

# FOOTBALL, MEMORY AND HERITAGE: THE STORY OF DJALMA SANTOS

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## ABSTRACT

The article aims at showing results from the project 'Football, Memory and Heritage: a Collection of Oral History Interviews for the *Football Museum*'. The research was performed at the Center for Research and Documentation on Contemporary History of Brazil (FGV, Rio de Janeiro) in partnership with the Football Museum (São Paulo, Brazil). The article shows, on the one hand, how the interest in soccer and its patrimonial and institutional aspects in Brazilian society has been increasing since the creation of collections of testimonies by institutions such as the Museum of Image and Sound in Rio de Janeiro (1965) and in São Paulo (1970), and the Football Museum, opened in 2008, which follows the latest world expographic standards. On the other hand, the article seeks to explore the raw material of testimonies collected from former players of the Brazilian team, who played in the 1958, 1962 and 1970 World Cups, the years the team were champions of the world, in order to put up for discussion how the complex relationships between history and national memory operate in the sports universe. The central argument to be raised in the article is that, in the discourse of former players such as Djalma Santos and others still living, the nostalgia for a bygone era of victories rekindles an important discussion for the collective imagination. The demarcation of boundaries between a glorious past – close to national roots – and a present of defeats or failures marked by 'forgetting' the true form of national play, activates a rhetoric built not only by the athletes but by an expressive fraction of the sporting press and the more general public opinion in which the national sporting memory is seen as impregnated with representations associated with nostalgia, loss and alienation from a 'golden age' of authentic Brazilian football.

## INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, Brazilian football memory has become a field of growing interest. We witness sports journalists dedicating entire books to the biographies of great players of the past. National idols and historic characters of various eras such as Charles Müller, Arthur Friedenreich, Pelé, Leônidas da Silva and Garrincha are some of the most notorious examples, as analysed by the Brazilian researchers such as Lopes (2009), Helal (2001), Mills (2005), Ribeiro (2000), Alfonsi (2013) and others.

In institutional terms, sports memory has become an object of growing attention, as we may notice in the recent and successful creation of the Football Museum, based

in the Pacaembú Stadium in São Paulo. In historical perspective, there is the pioneering role of conservation undertaken by the Museum of Image and Sound (MIS) in Rio de Janeiro, which compiled a series of interviews with players that began in 1967 and was extended until the 1990s. In the last decades, dozens of interviews were conducted with great stars, either retired or in the prime of their careers.

An exemplary case would be the one of Marcos Carneiro de Mendonça, the goalkeeper for Fluminense Football Club during its amateur period, in the first decades of the twentieth century, who was interviewed at the end of the 1960s. This initiative of MIS was materialised in the form of a book, *Futebol é arte (Football is art)*, organised by journalist Mário de Moraes, in which three interviews with great stars of the Brazilian national team are integrally transcribed: Domingos da Guia, Pelé and Zizinho.

In the case of the Center for Research and Documentation on Contemporary History of Brazil (in the Getúlio Vargas Foundation), the collection of oral testimonies is based on and inspired by, on a national level, the example of collective and institutional work. Undertaken by CPDOC/FGV, and founded in 1973 with the donation of private files from politics such as the former minister Gustavo Capanema, it has developed in the last few decades to the recent series on the *Military Memory*.

Within a series of interviews with former players, specifically these social actors enable access to a range of information not recorded in journals and often attached to the oral sphere that is intergroup relations. The use of a qualitative method of research and the Oral History methodology inaugurated by Paul Thompson allowed the observation of the careers of these former players who preceded the more famous players of the Brazilian national team, making it possible for us to raise three broader issues:

- 1) administrative and organisational aspects of national football institutions, such as CBD/CBF (Brazilian Football Confederation), responsible for the management of football;
- 2) technical-tactical properties used by the Brazilian national team coaches who competed in World Cups and their relationships with the previous conceptions of a “national style” of play; and
- 3) the strengths of individual and collective memory present in the memories of these athletes not only in the field, but in other situations that indicate their out-of-game behaviour, and the propaedeutic debate on the discipline and asceticism of football players.

Here, we present the biographical account of the third interviewee in the series of testimonies undertaken by the project Football, Memory and Heritage: Djalma Santos. The former left-back for the Brazilian national team and for Palmeiras allows us to highlight most aspects of the three issues listed above. The three-hour interview was conducted in his home by me and researcher Daniela Alfonsi, from the Museum of Football, in June 2011.

With the introduction of this summarised biography, our paper aims at presenting an initial database and a starting point for the reflection on the construction of football memory in Brazil. Therefore, we intend to discuss the application of Oral History as an indispensable source and method for the constitution of a Social History of Brazilian football.

