


JÔ SOARES VERSUS THE SPORTS COMMUNITY: a clash of interpreting modes during the 2018 FIFA World Cup

JÔ SOARES VERSUS COMUNIDADE ESPORTIVA: confronto entre modos de interpretar na Copa do Mundo de 2018

JÔ SOARES VERSUS COMUNIDADE ESPORTIVA: enfrentamiento entre modos de interpretación en el mundial de 2018


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ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the clashes among ways of interpreting football in sports coverage. It analyzes the case of the program produced by Fox Sports for the 2018 Men's FIFA World Cup. The choice is justified by the presence of comedian and talk show host Jô Soares as a commentator, which triggered a series of live debates. The focus is on the conflicts between perspectives external to the sports community and those held by the panel's regular members. Whannel's (1995) triangular model is employed to observe the broadcasts. The tensions among different groups of commentators are examined through the concept of interpretive communities, with particular attention to the various strategies employed on *Debate Final: Especialistas*.

KEYWORDS: Jô Soares; Interpretive community; Sports coverage; 2018 World Cup.

"All my friends who are in this field, and those who are not, will have to stop and think, to reevaluate the profession, because it has changed. The profession has really changed. A number of things that were not taken into account will have to be addressed"¹ (Soares, 2018).

Introduction

The epigraph above is from Jô Soares. The comedian and talk show host was invited to join the panel of commentators on the program *Debate Final: Especialistas*, aired by Fox Sports during the coverage of the 2018 FIFA Men's World Cup held in Russia. The panel was composed primarily of regular members with professional coaching experience in football and was moderated by Téo José, anchor and play-by-play announcer for the same pay-TV network. The invitation extended to Soares was justified,

1 Comment by Jô Soares aired on Fox Sports channels on July 16, 2018. Also available at: https://youtu.be/UMaTl2r794g?si=-UCFxS7i_DXH_jRq. Accessed on August 18, 2024.

in particular, by the fact that he has remained well-informed and had followed the World Cup tournaments since the mid-twentieth century. In short, he was regarded as a specialist in everything². The purpose of *Debate Final: Especialistas*, a program that falls within the format of televised roundtables, was to “break the mold” of traditional coverage of the competition, including in its relationship to journalism³.

While Jô Soares’s presence might be viewed as an exception, this article is aimed at examining the controversies surrounding *Debate Final: Especialistas*, and, more broadly, the format itself. During one of the episodes, Soares claimed that the coaching profession had changed – prompting accusations that he did not understand football, precisely because he had never managed teams on the sidelines. The tension highlighted the specific way in which athletes interpret football – who acted as members of an interpretive community. Such disputes have been certainly intensified during World Cup tournaments, when Brazilian football is put to the test. Hence, there is a need to reexamine the clashes between divergent perspectives on the sport.

This conflict became especially apparent given that Jô Soares built a substantial part of his public persona as an interviewer, helping to establish the talk show format in Brazil. He was widely credited with bringing sophistication and intelligence to the programming of Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão (SBT) – a free-to-air channel previously known for its kitsch and poor taste. The role of interviewer seems to have granted the comedian the function of a protocol-driven, avid reader, who drew on news reports, television and film documentaries, books, and other sources to accumulate knowledge on a wide range of topics – including football – for his conversations. This practice was invoked on air during *Debate Final: Especialistas* in response to criticism: “I keep researching and trying to stay up to date on everything. There is no human activity today in which one can make progress without continuous learning”⁴.

Thus, the aim here is to examine the frictions between different ways of interpreting football through the lens of Jô Soares’s participation in Fox Sports’s coverage of the Russia World Cup. His presence is particularly revealing in that it exposes the strategies used by the professional coaches on the program to assert themselves as legitimate interpreters of the sport. Soares gave voice to the anxieties of Brazilian fans by questioning whether Brazil could still claim dominance in world football. In this sense, it

2 Expression frequently used by Téo José during the World Cup (Ibidem).

3 Ibidem.

4 Ibidem.

is worth noting that the comedian approached the role typically performed by journalists, who often seek to position themselves as representatives of the ordinary citizen.

