

1 From goalscorer to politician – The case of Romário and Football Politics in Brazil

2
3 During his playing days, the Brazilian striker Romário was one of the most famous
4 footballers in the world. He played for three of Brazil's top clubs in Rio de Janeiro,
5 as well as Barcelona and PSV Eindhoven. He won the World Cup and scored over
6 one-thousand goals throughout his career. After this successful career, Romário
7 entered politics, first as a deputy in the city of Rio and later as a senator in the state
8 of Rio de Janeiro. Romário's electoral success is not simply down to his footballing
9 ability, nor the popularity of the sport in Brazil. Sports stardom, celebrity and
10 celebrity politicians are also engaging with complex cultural processes. He has
11 traded on his footballing stardom, but he also connects with his electorate through
12 specific policy campaigns that resonate particularly well to with his Brazilian voters.
13 More importantly, he uses football and his footballer career as a metaphor for the
14 wider problems facing Brazilian society. Drawing on literature from Sports Stardom,
15 Celebrity and Celebrity Politicians, this article charts the political career of Romário
16 within the socio-political context of Brazil and argues that celebrity politicians still
17 need to engage with their audiences regardless of their previous careers.

18
19 **Keywords:** Football; Brazil; Celebrity; Sport Stars; Celebrity Politicians.

20 21 Introduction

22
23 It is one of the iconic moments in world football. Shortly before Brazil's quarterfinal match
24 against Holland in the 1994 World Cup in the USA, the wife of Bebeto gave birth to their
25 third child. After scoring Brazil's first goal against the Dutch, the forward celebrated by
26 holding his hands together and rocking an imaginary baby. His teammate Romário
27 celebrated alongside him in the same way. Two Brazilian strikers demonstrated solidarity
28 and a love of the family on the world stage. Sixteen years later, the two (now former)
29 players were in the news again. This time they had both been elected as political
30 representatives; Bebeto in the state legislature of Rio de Janeiro, and Romário into the
31 Chamber of Deputies of the national parliament. In a country whose international image is
32 dominated by football, it is not exceptional that two World Cup-winning players had been
33 successful in political elections. Many Brazilians hold footballers, and especially World Cup
34 winners, in high esteem and this gives these players an initial platform with which to enter
35 politics.

36
37 Romário is one of the greats of Brazilian football. He claims to have scored over a
38 thousand goals and has been labelled as one of the best strikers ever by the likes of
39 Maradona, Roberto Baggio, Michael Laudrup and Johan Cruyff. Romário won the FIFA
40 World Cup in 1994, which followed a silver medal in the 1988 Olympics. He was also voted
41 the world player of the year in 1994 and, after Pelé, he is the highest scorer in the national
42 side's history. In addition, he has played throughout the world. Although the bulk of his
43 career was played in Brazil, he also won the Dutch league three times with PSV
44 Eindhoven, the Spanish League with Barcelona, alongside spells at Valencia, Miami and
45 Adelaide. Most of Romário's games were played in Rio de Janeiro, where he had spells

46 with three of Rio's four clubs. He began his career at Vasco de Gama, before playing for
47 Flamengo, and then their archrivals Fluminense. Further spells at Vasco followed, and it
48 was at their home stadium, the São Januário, that Romário scored his one thousandth
49 goal with a penalty kick. Although he has included goals from his youth career, this
50 landmark is still widely recognised as a significant achievement. Thus, Romário combined
51 the star name, international achievement, national icon and star player of Rio de Janeiro.
52 When standing for election for the Brazilian Socialist Party as a national deputy for the
53 state of Rio de Janeiro and later as a senator, Romário had a distinct advantage. He thus
54 represents a 'celebrity *politician*' (Street, 2004, 2012; Marsh et al, 2010) or a 'famed non
55 politico' (West and Orman, 2002); Romário has traded on his football stardom in order to
56 place himself in the political spotlight.

57

58 It would be facile to suggest that his football stardom is the only reason Romário was
59 elected. It denies the various socio-cultural aspects of Brazilian society and its political
60 momentum. As Archetti (2001) argues in relation to Diego Maradona, understanding
61 cultural context is vital when analysing national sporting heroes. The wider social and
62 political context in Brazil also facilitates this transition, when a famous self-made man that
63 represented the country abroad, coming from unprivileged areas, attracts personal
64 identifications of voters.

65

66 Brazilian footballers are world-renowned and many ply their trade outside of the country,
67 partly due to the financial problems of the clubs. Consequently, players have become
68 potent symbols of Brazil. Street (2012) has highlighted that research into celebrity politics
69 has focussed on the UK and US. Indeed much of this analysis has been on musicians and
70 movie stars, as these reflect the popular culture of both nations. The same is true of
71 academic attention on sport stars. The overwhelming focus in Andrews and Jackson
72 (2001), Gilchrist (2005), and Smart (2005) has been on North American and British sports
73 stars, and very little is mentioned of political involvement. Corrigan (2001), in the former
74 edited volume, discusses Imran Khan and his post-cricket writings and their contribution to
75 his participation in politics. Gilchrist (2005) is a rare example of an academic addressing
76 political engagement by sport stars, but highlighted how they were often apolitical in order
77 to avoid confrontation with their corporate sponsors.

