

## **THE 'SOLIDARITY RACKET' SIGNED BY POPE FRANCIS IN SUPPORT OF 500 POOR FAMILIES**

***The padel racket signed by Francis will be put up for auction to raise funds for the Vatican's 'Santa Marta' Pediatric Dispensary. In the morning, the Pope received and encouraged the promoters of the solidarity initiative, International Padel Federation president Luigi Carraro and Vatican Padel director, Alessandra Turco***

There is the signature of Pope Francis on the padel racket that will be put up for auction in favor of the Vatican Pediatric Dispensary "Santa Marta" to support the service of sheltering 500 poor families with young children.

The Pope received and encouraged - on Wednesday, April 26 - the promoters of this concrete solidarity initiative through sport: the International Padel Federation and Athletica Vaticana, the official multi-sport association of the Holy See.

Luigi Carraro, president of the International Padel Federation, and Alessandra Turco, director of Vatican Padel, attended the meeting with the Pope.

With them there were also a very touched Delfina Brea, 23-year-old vice world champion with the Argentine national team, Alfredo Peñalver, president of the prestigious Spanish brand Bullpadel, and Roman artist Barbara Salvucci, who designed the racket: together they promptly replied to the appeal for this solidarity initiative through sport.

Also, Diego Miller, president of the American Padel Federation representing the federations of the American continent, attended the meeting.

On the Vatican side, the youngest player: 21-year-old Davide De Santis.

### **THE MODALITIES OF THE SOLIDARITY AUCTION**

The Padel racket signed by Pope Francis will be offered for sale on Bullpadel's channels.

### **IN SUPPORT OF THE PEDIATRIC DISPENSARY "SANTA MARTA"**

The entire proceeds from the sale of the racket will be delivered to the "Santa Marta" Dispensary: the "neighbors" of Pope Francis. For 101 years this concrete solidarity network - entrusted to the Vincentian Sisters - has been welcoming poor families, with small children, from different countries, cultures, and religions, guaranteeing - in addition to food and nappies - above all the possibility of free specialist visits thanks to the availability of many doctors. Pope Francis chose to celebrate, "as a family," his birthday precisely with the 500 families supported by the Santa Marta Dispensary.

The project has the support of Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Culture and Education to whom the Pope entrusted sports in the Apostolic Constitution Praedicate Evangelium.

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**Luigi Carraro, president of the International Padel Federation, stated:**

*One racket, the same for everyone, all over the world. This is the symbolic power of the 'pala de padel' signed by the Holy Father. We have to imagine that in every corner of the world every player - amateur or professional - holds his racket as if it was Pope Francis' and is, therefore, a messenger of loyalty, solidarity, friendship, inclusion, and motivation with the goal of learning, growing, improving as people through sport. As His Holiness said recently, 'Sport is a metaphor for life' and if the proceeds of this racket can improve that of the families supported by the Vatican Pediatric Dispensary "Santa Marta" we will have won, without a doubt, the most beautiful and important trophy in the world.*

**Alessandra Turco, director of Vatican Padel, stated:**

*The Vatican Padel Federation - Vatican Padel - has been an official member of the International Padel Federation since April 29, 2022. Ours is a small and peculiar community that contributes to the sports world as it can. We are grateful to President Carraro for welcoming us. With this solidarity initiative we continue to go outside the "Vatican walls" to comply in a concrete way with the indications of "our captain", Pope Francis: "Do not forget the last, the invisible, because without caring for others the world does not heal". We all hope that the padel racket can increasingly be a symbol of union, brotherhood, and solidarity.*

**Delfina Brea, Argentine, vice world padel champion, stated:**

*I have never felt such an emotion. I was baptized by Pope Francis when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires. If someone had told me that one day, I would have met again Pope Francis in Vatican thanks to the padel racket, how could I have believed him? But instead, it really happened and to do a beautiful thing, actually the most beautiful thing: to help children who have not had luck in their life and hopefully will have it as soon as possible. Helping them is not a duty, but a privilege. That is why I sincerely thank the International Padel Federation and Athletica Vaticana, for teaching me today how a racket can have two 'faces' on the court but many more in life, simply by teaming up and helping others.*

**Alfredo Peñalver, president of Bullpadel, stated:**

*For the Bullpadel family, it is an honor to be part of the 'team' protagonist of this extraordinary initiative that sees Pope Francis signing a 'racket' made in the name of inclusion, mutual support, and care for others. An initiative that reminds us all how much sport can be a powerful engine of brotherhood, friendship, and help towards the weakest. In this sense, the commitment of the International Padel Federation and Athletica Vaticana is and always will be our commitment.*

**Barbara Salvucci, artist (creator of the racket design), stated:**

*Drawing the "solidarity racket" I experienced an authentic "spiritual journey" because the artistic expression always touches the soul. In doing so, I never lost sight of the real beneficiaries of the initiative: the children helped by the "Santa Marta" Dispensary. The real peculiarity of the racket is represented by the illustration on the central border: people with and without disabilities play together, holding a padel racket, witnessing the possibility that sport is really an inclusive experience, an open dialogue that contributes to open, with its universal language, roads of peace. The padel, precisely by its style, is a sport that fosters inclusion, friendship, and community. Going into the details of the design, the choice of colors is a reference to the flag of the Vatican City State and to the plain line of Athletica Vaticana.*