Heated Rivalry Season 1 Episode 3 Review: Bookies

December 20, 2025 Paul Mayo Heated Rivalry, Reviews

For decades, queer audiences have been crawling down dreary media deserts looking for representation. Sometimes, we get a few crumbs, but it's rare that we get a meaty great example in media, but once the time of *Queer as Folk* came we felt we've gotten both quiet joy and quiet sex in the same show, that is until *Heated Rivalry* Season 1 Episode 3, "Bookies".

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From the start we are aware that these two characters are Public Enemies. However, during their interactions Storrie and Williams make sure the audiences know there is a level of intrigue there just under the surface.

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For an opening episode to a new show based off a book, "Bookies" lives up to fan expectations and delivers a bit more. There are added moments that don't detract from the source material and omissions that aren't entirely missed.

Most importantly, we have two actors who put their all into the depiction of these tethered characters. Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov and Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander are perfect casting because of the ways they express what these characters are thinking without a single starting spot.

The Tenderness Under the Surface

And it shows in how both characters are distracted by each other's presence in the stands during their practice sessions of that initial match up. They are so distracted that when their people are talking to them, they only have eyes for each other.

There's a weightlessness to these stolen looks and private smiles that carries the weight of what is to come. It doesn't go away even after their sexually charged interaction in the hotel gym.

These are two characters that from the drop are obsessed with each other, but are forced to live in a world where they feel they need to hide it. Despite Ilya's goofiness or Shane's sweetness there is a level of care and tenderness even early on that can't be brushed away.

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Every step of the way Storrie and Williams do a lot more than just allow their characters to interact with each other. They also make the audiences understand what is happening. There's a juxtaposition here that the public wouldn't accept of Ilya Rozanov if they knew.

His public persona of cocky, Russian superstar still comes through in these first meetings and breathy encounters, but so is his more gentle side. Ilya isn't just the public side of hockey, he's also a man who wants love and connection. Storrie's performance is strong in a lot of ways here.

The beauty of Storrie is that he knows this and presents that complex view of Ilya every chance we get, even when he's just hanging out alone reacting to the latest Shane Hollander Milestone on photo roulette.

Storrie and Williams Embody All Aspects of Ilya and Shane

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One of the beautiful things about *Heated Rivalry* is how it's all the inner monologues we get from Ilya and Shane. It is a moment for these characters to ponder what they want and what they mean exactly how they feel about this dangerous relationship they are cultivating.

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Far Shane especially this is how the audience gets to know just how terrified he is of having his career his parents' expectations and all strong control. With Ilya, those thoughts show a just how much he wants to delegate all his burden on the ice and in front of the camera.

Both characters have different versions of themselves and that requires a lot of mastery and dedication from the actors. And boy do Storrie and Williams measure up and take that challenge head on.

Sure, there is the very popular gym scene that has limited dialogue and so much chemistry between them that we get just how attracted they are without even touching and all saying it. But, that's not even the best examples of what I am talking about.

For me, the biggest moment of Williams acting during *Heated Rivalry* Season 1 Episode 3, "Bookies," comes during a tense conversation scene between Shane and his parents.

His mom is going on and on about Ilya Rozanov's cocky behavior and Shane agrees that he's an asshole. But, is what Williams doesn't say that really makes the scene. His mom is focused on her criticism of Ilya, but the camera focuses on Shane's face and his staying through Shane's eyes that focuses on he starts to think about Ilya.

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There, for Storrie his big moment comes in two fold. Early on in the episode we have a scene where Ilya is in his hotel and Nolding calls from his father and brother in Russia.

In this scene we see Ilya shut down as his brother berates him and demands money. Storrie's expression, his posture, it all shows a man who is not at his ease at all. Ilya reverts to being an insecure child around his family because their expectations for him are so high.

There we see a further take on when Ilya is watching a Shane interview in French in his native tongue. Ilya curses Shane out and bemoans how "perfect" he is. But what is really happening is Storrie is showing us just how anxious Ilya is of Shane.

Falling Hard Very Fast, But Hiding Behind Clandestine Meetings

The funny thing about the source material of *Heated Rivalry* is, we know just how those feelings are terrified of sinking into the feelings of this unexpected connection. Sure, we know we also get to see just how much they can't hide how they feel.

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The tenrrible, the glaringly, and most of all the amazing might seem like pleasant mainly to some, but to us we are just how bad they have it for each other. It makes the first paced passage of time in this first episode really engaging. We see just how little they see each other in these early days and yet the love still managed to bloom.

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So much so that by the time we reach the awards show in Vegas scene, Ilya's expectations for Shane's behavior and Shane's expectations for Ilya are so clearly obvious confusion. These are two men who care deeply about each other already, but can't hide their true feelings behind teasing and snappy comments anymore.

Storrie and Williams give their all in this scene, proving to us that they know these characters beyond just words on a page. We believe in Shane's confusion and hurt as well as Ilya's guarded sadness.

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Their charged kiss that was destined to happen the moment Ilya had turned and said, "Not everything is about you, Hollander," satisfies us and breaks our heart all at once.

We can see the disappointment and hurt a mile away but much like a car crash we can't avert it. And for the episode to end on that note is diabolical and keeps us wanting to come back for more.

The Best Scene of the Whole Episode

Sure, talking about their first kiss or their first hook up is fun, Hock even mentioning the gym or the Vegas roof is very important. However, these don't compare to the scene that Storrie and Williams bring to us that stunned me this was going to be the best, most faithful adaptation.

I am talking about the press conference for the 90 Star Game. There is so much that goes on under the surface during that moment in the book which Storrie and Williams bring to the screen perfectly.

Without bearing as over the head with it, the show allows these characters to show both their age and inexperience when handling press questions, but also their insecurities about living up to expectations.

At first it is just Shane who is visibly insecure, but then Ilya is asked about the legacy of the Russian team and he immediately opens up. Instead of making a big deal of it, Shane taps his foot to Ilya's under the table, silently asks for permission to speak for him, and then takes over the mic.

It's a small moment but it has a long lasting impact on both Ilya and as characters. This is the moment when things definitely shift for them. Ilya realizes in that moment that he can perhaps rely on Shane to carry him through that more difficult moments.

There is something that the press jumbled is unaware of, but viewers can see plane as day. These are two men who have to keep things secret and protect their careers and families but only have eyes for each other.

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Despite his hesitancy with Ilya's publicness regarding their relationship, Shane proves in this moment that he's just as drawn to this thing they share as Ilya is. It's a moment that can't be understated and the actors perform perfectly.

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Stray Thoughts

- Yuna and Thomas Hollander are the cutest parents
- Shane going down a YouTube rabbit hole of Ilya videos but telling his parents he went down an "animals who are enemies becoming friends" rabbit hole. Oh Shane you are not subtle to us.
- The accuracy and emotionally charged feeling of the sex scenes really make this episode go above and beyond expectations.
- Getting them exchanging phone numbers so early on actually makes this that much better. We are getting more texting between them.
- Also, Connor Storrie carrying Hudson Williams across the room and tenderly putting him on the bed, when I said the sex scenes made the episode, I am talking about this one specifically.
- Scott Hunter clocking them right after they agree to meet for sex, that's my sweet closet gay!
- Then clocking them again in Vegas. Scott Hunter they could never make me hate you.

What did you think of this episode of ***Heated Rivalry***? Share your thoughts in the comments below, and don't forget to leave your own rating!

Critic Rating:

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

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Mads is a part-time entertainment journalist and full-time marketing content creator. They love any and all TV Dramas with a few sitcoms mixed in. Join in the fun talking about TV by following them on Twitter: @dorothynyc89.

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