78

79 This article seeks to expand this literature, contributing to the understanding of sports
80 celebrities under socio-political contexts of a country like Brazil. In doing so, it will address
81 the structural factors affecting Brazilian politics and football and how these factors
82 potentially politicised football players into electable politicians, as Romário. This article
83 draws on Brazilian football studies and political sciences, as well as international literature
84 on sports stardom, celebrity and celebrity politicians. This forms the core theoretical
85 foundation to analyse Romário's political discourses through speeches, interviews and
86 positions during his career as deputy (2011-2014) and the first months of his office duties
87 as senator (2015-2023).

88

89 **Sports Stardom, Celebrity and Celebrity Politicians**

90

91 A dual process helps to create the sporting celebrity in late Modernity. On the one hand
92 the sporting hero has attained fame through his or her own talents, hard work and
93 achievements. On the other, they are presented as celebrities by an insatiable media and
94 corporate sponsors. The sporting celebrity hero combines both aspects of this process.
95 The sporting celebrity is not a manufactured product sold by a manipulative culture
96 industry onto an unsuspecting public; the sports star has achieved something and is
97 worshipped by his or her fans accordingly. In this way, sporting celebrity helps illustrate the
98 combined processes. It is not a reductionist dualism that separates 'celebrities' from
99 'heroes'. Boorstin (1971: 70) helped create this dualism by asserting that 'the hero was a
100 big man [sic]; the celebrity is a big name'. For Boorstin (1971), the celebrity is known for
101 their 'well-knownness' and is manufactured by the media through 'pseudo-events'.
102 Following this dualism, Smart (2005) argues that sport stars have achieved something;
103 they have become heroes through sporting achievement. Despite this, they still are
104 packaged and sold as commodities by corporate sponsors and popular media. Stars like
105 Romário are still manufactured in the same way as other celebrities and this helps to
106 sustain their profile.

107
108 The sporting celebrity achieves a central role in the national public's imagination; they
109 become sacred figures. As CLR James (1963) argued, they can become the national
110 heroes of the former colonies. They help place a nation on the world map and become
111 reified as a result. This helps to explain the individualistic aspect of celebrity. 'Sport and
112 sporting heroes,' as Gilchrist (2005: 121) argues, 'are essential in terms of representing an
113 image of the nation to the rest of the world and, internally, play a part in hyper socialisation
114 of the young and the formation of a culturally specific subjectivity'. Footballers like Romário
115 emerge as global stars that represent Brazil. Yet this focus on individual stars is not
116 automatic. Rojek (2001) argues that the social ingredients of democratisation,
117 secularisation, and commodification create the conditions that allow celebrities to emerge.
118 With growing democracy, sporting national heroes contribute a sense of national unity
119 across a widening electorate. They become secular 'saints' as organised religion wanes
120 and are packaged as commodities which contribute to consumer culture. Although it is
121 dangerous to assume a uniform secularisation across the globe, especially when
122 Catholicism still retains a powerful moral and cultural influence in countries like Brazil, the
123 quasi-religious aspect of celebrity is important. The rituals around football help create
124 totemic figures who represent a club or nation (author 1, 2013).

125
126 It is important to note that celebrities, whether sporting or not, are both processes and
127 products (Marshall, 1997; Andrews and Jackson, 2001, Turner, 2004). The media help
128 package and present celebrities to the audience (Boorstin, 1962; Marshall, 1997; Rojek,
129 2001; Whannel, 2001; Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Smart, 2005; Turner, 2004; Gilchrist,
130 2005). Television is a prime driver in this process; 'The role of the media in promoting
131 stardom and celebrity status', as Giulianotti (1999: 118) argues, 'is critical and reciprocal
132 for the biggest medium of all'. Like other nations, Brazil has also seen the emergence of a
133 globalised commercial media network, Globo. This network specialises in various forms of
134 'neo-television' (Eco, 1990), that present 'pseudo-events' (Boorstin, 1963), football, and
135 *novelas* (soap operas). The ritualistic football season helps create its own soap opera, with

136 narratives, characters and dramatic storylines. Significantly, Globo adheres to Maguire's
137 (1999) 'media-sport complex' as it is the official media partner of the main elite football
138 championships in Brazil, both national and local. Regular exposure on television helps
139 propel football stars like Romário into the public consciousness.

