

Unconscious Dynamics and Collective Symbolism in Elite Football: A Psycho-Hermeneutic Analysis of Victory and Defeat in the Algerian National Team at the Africa Cup of Nations 2025

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ABSTRACT:

This research aims to analyze competitive sports from a psycho-interpretive perspective, by studying the unconscious and symbolic dynamics that govern individual and collective psychological responses in both victory and defeat. The research stems from the premise that technical explanations of athletic performance remain inadequate to encompass the intense emotions and profound psychological transformations experienced by players, coaches, and spectators during major competitions, particularly in the context of football as a highly symbolic social phenomenon.

The research concluded that a sporting event is not merely a competitive dimension but represents an intense collective psychological experience reflecting identity conflicts, the need for recognition, and the tension between self and other. It also emphasized the importance of the interpretive analytical approach in studying sports phenomena, given its ability to uncover the deep psychological meanings underlying athletic behavior. This opens new avenues for integrating psychoanalysis into sports science and fostering a deeper understanding of the dynamics of athletic competition.

KEYWORDS : Unconscious Dynamics, Collective Symbolism in Elite Football, Psycho-Hermeneutic Analysis

Introduction

A sporting event, especially in the context of major competitions like the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations hosted by Morocco, represents a dynamic and intense space where psychological, social, and symbolic dimensions intersect, transcending the purely physical and tactical aspects of athletic performance. The sporting event is not merely a technical competition; it constitutes a complex semantic structure that activates profound psychological dynamics involving both players and fans.

Within the psychoanalytic approach to sport, the psychological organization of each individual—the coach and the fan—is viewed as a multi-layered structure. This structure is based on a dynamic interaction between conscious processes related to tactical decision-making and performance execution, and a deeper unconscious level governed by the dynamics of psychological conflicts between instinctual drives and repressed emotions (Freud, 1955, p. 64). Although these unconscious dynamics are not present in conscious awareness, they play a structural role in regulating behavior and directing athletic performance, particularly in highly emotionally charged competitive contexts (Ferraro, Tom, 2023). In the same vein, we can view the sporting event as a symbolic space charged with emotions of collective psychological significance, including the reproduction of collective meaning. This makes it a symbolic field where the issues of national identity, belonging, and power are concentrated. Consequently, the sporting experience, especially in decisive moments of competition, is not understood solely through the logic of performance and result, but also as a psychological theater. Socially, it involves a reshaping of relationships between the individual and the group, and between the self and others, within a competitive context.

During a match, a player may experience a subtle psychological conflict between primary defensive impulses, such as the drive to win and prove themselves, and deeply ingrained fears related to failure, loss of acceptance, or what we might call symbolic punishment. Recent studies have shown that this dynamic intensifies particularly in high-stakes competition (Ronel & Segev, 2020, pp. 195-210). Sigmund Freud explained this psychological conflict within his structural model of personality as a constant interaction between the id, as the repository of instinctual drives, and the ego, which performs the function of reconciling the demands of the unconscious id with the requirements of the superego, which embodies the authority of social norms (Freud, 1955). Based on this understanding, the apparent goal of a sporting match—achieving victory—is not simply the primary motivation for athletic performance (Ryba & Wright, 2020), but rather a deeper interplay with a more profound system of instinctual drives that may be connected to the need for... Social recognition, proving merit, and achieving symbolic superiority within the reference group (Schinke, R. J.; Stambulova, N. B.; Si, G.; Moore, Z., 2018) are key to success. Conversely, performance may be burdened by the anxiety of failure and the pressure of collective expectations, factors that have been shown to be linked to increased psychological stress and emotional dysregulation among athletes in high-level competitions (Lundqvist & Andersson, 2021). From this perspective, the playing field is interpreted in socio-psychological literature as an organized symbolic space where collective emotional experiences are concentrated and aggressive tendencies are regulated within a socially legitimate competitive context. It is not merely a physical location for competition. Comparative studies have highlighted structural similarities

between collective rituals and sports matches in terms of bringing individuals together within a specific spatio-temporal framework to produce collective meaning and regulate emotions related to identity and competition (Giulianotti, R., 2021). From a symbolic analytical perspective, the playing field is viewed as a framed psychological space. Symbolic space serves a containment function, allowing competitive tendencies and aggressive emotions to be channeled within socially legitimate rules, thus ensuring the continuity of competitive interaction. This conception intersects with Jungian understanding of collective spaces as projection sites of unconscious meanings and emotions, where the stadium functions as a collective Temenos that enables the release of tensions within a safe symbolic framework (Stanghellini, G; Rosfort, R, 2020). Sociological studies have shown that sports stadiums perform a function similar to ritual spaces, where collective tension and emotion are redirected within symbolic rules that regulate violence and intensify the sense of belonging (Guschwan, 2020).

While the jersey or sports uniform is a central symbolic element in constructing identity and belonging within a competitive context, it transcends its performance function to play a socio-psychological role in activating processes of social identification and integrating the individual into a broader symbolic group (Reinboth, M; Duda, J. L., 2023). Wearing the national team jersey, for both players and fans, contributes to consolidating social identity and strengthening the sense of collective belonging through mechanisms based on the perception of membership in a specific group and the associated loyalty and internal cohesion (Wanna, D.L; al, 2022, pp. 403-421). The jersey also serves as a physical carrier of collective memory, containing historical achievements and numerical symbols, and helps reproduce meaning and emotion over time, thus supporting the formation of immediate bonds of belonging within the highly emotionally charged sporting space (Schinke, R J; Stambulova, N B; Si, G; Moore, Z, 2018). In the same vein, the goal is viewed as a symbol. Central to achievement, and a symbolic representation of the satisfaction of primary drives associated with success and excellence, this aligns with psychoanalytic perspectives that view the moment of registration as the culmination of emotional release and a symbolic response to the desire for recognition and worthiness (Ferraro, 2023). This symbol is not understood merely technically, but as a psychological variable that intensifies emotional tension within the competitive context.

