News



Chicago Bears logo is seen on the field prior to an NFL football game between the Chicago Bears and Minnesota Vikings Sept. 8 in Chicago. The Vikings won, 27-24. (AP/Kamil Krzaczynski)



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Pope Leo XIV, has received an invite to hold what would be his first live interview with an American television network since being chosen as the holy father in May.

No, the invitation does not come from a top news journalist or talk show host at ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX News, MSNBC or NBC News.

It's from Peyton Manning, his ESPN2 NFL co-host and brother Eli Manning, and the Monday Night Football "Manningcast."

Midway through the third quarter of Sept. 8's Minnesota Vikings-Chicago Bears game held in Pope Leo XIV's hometown of Chicago, Peyton showcased his penmanship as he drafted and sent letters to the Catholic Church's first-ever American pope, the first-ever papal White Sox fan, and purportedly its first Bears fan. (The Vikings won, 27-24.)

"If you're watching, your holiness, this is an open invitation. Come on the show anytime," Peyton said.

"Look at these two handwritten letters. I wrote His Holiness himself and I wrote his executive assistant."

Inked on Peyton's personal stationery, the letters introduced both Peyton and Eli — in case His Holiness wasn't familiar with their Super Bowl-winning resumes. Peyton said "we'd love for you to be a guest," and that "there is no pressure" to come on the show.

The letter says "if this letter piques your interest," the Mannings would bring him on the talk-formatted show that provides live reaction to Monday Night football and humorous conversations between the sometimes-bickering brothers and their famous guests.

The written invitation didn't exactly work.

"Kind of like I failed to recruit Randy Moss to Tennessee," Peyton said about his

collegiate alma mater. "I couldn't close the pope, but I made the effort, and that's the kind of effort we make. I tried my hardest."

While no reason was officially stated for the Holy Father not accepting the invitation, his appearance would happen for a game that normally kicks off at 2:15 a.m. Vatican City time, 8:15 p.m. Eastern Time.

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Peyton Manning, who led the Colts and Denver Broncos to Super Bowl championships while earning five Associated Press Most Valuable Player awards and a Pro Football Hall of Fame induction, placed Pope Leo into his own top pantheon of requested guests.

"It's you, it's Tiger Woods, it's Bradley Cooper, it's President Bush, it's Larry David. Y'all are our most wanted on that list for the 'Manningcast,' " he said.

Eli Manning has his own Super resume, with a pair of wins for his New York Giants over the New England Patriots after the 2007 and 2011 seasons.

Neither Eli nor Payton are believed to be Catholic, but their brother Cooper Manning converted to Catholicism, according to the New Orleans Clarion Herald.

Pope Leo's love of the Chicago White Sox is well-documented, as the team has made a monument of the seat where he sat for a game of the 2005 World Series which the “South Siders” won. He was prior general of the Order of Saint Augustine at the time.

A group of Chicagoans who visited the Vatican City in July gave the Holy Father a shirt with the words "Da Pope," a relational take on the Chicago Bears "Superfans" from Saturday Night Live in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

There has been no documented confirmation of Pope Leo's NFL fandom. If it is the Bears, their second and final Monday Night Football appearance comes on Oct. 13, when Chicago faces the Washington Commanders just outside the nation's capital.

The pontiff graduated in 1977 from Villanova University, an Augustinian university just outside Philadelphia. It is believed Leo also roots for the Villanova Wildcats — he has accepted a Villanova baseball cap — which had four NBA players on legendary coach Rollie Massimino's rosters when the pope, then known as Robert Prevost, attended the school.

He keeps up with Villanova alumni in the NBA, according to the New York Times, but there is no confirmation that he ever attended a game at the legendary Palestra, which Villanova and four other Philadelphia college teams called home in the 1970s.

Peyton Manning has a current Philadelphia football connection. His Hall of Fame teammate with the Colts, wide receiver Marvin Harrison, has a son named Jett who plays the same position. Jett scored 10 touchdowns as a freshman for defending Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association Class 6A state champion St. Joseph's Preparatory School, a Jesuit all-boys high school on Philadelphia's north side.

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A chance for Pope Leo to reveal his NFL fandom could come the day after Thanksgiving (Nov. 28), when his hometown Bears play the Philadelphia Eagles. Their home games happen a 25-minute drive south of the Villanova campus at Lincoln Financial Field.

But if the Holy Father ever joins "Manningcast," the appearance will probably need to involve a major dose of coffee, and none of the estimated 16 coffee shops within a half-mile walk of the Vatican walls would be open at kickoff time. Nevertheless, the offer from Peyton Manning stands.

"Come anytime," he said. "We'd love to have you, your holiness."

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