

SPORTS PATHS. ON IMAGINARIES, MISINFORMATION AND COMPARISONS: MESSI- RONALDO CASE

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Summary

This work reports a qualitative study, with a case study and comparative analysis type of research. The unit of analysis is the case to compare of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo based on their sporting careers, from their debut as professionals until the month of August 2023, associated with information manipulation in sports journalism in the press, web and TV. The results suggest that, although it is true that sports statistics favor Lionel Messi compared to Cristiano Ronaldo, the opinion of journalists in the media is influencing the generation of imaginaries that are far from what the statistics reflect, and concludes in misinformation. It is necessary to consolidate the ethical treatment of the information resulting from the analysis within the framework of the comparison of sports trajectories.

Keywords: Comparative analysis, sports career, imaginaries.

Introduction

High-performance sport reports a scenario in which analytical and comparative exercise is of primary necessity, not only because of the statistics associated with an athlete's performance (in relation to that of others, with one's own performance, or with historical performance). statistical), but also for the social roots that it brings with it. That is to say, among so many possible and existing notions, there is a whole notion of sport as a social and cultural fact (Acuña & Acuña, 2016), as a spectacle (Reyes, 2012), and this is materialized in fanaticism and the following of the spectators, that is, it is sport as a consumer product and as a generator of identities (Meneses, 2008; Reyes, 2022).

The use of statistics in sport is not new (Prió, 2023), however, although it is true that its use has been widely used over time, it is no less true that, originally, it was

associated with resulting performance metrics, whether it was in a season or in a specific competition. However, today, and along with the incorporation of other disciplinary fields (ergometry, biomechanics, kinesiology, biometrics, psychology, nutrition, etc.), the use of statistics has expanded, to the point that it is no longer only considered for the evaluation of performance, but also applies to the recognition of fundamental patterns according to the sports discipline, to sports training, to performance projections according to conceived conditions, etc. (Ross-Rodríguez & Leyva-Rodríguez, 2018).

Meters thrown, blows connected, body temperature, oxygen consumption (VO₂), energy intake, shooting angles, number of strokes, ball passes per zone, heat maps, calories expended, propulsion force, among multiple variables that guide the decision making in today's sport. That is, statistics are used not only to evaluate results, but also for decision making. For example: when in baseball, a manager decides to call a certain player as a pinch hitter, taking in to account that the statistics that said player has against the current pitcher is much better than that of the batter in the order in the line-up. This is known as data-based decision making, which, although it comes from the framework of public policies and business, is applied here from the logic of sport. Someone else could call it evidence-based decision making (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2018; Fernández et al., 2017), although they may have different approaches and connotations depending on the origin, nature and behavior of the data.

Statistics also serve to make comparative studies in sports trajectories. And what is a sports career? Well, this refers to the sporting career of an athlete from his debut as such to his final retirement. This implies all their sports statistics in seasons and official competitions, depending on the discipline, includes individual and/or collective awards (as applicable), official records, their time on national teams and teams (as applicable), also considering the transitions that the athlete may have had in the middle of his sports career (Reyes, 2012).

As can be seen in various media, there are television programs (and on the Internet), both public and private, dedicated exclusively to the analysis of sporting events. Sports journalists and commentators use statistics with the purpose of establishing patterns and comparative relationships of sports performance, differences and similarities, whether of teams, national teams, and/or athletes in particular. In the case that concerns this work, the focus is on the information manipulation carried out by certain sports journalists and commentators, to the point that they end up imposing criteria and opinion matrices that move away from the objective metrics of sport, and incorporate, according to tastes and preferences, lines of a discourse that biases the resulting analysis. This affects not only the presentation of information related to sporting events, but also involves the presentation of sporting trajectories. There is

evidence about the influence that the media have in the creation of opinion matrices in the collective imagination and that end up consolidating social representations about a phenomenon or people (Aparicio, 2004; Meza, 2018; Rubio, 2009). In this sense, the treatment of this type of information must be as close as possible to the ethical and objective treatment in journalism, in addition to being generated from an unprejudiced context of the passion and personal opinion, tastes and preferences of the journalist, and even, of commercial interests of the media in question (Rojas, 2015). According to El Kharrachi (2022):

In the opposite case, that is, in the absence of impartiality and balance in the news, the error of defamation, ignominy, discrimination or racism can be incurred, leading the public to be subject to confusion and even shock; of course, he will not be able to form an objective opinion (p. 44).

In a review of the state of the art, it is found that Murcia et al. (2022), highlights an analysis between sports chronicles generated by athletes and those generated by artificial intelligence. In this work, and following a literature review, it is noted that, in Graefe et al. (2016), it was found that those who read news associated with football in certain media outlets ended up giving greater credibility to the analyzes generated by artificial intelligence than to those analyzes carried out by sports journalists from the media in question. And Murcia et al. (2022), they state:

Traditionally, sports journalism has been accompanied by a perception of lack of seriousness in contrast to other types of fields (English, 2017). In an investigation carried out in Chile, Scherman & Mellado (2019) detected that sports journalism uses fewer sources of information, integrates fewer points of view, and presents less verifiable information to the public. Similar results were found in the research carried out in Spain and Mexico by Márquez-Ramírez & Rojas (2017) on the informative treatment of one of the largest cases of corruption in world football, the so-called FIFAGate (p. 94).

In addition, Márquez & Tenorio (2019) present research related to the journalistic treatment of sports statistics in the United States, and demonstrate reliably how sports journalists end up 'taking analysis to their own field', regardless of statistics, and even distorting them so that they 'support' the arguments they use, generating adhesions according to the editorial line of the media in question. And, they add:

Many readers/listeners/viewers choose a specific media for this reason. But, at the end of the day, there is the possibility that it seems more objective to them because the ideological line of the medium is more in line with theirs. That is, they feel more comfortable with that information (p. 19).

According to Maciá-Barber (in Fortuoso, 2018), sports journalism (especially sports reporting and opinion programs) has been engaging in a constant blurring of information and opinion, in spectacularization and exaltation of the superficial, in stimulation for confrontation, controversy, unfounded accusation “as a frequent criterion of news and the main driving force of the audience” (in Fortuoso, 2018; sec. 1/1), cancellation of the presence and role of women in sport , and finally, in the protection of business interests of the media.

A study carried out by Márquez-Ramírez & Rojas (2017), in relation to the corruption case called FIFAGate, and the coverage of the information by Mexican and Spanish media, concluded as follows:

Regarding the comparative measurement of quality journalism indicators, in no case was the average number of sources used per news item even two, which may denote insufficient research and information monitoring (p. 184).

According to Rojas (2015), sports information is anchored to an entertainment logic, and, analyzing the expansion of television and internet programs that address this type of 'journalistic' format, he maintains:

What these sports programs revealed was that infotainment, more than thematic, is purely stylistic, so that the adoption of this genre not only involves the choice of a certain type of content, but above all a peculiar treatment of the information. characterized by a more superficial and sensational presentation of the facts, the use of colloquial language and an informal style, the inclusion of rumor, anecdote and the morbidity of the conflict as supposedly news categories, the low quality and plurality of the sources consulted and in short, a staging that can hardly be considered purely journalistic (p. 51).