## THE INTERVIEW

Before focusing on the issues raised by the testimony of former player Djalma Santos, we must report the circumstances and conditions under which our interview occurred. At first we can affirm it was quite different compared with the two first speakers: Luís Moraes (interviewed at the CPDOC in Rio de Janeiro) and Dino Sani (interviewed at the Museum of Football in São Paulo). Being over eighty years old at the time, Djalma established, as a precondition to the interview, that the recording should take place in his home in Uberaba, a city of Minas Gerais. This fact forced the interviewers to go from Rio and from São Paulo to the state of Minas. As observed by Verena Alberti in her book, *Manual de História Oral* (Oral History Manual), the variation of the interview setting directly affects the type of speech that is collected, and is a strategic shift that deserves considerations and reservations.

In this case, one identifies both advantages and disadvantages: while testifying at home, interviewees may feel, at first, more comfortable to speak; on the other hand, they may feel embarrassed when finding themselves surrounded by family members. The interview may develop into a higher degree of informality, leaving the interviewee more relaxed and talkative. On the contrary, it can be argued that in the homely environment there may be several setbacks: telephone calls, ringing mobiles, unpleasant noises and interruptions from relatives, among many imponderable situations that affect the progress of the interview.

In Djalma's case, one can observe the interview was never impaired, and the result was not compromised. The testimony flowed, with a good performance demonstrated by the speaker, despite his advanced age. Djalma expressed his willingness to talk about his career and his memories of the World Cup – it is worth mentioning that he demonstrated familiarity with the cameras and the genre of the interview. The former player spoke during a total period of two and a half hours.

It is important to note some of the differences among Djalma, Luís Moraes and Dino Sani. Unlike Cabeção (Luís Moraes), Djalma is one of the players who achieved stardom by winning titles in international tournaments for the Brazilian national team. He played in four World Cups, and was double world champion (1958/1962), while Cabeção (Luís Moraes) participated in only one. Djalma was always a first-team player, while Cabeção had to settle with being a third-reserve player. Thus, Djalma's trajectory resembles a little more the one of Dino Sani, who was also a champion in the 1958 World Cup, but differs from it because Djalma was awarded another World Cup winners' medal.

We have identified one common aspect among these players, their social origin. The three came from modest families in the city of São Paulo. Luis Moraes was born next to São Jorge Park, Corinthians' training camp, and descends from working parents of Italian origin. Dino Sani, who was born in the neighborhood of Pompéia, also descends from Italian immigrants who worked for Matarazzo Enterprises. Djalma, on the other hand, was born in Bom Retiro, in Prates Street, but grew up in the neighbourhood of Parada Inglesa. His mother, Ms. Laura, and his father, Sebastião, were black and simple, and had poor living conditions.

Djalma's mother was a cleaning lady; she worked in a boarding house and her son helped her. Little is known about his father, who abandoned wife and (three) children after serving as a soldier in the Constitutionalist Revolution in 1932. Ms. Laura remarried, this time a wagon driver of Italian origin, Mr Vitor. Djalma met his father again years later, after his mother's death. It was him, who lived in Canindé, who signed his son's first professional contract with Portuguesa de Desportos, because Djalma was still a minor.

Djalma had an elementary education and never finished school completely. As a child, he performed manual labour to complement his family income; he worked in a shoe factory on Washington Luiz Street, next to Luz Station, where he had an occupational accident. His hand got stuck and the machine cut off part of his finger, which partially made motor movements. The accident prevented him from doing an internship he had planned in the Air Force but, apart from that, he continued to work at the shoe factory. He remembers he worked overtime to compensate for the time spent in football training early in his career.

As a child, Djalma supported Corinthians, but he did not have the means to watch the games in stadiums. He listened to them on the radio. One aspect mentioned in his account on his childhood refers to his sports idols at the time. He says he remembers going to a circus where two great stars of the São Paulo and Brazilian football of the 1940s would perform: Leônidas da Silva (São Paulo) and Domingos da Guia (Corinthians). In his account, the latter, a back player, was his model and was observed carefully by Djalma.

His début in professional football was in Portuguesa de Desportos, a club in which he climbed positions from the children's team to the junior's. Having started in central defence, he secured his place at right back when he became part of the professional league. His position was determined by coach Oswaldo Brandão due to the arrival of back player Brandãozinho to the 'Lusa' team. Djalma remembers that the team had players ready for the Brazilian national team, such as Pinga and Julinho Botelho.

His success while playing for Portuguesa took him to the 'Seleção de Novos' ('New Players' National Team'). Then, he got to the Brazilian national team, for which he would play in the World Cups of 1954, 1958, 1962 and 1966. In the last two, he was already playing for Palmeiras, a club he was fond of after spending more than ten years playing for it. With this privileged status of having competed in four World Cups, his narrative reflected a broader perspective than is possible for other players.