140

141 The culture industry has a range of roles that help package and market sport stars and
142 other celebrities as brands. These range from agents, lawyers, PR representatives, and
143 corporate managers. Private sponsorship also helps propel the sports star into the wider
144 media spotlight. Corporate brands, such as Nike, have helped promote stars like Michael
145 Jordan and Tiger Woods (Andrews and Jackson, 2000; Gilchrist, 2005). The Brazilian
146 predilection for utilising nicknames helps create these sporting brands and football stars.
147 At one they symbolise the popular *jogo bonito* image of Brazilian football. No other nation
148 has a team packed with players sporting their nicknames. In parallel, names like Pelé,
149 Garrincha, Zico, Sócrates, Romário, Ronaldo, and Ronaldinho help create a quasi-mythic
150 status for star players. They become world-renowned by a single moniker. These names
151 help elevate Edison Arantes do Nascimento (Pelé), Arthur Antunes Coimbra (Zico), or
152 Romário de Souza Fariaⁱ from a mere footballer to a star. More importantly, the use of
153 nicknames is also informal and a social leveller; nicknames are used by friends. By
154 extension, the mythic star player is also a friend who holds the same status as the fan.
155 This assists the star footballer in their transition to political life.

156

157 Despite the extensive media and corporate support for these stars, celebrity is 'a
158 negotiated terrain of significance' (Marshall, 1997: 47). There is a complex interwoven
159 relationship between media, sponsors, agents, and the celebrities themselves. Despite the
160 early academic focus on manufacturing celebrity, often narratives do not follow designated
161 paths when they hit the public. Whannel (2001) argues that events can build a
162 'vortextuality' of their own. Audiences are not homogenous and they interpret celebrities
163 and the media in varying ways (Hall, 1980; Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998). The
164 celebrity is thus open to a variety of 'collective configurations' (Marshall, 1997: xii) of
165 gender, ethnicity, nationality, and others. In relation to sport, heroes are often tied to
166 notions of masculinity (Whannel, 2001). Those individuals who understand their audiences
167 are the ones who can best navigate the tumultuous waters of stardom.

168

169 Wider political context is vital in understanding the rise of the celebrity politician (Marsh et
170 al., 2010). Growing individualisation means these celebrities become intimates - they are
171 the key sites of where cultural meanings are negotiated (Marshall 1997:72-3). This is tied
172 to a growing individualisation of society where personal beliefs and emotions are asserted
173 (Meštrović, 1997) whilst public participation in politics is falling (Sennett, 1976; Putnam,
174 2000). Bang (2004) argues against this thesis. He suggests that people are still engaged
175 in politics, but in a more individualistic way. Embracing the neo-liberal virtues of individual
176 hard work, they engage in politics for personal reasons. These 'everyday makers' are
177 reflexive and get involved in public participation for personal reasons rather than through
178 duty or ideology. The growing public awareness and interest in politics and the exercise of
179 power has seen the emergence of what Keane (2009) calls 'monitory democracy'.
180 Politicians have now become publically accountable for their decisions. Much of this is tied

181 to new media forms, especially the Internet. There is now a multiplicity of voices that are
182 monitoring, campaigning and lobbying politicians. With this growing awareness, new
183 political movements, such as *Lega Nord*, Pim Fortuyn's List and the Tea Party, are
184 claiming to speak out for unrepresented citizens (Keane, 2002). In the UK and Europe, this
185 awareness has led to disillusionment with the traditional party system and a sense of 'anti-
186 partyism' (Lipow and Seyd 1996; Axford and Huggins 1998). In Brazil, the dissatisfaction
187 with the situation or the distrust on traditional parties and politicians have constantly led to
188 the appearance of opposition or protest votes during the democratic period (Baquero,
189 2000). As will be shown later, Romário is not a protest vote. Growing political interest
190 amongst the populace ensures that 'politicians need to engage on a continuing basis with
191 citizens persuading them to participate. To do so, they use the media and celebrity' (Marsh
192 et al, 2010: 328).

193
194 The role of the media is the one unifying element of academic discourse on celebrity. Not
195 only do they circulate images and stories about the celebrity, they also help present the
196 celebrity in a certain way. The proliferation of print, television and social media helps to
197 personalise and dramatise the celebrity in the public sphere (Gamson, 1994; Meyer,
198 2002). Celebrity politicians must now use the tools of celebrity to reach their audience
199 (Marsh et al, 2010).

200
201 Like the sporting celebrity, the politician is also deemed to have certain qualities. They are
202 seen as imbued from the audience. For Weber (1948), the charismatic authority was seen
203 to be 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from
204 ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least
205 specifically exceptional qualities'. More importantly, the charismatic has to continue to
206 prove themselves to their audience (Weber, 1968: 1112-3) As Turner (2003: 14)
207 eloquently puts it: "When success deserts the charismatic leader, so does his [sic]
208 authority". Similarly, Durkheim (1915: 210) highlights how individuals can acquire "the
209 demon of oratorical inspiration" in these moments of congregation: Like Weber, Durkheim
210 suggests that this force "comes to him from the very group which he addresses"
211 (Durkheim, 1915: 210).

212
213 Presentation of self is vital for the celebrity politician in the media age. Street (2004)
214 argues that celebrity politics is a performance; they have to perform the correct persona in
215 order to appeal to their audience. The heavily mediated world of popular culture informs
216 and influences the political sphere. As Street (1997: 5) states, 'we 'read' our politicians
217 through their gestures and their faces, in the same way that we read performers on
218 television'. Meštrović (1997) has argued that the politician must give the appearance that
219 they are all things to all people. More significantly, the celebrity politician must appeal to
220 *their* audience (Weber 1968, Rojek, 2001; Marshall, 1997).

