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Napoli soccer team's midfielder Scott McTominay, left, shakes hands with Pope Leo XIV during a papal private audience with the team in the Clementine Hall at the Vatican on May 27, 2025. (Vadican Media via AP)

Andrew Dampf

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That Pope Leo XIV is a Chicago White Sox fan and likes to play tennis has already been established.

The most pressing sports question for many locals inside the Vatican and surrounding Italy concerning the first American pope remains a mystery, though.

Does Leo support an Italian soccer club?

Leo cast doubt on the assumption that he's a Roma fan during a private audience with freshly crowned Italian champion Napoli — Roma's rival — on Tuesday (May 27). But his comments revealed that he follows the Italian game.

When Leo entered the Clementine Hall inside the Apostolic Palace where Napoli's players and staff were seated, there was a slight delay before the guests applauded.

"Maybe they didn't want to applaud because in the media they say I'm a Romanista," Leo said, referring to Roma fans. "That's what the press says. Not everything that you read in the press is true."

Pope Francis, Leo's predecessor, was from Argentina and was a card-carrying supporter of Buenos Aires soccer club San Lorenzo.

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Napoli clinched its fourth Serie A title following a 2-0 win over Cagliari on May 23 with goals from Scott McTominay and Romelu Lukaku.

Napoli president and film producer Aurelio Del Laurentiis presented Leo with a Napoli No. 10 shirt — the same number worn by the late Diego Maradona when he played for the southern Italian team — with the pope's name on it and featuring signatures from all of the club's players.

"You're a No. 10," De Laurentiis said, referring to the number often worn by a team's most talented forward.

When De Laurentiis introduced Napoli coach Antonio Conte, the pope cut him off and said "I know him from the (TV) screen, I've seen him many times."

Conte has also coached Italy's national team, as well as Juventus, Chelsea and Inter Milan.

"He's profoundly Catholic," De Laurentiis said of Conte. "He's someone who believes in God very attentively and goes to pray often."



The crowd cheers as Napoli players celebrate winning their fourth Serie A soccer league title in an open-air bus parade alongside Naples' seafront, Italy on May 26, 2025. (Antonio Balasco/LaPresse via AP)

Leo cited the "social aspect" of Napoli's title.

"We know how popular soccer is in Italy and practically the entire world," Leo said. "So, in that respect, the social value of an achievement like this, which is greater than the mere technical-sports aspect, is an example of a team that works together, in which the individual talents are sacrificed for the common good."

The pope also warned that "when sports becomes a business, it risks losing the values that make it educational, and it can actually become un-educational."

"I want to make an appeal to parents and sports officials: you need to pay careful attention to the moral quality of the sports experience at the competitive level, because it has an impact on the humane growth of young people," Leo said.

The meeting with Napoli came less than two weeks after Leo held a private audience with top-ranked tennis player Jannik Sinner.