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Heated Rivalry

A burning sports romance served on ice

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CRAVE
Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie in a scene from *Heated Rivalry*

HUGO DUMAS
The Press

Imagine if the two star hockey players Sidney Crosby and Alexander Ovechkin had had a secret and torrid affair for eight years.

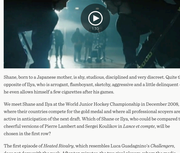
Posted at 7:75 am

This is what the hot miniseries *Heated Rivalry* (*Rivalité brûlante*, in the French version), tells, in a fictional way, of course, whose first two episodes out of a total of six will go on the Crave platform on Friday.

It's sexy, passionate, daring, carnal and, how to say, very explicit. Think of *Bridgerton* for the erotic-Harlequin aspect of *Heated Rivalry*, which derives from books by Canadian author Rachel Reid, a specialist in queer and dirty sports romance, in her own words.

And even before jumping on the ice, *Heated Rivalry* generates an impressive buzz on social networks and even caught the attention of the bosses of HBO Max, who bought the miniseries and will relay it, in the United States, at the same time as Crave in Canada.

Created and directed by Montreuse Jacob Tierney (*Letterkenny*, *Shoresy*), *Heated Rivalry* pits the two greatest players in the National Hockey League, Canadian Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Russian Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie).



Shane, born to a Japanese mother, is shy, studious, disciplined and very discreet. Quite the opposite of Ilya, who is arrogant, flamboyant, sketch aggressive and a little delinquent - he even allows himself a few cigarettes after his games.

We meet Shane and Ilya at the World Junior Hockey Championship in December 2008, where their countries compete for the gold medal and where their professional careers are active in anticipation of the next draft. Which of Shane or Ilya, who could be compared to cheerful versions of Pierre Lambert and Serguei Kostitsyn in *Lance et compte*, will he chosen in the first row?

The first episode of *Heated Rivalry*, which resembles Luca Guadagnino's *Challengers*, does not deep with the puck. After two minutes, the two players, whom the media portray as sworn enemies, meet at the gym and the flirtation begins. Fingers touch, legs touch, sticks are rubbed and it is Ilya, the more experienced of the two, who always gives the first skate stroke.

As neither lives their sexuality openly, the two athletes see themselves in secret and in constant fear of being exposed, which increases the intensity of their clandestine relationship. Armed with BlackBerry devices, they text - and sext each other - under the pseudonyms of Lily and Jane, in a matter of removing the suspicions of their too-meddling teammates.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CRAVE
Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams

During a single one-hour episode, the story advances by several months or even several years. Shane and Ilya evolve in different cities and the opportunities for the two lovers to meet again - about three times a year - do not abound.

Because Shane was drafted by the Montreal Metros and Ilya, who spends his summers in Russia, was recruited by the Boston Raiders - fictitious equivalents of the Canadiens and the Bruins. For the salem of rights, all official names associated with professional hockey, such as the Stanley Cup, have been changed.

Both tender, realistic and raw, the sex scenes of *Heated Rivalry* last much longer than the hockey scenes. The miniseries does not avoid clichés and exploits the homoerotic imagination such as showers or changing rooms, but completely assumes its soap opera side.

It is a soap (very well done) that we are watching, not a documentary about the great clashes between Canada and Russia at the Winter Olympics.

And *Heated Rivalry* doesn't get into nuances, let's say. Shane plays the perfect little guy, who drinks little, who eats brown rice and boiled salmon, and whose sponsors (Nike, Reebok) love.

Ilya represents the insolent asshole soaked in vodka, who expresses himself in broken English like Ivan Drago in *Rocky IV*. The two young men, who will be followed from late adolescence until the mid-twenties, however have complex family histories, which could be better explained.

Ilya grew up in a homophobic and broken family in Russia, while Shane was born into a loving clan, which would probably accept his homosexuality. In short, everything drives Ilya and Shane away, except this physical attraction that leads them to undress every five minutes in this film lustful series. You will often see buttocks, but no genitals.

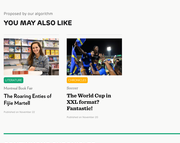


PHOTO PROVIDED BY CRAVE
François Arnaud and Hudson Williams

Quebec actor François Arnaud (*30 Rip*) plays American player Scott Hunter, one of the big stars of the NHL.

We quickly see it in the first two episodes that I watched this week, but its trajectory will greatly influence that of the two young protagonists, without disclosing the plot.

As for Sophie Nélisse, she plays Ross Landry, Shane Hollander's actress girlfriend, who serves as a bulwark to keep the media away from her sulphurous relationship with Ilya.

And as the actors of *Heated Rivalry* take place partly in Montreal, the director has grafted Quebec songs with the soundtrack, including *Une jour perdue* by Dumas and Chelsea mon amour by Philippe B.

This means that these two pieces here will play in the ears of HBO viewers while on screen, two queer professional hockey players will launch, court and do a lot more than a hut.

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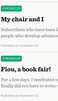

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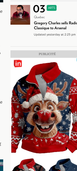

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Voluminous breasts, but sometimes dangerous
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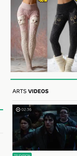

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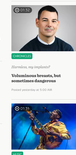

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