Vatican

Vatican News



Italy's Jannik Sinner, left, shares a light moment with Pope Leo XIV on the occasion of their meeting at the Vatican, Wednesday, May 14, 2025. (Vatican Media via AP)

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Pope Leo XIV has made peace with Jannik Sinner.

The top-ranked tennis player visited the new pope on Wednesday, gave him a tennis racket and offered to play, during an off day for Sinner at the Italian Open.

Leo, the first American pope, is an avid tennis player and fan and had said earlier this week that he would be up for a charity match when it was suggested by a journalist.

But at the time, Leo joked "we can't invite Sinner," an apparent reference to the English meaning of Sinner's last name.

By Wednesday, all seemed forgotten.

"It's an honor," Sinner said in Italian as he and his parents arrived in a reception room of the Vatican's auditorium. Holding one of his rackets and giving Leo another and a ball, the three-time Grand Slam champion suggested a quick volley. But the pope looked around at the antiques and said, "Better not."

Leo, a 69-year-old from Chicago, then appeared to joke about his white cassock and its appropriateness for Wimbledon, perhaps a reference to the All England Club's all-white clothing rule.

He asked how the Italian Open was going. "Now I'm in the game," Sinner said. "At the beginning of the tournament, it was a bit difficult."

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Sinner has a quarterfinal match on Thursday in his first tournament back after a three-month ban for doping that was judged to be an accidental contamination.

He will next face freshly crowned Madrid champion Casper Ruud. Sinner is attempting to become the first Italian man to win the Rome title since Adriano Panatta in 1976.

During the audience, Angelo Binaghi, the head of the Italian Tennis and Padel Federation, gave Leo an honorary federation card.

"We all felt the passion that Leo XIV has for our sport and this filled us with pride," Binaghi said in a statement. "We hope to embrace the Holy Father again soon, maybe on a tennis court."

The pope and Sinner posed for photos in front of the Davis Cup trophy that Sinner helped Italy win for the second consecutive time last year. Also on display in the room was the Billie Jean King Cup trophy won by Italy in 2024, the biggest women's team event in tennis.

Earlier in the week, after Leo's first quip about not wanting to invite him, Sinner said it was "a good thing for us tennis players" that the new pope likes to play the sport.

In addition to tennis, Leo is an avid Chicago White Sox baseball fan.

His predecessor, Pope Francis, was a lifelong fan of Buenos Aires soccer club San Lorenzo.

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This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. View the full series.