This case study draws on observations of the episodes aired throughout the tournament's calendar – from June 14 to July 15, 2018 – but is primarily based on full-length amateur recordings uploaded to video-sharing platforms on the internet. The analysis of the debates in this research considered the program's placement within the television schedule, the prominence of orality in discussions, and the need to cross-reference other historical documents in order to avoid misinterpretation (Herbert Neto & Roxo, 2025). Understanding the broader context is essential, as roundtable sports programs have a long-standing tradition in Brazilian television (Herbert Neto, 2022b).

This study unfolds in three sections following the introduction. The first addresses the journalistic dimension (the commentators' contributions) as well as the visual one, shaped by the televised debates. This approach calls for an analysis of the program's nuances simultaneously within the framework of sports journalism, through the lens of the concept of interpretive community, and based on Whannel's (1992) model for analyzing sports broadcasts. The second section focuses on the disputes among the commentators on the *Debate Final: Especialistas* panel. The agonistic nature of these exchanges is essential for understanding the discussions (Herbert Neto, 2024a). Therefore, describing the participants is also crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the multiple layers of these conflicts. The third section concludes the study.

All my friends – journalism, entertainment, drama, and interpretive communities

According to Hollanda (2013), *Grande Resenha Facit* established itself as a paradigm for roundtable programs on Brazilian television⁵. It first aired in 1963 on the now-extinct *TV Rio* and moved to *TV Globo* in 1966. Mentioning this program is relevant initially because of its studio layout – roundtable format with the host or anchor at the center – and the criteria used to select regular participants, such as their level of public notoriety and their affiliation with the main football clubs from Rio de Janeiro, the city from which the discussions were broadcast live⁶. Hollanda (ibid.) also argued that this identification of journalists with clubs stemmed from *clubismo* (club loyalty).

⁵ The program focused on the championship of the former Brazilian state of Guanabara, using videotape and airing on Sunday nights, closing the day's programming (Hollanda, 2013). This type of programming increased significantly with the advent of cable and subscription sports channels, which needed to fill their schedules and cover the many tournaments (regional, national, and continental) broadcast throughout the week (see Santos, 2013; Herbert Neto, 2022).

⁶ Nelson Rodrigues, *Fluminense*; Armando Nogueira, *Botafogo*; José Maria Scassa, *Flamengo*; and Vitorino Vieira, *Vasco da Gama* (Hollanda, 2013).

Club affiliation, conceptualized by Damo (1999; 2005), expresses a complex relational system characterized by the affective bond fans have with football teams. The author drew an analogy between these bonds and the formation of communities of sentiment, a perspective connected to Weber's concept of nation (1974). *Clubismo* is inseparable from the solidarity and loyalty among the most ardent and passionate supporters, who deploy both physical and symbolic violence to coerce rivals – in this case, opposing fan bases – as well as to antagonize adversaries and galvanize fellow supporters. As with national communities, there is a fluid group dynamic, with either dispersed or organized fan clusters, as well as conflict often arising around values of a racist, classist, and homophobic nature⁷ all directed at opponents.

According to Hollanda, the emotional bond between *Grande Resenha Facit* commentators and their clubs was expressed through passion – openly exhibited on air – which placed participants on the same level as fans and fervent defenders of their teams. This analytical framework was similarly explored by English (2018), who argued that sports journalism at both the local and national levels tends toward a strong partisan bias, not *stricto sensu*, but in the sense of abandoning traditional journalistic premises of objectivity. Such an attitude privileges allegiance to a team, factions within a club, or particular players on the national team (ibid.). This stance brings journalists closer to the role of cheerleaders and shapes their relationships with sources.

The most delicate issue concerns implications of these attitudes for the practice of commentary, especially during live sports broadcasts. According to Whannel (1995), live coverage consolidate two perspectives that form what he called an “uneasy combination.” On the one hand, there is the notion of non-intervention during the unfolding of a match, in which the images alone are expected to convey events; on the other, there is the idea that commentators are responsible for creating a compelling story, adding suspense and emotion to the plays. Faced with this impasse, the role of the specialist emerged as an alternative.