If we focus on the core of his narrative on the participation of Brazil in the World Cups we find a general diagnosis that seems to be relatively simple. He tries to explain why the Brazilian national team loses and why it wins. In his judgment, victories and defeats depend on a single factor: organisation. Brazilians come out winners when executive leaders work on planning and organisation; the Brazilian national team loses when these same leaders fail to organise and plan satisfactorily and rationally.

Accordingly, when commenting on the 1954 World Cup, of which Cabeção had also spoken, he raises the same questions as his national team partner. The elimination in the semi-final against the Hungarians happened because of mistakes from both executive leaders and the coach. About the first ones, he mentions as an example the match against Yugoslavia. At halftime, they were frightened by the football moguls with the information that a tie would eliminate them, when, in fact, as would later be confirmed, they would have qualified. Djalma mentions that he got so worn out at that moment that he entered the field weighing 72 kilos and left it weighing 68 kilos.

With regard to the coach, Zezé Moreira, Djalma did not consider the choice for the tactical system of match-up zone defence suitable. Zezé liked to use the button soccer board to show the tactical and strategic action of players. This requirement made it difficult for the team to develop in the field. Despite the criticism, it does not blemish Djalma's high praise of the coach, who taught him much of what he knows about football.

However, his critical remarks are much more incisive in relation to the executive leaders. First, because they talked too much, he said. They held many meetings that, in his opinion, disturbed more than helped players. Second, because they turned the training camp into a 'party', without encouraging an environment of tranquility. He also remembers that players also 'behaved badly', by secretly leaving the hotels and lodges where they were staying, thus breaking the rules.

Djalma's criticism in relation to the 1954 World Cup is very close to the one addressed to the executive leaders who led the national team during the 1950 World Cup in Brazil. The former player recalls that the widespread news of 'certain victory' (*já ganhou*, meaning 'we already won this one') publicised by the sporting press made an impression on the players in the training camp on the eve of the decisive match against Uruguay and negatively influenced them and contributed to their defeat at the Maracanã on July 16, 1950.

Djalma was then twenty-one years old. He had played for Portuguesa for the past two years, and he listened to the final on the radio, from São Paulo. He repeats the story that circulated then: to capitalise on the victory that seemed imminent, the moguls of CBD <spell this out> changed the training camp headquarters, which was located in Joá, a remote and uninhabited area in the west part of Rio de Janeiro. To come closer to politicians of the time, players were transferred to the São Januário Stadium. Given the proximity to such an environment of euphoria, as the enhanced version of Djalma Santos states, players could not effectively concentrate.

Thus, as other interviewees before him, Djalma's speech supports the organisational factor as decisive for the losses in World Cups. In his words, 'executive leaders do not do things right'. He assigns responsibility, then, to these leaders, who were, according to his view, badly chosen.

Unity and understanding were necessary between different parts, whichever they were – whether heads of delegations, the technical committee or athletes – so that the team could be successful. Even though Djalma almost always exempts players from these responsibilities, he says that in 1954 he was still new to the cast and did not have leadership enough to be a spokesman for the group, which was led by Didi, Bellini and Zito.

Djalma mentions examples of executive leaders who terrorised him. He also remembers the collective force of the Hungarian team, led by Puskas. His description is quite telling:

... the leaders stayed in town. I mean, on the eve of the game, they went to the training camp and went on the entire afternoon, "blah blah blah". In the game against Hungary, they arrived at the camp, we finished playing and someone said: "Remain seated because the men will talk to you." We stayed there, that bunch of people came ... (Santos/Hollanda and Alfonsi 17 July 2011).

Another occasion pointed out by Djalma as he compares situations with both 1950 and 1954 World Cups, was his penalty kick that changed the game against Hungary. He observes that, in case he had missed that kick, he would have surely become a new 'Barbosa', the scapegoat. He would have to bear the burden of being a black player, seen as unstable and unable to help Brazil in the most important moments.

If the argument sustained by the speaker points to organisation and victory in international competitions, his reasoning ultimately finds consistency in the subsequent World Cup, which took place in Sweden in 1958. In his view, 'in 1958 it worked out because it was well organized'. Brazil finally won the cup because it had a professional leadership, committed and mature enough to perform such a job. At this point, he resonates and/or agrees with another consensus voiced by the media, according to which the arrival of João Havelange at the head of CBD contributed to the cohesion and seriousness of the team lifting the trophy for the first time.

The victory in Sweden was favoured by the environment and the professionalisation of the cadres. The Brazilian national team had another coach, Vicente Feola. Djalma highlights the work of Paulo Machado de Carvalho, whom he considers a charismatic leader and 'an understanding person'. It did not minimise his anecdotal traits. The 'almighty' of communicators had some superstitions. The sculpture of a saint was taken to the training camp. He was a leader who stood close to the players, was full of charisma, and worked with an authoritative crew, including a dentist, a trainer (Djalma mentions Paulo Amaral), a masseuse (he mentions Mário Américo), a physician and a psychologist, among others. At that time, there was mutual trust and dialogue.