Some psychoanalytic readings attribute fertility/sexual connotations to the goal, as in Adrian Stokes' reading, which links the goal opening to the archetypal maternal symbol and interprets scoring a goal as an unconscious realization of a primitive desire for symbolic victory (Stokes, 1956). While noting that this type of interpretation remains controversial, contemporary psychoanalytic literature indicates that the strength of the emotional charge accompanying the moment of scoring a goal cannot be understood only in light of its tactical dimension, but rather as an intense psychological response to a symbol that carries meanings of recognition and superiority. (Stanghellini, G; Rosfort, R, 2020)

From the same perspective, the audience is not understood as a neutral spectator mass, but as a collective symbolic actor that performs the function of a moral authority that exercises monitoring, judgment, and granting or withdrawing acceptance. This allows it to be read as a representation of the collective superego or the Oedipal father who rewards and punishes through symbolic mechanisms such as applause or disapproval (Longstaffe, S, 2008). From

the perspective of Carl Gustav Jung, we can view the audience as a collective self in which individuals are fused into a single emotional entity, which multiplies the effect of the collective emotional charge in raising or weakening the performance of the team according to the nature of the prevailing interaction. (Giulianotti R., 2021). Contemporary studies have shown that crowd interaction constitutes a central mechanism for regulating collective emotion and contributes to guiding players' performance behavior through mechanisms of pressure, support, or symbolic rejection (Lundqvist & Andersson, 2021). The crowd also performs regulatory functions similar to those of the superego by granting acceptance, imposing normative control, or inflicting moral punishment upon failure (Tamminen & Bennett, 2020, pp. 12-16).

Alongside these central symbols, other elements such as the ball, the referee, and the time of the match emerge as symbolic carriers upon which archetypal representations firmly rooted in the collective unconscious are projected. These contribute to shaping the emotional experience and its meanings during high-level competitions. Modern phenomenological and analytical approaches support this view by highlighting the collective and shared nature of emotion and meaning within the sporting space (Fuchs, 2022, pp. 197-215)

In addition to the central symbols of the sporting event, other elements of the game, such as the ball, the goalkeeper, the referee, and the competitive time, possess symbolic meanings that contribute to shaping the emotional experience during the match (Stanghellini & Rosfort, 2020). The ball can be interpreted as a symbolic object of competition and control, the goalkeeper as a boundary position that regulates the transition between victory and defeat, while the referee assumes a normative, authoritative role that can become a focal point for projecting negative emotions during moments of tension (Fuchs, 2022, pp. 197-215). The time of the match also represents a symbolic framework that intensifies the sense of sequence, pressure, and the limits of action, reflecting a structural tension between beginning and end (Giulianotti, R, 2021). This interpretation confirms that the details of the game do not function as neutral technical elements, but rather carry unconscious psychological meanings rooted in individual and collective experience within the competitive context.

In light of Jungian conception of the collective unconscious, we can view the sports match as a modern space in which collective symbols and archetypes are embodied in an intensely dramatic way. The decisive player may become the embodiment of the "hero" model, while the opponent is reduced to the image of the "shadow" on which the group projects its fears and anxieties. In this sense, the match is not managed as a technical competition only, but as a symbolic drama that circulates the meanings of power, victory, defeat, justice, and identity, where winning and losing are invested as events with collective psychological significance that transcends the direct sports framework. (Jung, Carl Gustav, 1969, pp. 3-11) From a psychoanalytic perspective, we can interpret the sporting match as a symbolic space that activates complex psychological mechanisms for regulating individual and collective drives and emotions. From a Freudian perspective, competition serves a cathartic function through the mechanism of sublimation, whereby aggressive energy and instinctual drives are transformed into an organized symbolic practice governed by rules, thus limiting the transformation of tension into direct social violence (Ferraro, R, 2023). The Jungian perspective complements this understanding by viewing the match as a modern ritual that re-

enacts major archetypal conflicts (hero/opponent, light/shadow), allowing for the circulation of meanings of victory and defeat within a collective horizon that transcends the individual (Giulianotti, R, 2021). In this context, interactive psychological relationships arise, such as identification and transference between players, coaches, and spectators, where authoritarian or narcissistic images are projected within the network of competitive relationships. Under the pressure of competition, defense mechanisms are activated. Psychological defenses, as unconscious responses to protect the ego from anxiety and conflict, can contribute to maintaining emotional cohesion if they are flexible, or become a hindrance if they collapse under pressure. (Lundqvist, C; Andersson, G, 2021)

Despite the numerous studies that have addressed athletic performance from physiological, tactical, or even applied psychological perspectives, interpretive analytical approaches that explore the unconscious dynamics and collective symbols associated with winning and losing in the African context, particularly in international football, remain limited and rare. Studies that approach the sporting match as a multi-layered symbolic corpus, integrating classical and contemporary psychoanalysis to understand the emotional shifts and collective projections associated with the contexts of winning and losing, and extending their analysis beyond the end of the sporting event, are also lacking. This deficiency is particularly evident in the study of national team matches as spaces for reshaping individual and collective identity, rather than merely competitive events with purely technical results.