221
222 Romário is not the first Brazilian footballer to enter politics. One of the stars of the Brazil
223 1982 World Cup team, Zico, was appointed Sports Secretary in 1990, but resigned a year
224 later after Congress rejected his proposal to reform the game and stop corruption. A
225 similar process occurred a few years later when one of the world's most famous players,

226 Pelé, was nominated as Extraordinary Minister for Sport in 1995. Roberto Dinamite is
 227 another footballer who successfully traded on their sporting cultural capital. Dinamite
 228 played for the *Seleção* and spent most of his career at Vasco da Gama in the 1970s and
 229 1980s. After retiring from football he was elected to the Rio State Assembly and later
 230 became president of Vasco da Gama. For the 2014 election, there were twenty-three
 231 former football players that were candidates for deputies and senate in different Brazilian
 232 states. Of these only seven were elected – Romário and Bebeto being the most famous
 233 among them (Folha de S. Paulo, 2014). These numbers reinforce that football stardom
 234 itself does not explain political elections.

235

236 **From goalscorer to politician: Romário and Brazilian football politics**

237

238 Brazil is one of the largest countries in the world and is now emerging as one of the
 239 world's most developing economies. The former Portuguese colony is a federal nation
 240 state that grants significant autonomy to the federal states and the municipalities. These
 241 complex and competing political institutions have helped to create a fragmented political
 242 system and this requires a strong state to unite the disparate groups. Replicating similar
 243 patterns in the former colonial overlordsⁱⁱ, military dictatorship became one way of uniting
 244 the nation. From winning independence from Portugal in 1889, Brazil has endured various
 245 periods of dictatorship or quasi-dictatorship. While the military dictatorship endured from
 246 1964 to 1985, the civilian Getúlio Vargas represented a significant era of quasi-dictatorship
 247 from 1930 to 1946. These periods altogether mean that a third of the 20th century was
 248 marked by authoritarian governments in Brazil.

249

250 The population is ethnically heterogeneous. Native indigenous people saw the arrival of a
 251 large Afro-Brazilian population descended from slaves, immigrants from Portugal, Italy,
 252 Germany, and other European nations migrated to the former colony. Consequently, Brazil
 253 is not an 'ethnic nation' founded on a shared ethnic history (Smith, 1988). Ultimately, it
 254 becomes the apposite example of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). As
 255 inhabitants of a nation do not know every other citizen, they still have a shared sense of
 256 identity. For Anderson (1983), these 'imagined communities' have a series of shared
 257 rituals that unites all inhabitants. Essentially, the nation is constructed in the cultural
 258 sphere through the shared rituals of language, media, and history. Yet there is still an
 259 international flavour to nationalism, as Leite Lopes (2007: 75) states, 'if imagined
 260 communities are built upon specific regional elements of local traditions, these collective
 261 movements are, on the other hand, greatly inspired by ideas that circulate internationally'.
 262 The World Cup, in particular, has been entwined with nationalism from its origins. The first
 263 men's World Cup in 1930 was held in Uruguay to coincide with the centenary of the
 264 nation's foundations. Since then football has become a source of international prestige
 265 (Negreiros, 2009) for the imagined community of Brazil.

266

267 In Brazil, football provides the potent symbol of national prestige and sporting heroes that
 268 reflect the nation's inhabitants. Helal (2003) describes the sporting heroes have similar
 269 histories of overcoming difficulties during their lives, but the Brazilian heroes have also a
 270 trickery (*malandragem*) composition as a positive façade. Romário had a distinctive history

271 during the build-up of his heroism that fits within the mystifying process of Brazilian
272 sporting heroes. In 1992, Romário did not accept to stay on the bench in a friendly football
273 match against Germany. Because of this fact among other disciplinary misbehaviours, he
274 was excluded from the Brazilian squad for the next two years. During qualification for the
275 1994 FIFA World Cup, Brazil would face Uruguay in its last match and needed to win in
276 order to classify to that championship. The technical commission emphasised the
277 discipline and tactical requirements for the players and Romário did not fit in these
278 requirements, but he was already internationally recognized as a great football player and
279 goal-scorer. His re-incorporation to the team happened for that last match and he scored
280 the two goals that classified Brazil to the 1994 World Cup in a Maracanã stadium full of
281 100,000 spectators. His ability and performance as a goal-scorer redeemed his
282 undisciplined record and his laziness during training practices. The cycle would be
283 completed: from a discredited situation, the hero attended the call to save the team and
284 successfully fulfil his role with talent and irreverence. His indiscipline turned him into a
285 political rebel that criticised the Brazilian football establishment – he became a politicized
286 *malandro* (Helal, 2003).