According to Rojas (2015), there is a deterioration of certain sports content, as a result of what he calls sports buffoonery, alluding to a transgression of journalistic ethics and the civil responsibility inherent to the function of journalism. According to Rojas (in Red Ética, 2013):

The tendency has been to spectacularize the information, making the content that is broadcast daily not only journalistic, but also speculation and hypotheses, which for me are not part of sports journalism. For example, formats from entertainment and the personal lives of athletes, which should be part of other types of publications (sec. 1/1).

According to Suárez-Villegas (2015), the ethical commitments of journalism mutate in an information society, therefore, a process of self-regulation of the journalist in particular is essential, beyond the limitations of the media and professional codes. Díaz-Lozano & Chaparro-Domínguez (2018) had already pointed out exactly along these lines, reiterating the changes in journalism (especially digital journalism), but also in the adaptation that Latin American journalism has achieved or not.

Finally, there is a study carried out by Li (2014), in relation to the coverage and journalistic bias of four Spanish media about the Spanish first division soccer teams, Real Madrid and Barcelona FC. This study reveals that the Marca and As newspapers each use impartial headlines, non-neutral expressions, giving more space to news favorable to Real Madrid, the same as happens with Mundo Deportivo and Sport in relation to Barcelona FC. Besides:

Each of the four newspapers tends to use more descriptions that favor the local or favorite team and fewer expressions that favor its “eternal rival” or opponent... this analysis already demonstrates the situation of the treatment of the concept of “impartiality” in the press Spanish sports. Regarding the same facts, different media can show completely opposite ideas. This lack of an impartial and objective treatment of sports news leads us to pay attention again to the problem related to journalistic objectivity, to the unforgettable function of the media to construct and relate reality and, more importantly, to the reflection on the correct attitude that sports journalists must maintain and the social responsibility they have in a modern society where the values of sport and its habitual practice for many young people have become something belonging to daily life (pp. 72-73) .

Such a distinction in the treatment of information is curious, because, according to Li (2014), this journalistic behavior is observed in relation to the same sporting event. As informed by the evidence, it is possible to notice that the analysis of the media, in some cases, could be contaminating reality, distorting, favoring some and disfavoring others, regardless of the statistics and concrete and objective data. This does not mean that there are intangibles and that they must be considered for the analysis, however, it could happen that this is much less frequent and has less weight in the statements of journalists, TV programs and the Internet, and that they have a relevant influence on the community of spectators, listeners and followers of the sport. According to Gómez (2010):

In the press, especially, morbidity and sensationalism prevail. The game itself has taken a backseat. Where the anecdote and the spectacle outside the sports venues are more important than the sports essence itself, the spaces dedicated to this topic skyrocket. Rumors also enter the scene too frequently, intentional

or not, which endanger the already low credibility of sports information professionals. Ethics in the current sports press seems to be conspicuous by its absence (p. 2).

As warned, the management of information at a journalistic level ends up blurring the concepts of 'information' and 'opinion', and the journalist ends up standing as a showman of entertainment and sports entertainment (Quiroz, 2021). This is known in journalistic jargon as 'disinformation' or 'fake news' (Pyrcek, 2020), and it is what has been happening in the field of sports reporting as a journalistic format. If we add to this that many readers, listeners and followers of the media (and certain journalists) do not verify the veracity of the information (Vásquez-Barrio et al., 2021), well, what circulates then As information, in many cases, it is nothing more than a trivialization of it (Rojas, 2015).

This type of behavior is not applicable to the generality of sports journalists, because, in fact, sports journalism has gained strength in recent years, consolidating itself as a communication channel (Rojas, 2014), but one thing does not negate the other. Can this situation be coined only to editorial lines of the media? Can it be applicable to the search and competition for ratings and journalistic coverage? According to Reyes (2022), there are both in this framework.

Thus, the purpose of this work is to comparatively analyze two sporting careers that have been the focus of attention worldwide, such as those of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. In both cases, it will be noted that the journalistic media is imposing discourses and courses of action, generating unnecessary antipodes.

Methodology

The study developed is qualitative in nature, using a multiple case study based on comparative analysis (Del Pilar, 2018; Goodrick, 2014). For this, the case of the sports career of two world-renowned athletes such as Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo has been considered. Although it is true, the sports career considers the beginning of the sports career until the final retirement (Reyes, 2022), in the case that concerns this study, it has been decided to make a cut at the end of August 2023. In the case of Lionel Messi, he has been playing since the second half of 2023 in the United States, while Cristiano Ronaldo, after closing his participation in the 2022 Qatar Soccer World Cup, participates in the professional soccer league of Saudi Arabia.

For the comparative analysis to be considered valid, both the units of analysis and the behavioral variables to be analyzed must have similar characteristics. Thus, the following variables are declared to be compared: age, playing time (from the

beginning of his career to the end of August 2023), professional teams and national teams, goals, assists, titles. It is worth noting that the comparative analysis carried out is qualitative insofar as it focuses on a case study, also considering that the data are obtained from the sports press that offers information to compare, in addition to statements from journalists, athletes and coaches in various media.

Results and discussion

As has been highlighted, the objective of this work points to the comparative analysis of the sporting career of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, considering the existence of journalistic manipulation in the presentation of both careers to public opinion by a segment of sports journalism in Latin America and Europe.

Table 1. *Player comparison*

Statistics (until 8-21-2023)							
Player	Games	Goals	Assist	% G/J	% A/J	Contrib. Goal	Win/Play Titles
Messi	1035	817	340	0.79	0.33	1157	44/91
Ronaldo	1175	845	195	0.72	0.17	1040	35/98
Penalty goals: Messi (108); Ronaldo (154) [statistic included in overall goals]. Messi gave up 29 penalties to his teammates, and Ronaldo gave up 12 penalties. Messi has scored 13.21% of his goals from penalties, while Ronaldo has scored 18.22% of his goals from penalties. Messi has scored 18 penalty goals in UEFA ¹ Champions League, while Ronaldo has scored 19 times since that same instance.							
Direct confrontations: 37 Messi: 17 wins, 9 draws, 11 losses. 23 goals scored. Ronaldo: 11 wins, 9 draws, 17 losses. 23 goals scored.							
Legend: G/J: Goals per game; A/J: assists per game							

Source: self made.

In comparison, Messi was born on 6-24-1987, while Ronaldo was born on 2-5-1985, which implies that the latter is older than Messi by two years, three months and 19 days. Messi is 1.69 meters tall compared to Cristiano Ronaldo's 1.86. Messi debuted in the first division with Barcelona FC on 10-16-2004, while Ronaldo did so with Sporting Lisbon on 8-14-2002, that is, Ronaldo debuted two years, one month and 28 days before Messi. This data cannot go unnoticed, because in the analysis of the trajectory, it must be understood that, as reflected in table 1, in less time of sports career, in fewer games, the proportion of goals and assists of Messi is superior to that of Cristiano Ronaldo, despite the fact that, in total goals, the latter slightly surpasses Messi, (which is understandable) given Ronaldo's percentage production of goals compared to the number of seasons playing and the number of games played.