Typically, the specialist was someone with practical experience in sports, such as former athletes or coaches. However, Whannel (1995) noted that, over time, specialists came to be selected based on their popularity and their ability to adapt to the demands

⁷ This is supported by sports journalism. According to Schudson (2001), Hallin (1986), and Rowe (1995; 1996), this type of journalism occupies a vast area not subject to the parameters of objectivity and is strongly ethnocentric. It focuses more on national than international news, and more on regional than national news. There was a strong sense of loyalty among journalists to the values of the place where they produced content, with an emphasis on the relationship between reporting and the formation of a kind of reactionary “common sense” expressed in the prejudices found in certain fan communities.

of the media environment. This involves both the visual presentation of their persona and the public recognition generated by their commentary. Such developments help explain the transition of these figures from live television and radio broadcasts to sports debate programs, which began incorporating video clips from televised games (Whannel, 1995)⁸.

This context partly accounts for the overwhelming male presence in sports programming, though it does little to reframe the reality of commentators within the broader field of journalism. Despite the prominence of roundtable formats on television (Herbert Neto, 2021c), focused on interviews and debate, the connection between commentary and journalism remains insufficiently problematized in journalism studies. Schudson (2001) suggests that the act of commenting may be linked to journalists' interpretive autonomy. This autonomy manifests both in the ways news conventions construct narratives to frame reality and in the freewheeling interpretivism of column writing (Lippmann, 2008).

This refers to the classic, normative model of professional ideology that dominates journalism studies – an ideology rooted in the objective standards of journalism as practiced in the United States, marked by the division between opinion and information (Deuze, 2005; Nerone, 2013). A more suitable approach to the *Debate Final: Especialistas*, as McCargo (2012) suggests, is based on the drawn of the ideological boundaries of professionalism to understand the complexity of the topic and its intersections with society. According to McCargo, it is important to recognize the partisanship that shapes the opinions expressed in journalism (ibid.), even if this means drawing on practices from various Asian contexts to broaden our understanding.

McCargo (2012) argues that it is essential to examine the extent to which commentary is grounded in the authority and prestige of certain journalists. Only then can great autonomy be accepted, even if it evokes the authorial journalism that emerged from the revolutionary processes of the eighteenth century. Echoes of that disposition currently resonate in the so-called blogosphere, which is rich in controversy, predictions, and analysis, albeit less focused on events per se. On the surface, roundtable discussions serve to engage audiences (Herbert Neto, 2022a), fulfilling an entertainment function. At

⁸ Controversy is seen as a key factor in the popularization of talk show personalities. João Saldanha and Nelson Rodrigues were known for theatrical, informal, and direct gestures. For example, Rodrigues once contested, on *Grande Resenha Facit*, the use of videotape in a penalty not called in favor of *Fluminense*: "Camera on me. If the videotape says it was a penalty, too bad for the videotape. The videotape is dumb." Saldanha's popularity, in turn, led him to become head coach of the Brazilian national team during the 1970 World Cup qualifiers in Mexico (Hollanda, 2013, pp. 138–139).

the same time, such programs often showcase antagonistic positions between journalists and football players or coaches regarding how the sport should be interpreted (Herbert Neto, 2021a).

Controversial and caricatured digressions point to the entanglement between journalism and entertainment (Herbert Neto & Roxo, 2024). Jô Soares's presence on *Debate Final: Especialistas* was, according to Téo José, due to his experience as a host and interviewer on Brazilian television talk shows. This mention highlights the problems surrounding interviews. Interaction with interviewees has become vital in contemporary journalism; according to Schudson (1994), reporters rely on it and consult relatively few documents in producing news. Meanwhile, the presence of journalists in diverse formats – reality shows, soap operas, television magazines like *Fantástico* on TV Globo, and various sports programs – indicates frequent crossovers.

Beyond programs focused on interviewers, this crossover can be seen as a journalist hosts a reality show or comedy programs mimic journalistic traits⁹. This does not imply that entertainment is prioritized over serious reporting. Conversely, it appears to signal journalism's ability to impose its own features, methods (especially interviews), and textuality onto other subfields of cultural production. Bolin's (2014) study is relevant in this regard¹⁰.

Journalists with experience in print and radio often move into television and participate in sports programming. However, this crossover is not limited to such cases. It is common to find professionals whose careers were built in other areas appearing on roundtable programs (Herbert Neto, 2024a), due to their adaptability to the format and its demands. In these broadcasts, commentators generally respond to questions and defend arguments without needing to provide evidence, only their professional authority (Herbert Neto, 2023). The participation of the sporting community in *Debate Final: Especialistas* is illustrative of such reliance on authority.