287
288 Later, Romário had a main role on the winning team for the fourth Brazilian title of FIFA
289 World Cup after 24 years. A significant number of the current electorate followed
290 Romário's career and admire his achievements through the Brazilian team. Moreover,
291 many may also believe that Romário represents a 'true' Brazilian, someone who does not
292 fit in every rule, but has talent and overcome social barriers to be successful, even if he
293 needs to fight for changes in those rules. For some people, these characteristics are not
294 desirable for a politician, but Romário managed to conquer a significant electorate from his
295 personality.

296
297 The combination of football stardom and politicalised climate helps a celebrity like Romário
298 to access politics. Understanding the electorate political behaviour that elected Romário
299 requires an overview of the Brazilian politics. Voting is obligatory for all citizens between
300 18 and 70 years old and it is optional for people between 16-17 years-old, as well as those
301 who are over 70 years old. For the 2014 elections, the total electorate totalled 142.8 million
302 voters (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2014a). The system is open to many political parties –
303 currently the Superior Electoral Tribunal records 32 parties (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral,
304 2015). Therefore, alignment and suffrage are not necessarily sustained upon ideological
305 approaches. Balbachevsky and Holzhacker (2004) suggest three main explanations for
306 voting: as an expression of identity with the candidate; as a belief on a potential opposition
307 that the candidate represents; or an expression of the belief on the candidate's
308 management capacity. These positions reflect low levels of information and the
309 uninformed political opinions of the majority Brazilian electorate. In this sense, the
310 electorate are not only influenced in a scale of right or left wing, neither based on 'elite
311 interests/parties' versus 'people's interest/parties', but also the perception on candidate's
312 image of competence and honesty (Borba, 2005).

313
314 For these reasons, Romário's political achievements rely more on how the electorate
315 perceive his personality and fame instead of his ideological and political approaches. His

316 party, the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), claims in its manifesto to express the socialist
317 aspirations of Brazilians aiming to socialise the means and results of economic production
318 while recognizing “democratic and liberal conquerors” of humanity. The party admits the
319 possibility of working within the capitalist system, but it believes that only the socialist
320 approach would be the final solution for the social issues (PSB, 2015). One year after his
321 election for national deputy, a rumour that Romário would leave PSB was quickly denied
322 by him on Twitter: “Reality is simple and clear: I’m socialist and I believe I will stay in PSB
323 until the end of my office period” (Romário, 2011). Although he and his party claims to be
324 socialists, we cannot extend that the ideology conquers Romário’s votes, especially
325 because socialism is usually discredited as a political system in Brazil. Considering the
326 trends identified by Brazilian political science studies, it is very likely that the majority of
327 Romário’s voters do not know his party affiliation or are informed about the PSB’s
328 manifesto.

329
330 Romário’s electoral share has increased since first coming to office, which suggests that
331 he is not simply trading on his sporting capital. For the 2010 elections, in Rio de Janeiro
332 approximately 9.5 million people voted and about 7.4 million voted for one specific
333 candidate – 0.5 million voted for a party instead of a candidate and 1.5 million nulled their
334 vote or voted blank. Romário received 146,859 votes, being the sixth most voted deputy in
335 Rio de Janeiro for that election, among 751 candidates (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2010;
336 Andrade, 2014). On that occasion, Romário received 30% of PSB’s votes for national
337 deputy in Rio de Janeiro (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2010). For the 2014 elections, 7.3
338 million people voted on senator candidates and Romário received 4.68 million votes
339 (63.4%), being the most voted senator in the history for Rio de Janeiro state. His main
340 contender, former Rio de Janeiro city mayor on three legislations Cesar Maia, received 1.5
341 million votes (20.5%). Together with Romário, the PSB elected two other senators among
342 the 27 states (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2014b; Andrade, 2014).

343
344 During Romário’s office period as national deputy (2011-2014), he was vice-president of
345 the Tourism and sport commission of the Deputies Chamber in 2011 and then elected
346 president in 2013, surrogate on the Commission for education and culture, vice-president
347 on the Parliamentary front for people with disabilities and Director for sports and
348 accessibility themes on the Parliamentary front for physical activity. In 2014, last year in
349 office, PSB indicated Romário to join the Participative Legislation Commission as a
350 surrogate, what may be seen as a strategy to expand the areas of action beyond sport to
351 conquer visibility and legitimacy in future elections. These commissions are similar to
352 working groups on specific topics that might be permanent or temporary, being the main
353 space for legislation and inspection (Brasil, 2015).

354
355 Partly due his work in these commissions, Romário presented 17 information
356 requirements, 79 general requirements and 7 indications. More significantly, he authored
357 or co-authored 21 law projects on topics related to people with disabilities (7 projects),
358 sport (5 projects), strategies against corruption (3 projects), education (3 projects) and
359 strategies against sexual abuse and sexual harassment (3 projects). Nine of Romário’s
360 projects were appended to previous proposals, seven were archived for not corresponding

361 to the Chamber's internal rules, four projects still wait for reviews and only one is expected
362 to be discussed by the plenary. These were also the main topics of his 48 discourses at
363 the plenary, but he frequently used his speeches to promote sports events and Brazilian
364 participation on them, to criticise sports governing bodies and to salute actions related to
365 people with disabilities. Romário also required the establishment of an investigation on the
366 Brazilian Football Confederation, which had enough signatures but it was not accepted by
367 the Chambers presidency. During his legislature, 13 of his 48 discourses focused on
368 criticism on the management of the Brazilian Football Confederation, another five
369 mentioned his worries due to the preparation for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and one
370 focused on corruption allegations against the Volleyball Brazilian Confederation. Mentions
371 to people with disabilities and Down syndrome appeared in 14 of his discourses (Brasil,
372 2015).

