News





A combination photo shows Philadelphia Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie celebrating after winning the NFC Championship game against the Washington Commanders at Lincoln Financial Field, and Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce (87) speaks to the media after being presented with the Lamar Hunt Trophy after the AFC Championship game against the Buffalo Bills at GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium Jan. 26, 2025. (OSV News/Mandatory Credit: Eric Hartline-Imagn Images and Denny Medley-Imagn Images via Reuters)

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When it comes to the pressures associated with being the shepherd of a diocese, it doesn't get much easier than advocating for your community's football team.

Such is the situation for Bishop James Johnston, who has spearheaded the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri, since 2015. On Feb. 9, Johnston's favorite football team, the Kansas City Chiefs, meets the Philadelphia Eagles in Super Bowl LIX at Caesars Superdome in New Orleans.

To the dismay of every other NFL fan base, watching the Chiefs grapple for the Lombardi Trophy has almost become an annual occurrence. No team has won more games than Kansas City since two-time NFL Most Valuable Player quarterback Patrick Mahomes assumed the reins in 2018.

Sunday's worldwide event marks Kansas City's fifth Super Bowl appearance overall and the team's third during Johnston's tenure. The Chiefs have won three crowns, including the past two. If they defeat the Eagles, the Chiefs would become the first franchise to win three consecutive Super Bowls.

"While our faith is paramount as we journey through this life, sports and teams have a very important role in a community," Johnston told OSV News. "The Chiefs' run over these last seven years is something that I was privileged to be a part of during my years here as bishop."

Regardless of the Super Bowl victor, Johnston said fans from all over the globe are encouraged to maintain perspective.

"A Super Bowl brings people together across so many lines and in ways no other event could," Johnston said. "It supercharges community spirit and common identity in ways that are truly amazing. The greater Kansas City area, and indeed this multistate area of the Midwest, feels like a family when it comes to the Chiefs. It's a source of pride and joy."

Two years ago, Johnston and Archbishop Nelson Pérez of Philadelphia found themselves in the exact same scenario. Shouldering a tradition known as the "Bishops' Bet" — a friendly wager between the Catholic spiritual guides of the respective dioceses of the Super Bowl teams — the two leaders promised to send a $500 donation to the charity of the other's choice. The Chiefs' last-second win

secured a generous offering to the Catholic Charities of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

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Before the Chiefs' 25-22 overtime victory over the San Francisco 49ers last year, Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco had promised — and reportedly ultimately delivered — a monetary donation along with a shipment of San Francisco-based food product Rice-A-Roni.

This year, in addition to a charitable donation, there has been some talk of cheesesteaks — a culinary delight that originated in Philadelphia — heading to the Midwest should the Chiefs capture an unprecedented third straight Super Bowl. An Eagles Super Bowl win — which would be the franchise's second — could procure some Kansas City barbecue spicing the environs of the City of Brotherly Love.

"This doesn't get old," Johnston said. "It's all in good fun. We try to use it to emphasize the positives that sports offer, but also the friendship between the bishops and our dioceses."

Despite the Chiefs' sustained success, Johnston recognizes that sports often result in bitter disappointment.

A native of Knoxville, Tennessee, and a graduate of the University of Tennessee, Johnston vividly recalls Super Bowl XXXIV on Jan. 30, 2000, a contest that defined the ubiquitous thrill of victory and agony of defeat.

Trailing the St. Louis Rams, 23-16, in the waning seconds, the Tennessee Titans fell one yard shy of a touchdown as the clock posted all zeroes. The scene of grown men — not to mention stunned Titans fans scattered throughout the Georgia Dome in Atlanta — visibly crying tears of disbelief remains a legendary talking point a quarter of a century later.

"I'm first a Tennessee Volunteer fan, still cheering for the Big Orange," Johnston said. "The Titans moved to Tennessee from Houston, and so my emotional ties to them are not as strong. But I did pull for the Titans and vividly remember the ending to that Super Bowl, where they were so close. I pull for the Titans — unless they're up against the Chiefs."