito do herói: uma análise a partir do discurso da Folha de S.Paulo acerca do caso Ronaldo na Copa do Brasil de 2009

O objetivo deste artigo consiste em analisar e discutir como o jornal Folha de S.Paulo retratou a imagem de Ronaldo nas matérias publicadas durante a disputa e após a conquista da Copa do Brasil de 2009. Metodologicamente, o presente estudo é caracterizado como uma pesquisa histórica, pautada pelos procedimentos da história do tempo presente e o material de análise foi constituído pelo caderno de esportes da Folha de S.Paulo. Notamos que o jornal elabora o discurso através de um protagonismo implícito no histórico de conquistas e fracassos do atleta, demonstrando Ronaldo como um sujeito consolidado no campo esportivo e associando sua imagem como modelo de representação social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Heroísmo; Imprensa; Futebol; Cultura nacional.

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