Study Objective and Positioning:

Based on this scientific gap, the current study seeks to analyze the unconscious dynamics and collective symbols associated with the Algerian national team's matches against the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria in the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations. It employs an analytical-interpretive approach to provide a deeper understanding and interpretation of the sporting event as a socio-psychological practice rich in symbolic meaning. Drawing on psychoanalytic approaches, particularly those of Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein, and Anna Freud, this study aims to deconstruct the symbolic structures and psychological mechanisms that are activated in both victory and defeat.

Research Questions / Analytical Assumptions:

In light of the adopted theoretical framework and the identified research gap, we can propose a set of analytical hypotheses, including:

- 1- The symbolic elements inherent in competitive football matches (such as the goal, jersey, crowd, and referee) function as psychological mediators for regulating unconscious emotional responses among players and fans.
- 2-The psychological function of these symbols varies depending on the outcome of the competitive context (win/lose), reflecting distinct patterns in emotional regulation and the activation of defense mechanisms.
- 3- The collective emotional responses that appear during or after matches should not be understood merely as reactions to technical performance, but rather as projections of deeper symbolic psychological dynamics that contribute to the formation of collective identity and the production of meaning. Methods:

1/Study Design and Methodology : Design and Analytical Approach

In this study, we adopted the hermeneutic-psychoanalytic approach, a qualitative method that aims to analyze the sporting phenomenon as a symbolic structure open to interpretation. This is achieved by deconstructing the behaviors and emotions associated with the sporting event. We applied this method to two case studies: the Algerian national team's matches in the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations against the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria. These two contrasting contexts (win/lose) allowed us to observe the differences in the psychological and emotional dynamics accompanying the sporting event.

2/ Study Material and Units of Analysis:

The study corpus consists of two matches of the Algerian national team during the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, held in Morocco. These matches were selected using purposive comparative sampling to represent two contrasting situations, both semantically and emotionally: the Algeria vs. Democratic Republic of Congo match (victory scenario) and the Algeria vs. Nigeria match (loss scenario).

This comparative approach allows us to observe the shifts in psychological and symbolic responses among sports actors, particularly players, coaching staff, and fans, in two contrasting emotional contexts (victory/defeat). The study relied on a multi-source corpus that included full recordings of the two matches, close-ups that allowed for the observation of players' emotional expressions, crowd behavior in the stands during the match, and reactions after its conclusion, as well as media materials that accompanied the two events (live commentary, media coverage, and press photos). These events were treated not as neutral descriptive data, but as semantic and emotional factors that express underlying psychological dynamics within the sports context. At the analytical level, the corpus was broken down into partial semantic units that were organized around three integrated units:

The modern unit: Event-based Unit: This unit encompasses pivotal moments within a match, such as missed opportunities, decisive goals, controversial refereeing decisions, and protests, as points of extreme tension where psychological and emotional responses intensify.

The Behavioral-Affective Unit:

This unit focuses on the expressions exhibited by players, coaches, and spectators, including body language, gestures, intense emotions, silence, and celebratory displays, as direct behavioral indicators of the psychological states associated with the course and outcome of the match.

The Symbolic Unit:

This unit includes recurring symbolic elements within the sporting event, such as the goal, jersey, spectators, referee, and stadium, which are treated as symbols carrying psychological and social meanings that contribute to shaping the emotional experience and collective identity within the competitive context. This division enabled us to organize the study systematically, linking the event to the behavior and the symbol, thus paving the way for its application to qualitative coding and interpretive analysis, while maintaining consistency between data sources and levels of analysis.

3/ Coding Procedure and Interpretive Framework: The study underwent a qualitative interpretive coding process, which aimed to identify the central mathematical symbols within the competitive event (such as: the goal, the jersey, the audience, the field, the referee) and link them to observable behavioral and emotional indicators. This was done to assign them to operational psychological functions that reflect unconscious dynamics accompanying athletic performance.

The coding process was organized within a unified operational symbolic coding matrix, which enabled the standardization of analysis procedures between the two case studies and ensured methodological consistency and inter-comparability. This matrix allowed for a structured transition from the descriptive observation of behavioral indicators to the identification of their operational psychological significance.

The interpretive framework of the analysis was based on psychological references drawn from classical and contemporary psychoanalysis. These were used as procedural tools to understand unconscious motives, defense mechanisms, and patterns of identification and projection, without delving into detailed theoretical discussion. This adherence to the principle of gradual separation between analytical procedures and theoretical interpretation was maintained.

The analysis was conducted according to a gradual procedural path comprising four successive and integrated stages. These stages aimed at a systematic transition from the initial observation of raw material to structured interpretive analysis, ensuring control over the analytical process and minimizing interpretive bias.

3/1-Initial Observation: Preliminary Observation

In the first stage, recordings of both matches were viewed in their entirety without any prior coding. This was done to develop a general understanding of the course of the sporting event, its temporal structure, and its overall emotional context. In this step, we were able to identify the prevailing psychological climate and patterns of tension and release without direct analytical intervention, thus ensuring that premature interpretations were not imposed on the studied material.