373

374 These proposals are arguably appealing and significant for the public, bringing media
375 attention and visibility to Romário and to his advocated causes. He appeared to be very
376 active on presenting proposals and participating in commissions. However, during his
377 years in office, he was not competent on legislating and implementing his proposed
378 policies. Confirming the thesis on the disinformation of the Brazilian electorate, his senate
379 election are supported on the successful capacity of image creation and the power of
380 discursive strategies to attract voters, instead of an efficient legislation.

381

382 Understanding the audience is a key part of the celebrity (Rojek, 2001), Romário
383 acknowledges and reinforces his link to his electorate. In a speech given in Parliament on
384 8th October 2014, he declared:

385

386 It's not everyday that a former slum inhabitant is elected senator of the republic and
387 it is not everyday that a candidate receives 4,683,963 votes. For this reason, I will
388 leave the modesty aside to say that this is an historical moment for the parliament
389 and for my state. I'm very honoured to become the most voted senator in the history
390 of Rio de Janeiro. And this fact only increases my responsibility... Some say that I
391 don't have enough experience and I'm acquiring it, but I'm sure I have some
392 experience that those who were born with a silver spoon don't have. I refer to the
393 experience of walking 6km on foot to go to the school, the experience of almost
394 starve in the childhood, of not having a fridge at home, of the difficulties of going to
395 the training sessions when I was a teenager... I also refer to the experience of
396 losing friends to criminality and drugs addiction. Maybe I was elected because a
397 part of the population is tired of the same as always and want to see in the
398 congress people with their face (Faria, 2014).

399

400 Through this speech, Romário highlights how he has attracted the most votes of any
401 senator in the history of Rio de Janeiro. He argues that this was due to two factors. More
402 broadly, it was due to dissatisfaction with the existing political class, particularly
403 considering that his concurrent were a career politician. Specifically it was down to his
404 appeal with the electorate. He did not refer to his sporting exploits, but referred to the fact
405 that he was from the same social background as his electorate and understood their
406 travails and concerns. As the Brazilian political science shows, the candidate personality

407 constitutes the historical basis for structuring the electoral behaviour (Borba, 2005), and
408 this is still the case to explain and how Romário explores his political persona.

409

410 The role of the audience is vital for the charismatic politician. Romário highlights that his
411 audience came from the same social background where he grew up, but this is changing
412 based on his performance as a politician:

413

414 “On the streets, I notice that 80% of those who voted for me are from the lower
415 social classes. Nowadays, many people from the richer social class greet me and
416 say that would vote for me in the next elections. I win the credibility from those who
417 thought I would be another fool that entered the politics to defend lost causes or to
418 steal. Damn, there are deputies for 16 years who did not a single shit!” (Bastos,
419 2012)

420

421 His perceived credibility were conquered on law proposals that were not accepted. Now,
422 as a senator, he repeats the same policy foci, proposing the same laws once denied in the
423 Chambers through the Senate. His three policy strands are inextricably tied to his own
424 background story, as well as resonating with the poor in Rio and more generally in Brazil.
425 Part of this is to provide suitable healthcare to his constituents, but also using sport to
426 promote healthy lifestyles. He has a daughter with Down’s Syndrome, and this is another
427 key element to his support for healthcare. Finally, he campaigns against corruption in the
428 CBF and government. It is this area that is winning him support from other social groups.

429

430 Romário currently maintains two websites: one for Romário the footballer
431 (<http://romario11.com.br>); and one for Romário Faria the politician
432 (<http://www.romario.org>). The same applies to his Facebook pages, where the footballer
433 has 0.5 million fans and the politician has 1.8 million fans. He is carefully presenting
434 himself to his diverse audiences – football fans and the electorate. The website for
435 Romário’s election campaign for national deputy (www.romario4011.com.br) clearly
436 illustrated his intention to draw on his football appeal, whilst at the same time not alienating
437 his audience. Despite playing for three of Rio’s four biggest clubs (Vasco da Gama,
438 Flamengo and Fluminense), Romário chose not to display these club affiliations on his
439 political promotions. Instead, he is seen sporting the green and gold jersey that symbolises
440 Brazilian football. His dedication to his home city of Rio is reinforced on his parliamentary
441 website (<http://www.romario.org>). The headline banner utilises prominent architectural
442 symbols from Rio’s skyline, including the statue of Christ the Redeemer. It also utilises
443 another famous Rio landmark, the Maracanã stadium. This is more detailed than the other
444 landmarks and sits prominently at the centre of the banner. Football and the city are also
445 reinforced through the design of Romário’s name; on the website it is spelled RomáRio to
446 emphasise the city. The final ‘o’ is shaped like a ‘speech bubble’ that suggests that the
447 senator is someone who will say what needs to be said. The link to his former career is
448 emphasised with a ‘full-stop’ in the shape of a football.