¹Union of European Football Associations.

Messi surpasses Ronaldo in assists, average goals per game, average assists per game, goal contributions and titles won (clubs and national team). Messi has conceded a greater number of penalties to his teammates than Ronaldo has conceded to his teammates, and, if the penalty goals scored by both are subtracted, Messi (709) surpasses Ronaldo (691) in that statistic, all this considering, as said previously, that Messi has played two fewer seasons. In relation to direct confrontations, there is parity in the total goals scored, but the balance of wins and losses favors Messi.

In addition to the age difference between these two players, another fact stands out that is decisive for the analysis, and this has to do with the position in which they both play, that is, Ronaldo (beyond the shirt number, which ends being in the end, a preference or an award, either by the coach, or by consensus of the locker room), is a player who stands out as a forward throughout his sporting career, while in the case of Messi, he has been characterized by playing as a midfielder with an offensive vocation.

Table 2. *Doubles, hat-trick, poker and re-poker*

Per match	Messi	Ronaldo
Doublet (2g)	156 (38 with penalties)	151 (47 with penalties)
Hat Trick (3g)	57 (15 with penalties)	63 (33 with penalties)
Poker (4g)	6 (3 with penalties)	9 (4 with penalties)
Re-poker (5g)	2 (1 with penalties)	2 (1 with penalties)
Legend: Double: 3 goals in a match; hat-trick: 3 goals in a match; poker: 4 goals in a match; re-poker: 5 goals in a match		

Note: Taken from Acosta (2023).

In relation to doubles, triplets (hat-tricks), poker and re-pokers, Cristiano Ronaldo has a slight advantage over Messi by surpassing him in games with 3 goals and in games with 4 goals. Messi surpasses him in games with 2 goals and there is parity in games with 5 goals scored. However, he highlights that, in 3 out of 4 of the variables, Ronaldo has reached such figures with a majority of games in which he has scored with penalties (relative to Messi).

Table 3. *Titles at national team level*

Titles at national team level	
Messi	Adult World Champion, Youth World Champion, Olympic Champion, Copa América Champion, UEFA-Conmebol Champions Cup Champion
Ronaldo	Euro Cup Champion, UEFA Nations League Champion

Source: self made.

As table 3 highlights, both players have achieved titles at the national team level. In fact, both managed to become continental champions with their respective teams, while Messi won the World Cup (in adult and youth categories) and Olympic gold as

the most notable achievements at the national team level, having in this context a quite considerable advantage.

Table 4. Titles at club level

Titles at club level	
Messi	10 Spanish leagues, 2 French leagues, 4 UCL, 3 club World Cups, 3 European Super Cups, 1 Leagues Cup, 7 King's Cups in Spain, 8 Spanish Super Cups, 1 French Super Cup
Ronaldo	3 Premier Leagues, 2 Spanish Leagues, 2 Serie A Leagues, 5 UCL, 4 Club World Cups, 3 European Super Cups, 1 Arab Champions Cup, 2 King's Cups in Spain, 1 Italian Cup, 1 FA CUP, 2 EFL CUP, 2 Spanish Super Cups, 2 Community Shield, 2 Italian Super Cup, 1 Portuguese Super Cup

Source: self made.

Messi has played for three professional clubs, namely: Barcelona FC (Spain), Paris Saint Germain (France), Inter Miami (United States), and Ronaldo has played for Sporting Lisbon (Portugal), Manchester United (England) in two periods, Real Madrid, Juventus, Al Nassr (Saudi Arabia). Both players have achieved continental and national titles with their respective teams, some more successful than others, but in the accumulated history, Messi has a greater number of titles than those obtained by Ronaldo. The latter leads Messi in a UEFA Champions League (5-4) and in a club World Cup (4-3), while the latter leads Ronaldo in national leagues and cups.

Table 5. Individual titles

Individual titles ²	
Messi	7 Ballon d'Or, 2 The Best, 1 FIFA World Player, 2 Laureaus, 6 European Golden Boots, 2 Ballon d'Or in World Cups, 6 times top scorer ³ UCL, 1 Golden Boy, 4 Onde D'Or ⁴ , 2 times UEFA Best Player, 2 MVP ⁵ World Cup South Africa 2014 and Qatar 2022, Copa América Golden Boot, 2 Copa América MVPs, 8 league top scorers, 2 times best player in the Club World Cup, Best world player of the decade (2011-2020) according to the IFFHS, Best constructor of world game of the decade (2011-2020) [IFFHS], 3 UEFA goal of the year awards
Ronaldo	5 Ballon d'Or, 2 The Best, 1 FIFA World Player, 4 European Golden Boots, 1 Golden Foot, 7 times UCL top scorer, 2 Onde D'Or, 3 times UEFA Best Player, Euro 2021 Golden Boot, 4 top scorers leagues, 1 time best player in the Club World Cup, Best world goalscorer of the decade (2011-2020) according to the IFFHS, Best world goalscorer of the 21st century (2001-2020) (IFFHS), Best Player of the Century Globe Soccer Awards, 1 Puskas FIFA for best goal of the year, 2 awards for best goal of the year UEFA

Source: self made.

²After this study, Lionel Messi won the 8th Ballon d'Or of his career and the 3rd The Best award.

³League scoring leader.

⁴Eleven de Oro, award given by the French magazine Onze Mondial, to the best footballer of the year in Europe.

⁵Most Valuable Player Award.

In relation to individual titles, Messi prevails in relation to two relevant categories, namely, quantity and quality of them. The most important and prestigious titles in world football are the Ballon d'Or, 'The Best' award, the FIFA World Player, UEFA best player and World Cup MVP. The comparative analysis leans mostly into this category. Although it is true, several of these awards are based on the voting of journalists, coaches and players, there are some of them that do not report to voting, but rather, report to the reflection of the net statistics, such as the golden boots, in the that Messi also prevails over Ronaldo.

In relation to individual awards, Messi prevails, either as a result of voting, or as a product of net statistics (Pichichis, Golden Boot). This data is relevant despite the existing journalistic manipulation that revolves around the thesis that the awards obtained by Messi would come as a gift from UEFA and FIFA, as claimed by Calero (2023), Montenegro (2023), Lugano (ESPN, 2023), Morales (2022), and Libertad Digital (2014). That is to say, in the case of individual awards via suffrage, Messi surpasses Ronaldo, and in the case of individual awards obtained via net statistics, Messi also surpasses Ronaldo, rendering null and void the journalistic thesis that has boiled over after the obtaining the World Cup by Argentina and Messi in Qatar.

That accusation is complex. If for an award the voters are the captains of national teams, coaches of national teams, sports journalists, then they would have to agree to vote and select Messi, that is, to supposedly 'give' him the corresponding award. And it is paradoxical, because just in the voting for the Ballon d'Or won by Cristiano Ronaldo in 2014, it was accused that some of the votes did not coincide with the choices that some voters had made (Infobae, 2017), added to that for the only time FIFA delayed the vote by two weeks the same year in which the beneficiary was Cristiano Ronaldo (ESPN, 2013, Fest, 2013).

