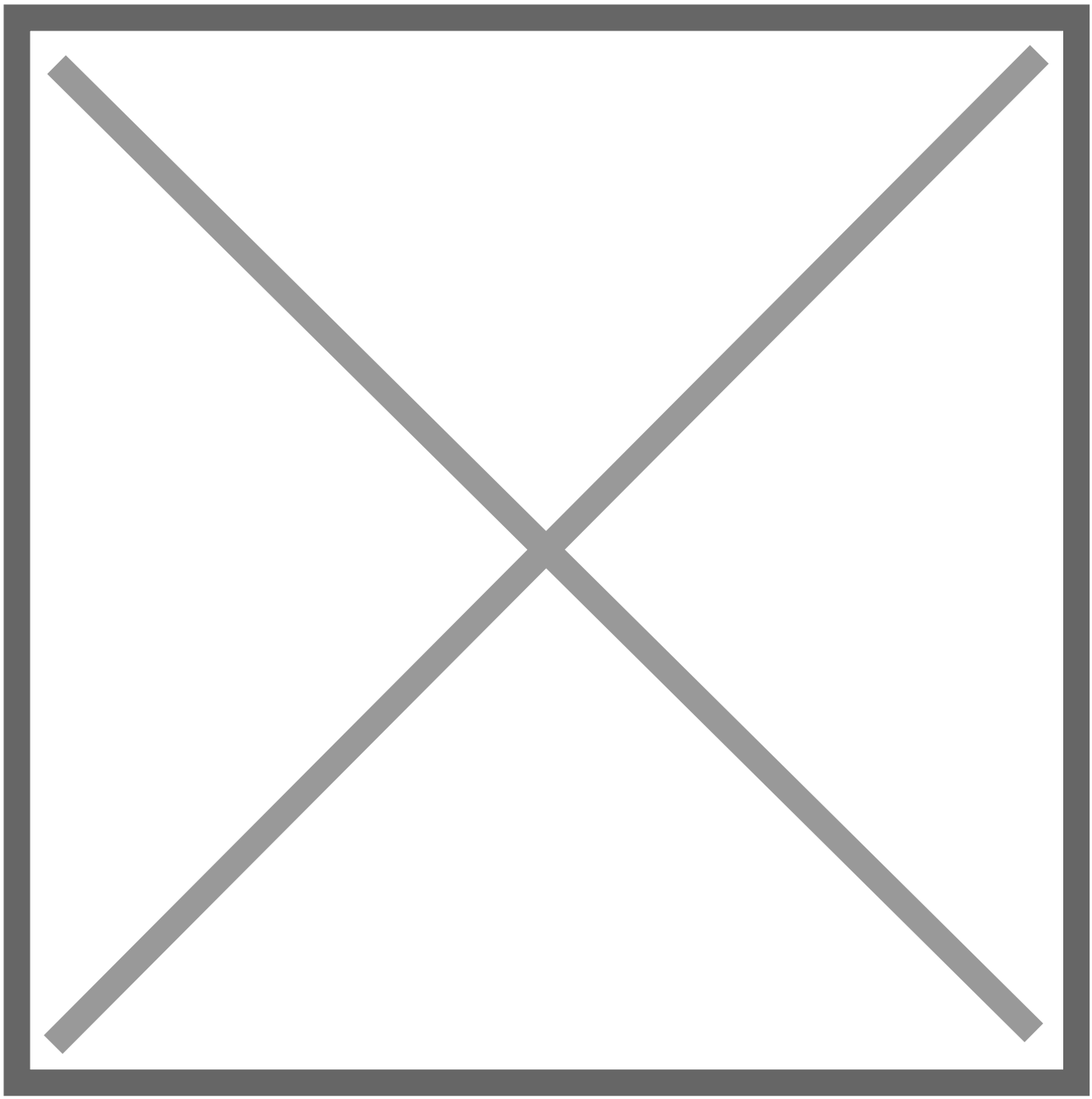
News



Pope Leo XIV wears a Chicago White Sox baseball cap during his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican June 11, 2025. The new co-owner of the Chicago White Sox calls meeting Pope Leo XIV at the Vatican Nov. 19 "a really wonderful experience and one that I won't forget." News reports said he asked for a papal blessing on a future new stadium he hopes to see one day. (OSV News/Reuters/Remo Casilli)



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A stakeholder — and next owner — of the Chicago White Sox baseball team said Pope Leo XIV told him that he'd "love to" throw a season opening first pitch in the future — "schedule permitting."

Leo's favorite sports team is the White Sox, and much has been made of his being a huge fan of the Chicago South Siders. He grew up as a diehard Sox fan in Chicago's south suburb of Dolton.

Justin Ishbia, a Chicago billionaire, owner of a private equity firm and a co-owner of the team, told several major news outlets he met the pope outside St. Peter's Basilica at his general audience Nov. 19 and shared with him his vision for the future of the White Sox.

"And in the conversation I extended an invitation for him to visit Chicago and throw out the first pitch on opening day should this ballpark come to fruition," Ishbia told a Chicago Tribune sports columnist. "As part of that, I also presented to him a 2005 World Series championship team jersey, signed by the team, as a symbol of teamwork and perseverance. I said, 'I'm hopeful you'd bless our stadium, and our

stadium will be a place that creates joy and happiness and many championships for decades to come.'"

The now-famous video footage of then-Fr. Robert Prevost's game 1 appearance at the 2005 World Series between the White Sox and the Houston Astros cemented Leo's place in history as the world's most well-known Sox fan. The team put markers in the place where he sat that night, in section 140, row 19, seat 2 of Rate Field. The White Sox won the championship.

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Ishbia holds stakes in other U.S. sports teams in the National Basketball Association and Major League Soccer. He described himself as the next "steward" — not "owner" — of the White Sox franchise, saying the team belongs to the city of Chicago. He also brought up again the possibility of a new stadium for their ballpark, whose lease ends in 2029, that he hoped would be located in the South Loop, the southern edge of Chicago's downtown.

The team has been under the ownership of Jerry Reinsdorf since 1981. In June, Reinsdorf announced Ishbia would potentially be taking over fully by 2034.

Ishbia said he met Leo through a friend, U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See Brian Burch of the Chicago area, who is co-founder of CatholicVote.

"There's an opportunity for one of the most well-known men in the world who has billions of people who love and follow him — if we can get him behind us and part of our organization, the brand, that's one of my roles as steward, to hopefully bring him into the family, into the fold," Ishbia told the Chicago Sun-Times about the pope. "For many, many years, hopefully we'll have a fan in our corner who has unique access to upstairs."

He told The New York Times that as steward of the team, and being a baseball fan himself, he understands what fans want — "someone who cares."

The news outlets reported the pope personally took the autographed jersey from Ishbia, rather than having it go directly to an aide.

Ishbia quoted Leo: "He said, 'No, no, no. Hold on — that stays with me.'"