9 In Brazil, examples include Tadeu Schmidt and Tiago Leifert, who hosted *Globo Esporte* and later Big Brother. Pedro Bial and Marília Gabriela stood out as talk show hosts. Conversely, programs such as Greg News and Lady Night – hosted by Gregório Duvivier (HBO) and Tatá Werneck (Multishow), respectively – mimic journalistic settings but are focused on humor.

10 Bolin (2014) argues that the expansion of journalistic programs and websites on television and social media platforms, along with their differentiation into various subforms, represents an enlargement of the field: "hyperjournalism." However, little attention has been given to questions of journalistic authority and the impact of using journalistic methods in cultural genres not committed to truth-seeking, or to the reduction of asymmetries between journalists and audiences enabled by new technologies. In sum, these two processes affect the professional boundaries of journalism through the presence of dilettantes in programs that resemble or imitate journalism.

Whannel has emphasized the impact of the intersection between journalism and other cultural subfields on the language of television (1995; 2005; 2009). He developed a triangular model in which the first vertex is composed of journalistic conventions, reinforcing standards of impartiality, neutrality, balance, and objectivity. In football coverage, this translates into an observational mode of reporting, capturing the course of events in real time to offer the public immediate access and a sense of witnessing. The sequence of events in action is privileged, while the footage gives the coverage a realistic effect (Whannel, 1995).

The second vertex is entertainment, governed by the principles of effective communication. This involves a performative mode grounded in high professional and technical standards, with broad appeal to a heterogeneous audience and an emphasis on emotionally charged spectacles with flair and intensity. While Whannel's (1995) practical definition of entertainment remains somewhat vague, he emphasizes interaction with ideals such as enjoyment, identification, and variety. In its simplest form, watching sports brings aesthetic pleasure. Simultaneously, coverage offers audiences both relaxation and excitement, shaped by expectations and unpredictability.

The third vertex is drama. Within this dimension, a dramatic convention should be constructively employed to organize the entire sports program, emphasizing characters, conflict, and suspense to give shape to the narrative. Meaning-making depends on audience engagement with the flow – on television, that means fast-paced images and frequent camera cuts. While the existence of conventional plots in sports events may be debatable, specialized coverage is, to some extent, capable of reconfiguring, representing, and highlighting particular features using different rhetorical strategies and focalizations, often framing characters as either heroes or villains (Whannel, 1995).

The agents involved in these productions are fundamental to the broadcasts and tend to cluster around shared values and interpretive frameworks. This points to the notion of an interpretive community, formed in sports coverage through groups of individuals who share rhetorical resources and set themselves apart from other modes of interpretation. The fact that journalism is a relatively informal profession points in the same direction. According to Zelizer (1992), there are communities that attempt, through their practices, to decode social phenomena, such as historians, politicians, and journalists among them (p. 3). As a concept concerned with the protocols employed to secure privileged interpretive status over events, it is useful for problematizing the boundaries of journalism (Zelizer, 1992; 1993).

To establish themselves as legitimate spokespersons, members of these communities work to ensure their cultural authority over the subjects they cover. In the field of Communication and, more specifically, in studies of press activity, this concept is known as journalistic authority (p. 11). In her research, Zelizer identifies key traits. She argues that journalists act as an interpretive community, and that this cohesion helps to legitimize their authority. These interpreters share specific ways of narrating events that set them apart from others (Zelizer, 1992, p. 3). Despite clear differences between journalists – relatively homogeneous as a group – and athletes, coaches, managers, referees, and technical staff, all of these actors coexist within sports coverage.

During the 2018 World Cup in Russia, pay-TV programs like *Linha de Passe* (ESPN) featured panels exclusively composed of commentators whose careers were built in journalistic outlets. Others, such as *Noite dos Craques* from *Esporte Interativo*, opted for panels based entirely at the sporting community, mediated only by hosts aligned with journalistic standards. SporTV followed the Fox Sports model and favored diverse profiles¹¹. However, since the early days of broadcasting in Brazil, sports coverage has been porous, featuring actors, musicians, and comedians (Herbert Neto, 2024b). The invitation to Jô Soares reflects the continuity of this tradition.