Table 6. *Messi and Ronaldo in World Championships (adults)*

Player	World Cups	Games	Triumphs	Goals	G/P	Assist	P/A	Better position	World MVP	MVP p/p ⁶
Messi	5	26	16	13	0.50	5	0.19	Champion, 2022 Runner-up, 2014	MVP 2022 ⁷ MVP 2014	11
Ronaldo	5	22	9	8	0.36	2	0.09	Semifinalist, 2006	--	7
Penalty goals: Messi kicked five penalties in World Cups, scoring four of them and missing one. Ronaldo took two penalties in World Cups, hitting one and missing one.										
Legend: GP: Goals per game.										

Source: self made.

⁶This statistic began to be followed in 2002.

⁷He became the first player to win the World Cup MVP, and at the same time become World Champion since Romario achieved it with Brazil in the 1994 World Cup.

Both Messi and Ronaldo have participated in five World Cups since their debut in these instances in 2006. Considering that the World Cup is the most important competition in this sport in the world, the statistics are widely favorable to Messi, and even more so after the triumph achieved in the world championship in Qatar in 2022. Looking at the statistics, in the same number of world cups, Messi surpasses Ronaldo in games played, wins for his team, goals scored, goal average, assists, assist average, best position achieved in this event, world cup MVP, match MVP.

Table 7. Goals scored by Messi and Ronaldo against national teams according to their respective rankings

National team ranking	Goals		%	
1-10	Messi	17	M	16
	Ronaldo	16	R	13
11-50	Messi	43	M	42
	Ronaldo	44	R	36
51-100	Messi	31	M	30
	Ronaldo	32	R	25
100+	Messi	13	M	12
	Ronaldo	31	R	26
TOTALS	Messi	104	M	100
	Ronaldo	123	R	100

Note: Taken from Maverino (2023).

Referring to the ranking of national teams to which both Messi and Ronaldo have scored goals, there is a certain parity in relation to the total goals and the ranking of said teams. When considering the percentage, the difference is noticeable: Messi has scored 60 goals against teams ranked up to 50th in the ranking, and Ronaldo has scored the same amount against that same group of teams. However, considering the percentage, it is noted that, in Messi, his goal contribution to those teams, points to 58% of his total goals scored, while in the case of Ronaldo it amounts to 49%. Messi has scored 91 goals (88%) against teams ranked up to 100th in the ranking, and Ronaldo has scored 92 goals (74%) against that same group. The rest of the goals of both players have been scored against teams that are below 100th in the ranking, being in the case of Messi 12%, and in the case of Ronaldo 26%.

As of the information cut-off date for this job⁸, Argentina leads the world ranking of national teams generated by FIFA (2023), and Brazil occupies 3rd place. Following in that order are Colombia (16), Uruguay (17), Peru (22), Chile (36), Ecuador (38), Paraguay (52), Venezuela (53) and Bolivia (83). Portugal is the No. 8 team in this ranking and shares a group with Slovakia (48), Bosnia (63), Iceland (67),

⁸9-21-2023: <https://www.fifa.com/es/fifa-world-ranking/men?dateId=id14142>

Luxembourg (85) and Liechtenstein (199). The ranking shows that the level of competition of both teams is higher for Argentina.

In its qualifying rounds, Argentina faces 6 teams that are above the first team that Portugal must face in its qualifying rounds. Now, it is not only because of the level by which the teams are ranked, but also because of the group of footballers that they bring together. The countries that export the most players are Brazil, France and Argentina, in that order. They are followed by England, Spain, Colombia, Germany, Croatia, Nigeria and Serbia (CIES Football Observatory Weekly Post, 2023). This is the top ten countries that export soccer players, and it is striking that, of these 10 countries, only three are South American; however, 45% of the total of these players do come from South America.

The South American qualifiers pit Messi against Neymar, Luis Suárez against Radamel Falcao, among others. But, for Ronaldo to face Lewandowski or Mbappé in Europe, it has to happen, either in a World Cup, or in a European Championship, or in an international friendly. The European qualifiers are short, with small groups in which traditional teams are favored since they are seeded. There are always surprises in the playoffs, but these are few. The South American qualifiers are, by far, the longest, most complex and the best qualifiers in the world (Barraza, 2023).

According to Reuters (2022), if we talk about the transfer value of the national teams and their formation for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, England was the team with the highest value quantified by the group of its players, followed by Brazil, France, Spain, Portugal and Germany, respectively. Now, as of October 2023, this list has changed a little, having the following teams in the first six in order: England, France, Portugal, Brazil, Argentina, Spain (Transfermarkt, 2023). Curiously, Argentina has not topped the list, neither before the World Cup nor after it, despite having achieved victory and what it meant in signings of Argentine teams after the cup. On the other hand, it is noted that Portugal has been better positioned in this regard, which, in some way, demolishes the thesis that the value of the players of both teams favors Argentina. What's more, the world champion Argentina team is a renewed team full of new players compared to the Portugal, France, Brazil, and Germany teams. That is to say, Argentina was not a team full of established players, apart from Messi, Di María and Lautaro. A very good team full of young players.

According to the Oxford model, created by mathematician Joshua Bull, a prediction was made by creating a prioritizing order of teams that could win the Soccer World Cup, considering the performance of the men's national soccer teams, taking the performance of the men's soccer teams as a predictive reference. last 4 years (using the year of the World Cup as a standard) at the level of results. The research was done based on data from Elo Ratings, a rating system for men's national soccer teams,

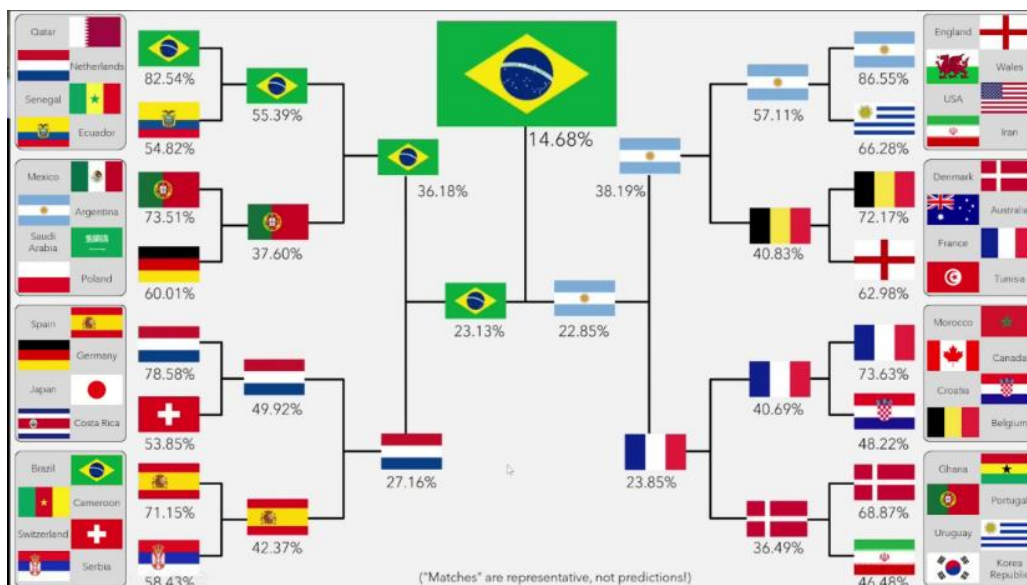
focusing on all international matches since 2018. It simulated the group stages a million times, taking the most common results, and then advance each eliminatory game 100 thousand times (Doberti, 2022).