3/2-Segmentation into Episodes

In the second phase, each match was divided into episodes based on significant shifts in the dynamics of the game, particularly pivotal moments, as well as the escalation or explosion of emotional responses from players or the audience, including interventions by refereeing decisions or the coach. This segmentation helped organize the analytical material into coherent semantic time units, which formed the procedural basis for the qualitative coding phase.

3/3-Symbolic Coding:

In the third stage, the selected semantic scenes underwent a qualitative interpretive coding process, relying on a procedural symbolic coding matrix. This coding aimed to identify the recurring central symbols within each scene (such as: goal, jersey, crowd, referee, time), as well as to monitor their behavioral, emotional, and interactive manifestations, and assign them to operational psychological functions within the competitive context. A unified coding grid was adopted for both matches to ensure methodological consistency, comparability between winning and losing scenarios, and to minimize interpretive bias during the analysis process.

3/4- Interpretive Linking to Context:

In the fourth stage, the coding outputs were linked to the overall context of each match, taking into account the nature of the result (win/lose), the structure of interaction between the sports actors, particularly the players, the audience, and the sources of symbolic authority within the sporting event (such as the referee or coaching staff). This linking aimed to place the coded symbols and behavioral patterns within a dynamic network of relationships, allowing for an understanding of how psychological and emotional responses are formed according to the varying competitive context. This serves as a prelude to presenting the analytical results in the dedicated section, without including any extensive theoretical explanation in this stage.

3/5-Symbolic Coding Framework: Symbolic Reference Framework

Within the framework of the coding and analysis process, we linked each identified symbol to operational psychological axes derived from three integrated analytical approaches. These included the analysis of motivations and defense mechanisms, the approach to the collective unconscious and symbols, and the analysis of desire and the relationship with the other within the symbolic system. These references were used as implicit interpretive frameworks that guided the process of reading the symbols and linking them to observed behavioral and emotional indicators. This was done without subjecting them to explicit theoretical discussion within this section, thus ensuring a methodological separation between analytical procedures and theoretical interpretation.

4-Comparative Logic: The study relied on cross-case analysis between the states of victory and defeat, considering them as two distinct symbolic psychological contexts. This allowed for the analysis of differences in emotional and defensive responses among athletes. This comparative logic enabled the discovery of the unconscious structures that regulate athletic behavior in conditions of victory versus defeat.

5/ Methodological Validity and Analytical Rigor: Trustworthiness and Rigor

The study relied on a set of qualitative procedures aimed at enhancing the reliability of the analysis and minimizing interpretive bias. This included adopting a standardized coding grid applied to both cases to ensure analytical consistency, along with documenting analytical decisions in analytical notes that accompanied the coding and interpretive linking stages. Furthermore, continuous revision of the raw material was employed to verify the accuracy of the coding and the validity of the preliminary conclusions. A strict separation between methodological procedures and theoretical interpretation was maintained to preserve the clarity of the methodological structure and enhance the credibility of the interpretive analysis.

Results:

This section presents analytical data in a comparative format between the winning and losing cases. Tables highlight the embodiment of central symbols and the change in emotional and behavioral indicators across semantic scenes. This presentation is descriptive, demonstrating the regularities and variations of the descriptive analysis, paving the way for its subsequent interpretation.

Table No. (01) illustrates the use of emotional symbols across semantic scenes in the two matches

Prevailing emotional state	observed behavior patterns	Observed Indicators	dominant symbol	approximate time frame	scene/stage	match
Initial emotional mobilization/ high anticipation	Unbalanced offensive pressure, sporadic individual initiatives	Regular cheers, synchronized rhythmic applause, immediate collective response	The audience	30_0	Opening	Algeria/Congo
Escalating tension/intense performance anxiety	Accelerating the pace, an uncalculated rush	Unfulfilled opportunities, hesitation in decision-making, clear expressions of frustration	Goal	90_75	Pre-decision	Algeria/Congo
Controlled peak anxiety/emotional control	A cautious defensive focus, considered an offensive precaution. Offensive hedging	A relative slowdown in pace, waiting for decisions, intense visual focus	Time	119_90	Extra time	Algeria/Congo
Controlled peak anxiety/emotional control	A rush towards the stands, an unorganized celebration	Scoring a decisive goal, a synchronized collective surge, physical cohesion	Goal	119	The pivotal moment	Algeria/Congo
Complete psychological relaxation/temporary	A collective, extended celebration; a temporal extension of	Long waves of applause, continuous collective cheers,	The audience	_	After the end	Algeria/Congo

security	.joy	extensive physical contact				
Defensive anticipation/high alert	A conservative, cautious, and tactically astute defensive posture	Constant physical pressure, superiority in one-on-one duels	opponent	30 _ 0	Opening	Algeria/Nigeria
Sudden frustration/sudden shock	Loss of rhythm, organizational disorder	Reaching a target, slowed response, expressions of shock and confusion	Goal	70 _ 45	Midway through the match	Algeria/Nigeria
High anger/rejection of the result	Oppositional behavior, intense emotions	Reaching a target, slowed response, expressions of shock and confusion Frequent rejection signals	The ruling	90	End of match	Algeria/Nigeria
Prolonged Collective emotional disengagement	Group interaction broke down, integration declined	Partial silence, tense discussions, a gradual withdrawal from the crowd	The audience	_	After the match	Algeria/Nigeria