449

450 His political website brings together the various proposals he championed as a national
451 deputy and currently as a senator. The website summarises the proposals on eleven
452 topics: harassment in public transportation; Olympic and Paralympic fund; constitution at

453 schools; corruption; revenge pornography; scientific research; people with disabilities;
454 school inclusion; funding to para-sports; sexual abuse; and sport in schools. It reinforces
455 that his policy priorities are related to sport, disabilities, social justice, and corruption. The
456 current status of these projects is not clarified, so it demonstrates that he is very active as
457 a senator. Whilst all these topics are unarguably significant, the majority were appended or
458 archived at the deputy chambers and then again brought in the senate, as mentioned
459 previously. As he did as a player, he built on the work of others, rather than creating
460 everything himself.

461
462 Romário makes use of a variety of ‘media spectacles’ (Kellner 2010) to present his
463 approach. He takes opportunities to present himself as a man of the people, as well as
464 making political points. Romário the politician spoke about the London 2012 Olympics and
465 Paralympics on 6th September 2012. In what Rojek (2001) would call ‘staged celebrity’, the
466 timing of Romário’s speech coincided with a national holiday. September 7th is
467 Independence Day in Brazil and many Brazilians take extended holidays. Romário
468 delivered his speech to an empty parliament as many of the politicians had already left for
469 their vacation. The simple act of delivering the speech to an empty chamber reiterated that
470 Romário was a full-time politician and worthy of public support. It also reinforced the
471 impression that other politicians were not full-time professionals. His political website not
472 only presented his speech as a news story and provided a transcription, but it also
473 published a photograph of his occasion. Many photographs of politicians are taken from
474 the front, with the photographer (and therefore the audience) looking up the politician. This
475 gives the speaker an air of grandeur and importance as well as demonstrating their
476 leadership qualities. For this speech, however, the photograph is taken from over
477 Romário’s left shoulder. The footballer-politician is illustrated from the left side, his face
478 barely visible. The key message from the photo is not the gravitas of the speaker but the
479 reaction of the audience, or lack of them. The deputies had already left for their holiday
480 and Romário was making this point clear.

481

482 **Football as a metaphor for politics**

483

484 Romário is using football, and to a lesser extent the Olympics, as a metaphor for
485 government. In doing so, he is speaking the language of his electorate, and widening his
486 appeal. The metaphor of football is a useful skill to communicate with the electorate.
487 Mascarenhas et al (2014) argue that a significant feature of Lulism, the popularity of the
488 former President Lula, was his ability to speak the language of football. Lula would equate
489 politics with football and insert footballing terms into his speeches. He would refer to
490 teamwork and the quest for victory. He equated his political successes and defeats with
491 the fluctuation of his football team Corinthians. By using the language of football to
492 describe political points, he communicates clearly to a significant proportion of the
493 electorate (Goldblatt, 2014). This form of ‘football-politics’ (Porro and Russo, 2000) helps
494 to simplify political language. In doing so, it promotes the politician as a ‘man-of-the-
495 people’ and appeals to their electorate (Mascarenhas et al, 2014). Romário is replicating
496 this approach. Not only does it reflect his previous career, it also reinforces that he is a
497 ‘man-of-the-people’. His celebrity profile helps to amplify his message as it has given him a

498 public platform. An outspoken critic like Romário, will fill valuable airtime on television, and
499 provide additional debate. Significantly, it also maintains Romário's position in the media
500 and highlights that he is talking the same language as the electorate.

501

502 Romário frequently refers to the corruption of the football federation and the impact that
503 this has had on the national team and club football. His focus on the corruption of the CBF,
504 FIFA, and World Cup led him to contribute a foreword to Andrew Jennings's (2014) book on
505 FIFA and corruption. Jennings is an investigate journalist who has spent a number of
506 years exposing bribery and dubious governance at football's world governing body.
507 Romário thanked Jennings for providing him with the material to challenge and requests
508 more so he can keep up the fight. More importantly, he highlights how poor governance is
509 directly impacting events on the pitch. The day after Brazil were humiliated by a 7-1 defeat
510 to Germany in the semi-final of the 2014 World Cup, Romário provided his analysis:

511

512 Yesterday was a very sad day for our football. Those with good memories will
513 remember my words: "Off the field, we have already lost the World Cup". Sadly it
514 was no different on the field. There is a crisis in our beloved sport. You think the
515 problem is only the players or (coach Luiz Felipe) Scolari? No way. Our football has
516 been deteriorating for years, being sucked dry by talentless moguls. [President]
517 Dilma will have to present the cup to another team. They will take the cup and we
518 will be left with our overpriced stadiums and no material legacy. This is the cup of
519 shame (Ashton, 2014).