Figure 1. Results of the Oxford Mathematical Model in relation to teams with the highest probability of winning the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Note: Taken from Oxford Mathematics (2022).



The study showed that the team with the highest probability of winning the World Cup was Brazil with 14.72% probability, followed by Argentina with 14.36%, Holland with 7.84%, Spain with 7.03%, France with 6.37 %, Belgium with 6.31%, Portugal with 5.60%, among other selections. That is, the model highlighted Argentina as the second team with the highest probability of winning the World Cup.

Figure 2. Representation of the Oxford Model for the Qatar World Cup, 2022. Note: Taken from Oxford Mathematics (2022).



It is worth noting that, when they met in finals, Messi triumphed against Neymar (Copa América), Cristiano Ronaldo (UEFA Champions League), Mbappé (World Cup), and lost a final with Cristiano Ronaldo (Copa del Rey -Spain-, 2011).

Figure 3. Historical ranking of scorers. Note: Taken <https://n9.cl/ww36p>

Ránking estimado (Máximo Goleador del Fútbol Profesional) ✓ GOLES OFICIALES * Última Actualización 20-06-2023					
	JUGADOR	GOLES	Partidos	Promedio	Temporadas
1°	Cristiano Ronaldo	849	1178	0,72	2002-Act
2°	Lionel Messi	817	1035	0,79	2004-Act
3°	Josef Bican	805	530	1,53	1928-56
4°	Pelé	757	815	0,92	1956-1977
5°	Romario	743	961	0,77	1985-2009
6°	Ferenc Puskás	706	718	0,99	1943-66
7°	Gerd Müller	681	758	0,9	1962-83
8°	Jimmy Jones	647	614	1,05	1946-65
9°	Robert Lewandowski*	621	866	0,72	1999-Act
10°	Zlatan Ibrahimović	573	986	0,58	1999- Act

In reference to the top ten scorers in the history of professional football, it is noted that Ronaldo leads the ranking of scorers with the total number of goals scored, surpassing all the players on the list, just as he also does in terms of the amount of games in which he has participated. It is striking that neither Ronaldo nor Messi have a better average of goals per game. Josef Bican (1.53), Jimmy Jones (1.05), Ferenc Puskás and Pelé (0.92), have a better average than Messi (0.79), while Ronaldo is then surpassed by all the previous ones (and Romario is added to this list with 0.77), given that he reaches an average of 0.72, the same as Robert Lewandowski.

Figure 4. Historical ranking of scorers. Note: Taken from <https://n9.cl/ww36p>

Ránking RSSSF (Incluyendo categorías no profesionales)					
	JUGADOR	GOLES	Partidos	Promedio	Temporadas
1°	Cristiano Ronaldo	849	1178	0,72	2002-Act
2°	Lionel Messi	815	1033	0,79	2004-Act
3°	Josef Bican	805	530	1,52	1928-56
4°	Pelé	765	831	0,92	1956-1977
5°	Romario	753	963	0,80	1985-2009
6°	Ferenc Puskás	741	746	0,99	1943-66
7°	Gerd Müller	735	793	0,9	1962-83
8°	Robert Lewandowski*	593	818	0,73	1999-Act
9°	Ferenc Deak	576	378	1,52	1940-1954
10°	Uwe Seeler	575	616	0,93	1953-1972

This list of total scorers (Figure 4) is led by Cristiano Ronaldo (849 goals). When comparing the average goals per game, the list is led by Josef Bican, tied with Ferenc Deak, followed by Puskás, Seeler, Pelé, Müller, Romario, Messi, Lewandowski, and Ronaldo, respectively. If this table is generated from the goal average, Ronaldo becomes 10th in goal average, while Messi, who is second in total goals, becomes 8th in goal average.

Figure 5. Top scorers in a single club. Note: Taken from <https://n9.cl/ww36p>

Máximos Goleadores en un mismo club			
	JUGADOR	GOLES	Partidos
1°	Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona)	670	778
2°	Pelé (Santos)	643	659
3°	Gerd Müller (Bayern Múnich)	570	611
4°	Josef Bican (Slavia de Praga)	534	274
5°	Uwe Seeler (Hamburgo)	490	580
6°	Eusébio (Benfica)	473	440
7°	Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)	450	433
8°	Ian Rush (Liverpool)	349	604
9°	Telmo Zarra (Athletic Club)	335	354
10°	Raúl González (Real Madrid)	323	741

Messi (Figure 5) is the player with the most goals in a single club (670), followed by Pelé, Müller, Bican, Seeler, Eusébio and Ronaldo in 7th place.

Figure 6. Top international scorers. Note: Taken from <https://n9.cl/ww36p>

Máximos Goleadores internacionales (selecciones)			
	JUGADOR	GOLES	Partidos
1°	Cristiano Ronaldo (Portugal)	124	200
2°	Ali Daei (Irán)	109	149
3°	Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona)	98	172
4°	Mokhtar Dahari	89	142
5°	Ferenc Puskás (Hungría)	84	89
6°	Sunil Chhetri	84	129
7°	Ali Mbkhout	79	105
8°	Godfrey Chitalu (Zambia)	79	111
9°	Hussein Saeed (Irak)	78	137
10°	Pelé (Brasil)	77	92

Ronaldo leads the list of players with the most goals scored for his country's national team, with 124 goals, followed by Daei, Messi, Dahari and Puskás. If the goal average is calculated, it is noted that Puskás, with an average of 0.94 goals per game, is in front, followed by Pelé (0.83) and Daei (0.73), respectively.

#	JUGADOR	PERÍODO	ESPAÑA	INGLATERRA	ITALIA	ALEMANIA	FRANCIA	TOTAL
1	Lionel Messi	2004-2023	474	0	0	0	22	496
2	Cristiano Ronaldo	2003-2022	311	103	81	0	0	495
3	Jimmy Greaves	1957-1971	0	357	9	0	0	366
4	Gerd Müller	1965-1979	0	0	0	365	0	365
5	Robert Lewandowski	2010-2023	23	0	0	312	0	335
6	Steve Bloomer	1892-1914	0	314	0	0	0	314
7	Dixie Dean	1924-1938	0	310	0	0	0	310
8	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	2004-2023	16	17	156	0	113	302
9	Delio Onnis	1971-1986	0	0	0	0	299	299
10	Gordon Hodgson	1925-1939	0	287	0	0	0	287

Figure 7. Top scorers at club level in Europe. Note: Taken from <https://n9.cl/8bxm4>

The list of top scorers at club level in Europe is led by Messi and followed by just the slightest difference by Cristiano Ronaldo. Next on the list are Greaves and Müller (both retired), and Lewandowski (who remains active playing for Barcelona FC). The Polish player is 1 year younger than Messi and 3 years younger than Ronaldo. Since Cristiano Ronaldo left Real Madrid, he has won 6 titles in 6 years (including one with Al Nassr), while Messi, since he left Barcelona FC, 3 years ago, has won 6 titles (including one with Inter Miami), 1 The Best, 1 Ballon d'Or⁹.