Source prepared by the researchers

Table (1) illustrates a clear distinction in the emotional dynamics and the use of symbols across the symbolic scenes in the two matches, according to the difference in the competitive context between victory and defeat. In the Algeria vs. Democratic Republic of Congo match, the emotional dynamics are characterized by a gradual escalation of tension, especially in the pre-decisive scene, where the focus of the symbol around the goal is accompanied by indicators of instability and an acceleration of play. This is followed by a noticeable shift towards emotional control during extra time, before the pivotal scene witnesses a sharp release represented by a collective surge and uncontrolled celebration after scoring the decisive goal. The process ends with a state of psychological relaxation and positive

emotional mobilization after the final whistle. In contrast, the Algeria vs. Nigeria match shows a different emotional pattern characterized by an early emergence of defensive caution, followed by a sudden shift towards frustration after conceding a goal, then an escalation of protest emotions at the end of the match with the focus of the symbol around the referee. The encounter ends with a gradual withdrawal of the crowd and a decline in The audience's reaction, and this display reflects a regularity in the transformation of emotional states over time within each match, with a clear difference in their direction and intensity between the contexts of winning and losing.

Table No. (02) represents the comparative analysis of the interactive structures and subsequent reflections of the sporting event.

Table 2: Cross-Case Comparison of Interactive and Post-Match Dynamics

Algeria - Nigeria	Algeria - Congo (Win scenario)	Analytical dimension
The final whistle, tinged with refereeing controversy, marked a sudden and abrupt end to the competitive flow of the game	A late goal in stoppage time proved to be a decisive turning point in the match	The pivotal moment
A shift from relative tactical organization to behavioral disintegration in the final minutes.	A shift from cautious emotional control to intense collective expression following the decisive moment	Regulating group behavior inside the stadium
Immediate attack, direct protests, objectionary interactions	Mass surge, simultaneous celebrations, reciprocal physical interaction	Player behavior during decisive moments
A gradual decline in engagement, followed by expressions of anger and resentment.	Continued support before the decision, followed by widespread celebratory unity afterward	Dynamics of interaction with the crowd
The referee became a central focus of the protest interaction	Limited functional presence, John escalating the interaction	The referee's positioning within the interactive scene
The circulation of a video showing a crying fan, direct protests from the players, and verbal altercations.	The appearance of banners with symbolic/political content,	Key symbolic events on the field
A gradual decline in engagement, followed by expressions of anger and	Continued support before the decision, followed by widespread celebratory unity	The sports organization's response

resentment.	.afterward	
The referee became a central focus of the protest interaction	Limited functional presence, John escalating the interaction	The structure of the subsequent media discourse
The circulation of a video showing a crying fan, direct protests from the players, and verbal altercations.	The appearance of banners with symbolic/political content,	The collective mood after the match
		The impact extends into public space
The circulation of a video showing a crying fan, direct protests from the players, and verbal altercations.	The appearance of banners with symbolic/political content,	Time of emotional stability

Source prepared by researchers

The comparative analysis presented in Table (02) reveals a clear difference in the interactive structures and collective emotional dynamics accompanying the sporting event, depending on the match result. In the case of the victory against the Democratic Republic of Congo, the interaction centered around the goal symbol as the decisive moment. The players' behavior was characterized by collective momentum and coordinated movement following the scoring of the decisive goal. This was accompanied by a noticeable shift from tension to emotional release. The audience's interaction was characterized by continuous support, culminating in a collective outburst of celebration. The refereeing authority was relatively present within the dynamics of the interaction. This interactive pattern extended after the end of the match in the form of a positive emotional continuity, manifested in national celebrations and a unified collective mood around the narrative of victory.

In contrast, the loss to Nigeria reveals a different interactive structure, centered on the referee as a central symbol. Emotions and protest behaviors were focused on the refereeing authority after the final whistle. The players displayed temporary emotional reactions followed by protest behavior, reflecting a shift in behavioral organization from caution to relative disarray. The crowd's reaction was characterized by partial silence followed by anger and a gradual withdrawal. This was accompanied by escalating media debate and continued discussion after the match. The extended duration of the impact in this case indicates a collective mood marked by sadness and anger, along with a negative emotional state following the match, and a fragmentation of reactions and interpretations related to the sporting event.

In light of these descriptive findings, we move to discussing their psychological and symbolic significance within the adopted analytical framework. This involves linking the systematic descriptive observation patterns highlighted in the analytical tables to the competitive context in which they were formed. These observational patterns are not understood merely as a direct reflection of the sporting outcome, but rather as indicators of psychological dynamics that govern the interaction of athletes, both individually and collectively, with the competitive event.

The discussion focuses on analyzing the mechanism of central symbols in both victory and defeat, considering them as tools for regulating emotional responses and constructing collective meaning. This contributes to understanding the sporting event within an interpretive analytical framework that transcends its immediate technical dimension and places it within a complex socio-psychological process.