Such tensions were present throughout the World Cup – from the visual dimension of *Debate Final: Especialistas* to Jô Soares's discomfort in expressing his opinions. Nevertheless, the frictions were most visible on July 15, 2018. For this reason, this study focused on that particular episode. The live broadcast took place after the World Cup final, which ended in France's victory over Croatia. Brazil had been eliminated 12 days earlier, in the quarterfinals. The early elimination raised questions about Brazilian men's football, particularly concerning tactical and technical preparation, which was a sensitive topic for the panelists.

A pause to reflect – *Debate Final: Especialistas* and the clash with the sports community

In the July 15, 2018 edition, the panel in the studio was composed of coaches: Vanderlei Luxemburgo, Abel Braga, Roger Machado, and Diego Aguirre¹². Only the latter

¹¹ Article published on July 13, 2018, in *Folha de S. Paulo* highlights the confrontational nature of roundtable programs in Brazil, while noting that *Seleção* adopts a milder tone compared to *Debate Final: Especialistas*. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/esporte/2018/07/mesas-redondas-tem-ate-plateia-e-vao-de-tom-ameno-a-guerra.shtml>. Accessed on August 18, 2024.

¹² Program aired on Fox Sports on July 16, 2018. Available at: https://youtu.be/UMaTl2r794g?si=UCFxS7i_DXH_jRq. Accessed on August 18, 2024.

– a Uruguayan with experience coaching professional teams in Brazil – was an occasional guest. Machado was a regular member of the show and represented the younger generation of Brazilian coaches. However, the presence of Luxemburgo and Abel that stood out the most. Both began their careers as professional athletes, trained in the youth academies of clubs in Rio de Janeiro¹³, and went on to lead teams after retiring as players¹⁴. Their experience on the field served as a key factor for *Debate Final: Especialistas*.

The very title chosen by Fox Sports reveals an effort to project authority. This intent was reinforced by the makeup of the panel, which, in addition to Luxemburgo and Braga, included the experienced Carlos Alberto Parreira, who, in his roles as head coach and assistant, participated in three World Cups with the Brazilian national team. In the studio, the outlier was presenter Téo José, whose career had been built as a play-by-play commentator for other networks: his anchoring role required that he moderate the tone of the discussions with a degree of restraint. His interactions with Jô Soares, however, pushed beyond these boundaries.

The actor and writer had not built a career in the sports field but in entertainment. He hosted *Programa do Jô*, a late-night talk show on TV Globo¹⁵, for nearly 17 years, after hosting *Jô Soares Onze e Meia*¹⁶ on SBT for over a decade, both featuring interviews in a similar style. Before that, he had gained recognition as a comedian in film, theater, and television¹⁷. He was also a musician, with albums marked by a humorous vein¹⁸ and instrumental inclination¹⁹. These past ventures symbolized the continuity of traditions in sports broadcasting, either leaning toward humor, or intertwined with music (Herbert Neto, 2024b).

13 Information about Vanderlei Luxemburgo available at: <https://museudofutebol.org.br/crfb/personalidades/470219/>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

14 Information about Abel Braga available at: <https://museudofutebol.org.br/crfb/personalidades/481965/>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

15 Information from *Memória Globo*, available at: <https://memoriaglobo.globo.com/entretenimento/auditorio-e-variedades/programa-do-jo/>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

16 Content available at *SBT Vídeos*: <https://www.sbtvideos.com.br/programas/especial-jo-soares>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

17 Information from *CNN Brasil* available at: <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/entretenimento/morre-aos-84-anos-o-escritor-e-humorista-jo-soares/>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

18 The album *Capitão Gay*, featuring songs from the comedic character's sketches, is available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/uRbaJtUqxvE?si=nOSQlc-ZCNLaeawp>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

19 The album *Jô Soares e o Sexteto* was released in 2000. Information available at Immub: <https://immub.org/album/jo-soares-e-o-sexteto>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

Just as the routines of media outlets were nor unfamiliar to Jô Soares, neither was football a distant topic: in addition to being a symbolic supporter of Fluminense Football Club²⁰, he coauthored the book *A Copa que ninguém viu e a que não queremos lembrar* (1994) with journalists Armando Nogueira e Roberto Mulyaert. This memoir-style work on the 1950 and 1954 World Cups was a rather uncommon gesture at the time, aimed at the publishing market, to document the tournaments that preceded Brazil's golden era and the more aggressive coverage by television networks.