A study carried out by Castañer et al. (2017), in relation to the motor skills of Messi and Ronaldo, and how they use them in goal situations. To do this, they used the OSMOS-footballer instrument and generated associations between more than 50 categories based on the detection of T patterns and polar coordinates. The study concludes by stating that "Messi is considered an unpredictable player in his goal-scoring actions and Ronaldo is considered an accurate shooter with more recurring patterns" (p. 16). In addition to this, the study indicates that Messi's 'Value of actions by estimation of possibilities' (VAEP) is 1.21, while that of Ronaldo is 0.61, which implies that the actions generated by Messi They have greater value in relation to the possibilities that they end in a goal. The curious thing about this study is that it was generated between the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016 seasons, a period in which the Portuguese player obtained more collective and individual triumphs in Spain, and in which he had a greater harvest of goals. than the Argentine.

⁹After this work, Messi won the 8th Ballon d'Or and the 3rd The Best award.

Munguía (2019) developed a study to determine the efficiency of players in the Spanish soccer league. The study used the 'Data Envelopment Analysis' technique (sample of 22 players between the 2014-15 and 2017-18 seasons), taking as variables the age, purchase price and minutes played of each player, goals, assists and market value. The results of the study point to Messi as the most efficient player in the league, followed by Gareth Bale, Luis Suárez and Cristiano Ronaldo. He highlights that "In the particular duel between Messi and Cristiano, it is the Argentine who achieves a higher efficiency index" (p. 2). Up to this point, specific data has been presented with reference to the variables originally proposed. Below are arguments presented by the press and journalists. After the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, a series of questions began about the title obtained by Argentina in this competition, and this situation has served to increase a series of accusations from the sports press (and other figures) regarding the legitimacy of sporting achievements. of Lionel Messi, which, according to this matrix of opinion, would be detrimental to Cristiano Ronaldo, because, according to the press and some journalists, Messi's sporting achievements would be gifts from FIFA, UEFA, or because Xavi and Iniesta would have been the true heroes of Barcelona's exploits in the era in which these players came together. In fact, in the press there are statements such as the following:

Table 8. *Accusations against Lionel Messi*

Information	Fountain	Involved
Messi won the World Cup in Qatar, helped by FIFA through penalties	Scope, 2023	Álvaro Morales (ESPN journalist)
FIFA favors Messi	Mena, 2023	Álvaro Morales (ESPN journalist)
They give Messi the prizes	Clarín, 2023	Juanma Rodríguez (El Chiringuito commentator)
Messi, cold chest	González, 2019 Capital, 2022 A24, 2022	Spanish and Latin American press Tomás Roncero (El Chiringuito commentator) Álvaro Morales (ESPN journalist)
Messi, failure	D13, 2022	Álvaro Morales (ESPN journalist)
Messi doesn't win anything important without Xavi and Iniesta	TUDN, 2020	Jürgen Klopp (Liverpool manager)

Source: self made.

The Portuguese player is, on his own merit, one of the great footballers in history. He is a total footballer, worked from conscience, from the clear and obsessive assumption of a goal. He is a player committed to training based on seriousness and professionalism, difficult to see in these times. Nobody has given him what he has earned, he has obtained it through personal merit and from the group of teammates, coaches and other technical bodies that he has had. In fact, Cristiano Ronaldo has become the greatest scorer in history. He still is, now in Saudi Arabia, regardless of the league level.

Ronaldo and Messi did what no pair of footballers in history has done, staying at the top of world football competing against each other for more than a decade. And this is so, because, while it is true that other footballers dominated world football, no one had done it for so long and at such a high level (Browne, 2022). Now, the issue is that, to exalt the figure of Cristiano Ronaldo, some journalists strive to depreciate the merits of Leo Messi, and, in the name of 'journalistic ethics', generate accusations without due journalistic balance (Salas, 2023). So much so that the arguments used are even contradictory. An example of this: the argument that Messi disappears in important moments, when it turns out that he is the player who has scored the most goals in finals in the history of football, even scoring two goals in regular time in the World Cup final in Qatar. and one more in the penalty shootout. And, curiously, when it comes to football issues, the parameters of comparison are unequal. For example: when penalties are kicked by Messi, he is deducted because they were not goals scored in created plays, but through the maximum penalty. However, it seems that, when Ronaldo kicks them, they do have value (Salas, 2023). And, as Ugía (2017) maintains, "We often observe in the digital press that the same news is treated in one way or another" (p. 8).

Little of what Lionel Messi does is seen with the same glasses with which what Cristiano Ronaldo does is seen. Consider that Portugal has qualified for the World Cup, in uncompetitive qualifiers, playing 8 games with teams such as Serbia, Ireland, Luxembourg and Azerbaijan (Figure 6), while Argentina qualifies in the most complex and longest qualifiers on the planet, qualifiers in which 10 teams play, of which only 2 have not been champions of America (Ecuador and Venezuela), and in which only Venezuela has never qualified for the World Cup. However, according to the meta-narrative of journalists such as Álvaro Morales and Martín Lieberman, Messi would be receiving gifts from FIFA, and so much so that the AFA and Conmebol would be in cahoots and have bowed to FIFA to give Argentina qualification for the World Cup, and then he gives them the World Cup.

Figure 8. *Qatar 2022 World Cup qualifying group.* Note: Taken from <https://cutt.ly/UwcPaYPG>

Europa - Fase 1 Grupo A Clasificación Mundial Qatar 2022								
Grupo A	Grupo B	Grupo C	Grupo D	Grupo E	Grupo F	Grupo G	Grupo H	Grupo I
EQUIPO	PJ	PG	PE	PP	GF	GC	PT	
1 Serbia	8	6	2	0	18	9	20	
2 Portugal	8	5	2	1	17	6	17	
3 Irlanda	8	2	3	3	11	8	9	
4 Luxemburgo	8	3	0	5	8	18	9	
5 Azerbaiyán	8	0	1	7	5	18	1	

An example: Al Nassr qualified a few days ago for the 2024 Asian Champions League, with goals from Ronaldo. It was fantastic. Well, it turns out that Inter Miami qualified for the ConcaChampions 2024, in order to reach the final of the Leagues Cup, but that was not news to these journalists. What was news? That Conmebol is considering inviting Inter Miami to play in the Copa Libertadores de América... And that, according to Morales and Lieberman, is a little gift. Ronaldo earns it, and Messi gets it as a gift. Inter Miami's natural competition is Concacaf, not Conmebol. Inter Miami earned participation in the ConcaChampions, playing and scoring goals to win the games, even arriving at that competition as the worst team in the MLS league and competing with the Mexican league clubs.