520

521 Rather than blame the players and coach, he identified the problems off the pitch as being
522 the issue. Moreover, he focused on the costs of hosting the World Cup and how this
523 shames the nation, rather than the defeat itself.

524

525 More importantly, Romário uses football as a metaphor for wider society. He draws
526 analogies between the focus on political elites on mega-events, rather than on providing
527 quality services for the poor. In an interview with the BBC, he was asked by the journalist
528 Stephen Sackur whether calling FIFA executives thieves, blackmailers and a cancer was
529 the right sort of language to be using when Brazil was being placed under the spotlight
530 across the world. Romário responded:

531

532 I don't know if this is the language used here in Brazil by Brazilians, but this is how I
533 speak. This is how I see these people, people who are really harming Brazil, and
534 Brazilian sport, specifically Brazilian football. These are people who, in my opinion,
535 have no credibility whatsoever. But unfortunately there is an elite in Brazilian politics
536 that let these people do what they are doing. In my opinion they are causing great
537 damage to our country's image... There's here this idea that everything for the
538 World Cup should be up to the FIFA standard and people have been told that the
539 FIFA standard is 100% quality. Why can't we have the FIFA standard, the quality, in
540 hospitals, schools, public transport, security, disabled access? These are what
541 people are demanding in the streets. And the people are right, I agree with them
542 (BBC, 2014).

543

544 He questioned the existing political elites that permits corruption and fraud, not only in
545 football but across society. More importantly, he uses the language of football to call for

546 better quality in public services. The link is that corrupt official demand certain quality
547 standards when demanding commercial advantages, but they cannot do the same for the
548 general public. Those in power demanded certain advantages for their own financial gain,
549 rather than for the public benefit.

550

551 **Conclusion**

552

553 Sporting celebrity politicians attain their exalted position thanks to a number of factors.
554 Through their sporting prowess they attain positions of national and international standing.
555 The media and cultural industries help promote the sporting hero as a celebrity, which
556 sustains their image in the public sphere, and can bring financial rewards. In the politicised
557 world of Brazilian football, footballers assumed a political position. Star players like
558 Sócrates advocated for democracy and were publically political. With the growth of
559 celebrity footballers, openly political views have receded. Gilchrist (2005) has argued that
560 in the globalised commercial world of contemporary sport, these sporting celebrities tend
561 to be apolitical so as to maintain their commercial contracts.

562

563 Romário had a few political insights as a player, yet this became more visible after he
564 retired. He is a global football star who has traded on this public recognition to enter
565 politics. This makes him a 'famed non politico' (West and Orman, 2002) or a 'celebrity
566 *politician*' (Street, 2004, 2012; Marsh et al, 2010). Now Romário is establishing a separate
567 career as a politician, his political stance is emerging. Celebrity politicians operate in
568 similar ways to sporting heroes.

569

570 Being a footballing celebrity clearly provides a significant profile for someone entering
571 politics. This is more advantageous in Brazil where much of the nation's historic national
572 identity has been projected through football. Undoubtedly, Romário has utilised this appeal
573 to his political advantage. His presentation of self during his campaign and on his political
574 webpage clearly draw on his football background. Romário communicates with his
575 electorate using the tools of his football stardom. He uses the full range of social media, a
576 website, twitter, Facebook, and a blog, in order to communicate directly with the voters. In
577 this way, he avoids the monopoly of Globo who may moderate or amend his message.
578 This allows him to present himself as the anti-politician; a 'man-of-the-people' who reflects
579 the average voter in his constituency. Street (1997) highlights the importance of
580 soundbites as they are easy to broadcast on television. Romário's use of twitter and
581 Facebook help him deliver short comments to the electorate. They are soundbites for the
582 Internet generation. More importantly, it also makes him appear accessible and the focus
583 of his polices reflects this.

584

585 Furthermore, he utilises the language of football, as Lula did before, to speak in a way that
586 the voters understand. Romário uses football as a metaphor for wider society. Not only
587 does he identify the corruption and fraud that is taking place in the CBF, he draws the
588 analogy that this money could be better spent on public services to help the poor. In this
589 way he is resonating with his audience and maintaining his public profile. This is also
590 setting himself apart from the traditional political class who are also seen as corrupt,

591 ineffective and apathetic about poor's problems. By utilising the cultural capital of their
 592 previous career and the idea of overcoming the poverty to become an international well-
 593 succeed football player, whilst simultaneously campaigning on key issues, a sporting
 594 celebrity politician like Romário can win popular support and maintain their public profile.

595

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597

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 599 constructive and useful comments have greatly improved this article.

600

601 **Endnotes**

ⁱ Romário is also known by his nickname of *Baixinho* ('Shorty')

ⁱⁱ Throughout a similar period, Portugal was a dictatorship under Salazar, as was Spain under Franco. To a lesser extent, Mussolini's Italy and the 'Regime of the Colonels' in Greece also highlight similar dictatorships.

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