A visual element marked the physical detachment of Jô Soares in 2018. Throughout the *Final Debate: Experts* coverage, the commentator appeared outside the studio, with his image projected on a large screen next to the panel's table²¹. One of the justifications for the improvised set in the former presenter's home was his fragile health. It is worth considering whether this physical distance – reinforcing the perception that the actor and writer did not belong to the group assembled by the network – symbolically intensified the sense of antagonism with the sports community (Image 1).

Image 1

In the Fox Sports studio, Jô Soares appears on a large screen

20 The comedian was honored by Fluminense after his death. Available at GE.globo: <https://ge.globo.com/futebol/times/fluminense/noticia/2022/08/07/jogadores-do-fluminense-farao-homenagem-a-jo-soares.ghtml>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

21 Although participating live in *Debate Final: Especialistas*, Jô Soares was in another city. Information from Folha de S. Paulo available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/esporte/2018/07/mesas-redondas-tem-ate-plateia-e-vao-de-tom-ameno-a-guerra.shtml>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.



Source: Youtube. Disponível em: youtu.be/PmXj-qX-fsl

The July 15, 2018 edition served as a final assessment of both Brazil's campaign and the performance of the top teams in the tournament. It seemed an opportune moment to reflect on the reasons behind the national team's underwhelming result. In this context, Jô Soares prompted the other participants to think about the broader state of football in the country – a provocation directed at both the regular panelists and the guests. Notably absent was Parreira, the most restrained of the commentators with a coaching background.

From the outset of the debates, Luxemburgo and Braga had played a dual role: assessing the progress of international teams while simultaneously downplaying the challenges faced by the Brazilian team. It is important to consider whether their cautious assessments of Brazil's failure at the World Cup stemmed from a sense that, in criticizing the team, they would also be casting doubt on the development of Brazilian football—a system they had long been part of ²². Jô Soares's proposal to reevaluate the coaching profession served as a trigger for a defensive stance to surface more forcefully, even though his tone remained measured and the use of friendly terms suggested camaraderie among colleagues.

In response to the call for renewal of Brazilian coaches in *Debate Final: Especialistas*, Abel demanded a definitive solution for all the problems facing national

²² The reticence in the coaches' comments are evident even in the second segment, when the tone of the broadcast was more moderate. Available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/PmXj-qX-fsl>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

football: "You're suggesting there's a need for change, so you should know exactly what change needs to be made. Hold on, my friend!"²³. He then responded not in defense of his own career, but on behalf of the entire sports community: "Let me tell you something else. I'll even speak for the two [younger coaches] if they allow me – especially my friend next to me: we are not afraid of anything, comrade"²⁴. His reactive stance appeared to oppose Jô Soares's assertion that coaches needed to adapt to the transformations shaping that year's World Cup.

Faced with the rebuttal, Soares reiterated: "Football is going through several changes – several changes happening all at once. So all I say is this: caution! Keep paying attention, because things are changing. At what level or how, I don't know"²⁵. Even expressed with restraint, his remarks continued to irk representatives of the sports community. Abel would not be the only member of the Fox Sports roundtable to act in defense of his profession: Luxemburgo voiced indignation at the suggestion that Brazilian coaches were having a hard time to adapt to innovation. "The press keeps talking about Brazilian coaches, saying we have to go abroad to learn football, to somehow learn what others are doing. We completely reject that, because we know a lot about football"²⁶.

By mentioning the press, Luxemburgo brought to light the clash with a community of professionals shaped within newsrooms, historically present in sports debate programs. His reference brought journalism to the forefront, one of the key axes in the model for analyzing sports coverage. The coaches' heated responses prompted Téo José to invoke journalistic standards to temper the rising tensions and advocate for neutrality between the sides in the debate – even though Soares was clearly at a disadvantage due to his lack of familiarity with the other panelists and his numerical minority against the coaches²⁷.

According to Luxemburgo, journalists were unfairly targeting Brazilian coaches under the assumption that they were outdated compared to their foreign counterparts. His defense also carried a nationalistic tone, aimed at safeguarding the constellation of elements surrounding Brazilian football as a kind of national heritage²⁸. This rhetoric

23 Comment aired on Fox Sports programming on July 16, 2018. Also available at: https://youtu.be/UMaTl2r794g?si=-UCFxS7i_DXH_jRq. Accessed on August 18, 2024.