Leo Messi won 4 UEFA Champions Leagues, but, for the detractors, it was not like that. These titles would have been won by Xavi, Iniesta, Puyol, and Messi was a companion. However, note that, with the exception of the cup obtained in 2006 in which Messi played 6 games, scored a goal and provided 2 assists, in the cups obtained in 2009 (12 games, 9 goals and 5 assists), 2011 (11 games, 14 goals and 5 assists), and 2015 (13 games, 10 goals and 6 assists), his performance was the best of his entire team, scoring in 2 of the 3 finals he played in (he did not participate in 2006 due to injury).

Figure 9. Statistics Xavi, Iniesta and Messi in 2010 in Spain. Note: Taken from Marca (2011).

La Liga 2010	Iniesta	Messi	Xavi
Apariciones	32	36	33
Minutos Jugados	2 466	3 133	2 591
Goles	5	42	6
Minutos por gol	493	75	432
Tiros por partido	1,2	5,2	1,2
% precisión de tiro	55%	64%	63%
Toques por partido	83	80	108
Asistencia de gol	6	15	12
Pases por partido	61	53	89
% pases completados	90%	87%	92%
Duelos por partido	10	15	6
% duelos ganados	58%	51%	57%
Cambio de juego por partido	2,3	1,6	4,5
% de cambios de juego completado	21%	29%	32%
Entradas por partido	1,5	0,9	1
% entradas ganadas	83%	85%	76%

The same thing happens with the Argentina team. According to his detractors, Messi would never have won anything if it had not been for Di María. Consider, for example, the data from the Copa América won by Argentina in 2021. Messi finished with 4 goals and 5 assists, being the scoring leader along with Luis Díaz (Colombia) and Gianluca Lapadula (Peru), and the leader in assists.

He was named MVP of the cup. Di María finished the tournament named Best Player in the Final (as appropriate), with one goal and one assist in the entire tournament (goal in the final). And the World Cup in Qatar, well, the comparison maintains the same logic: Di María playing 5 games, one goal and one assist, while Messi ends up being the most decisive for the team, again: 7 games, 7 goals, 3 assists. Both scored in the final in Qatar, with Messi scoring in regular time and extra time. In the case of Cristiano Ronaldo, the metanarrative presents him as the hero who made Madrid a great team by leading it to win 4 more European cups, as if he had played alone and with a team in decline.

Let's see: note that Cristiano Ronaldo is champion of the Euro Cup, but he did not play in that final. However, the press does not question Ronaldo's Euro Cup title. In the entire tournament, he scored 3 goals, half of what Griezmann scored with France in that event, and he did not play in the final. But he is hailed, justly, as he writes, as a European champion. If we compare the Euro Cup won by Ronaldo and the Copa América won by Messi, we would have that Ronaldo scored 3 goals and one assist, and he did not play in the final; while Messi scored 4 goals, gave 5 assists, playing in the final of the tournament. Should the fact that he had not scored in the final detract from his merits? Why in the case of Messi, and not in the case of Ronaldo? Or, why is Ronaldo recognized, with In all fairness, his Euro Cup title, but in the case of Messi, is the treatment different?

A comparison of the statistics of the Copa América 2021 and the Euro 2020 (See figure 10), shows the contribution of Messi and the leadership of the Argentine statistics compared to the leaders in the Euro Cup statistics. Messi dominated all the statistics in his tournament, while, in Europe, there was no player with such a decisive level.

Figure 10. Comparative leadership in Copa América 2021 and Euro 2020. Note: Taken from <https://urlc.net/wpru>



Another example: Ronaldo Nazario has two World Cups to his credit, the one he won in 1994 and the one in 2002. However, he did not even officially step on the field in 1994, but he is still counted and is not questioned. The same goes for Pelé. Pelé played in 4 World Cups (1958, 1962, 1966 and 1970). In 1958 (6 goals) and 1962 (1 goal) he was champion, as well as in 1970 (4 goals). 4 World Cups played, he scored 12 goals and registered 10 assists, with 3 titles obtained. But no one questions Pelé's 1962 title, but on the contrary, it is awarded fairly and without discrediting him, because, despite the fact that Pelé played only two games and could not continue the World Cup due to an injury, in the end After all, he was a member of the Brazilian team that won the title (TyC Sports, 2022).

According to the journalists who have already been mentioned, Messi did not win the World Cup, they would have given it to him as a gift. It is difficult to understand then that the other 31 teams and the other 31 federations are also fans of Messi, including Portugal, because, 'knowing' that 'everything would have been arranged' for Messi to win the World Cup, so they went to play it without a word. . Those who cite such comments, generating matrices of opinion, seem not to remember that Argentina defeated Holland, Croatia and France in consecutive phases. In that order, the best from the previous World Cup (2018), and they forget that in 2014 Argentina lost the final with Germany, by one goal to zero and in extra time.

See the topic of the Ballon d'Or. It turns out that, for Messi's detractors, Lionel Messi's balls are gifts from FIFA. According to such opinions, Cristiano Ronaldo was the loser, even the year in which Spain won the World Cup, and the Ballon d'Or was given to Messi, above Xavi and Iniesta. That year, Iniesta spent much of the season

injured, without playing, and managed to reach the World Cup. While it is true Iniesta scored the goal with which Spain won the World Cup, that goal would not be enough to silence Messi's season and his raw statistics at Barcelona FC. If the performance of both players in the UEFA Champions League that year is considered, Messi scored 12 goals, being the leading scorer, while Iniesta scored only 1 goal. In relation to assists, Iniesta achieved 5 and Messi achieved 3 of them. At the World Cup in South Africa, Xavi participated in 7 games, scored no goals and provided 1 assist; Iniesta played 6 games, scored 2 goals (one of them, the goal scored in the final) and did not provide any goal assists. Messi did not score goals or assists in the World Cup. The Golden Ball of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa was Diego Forlán, a Uruguayan striker who ended up scoring 5 goals and giving one assist, and also had a season in the Spanish league with 18 goals and 8 assists.

If the logic associated with Iniesta's benefit from the 2010 Ballon d'Or were the generic logic to apply, then the 2014 Ballon d'Or would have had to be given to Mario Gotze, who scored the goal with which Germany defeated Argentina. in the end. However, that was Gotze's outstanding performance all season, so he was not considered the winner of the award, and it was awarded to Cristiano Ronaldo. Furthermore, the German player who came highest in the voting for the 2014 Ballon d'Or was Manuel Neuer, who could have won it, given that his season was superlative: he won the Bundesliga, the German Cup, the World Cup with Germany . He was UEFA goalkeeper of the year, best goalkeeper of the year for the International Federation of Football History and Statistics (IFFHS), 2014 World Cup gold glove winner and member of the World Cup ideal 11.

The questioning of the Ballon d'Or votes could be inconsequential in the sense that the analysis criterion with parity is not applied, also considering that these votes involve three actors with the right to vote: technical directors of national teams, captains of national teams and journalists with the right to vote.

If the same criteria were applied to Messi, then the 2014 Ballon d'Or should have been awarded to Manuel Neuer and not Ronaldo, the 2013 Ballon d'Or that was awarded to Ronaldo should have been awarded to Ribéry or to Messi himself. That year, by titles, Ribéry was superior (UEFA Champions League, Bundesliga, German Cup, European Super Cup, Club World Cup; best player of the year for UEFA, best player of the Super Cup, Bundesliga player of the year, ball gold from the Club World Cup, Global Soccer Awards), and by statistics, Messi (60 goals) was superior to Ronaldo (55 goals).