Discussion:

In light of the data shown in Table No. (1), we can interpret the Algerian national team's victory over its counterpart, the Democratic Republic of Congo, from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective as a positive psychological release of repressed tensions. The course of the match showed a gradual escalation in anxiety and tension until the moment the decisive goal was scored in extra time, as a collective psychological release of accumulated tension, which is consistent with the concept of collective catharsis. The symbolic victory leads to the re-establishment of the feeling of recognition and competence within the sports group, meaning that the ego image has returned to balance. We can also interpret that moment as something like a collective emotional explosion and a collective liberation from psychological pressure that was discharged within a collective symbolic structure, and this reflects a psychological release mechanism for repressed tensions. (Lundqvist & Andersson, 2021), we can also interpret the goal from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective as a symbol of satisfying instinctual drives and achieving symbolic victory, making the moment the net ripples as an embodiment of the ego's triumph over the associated internal threat and a culmination of an unconscious desire to prove worthiness and gain collective recognition (Ferraro, Tom, 2023). Some Freudian interpretations, such as Stoks 1956, have explained that this moment has sexual symbolic dimensions, considering the goal opening as an archetypal representation of maternal femininity, meaning that scoring a goal is a symbolic penetration accompanied by the pleasure of victory, which explains the intensity of the emotional charge at the moment of scoring. Despite the controversy surrounding this psychoanalytic interpretation, recent research in symbolic existential analysis confirms the value of the goal, which transcends the technical sporting framework to express a deep psychological satisfaction of the meanings of victory and sees scoring as a release of accumulated tensions. (Stanghellini & Rosfort, (2020), through this interpretation, we can consider the golden goal in the Congo match as the culmination of a psychological process of transcendence for the team, where aggressive competitive energy and tension were transformed into a disciplined sporting achievement within the rules of the game. This demonstrates the function of sport as a socially acceptable cathartic mechanism (Freud, 1955). From Carl Gustav Jung's perspective, we can interpret the player who scored the goal as a collective hero embodying the archetypal hero archetype who returns victorious, carrying the symbolism of victory for the collective self. He achieved for the Algerian national team a victory that, in its symbolism, resembles a successful epic. This reinforces the effectiveness of this moment in stimulating a deep sense of pride and belonging, and in reproducing the shared identity within the symbolic context of the match (Jung, Carl Gustav, 1969). These data explain to us that the match was not only a stage for sporting action but also a space for reorganizing meaning and emotion within an intense, unconscious, symbolic psychological structure. At the level of collective

dynamics, the audience played a crucial role as the collective conscience during the Algerian national team's match against the Democratic Republic of Congo throughout the game. The data shown in Table 1 indicates that the continuous rise in crowd support and regular chants, which boosted morale, was accompanied by increased confidence and emotional discipline among the players. This reflects the audience's function as a collective superego, simultaneously evaluating and supporting the team. This symbolic presence contributed to creating a safe psychological climate that reinforced the sense of social acceptance, a factor known for its positive impact on performance under match pressure (Ferraro, R, 2023). From a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, we can interpret the audience's approval after a victory as a way to satisfy the superego (Freud, 1955). The crowd's chants and applause serve as external recognition of the achievement's value, reducing anxiety and reinforcing feelings of worthiness.

We can also interpret and explain the collective celebration that followed the decisive goal as an embodiment of something like a symbolic paternal relationship, meaning that the audience performs the function of the satisfied father who grants recognition and pride upon superiority, which gives it its emotional and sentimental dimension and transcends its technical value. This appeared in a state of intense emotional fusion within the stands, so that voices and movements were present in a spontaneous celebratory expression, indicating the melting of individual boundaries in favor of a shared emotional experience. From the perspective of Jungian psychoanalysis, we can interpret this fusion as an activation of what is known as the collective self, which is the state in which the individual is fused into a broader collective identity in moments of great symbolic victory. At this moment, the player or the fan is no longer a separate entity, but becomes part of a single psychological structure that shares the emotion and identity. (Giulianotti, R, 2021), thus the audience appears not only as an external support factor in the event of victory, but also as a structural element that actually contributed to transforming the sporting event into a complete symbolic psychological experience. In this experience, the behavioral and emotional outcomes aligned with the indicators in Table (01), reflecting emotional stability and group cohesion. This interaction reflects a positive shift from a state of competitive anxiety to a state of healthy narcissistic reassurance, whereby the player receives symbolic confirmation of the value of the sporting achievement within the framework of the group (Freud, 1955). This dimension acquires particular importance in the context of the results, which showed that the moment of scoring coincided with an organized collective emotional outburst, indicating a relative maturity in the organization of collective emotion. كما يمكننا The national jersey is interpreted as a symbolic representation that transcends its function as a sports garment, becoming a vehicle for identity and collective belonging. A player wearing the Algerian jersey and achieving victory under its banner imbues this symbol with a heightened emotional charge. The victory is no longer perceived as an individual achievement but rather as an expression of collective success linked to the nation's colors and symbols of sovereignty. This aligns to some extent with what modern literature suggests: that a sports team's jersey and logos serve as a marker of collective identity, capable of evoking feelings of pride and collective honor in both players and fans (Stevens, J; Hogg, M. A, 2020). This was clearly evident in the post-match scenes, where Algerian jerseys and flags were displayed in the stands as part of celebratory rituals,

reflecting the public's inclination towards what is known as "basking in reflected glory"—that is, enhancing self-esteem through the mechanism of symbolic identification. (Wanna, D.L; al, 2022). In this sense, victory contributed to deepening the sense of collective identity among fans and re-encoded the national jersey as a symbolic emblem of collective achievement, not merely a physical item associated with athletic practice.

We can also explain the role of the referee, who remained a marginal element in the emotional and symbolic structure of the match. He did not become a focal point of projection or a central symbol of conflict, as often happens in cases of defeat. The positive atmosphere and smooth flow of the match contributed to keeping the referee's authority in the background, as a neutral regulatory framework that did not warrant objection. The absence of hostile reactions from players and the public towards the referee's decisions indicates the absence of the psychological need to seek a "scapegoat," a need usually associated with attempts to justify failure. This context reflects what psychological literature suggests: that success reduces the activation of projective defense mechanisms, as there is no failure that necessitates external blame, redirection of aggression, or frustration to be vented by blaming others. (Ferraro, R, 2023) Conversely, a tacit acceptance of the referee as a guarantor of fairness within the game prevailed. This can be explained by the fact that winning generates a sense of psychological security and reduces sensitivity to external factors. This balanced perception of the referee as a neutral authority is a healthy indicator of the soundness of individual and collective ego organization, which, in this case, did not need to defend itself through mechanisms of projection or denial.