This positive atmosphere was repeated four years later, when Brazil was champion



for the second time in Chile. But Djalma does not go further on the frustrating campaign in the 1966 World Cup, in England. In this case, with a certain tone of disdain, he says that the festive mood that harmed the team before had returned. In 1966, there was too much freedom and too many parties. Once again, the executive leaders made the mistake of changing the training camp in England.

Aside from the memories of World Cups, Djalma talks about his life in the clubs he played for: Portuguesa (1948–1958), Palmeiras (1958–1968) and Atlético Paranaense (1968–1972). International trips continued to be important as part of his education and for gaining a broader knowledge of the world. He got to know other countries and experienced new situations. He recalls a trip to Egypt and the extreme heat of Cairo and Alexandria. Then, the extreme opposite, when he had the chance to experience the rigorous cold of Denmark. In Europe, they also visited Spain and Sweden. There were also trips to Latin America, to countries such as Colombia and Peru.

But there are excursions whose recollections have nothing but an anecdotal tone. When talking about a trip to Turkey, what makes him laugh has an almost tragic character. He recalls how players went fishing in their free time. He enjoyed fishing in the Bosphorus, at the strait that separates European Istanbul from Asian Istanbul. As it happens Djalma could not swim and, one day, while fishing next to a wall, he fell in the water and almost drowned. He would not have survived if it were not for some Turkish fisherman who saved him.

When speaking of the time he played for clubs in São Paulo, he addresses an important issue: racism.<sup>1</sup> Or rather, from his point of view, the absence of racism. His experience in Palmeiras, known as a team of Italian origin, allows him to state, spontaneously and categorically, that there was no prejudice against the fact of him being ‘creole’ – a term used at different times during the interview, among other similar expressions such as ‘black boy’ and ‘nigger’.

For instance, when talking about Pelé, he always mentions him as ‘the creole’. In his words, there is no such thing as prejudice – it is created by the very people who use it. Thus, he did not feel like a target of racism, as many claim, when he arrived at the former Palestra Itália, which he captained. To support his argument, he says that there was another ‘creole’ in Palmeiras, Ademir Pantera.

The vocabulary appears, here and there, as one of the themes of his testimony. He remembers that while still in Palmeiras, he failed to intercept an air ball in an important match against Peñarol, in Montevideo. When intercepting the ball that threatened the defence of Palmeiras, his kick got an unexpected effect and turned back. The ball hit the crossbar and went into the goal. Therefore, the own goal was nicknamed ‘djalmada’ by his fellow players, alluding to the famous ‘domingada’ by Domingos da Guia.

This expression, however, was positive and referred to when back player Domingos

1 On the issue of racism, we suggest the essay on the player Didi. In his text, Toledo assesses racism in Brazilian football based on the differences between mark prejudice and origin prejudice developed by anthropologist Oracy Nogueira.

da Guia, who handled the ball with class, dribbled through the opponent and took the ball out of the penalty area. As previously mentioned, Da Guia was his great idol: ‘When I was a boy, it was Domingos da Guia. He played the World Cup in Italy. Domingos da Guia. Then, I got very fond of Domingos da Guia. Then, I played with his son, Ademir da Guia.’

In a mnemonic process, very common in accounts of the past, Djalma draws comparisons between ‘yesterday’ and ‘today’. The São Paulo of his childhood was quieter, as he describes the neighbourhood life. There were regional Saint Peter and Saint John street fairs. In the 1950s, there was not space for children in the streets anymore. As for the Brazilian national team, he says that there was not so much harassment from the press. He remembers from time to time his picture appeared in a magazine, and he remembers a journalist from Gazeta, Solange Bibas, who accompanied the teams from São Paulo.

However, the situation was different from the current approach of advertising and the stardom of players. Djalma mentions Neymar, who currently plays for Santos, as a case of concern. In his opinion, wearing gloves in the field is an excess. And even though Neymar is so young, he is already very much harassed. Djalma claims that it is essential for the player to be orientated in order not to lose focus of his career, out or on the field.

The final part of his interview is dedicated to the closing of his career as a player for Atlético Paranaense – he remembers the famous state rivalry with Coritiba – and the beginning of his period as a football coach. During this period, he had various experiences in Brazil and abroad. He coached teams in Bolivia and Peru, then in Italy and even in Saudi Arabia. He spent four years in Italy and learned something ‘barbarian’. He accepted all challenges and took his family with him whenever he wanted to. But he did not like coaching professional teams, ‘it was not who he was’. On the other hand, he greatly enjoyed coaching children, with whom he likes working on discipline. Today, he dedicates his time to football schools in Uberaba, Minas Gerais.

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