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evi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif., will host the Super Bowl LX game between the New England Patriots and the Seattle Seahawks. Archbishops Paul Etienne of Seattle and Richard Henning of Boston placed a friendly wager over the outcome of the Feb. 8 game. (OSV News/Reuters/Carlos Barria)

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Ahead of Super Bowl LX Sunday on Feb. 8, a familiar and friendly tradition continues between two archbishops whose dioceses now share football's biggest stage.

With the New England Patriots and Seattle Seahawks set to face off at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California, Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle has joined his counterpart in Boston, Archbishop Richard Henning, in an annual Super Bowl wager — one rooted not in pride or prediction, but in charity.

The agreed-upon terms are simple: a $500 donation to Catholic Charities, with particular attention given to ministries that care for and support immigrants.

The decision to proceed was not automatic.

"Yes, Archbishop Henning and I had a good conversation," Etienne told OSV News. "We were actually debating whether or not to go through with a wager given the gravity of everything going on in our world today. However, we recognize the ability that sports have to unify communities."

In Seattle, where sports loyalties run deep and civic pride is often measured in decibels, the timing of the Super Bowl has only intensified the mood.

"Seattle is a city that loves its sports," said Etienne, Seattle's Catholic spiritual leader since 2019. "It's known for having one of the loudest stadiums in the country, and all the Seahawk fans are known as the '12th Man.' "

Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle (OSV News)

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Archbishop Richard Henning of Boston (OSV News)

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With Seattle establishing itself as the top team of the NFC, the excitement has spread well beyond the usual circles.

"There is clearly a buzz of excitement across the region as people anticipate the big game," Etienne said.

For Etienne, sports serve as a window into something larger — how communities form, how individuals grow and how values are learned.

"Sports is one way that communities come together," he said. "Athletes learn to work together as a team, respect each other, support each other and appreciate the gifts that each player brings. Sports teach lifelong skills like sportsmanship, respect, hard work, and perseverance — which is one reason why the Archdiocese of Seattle has a robust CYO sports program for our Catholic Schools and parishes."

That emphasis on character becomes especially meaningful when the outcome disappoints.

"I recall a rough quote or idea from Father Ted Hesburgh, former president of Notre Dame, who said that one benefit of sports is that it builds integrity," Etienne said.

"Athletes (and fans) should play with all their heart, but not lose heart in defeat. One must maintain their integrity in winning or defeat."

Despite shepherding a region defined by sports passion, the archbishop is quick to clarify his own relationship with athletics.

"Honestly, I am not a 'sports guy' — unless you're talking about Indiana Hoosier basketball," he said. "I grew up on a farm, so I enjoy the outdoor life with activities like hiking and fishing."

And when kickoff arrives, the archbishop plans to take it all in quietly.

"Most likely from the comfort of my couch," he said.

Henning, meanwhile the eldest of five siblings who became the seventh archbishop of Boston in 2024, will be rooting for a franchise that has captured six Super Bowl titles — tied with the Pittsburgh Steelers for the most in NFL history — while also carrying the distinction of five Super Bowl losses, matched only by the Denver Broncos.

Seattle's own Super Bowl history remains sharply etched in the memory of fans nationwide: one dominant championship victory in Super Bowl XLVIII, followed by a painful attempt at a repeat that ended in heartbreak when a controversial pass from the one-yard line was intercepted with 20 seconds remaining, sealing a stunning 28-24 New England Patriots victory.

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As both archbishops have acknowledged, the game unfolds against a much heavier national and global context.

In what was billed a Bishops' Bet reveal by EWTN "News Nightly" Feb. 6, the two archbishops shared a combination of levity and seriousness when confirming the wager.

"This is an important moment of unity," Henning said. "This is a shared cultural moment, hopefully a moment for people to gather to be with friends and family. At the same time, we don't want to forget there are other realities in our world and suffering, and being attentive to that as well."

And at its best, Etienne believes, sports offer something quietly necessary.

"Healthy competition is a part of so many aspects of human life," he said. "It's good for people to have something to take their minds off of other matters in their world and in their lives, to just relax and hopefully the outcome of the game will still allow everybody watching it and participation in it to still be relaxed and joyful at the performance of their teams."