24 Ibidem.

25 Comment aired on Fox Sports programming on July 16, 2018. Available at: https://youtu.be/UMaTl2r794g?si=-UCFxS7i_DXH_jRq. Accessed on August 18, 2024.

26 Ibidem.

27 Ibidem.

28 Ibidem.

echoed a longstanding tradition in sports broadcasting that has historically aligned itself with political discourse, with implications for both authoritarian and democratic periods (Herbert Neto, 2021b). In 2022 and 2024, for instance, Luxemburgo himself joined two different political parties, intending to run for positions in both the Legislative and Executive branches, respectively²⁹.

Despite being significantly older than the two coaches—Soares was 80 at the time, while Abel and Luxemburgo were 66 – the former talk show host made a point of maintaining the serenity that had characterized his interviews. This was, of course, a valuable trait when engaging with guests in the armchair setting of his previous shows, designed for viewer enjoyment. In the roundtable format, after the firmness shown by the coaches, there were no further calls to reflect on potential changes to bring Brazilian football in line with contemporary demands. From that point on, the exchanges unfolded with less aggression.

Things that were not taken into account – final considerations

The signals of misalignment with the international scene, in a way, anticipated a trend. By way of record, it is worth noting that from 2019 – the year following the World Cup in Russia – until 2024, teams led by Brazilian coaches won only two editions of the Brazilian Championship. Teams led by European coaches won the other four trophies³⁰. The data from the main men's football competition in the country point to a growing awareness among clubs of the need to align themselves with global trends. Still, this remains merely a suggestion.

The inclination of the *Debate Final: Especialistas* panelists to take sides on the topics discussed at the roundtable is closely tied to the casting choices made by Fox Sports for the program. All the guests were invited specifically to comment on the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia³¹. After the tournament, Abel Braga³² and Vanderlei

29 Information from newspaper *Correio Braziliense* available at: <https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/esportes/2024/04/6832911-vanderlei-luxemburgo-vira-folha-e-muda-de-partido-8216energia-e-comprometimento-8217.html>. Accessed on July 17, 2024.

30 Data about the Brazilian Championship available at RSSSF: <https://rsssfbrasil.com/historical.htm#brasileiro>. Accessed on July 17, 2024.

31 The signings were announced in June 2018. Information from the *Comunique-se*: <https://portal.comunique-se.com.br/fox-sports-na-copa-tecnicos-comentaristas-e-12-horas-ao-vivo-por-dia/>. Accessed on August 16, 2024.

32 In January 2019, Abel Braga was announced as Flamengo's new head coach. Information from GE.com: <https://ge.globo.com/futebol/times/flamengo/noticia/quinze-anos-depois-abel-volta-ao-flamengo-animado-eu-venho-com-fome.ghtml>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

Luxemburgo³³ resumed their posts with first-division teams in the Brazilian Championship³⁴. Given the immediate return to their careers, the *esprit de corps* demonstrated during the debates – and the reactions aimed at Jô Soares – are understandable. This episode is thus exemplary of the conflict between differing modes of interpretation.

Although not always resulting in tense confrontations, the presence of an analytical perspective grounded in the everyday experience of clubs and football institutions – voiced by members of the sporting community – and that of another, more closely tied to notions such as impartiality and neutrality, has remained a constant feature in televised sports coverage (Hollanda, 2013). Despite their resilience, the journalistic and sporting communities have never held a monopoly over discourse on sports in Brazil, given how the subject appeals to the general public (Herbert Neto, 2024a). This is reflected in the participation of entertainers such as Jô Soares in specialized programs aimed at commenting on sports news.

Jô Soares's autobiographical accounts revisit the tensions surrounding the Fox Sports program (Soares; Suzuki, 2018, pp. 206–207), his last regular appearance on televised sports debates. Despite the disagreements, the specialized cable network achieved excellent ratings with its 2018 FIFA World Cup coverage³⁵. This was partly due to its acquisition of the live broadcasting rights. It can be assumed that these conflicts helped boost viewership, especially since its main competitor, SporTV which also aired the tournament live, invested in programming that brought together members of both the sporting and journalistic communities³⁶.

