

San Antonio Spurs center Luke Kornet receives a blessing before the game. (Instagram screenshot)

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The NBA playoffs are not usually the place where one expects to find Catholic nuns turning into social media superstars. But that's exactly what happened after a group of Salesian Sisters from San Antonio were spotted courtside in Spurs jerseys.

In an era when viral moments are often manufactured, the sisters' sudden online popularity has resonated because of its sincerity. Videos circulating across social media captured their enthusiasm.

Clad in white habits beneath black-and-silver Spurs jerseys, the nuns greeted players as they walked onto the floor. For many, the combination seemed delightfully unexpected — traditional Catholic sisters immersed fully in the high-energy spectacle of the Western Conference Finals at Frost Bank Center.

The nuns' connection to the team stretches back decades when the Spurs lineup featured David Robinson and Tim Duncan. In the late 1990s, while working closely with students at St. John Bosco School, they began following the team partly as a way to connect with students.

Indeed, the nuns, rather than dismiss sports as a distraction from religious life, leaned into it as part of their ministry. Sr. Bernadette Mota, director of mission advancement of the Salesian Sisters, told Sojourners the Salesian Sisters first began attending Spurs games 20 years ago.

"We had a couple elder sisters at our provincial house, our retirement house for our sisters who need assisted living," she said. "Some of them were born and raised in

San Antonio, and anytime there was a game on they would watch it. And they would get very irritated when the game had to be turned off because it was bedtime. These were die-hard Spurs fans, and since then, those sisters have passed away. But we have other sisters who have taken the baton."

The sisters' excitement also highlights a side of religious life that many outside the Catholic Church rarely see. Public perceptions of nuns are often shaped by stereotypes emphasizing silence or austerity. The Spurs-loving sisters, however, present a very different image: Playful and energetic.

The joyful contrast between habits and basketball jerseys has proven irresistible online. One particularly memorable moment ahead of Game 4 on Sunday night (which the Spurs won against the Oklahoma City Thunder) involved player Luke Kornet, who stopped before a game to receive a blessing from the nuns.

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Kornet, a practicing Catholic, towered over the women, creating an unintentionally comic but deeply endearing interaction.

To receive the blessing, the 7-foot-1 center had to bend almost completely in half so the sisters could reach his head. The resulting scene quickly spread online, with online users charmed by the visual contrast between the towering athlete and the diminutive sisters praying over him.

In a sports environment typically defined by celebrity culture and relentless competition, the exchange introduced a quieter kind of power — one rooted in prayer and spiritual encouragement. Watching a pro athlete pause before a big game to bow his head before Catholic nuns offered a reminder that faith still quietly shapes many corners of American public life, including professional sports.

"I just really look up to the way he's not afraid to share his faith on the public scene," Mota said of Kornet.

Mota said the sisters do not pay for the tickets because it wouldn't be a good use of their funds. As a result, they attend whenever they get tickets as a gift. They also watch Spurs games on network TV.

"After dinner and chores, whoever wants to stay and watch the game will watch it there," Mota said. "We only watch the games that are on regular TV because we don't have cable. We used to have cable but it was ridiculously expensive, so that wasn't a good use of our funds."

The online reaction to the sisters' fandom has been overwhelmingly affectionate. Social media users jokingly referred to them as the Spurs' "ultimate home court advantage," while others half-seriously insisted the team should make this a habit at every postseason game.

The approach by these sisters also reflects the spirituality of St. John Bosco, founder of the Salesian order in 1859. He believed that joy, recreation and friendship were essential parts of both education and evangelization.

In response to the sisters, OKC fans have started dressing as nuns as a way of bringing them good luck. The Thunder, after winning Game 5, are currently up 3-2 in the best-of-seven series. The winner will face the New York Knicks in the NBA Championship.

For the Salesian Sisters, cheering on the Spurs jerseys is not separate from their vocation. In many ways, it flows naturally from it.

"I'm a big sports fan myself. I actually played basketball in high school and I coached basketball for a couple years before entering the convent," Mota said. "I'm a Spurs fan. They're a good all-around team and they have a great fan base."