In contrast, the loss to Nigeria revealed a different psychological landscape characterized by the dominance of negative emotions and the activation of more intense defensive mechanisms compared to the winning scenario. The emotional trajectory in this case was marked by the emergence of anxiety from the first minutes of the match, as fear of the opponent's strength dominated the team's collective consciousness. This can be interpreted as the activation of one of the "shadow" components in the collective unconscious, where the opponent was represented as the strong and threatening other that necessitates constant vigilance (Jung, Carl Gustav, 1969). Despite the players' ability to temporarily contain this initial anxiety, conceding a surprise goal in the middle of the match constituted a psychological shock that disrupted the emotional and tactical rhythm and led to a noticeable decline in the level of focus and organization. According to performance psychology, we can understand this shift in light of the phenomenon of "suffocation under pressure," where the sudden rise in anxiety levels contributes to weakening mental and physical efficiency during crucial moments. (Lundqvist, C; Andersson, G, 2021), and this was clearly demonstrated by the manifestations of confusion and hesitation that followed the Nigerian goal, indicating a temporary failure in the mechanisms of psychological adaptation to the sudden stress, and a relative fragility in the team's ability to regain emotional balance after the shock. These justification narratives acted as a psychological defense mechanism to protect the collective ego of the public from accepting the painful truth. This represents what is known as the rational justification mechanism, where the mind resorts to interpretations that lessen the impact of failure on the self (Freud, 1955). Sociology has indicated the spread of these defense mechanisms among the public following the loss to the collective self-esteem. (Bromberger, 2020)

Following the final whistle, the psychological landscape shifted to a phase of negative emotional outburst, centered on the symbolism of the referee as the focal point of collective frustration and anger. At that moment, the referee represented authority, onto which the players and fans alike projected their feelings of disappointment and injustice. This manifested in direct protests from the players, characterized by angry body language and clear gestures rejecting the result, alongside jeers and protests from the stands. The general mood then shifted to a silence heavy with suppressed anger. Psychoanalysis interprets this response as a collective activation of the projection mechanism, where blame was directed at the referee as the "other" responsible for the loss, instead of confronting the team's own feelings of helplessness or inertia (Klein, 1956, pp. 99-110). The denial mechanism also emerged in the discourse surrounding the defeat, with widespread interpretations downplaying the Nigerian team's superiority and attributing the loss to external factors such as mistakes. Attributing defeat to refereeing decisions or bad luck are justificatory narratives that serve a defensive function, protecting the collective ego from accepting the painful reality of defeat. This pattern falls under the umbrella of rationalization, where the mind seeks to reinterpret the event in a way that mitigates the threat of failure to self-image (Ferraro, R, 2023). This is confirmed by studies in sports psychology that indicate the prevalence of these defense mechanisms among fans after defeats to preserve collective self-esteem (Tamminen & Bennett, 2017, pp. 183-199 .(

Following a defeat, defensive mechanisms extended to various actors within the sports system, including the coach, the club's management, and the media. At the coach level, a defensive, justificatory discourse was adopted, reinterpreting the loss as a result of tactical or refereeing circumstances rather than acknowledging technical or psychological shortcomings. This can be interpreted as a justification mechanism aimed at protecting the coach's professional image and maintaining the legitimacy of their leadership. While this type of discourse temporarily alleviates immediate psychological pressure, it postpones constructive self-criticism and limits opportunities to learn from the defeat. At the broader fan level, the mechanism of displacement emerged as an indirect means of releasing aggression. Anger was directed towards alternative targets, such as attacking the referee on social media or blaming specific players for the loss. This displacement acts as a safety valve, allowing for the release of pent-up aggression that did not find a sufficient outlet during the match (Ferraro & Tom, 2023). However, the danger of these defensive mechanisms lies in prolonging negative emotions rather than containing them. Data has shown that The collective mood after a defeat was characterized by prolonged sadness and anger, reflecting the difficulty in completing the emotional release process in a healthy way. Recent research in sports psychology confirms that negative emotions associated with failure tend to last longer and are more complex to regulate compared to feelings of joy resulting from victory, especially when psychological defense mechanisms hinder the acceptance and adaptation to the event (Lundqvist, C; Andersson, G, 2021).