The setting offers other insights into the relationship with the audience. The bench on which the participants sat was shaped like a hashtag, —a symbol used on

33 In May 2019, Vanderlei Luxemburgo was announced as Vasco's new head coach. Information from GE.com: <https://ge.globo.com/futebol/times/vasco/noticia/vanderlei-luxemburgo-posta-mensagem-para-a-torcida-do-vasco-quer-dar-um-alo.shtml>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

34 Vanderlei Luxemburgo's return to coaching did not prevent him from being invited to join the Fox Sports commentary team in 2019. Information from the channel's website: <https://www.foxsports.com.br/videos/1561629763785-brasil-parou-de-produzir-craques-especialistas-discutem-motivos-para-escassez-de-grandes-talentos>. Accessed on July 16, 2019.

35 Fox Sports grew its audience by 126% during the 2018 World Cup group stage, reaching second place in pay-TV ratings and becoming the only channel to compete with SporTV during the tournament. Information from *Folha de S. Paulo*, available at: <https://telepadi.folha.uol.com.br/fox-sportx-celebra-audiencia-126-maior-com-copa/>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

36 In subscription packages, Fox Sports and SporTV were the only channels with broadcasting rights for the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Information from *Folha de S. Paulo*, available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/esporte/2018/02/com-desistencia-da-band-globo-vai-transmitir-sozinha-a-copa-da-russia.shtml>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

digital platforms to indicate trending topics and allow for some degree of measurement. The heated clashes in *Debate Final: Especialistas* caused the name of the program and that of Jô Soares to appear among the most mentioned terms on Twitter, for example³⁷, as another indication of how conflicts capture attention. The case also underscores certain methodological limitations of the Whannelian model for analyzing sports coverage in broadcasting, particularly with regard to television.

First, because the intersections among the model's vertexes are constant, which complicates a static framework fixed around three poles. Soares – who was linked to football and had a career in entertainment – embodies this complexity. A more dynamic lens is thus preferable, especially in light of the rise of digitalization and multiplatform communication. Second, because the model is centered on coverage in the United Kingdom. Whannel (1995) developed his study and framework based on what he observed within the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). To avoid falling into Eurocentrism, future efforts might seek to develop models tailored to national specificities and oriented toward popular culture.

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37 The hashtag for *Debate Final: Especialistas* and the name Jô Soares were among the most mentioned topics on Twitter during the 2018 World Cup. Information from UOL blog: <https://natelinha.uol.com.br/televisao/2018/07/06/fox-sports-comemora-resultados-com-a-cobertura-da-copa-do-mundo-118176.php>. Accessed on August 17, 2024.

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RESUMO

O intuito deste trabalho é examinar os confrontos entre modos de interpretar o futebol na cobertura esportiva. Com este propósito, será avaliado o caso do programa que o Fox Sports preparou para a Copa do Mundo masculina da modalidade em 2018. A escolha se justifica em função da presença do humorista e apresentador de talk show Jô Soares como comentarista, pela série de discussões que a escalação desencadeou ao vivo. A intenção é ponderar sobre os conflitos entre perspectivas externas à comunidade esportiva e os componentes na bancada. Será mobilizado o modelo triangular de Whannel (1995) com a finalidade de observar as transmissões. Os choques entre os conjuntos de comentaristas serão enxergados à luz do conceito de comunidades interpretativas, com foco nas diferentes estratégias usadas em Debate Final: Especialistas

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Jô Soares; Comunidade interpretativa; Cobertura esportiva; Copa do Mundo de 2018.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo es examinar los choques entre formas de interpretar el fútbol en la cobertura deportiva. Así, se evaluará el caso del programa que Fox Sports preparó para el Mundial masculino de 2018. La elección se justifica por la presencia del comediante Jô Soares como comentarista y la serie de debates que mantuvo en vivo. La intención es considerar los conflictos con las hegemónicas perspectivas externas a la comunidad deportiva. Para observar las transmisiones se utilizará el modelo triangular de Whannel (1995). Los enfrentamientos entre los conjuntos de comentaristas se verán a la luz del concepto de comunidades interpretativas, centrándose en las diferentes estrategias utilizadas en Debate Final: Especialistas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Jô Soares; Comunidad interpretativa; Cobertura deportiva; Copa del Mundo 2018.