Ribéry declared: "It was unfair. It was an incredible year for me. I should have won. They extended the time for delivery of votes, something strange happened. It seemed like a political decision to me" (ESPN, 2022; sec. 1/1). The EFE news agency (2013)

highlights that FIFA delayed the vote by 2 weeks, suggesting that Ronaldo's football moment in that last month was an element that modified voting intentions, in addition to what several reported afterwards. technicians who stated that their votes were altered, including Al Zarra Fahad, Qatar coach at the time of the vote, and who maintained that they asked him to vote for Cristiano Ronaldo, in order to clean up the already worn image of Joseph Blatter in gratitude for the awarding of the Qatar World Cup venue (Infobae, 2017). Shortly before this couple of extended weeks, Messi was injured, and Ronaldo scored 4 goals to qualify Portugal for the World Cup, leaving a different image in the voters' retinas, since the vote should have already closed (ESPN, 2013; Fest, 2013). This is how Marca (2013) describes it: "In this way, the official voting period will close on the 29th, so the jurors will be able to even change their vote if they had already cast it, taking into account the matches played in that period" (sec. 1/1).

In 2018, at the World Cup in Russia, Nordim Amrabat, a Moroccan player, said: "I don't know what he usually does, but he was very impressed with Cristiano Ronaldo, and I heard Pepe ask him at half-time if he could have the 'CR7' shirt. What are we talking about? It is the World Cup, there is no circus here" (Mariño, 2018; sec. 1/1). FIFA later denied the referee's request for a shirt. Curiously, this request could have some favoritism, despite the fact that Morocco ended up losing the match by the minimum.

To date, Messi moved to the United States, to play in the MLS with Inter Miami, and in just 7 games, he won the Leagues Cup title (tournament played between teams from the United States, Canada and Mexico), with 10 goals and 4 assists. He came from playing for the French PSG, winning two leagues in two years and a French Super Cup. The rest would do it with Barcelona and the Argentine team. Ronaldo, to date, plays for Al Nassr in Saudi Arabia. This is his second season, after arriving last year, being terminated by Manchester United due to the player's controversial statements in the middle of the World Cup and on open television. Arriving in Arabia he found a leading league team, but ended up losing the league, eliminated from the Arab Super Cup and the Arabian Cup (Mayorga, 2023). His second season began by winning the Arab Cup and six goals in six games.

Journalists accuse Messi, alleging that he is 'cold-chested', that due to his personality he does not manage the team he plays for, be it his club, be it the Argentine national team, that he disappears in important moments. In reality, it is a weak argument to contradict a player who has 37 goals in 50 finals (this being a world record), and for someone who has just reached 44 collective titles, at club and national team level, world record (shared with Dani Alves), and that, in the final of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar he scored 2 goals, plus a third in the penalty shootout.

Messi has scored 37 goals in finals and provided 16 assists, while Ronaldo has scored 22 goals and provided 2 assists in finals. If we talk about national teams, Messi has scored 4 goals in finals and distributed 9 assists, while Ronaldo has not scored goals or distributed assists in finals. When they met in Spain, Messi played in 23 finals and Ronaldo, 15. Messi scored 26 goals and gave 11 assists, and Ronaldo scored 15 goals with one assist. Curiously, they defenestrate Messi for having played in 5 World Cups to win 'only' one. Ronaldo played in the same number of World Cups, and hasn't won yet.

Pelé won 3 World Cups, but never played in Europe, he only played in Brazil and the United States. So, how is it that he is considered the best in history, if he never faced the great European competition of the time, except in World Cups every 4 years, and only in some of the matches? Some argue that Maradona could be close to that designation of the best in history. He played World Cups, won one and lost a final. He played in Europe, he won Napoli champions in the league and in the UEFA Cup, he played in Spain for Barcelona and Sevilla. But, his unsportsmanlike conduct, associated with numbers that are not close to those of Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, could cancel him out as the best. There are also Johan Cruyff, Michel Platini, Marco Van Basten, but none of them managed to win a world title, and although they had good careers in Europe, they are not close to the numbers of Messi and Ronaldo.

Who could emerge then? Maybe Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo Nazario. But, although they were both phenomena, and, although they were world champions, their numbers are not close to those of Messi and Ronaldo either. Zidane played in two finals, won one and lost the second. He was champion in Europe with Juventus and Real Madrid, with the latter having his best years. Ronaldo managed to win two World Cups (despite the fact that in 1994 he did not play officially) and lost a final, precisely with France. In one of the two world cups won (1994), he was part of the team, but did not play. Maybe Messi and Ronaldo can settle. However, according to statistics, Messi ends up prevailing. And that does not necessarily have to discredit Cristiano Ronaldo. Possibly, some of the aforementioned names should join the bid to be considered the best in history, not only for goals and titles, but also for his legacy in football.

The way in which a certain group of journalists manipulates information in the case of the sports careers of Messi and Ronaldo, allows us to notice that the news was surpassed by opinion, and this may be a product of what was explained by Rojas (2015), it is That is to say, there is impoverishment of the journalistic exercise.

Conclusions

The comparison of sports trajectories is a constant, and, although it is true that statistical metrics result in objective data and information, much of the analysis that

abounds in TV and Internet programs dedicated to opinion and sports reporting, ends up prevailing, not from that context, but from a biased journalistic analysis that influences the collective social imagination.

Regardless of whether it is Messi and Ronaldo for the selected case, the same happens with other athletes in other sports disciplines, with teams, with coaches, in media of all kinds, on social networks, in all countries. Federer-Nadal-Djokovic in tennis dominates the discussion; Fangio-Schumacher-Hamilton-Senna, in F1; Jordan-James, for basketball; Ali-Mayweather-Pacquiao (and others), in boxing, in short, an endless list. Now, for a comparative analysis to be such, it must be understood that the object of comparison must share common traits susceptible to comparison, because otherwise, bias supervenes in the analysis. Finally, it is not about imposing an analysis, since, at the end of the day, it is the person who, with his tastes and preferences, will end up giving 'a' verdict, not 'the' verdict, but one more.

The comparative analysis of the sporting careers of Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo shows two fantastic careers, without it being necessary to demean one player to exalt the other, since each one has earned what he has achieved in his own right. Although it is true that it is understood that some individual awards are awarded based on voting, it is considered that, as in any assessment, it usually happens that opinion is divided, especially when it comes to the projection of the athletes who have been the object of comparison. , but, it is insisted, this does not mean that one should be devalued to exalt the other, which, with evidence in this work, is confirmed to the detriment of Messi.

An ethical treatment of sports statistics is necessary, which serves as support and as a deontological framework for journalistic debate in the so-called mass media such as the web, the written and digital press, TV, social networks, etc. Perhaps it is worth enjoying sporting feats, without the need to apply the binary law to impose tastes and preferences, in addition to recognizing in others what is expected to be recognized in oneself, and in personal preference. It is the beginning of alterity and the otherness that ends up appearing.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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