From a collective symbolic perspective, we can interpret the defeat as a collective narcissistic wound inflicted on both the players and the fans. The loss was not merely experienced as a sporting failure, but as a loss in a symbolic battle that represented the nation in the collective imagination, thus activating feelings of disappointment. This narcissistic wound triggered

defense mechanisms aimed at mitigating its severity, particularly denial and projection. However, at the same time, it unleashed what Carl Gustav Jung calls the "shadow of the group," which quickly surfaced in the mass media. In this context, the opponent and the referee became objects of hatred, and negative attributes that the wounded collective self was unable to internalize were projected onto them. Thus, the "other"—the Nigerian team and the referee—became a mirror reflecting the components of the collective self's shadow, representing it as the source of the injustice and oppression felt by the public (Jung, Carl Gustav, 1969). This amplification of the image of the external enemy, on the one hand, contributed to protecting the idealized image of the collective self by denying responsibility for the failure, but on the other hand, it is Another factor hindered the psychological adjustment and acceptance of reality, which explains the continuation of arguments and anger for a long time after the match compared to a winning scenario, as a complete psychological integration with the experience of defeat was not achieved. Finally, we can say that the loss led to a temporary weakening of the positive symbolic value of some symbols that had acquired a central position in the event of victory, most notably the national jersey, which transformed from a symbol of collective pride and honor into an element burdened with negative connotations after the defeat. A reluctance among fans to wear the national team jerseys after the match was observed, which can be interpreted as an unconscious desire to distance themselves from the collective identity associated with failure, in order to protect individual and collective self-esteem. This practice falls under what is known in sports group psychology as the phenomenon of "cutting off reflected failure," where the fan seeks to sever the symbolic connection with a losing identity to maintain their psychological equilibrium (Wanna, D.L.; al., 2022). In contrast to the narrative of heroism and cohesion that accompanied the victory, a justificatory narrative prevailed in the media discourse after the loss, focusing on refereeing errors and external circumstances as decisive factors in explaining the match result. This reflects a fundamental difference in the mechanisms of meaning construction. In the absence of an achievement to be proud of, the event is reframed in a way that lessens its impact. The collective self-image, through the production of interpretations that soften the blow of failure and protect identity from fragmentation (Bromberger, C, 2020). At the level of collective cultural significance, it becomes clear that victory contributed to consolidating a positive narrative that reaffirmed national symbols and the unity of identity. The sporting triumph was framed as a story of national heroism, and the players were imbued with the image of popular figures in the public imagination, in line with sociological theories that view sporting victory as a moral triumph for the nation, invested in strengthening social cohesion and collective pride (Bromberger, C, 2020). In contrast, defeat generated a different narrative characterized by fragmentation and inconsistency. Some discourses focused on the injustice of refereeing and bad luck, while others called for accountability and a reassessment of performance. This prevented the formation of a unified positive meaning surrounding the event. Instead of being recounted as a story of heroism, the loss was represented as an experience of frustration and a warning that reopened questions about competence and national football identity, and perhaps sparked deeper discussions about... Structural flaws, and based on this we can say that the context of victory enabled the re-encoding of the sporting event in a way that produces integration and pride, while the state of defeat led to a

deconstructive reinterpretation that highlighted the tensions and boundaries within the social experience (Ferraro, 2023). This comparative analysis confirms that the sporting match transcends being a symbolic psychological drama whose meaning changes radically according to its outcomes. It either plays the role of a purifying ritual that strengthens the psychological structure of the group in the case of victory, or it turns into a collective shock that reveals latent conflicts and calls for the activation of psychological defense mechanisms in the case of defeat, thus deepening the understanding of the match as a projective and interpretive field in which the emotions and symbolic visions of the group are embodied on the stage of reality.

On a symbolic level, the comparison between victory and defeat reveals a clear shift in the semantic center of gravity around which the meanings of the sporting event are organized. In the case of victory, the goal, as the moment of scoring, constitutes the central symbol around which the narrative of the match revolves. It represents the point of passage to victory and embodies the meaning of collective superiority. Feelings of joy and pride are concentrated around it, and the goal becomes the positive dramatic plot that gives the event its harmony and meaning. In contrast, in the case of defeat, this symbolic center shifts to the referee, who becomes a representation of authority and the conclusion of the conflict. In the collective imagination, the referee transforms from a symbol of achievement to a symbol of frustration, representing a fundamental difference in the psychological mechanisms used to process the event. In the case of victory, superiority is absorbed through the positive representation of the goal as a symbol of competence, which reinforces a positive collective identity (Ferraro, R, 2023). In the case of defeat, failure is processed by projecting it onto an external symbol represented by the referee and the opponent, which, without being fully psychologically absorbed, leads to a division in the interpretation of the sporting event (Bromberger, C, (2020), and this shows that mathematical symbols can serve as a vessel for psychological integration and meaning-making in cases of victory, or they can become a projective structure onto which failures are attributed when the group is unable to accept defeat.

Furthermore, the comparison between victory and defeat reveals a clear contrast in the role of the audience as an active collective entity in shaping the psychological experience of the sporting event. In the case of victory, the audience assumed a role of intense moral support, acting as a "satisfied parent" or a rewarding superego, which instilled in the players a sense of socially acceptable achievement and contributed to unifying players and fans within a single identity perceived as a victorious team (Tamminen & Bennett, 2020). In the case of defeat, however, the role of the audience took on a more complex and dual nature. On the one hand, it constituted a source of pressure and implicit criticism, while on the other hand, it was divided amongst itself in varying attempts to interpret and adapt to the defeat. We can interpret this as the collective superego shifting from a state of frustration and self-recrimination in the face of defeat, where feelings of guilt and disappointment emerged among the players under the weight of the audience's silent stares, thus activating a form of internal moral punishment. In parallel, the fans were divided between those who accepted reality with relative calm and those who sought mechanisms External to suspend disappointment, which led to a relative disintegration of the temporary unity of the crowd that was cohesive during the cheering, and this difference reveals to us that the spirit of the crowd crystallizes as a unified entity that transcends individual differences in moments of victory,

but it quickly fractures in cases of defeat, giving way to diverse, heterogeneous individual psychological interpretations. (Guschwan, 2020)

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