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Now That 'Heated Rivalry' Is Returning for Season 2, the Show Has To Spotlight This Overlooked Book Character

By Sandi Caballero
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Sandi Caballero is a Senior Entertainment Reporter for Collider. Her professional journey began in the mid-2010s as a blogging specialist before evolving into writing roles in the 2020s. At Collider, Sandi started as a Senior Writer in late 2022 and has been a Senior Editor since 2024.

Editor's note: The below contains light spoilers for Heated Rivalry Episode 4.

It's official. *Heated Rivalry* is **coming back for Season 2**. The Crave original, which promised three weeks ago, has seemingly taken the world by storm, becoming an internet sensation and turning its two stars, **Connor Storrie** and **Hudson Williams**, into two of Hollywood's hottest up-and-coming actors. Based on the epoonymous 2019 novel by bestselling author **Rachel Reid**, itself a part of the overarching *Game Changers* series, *Heated Rivalry* follows Shane Hollander (Williams) and Ilya Rozanov (Storrie), two professional hockey players and rivals who enter into a passionate, secret relationship spanning several years.

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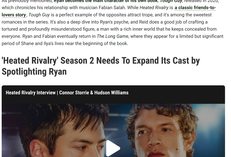
Season 1 mostly adapts *Heated Rivalry*, the second entry in the *Game Changers* series, but also includes major elements from the first book, *Game Changer*, which focuses on the romance between hockey superstar Scott Hunter (**François Arnaud**) and barista Kip Grady (**Robbie G.K.**). Presumably, Season 2 will adapt *The Long Game*, Reid's direct sequel to *Heated Rivalry* and the last book in the *Game Changers* series (so far, anyway). With the show being such a success, and The *Long Game* featuring almost every major character from the book series in some capacity, it makes sense that Season 2 would expand the show's world beyond Ilya and Shane. The show's confirmed return also serves as **the perfect opportunity to introduce arguably the most compelling and interesting character in the books**.

'Heated Rivalry' Episode 4 Namedrops One of the Books' Most Interesting Characters



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Heated Rivalry **Episode 4 is crucial** to Ilya and Shane's relationship, as it's the first time they bond more emotionally beyond their physical arrangement. During their now-famous lava rewell scene, as they watch a hockey game, **Ilya and Shane casually discuss Ryan Price, a player who gets traded every season**. Ilya goes on to say Ryan is not who Shane might think, mentioning how he's a bit quieter and has a tough time making friends. This conversation is lifted directly from the novel, but it actually references a prior scene in the book that the show doesn't adapt, where Ryan and Ryan bond over a particularly tough flight. It takes place during Ryan's time with the Boston Raders and under Ilya's captaincy, and sees Ilya comforting Ryan by making a superficial but meaningful bond with him.

Ryan suffers from severe anxiety, and Ilya eases him by talking to him and lending him his chef to watch a loud and dumb action movie. While it might not seem like a major scene in the grand scope of things, **it's actually quite an important moment for Ilya**, as it's one of the few times when he actually acts like a captain to one of his teammates. It's also one of the earliest times when we see just how empathetic Ilya is, showing a softer side to himself that's usually reserved for Shane only. While it's disappointing that *Heated Rivalry* didn't include this scene, the season already has so much ground to cover over its six episodes.

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As previously mentioned, **Ryan becomes the main character of his own book**, *Tough Guy*, released in 2020, which chronicles his relationship with musician Fabian Salah. While *Heated Rivalry* is **a classic friends-to-lovers story**, *Tough Guy* is a perfect example of the opposites attract trope, and it's among the sweetest romances in the series. It's also a deep dive into Ryan's psyche, and Reid does a good job of crafting a tortured and profoundly misunderstood figure, a man with a rich inner world that he keeps concealed from everyone. Ryan and Fabian eventually return in The Long game, where they appear for a limited but significant period of Shane and Ilya's lives near the beginning of the book.

'Heated Rivalry' Season 2 Needs To Expand Its Cast by Spotlighting Ryan

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In my review of *Heated Rivalry*, one of my minor issues with the first two episodes was how underdeveloped the supporting cast seemed. Don't get me wrong, we all love Shane and Ilya — they are, indeed, the reason why we're all watching. However, the best LGBTQ+ shows out there — **Looking**, *Queer as Folk*, **The L Word**, **It's a Sin**, and **Heartstopper**, just to name a few — rise on the strength of the rich and perfectly defined world they build, and that includes a strong supporting cast. Season 1 of *Heated Rivalry* has already taken a huge step on this front by focusing an entire episode around Scott and Kip, introducing another major gay couple and enriching its in-world dynamics. **The show could use this same technique to introduce the other major couples in Game Changers**, especially because the actual plot of The *Long Game* features two of them pretty significantly.

Additionally, alongside Ilya, **Ryan is the single most interesting character in all of Game Changers**. With him, Reid explores the very sensitive and relevant topic of our generation's most prevalent mental health struggle. Ryan is the typical gentle giant with an edge, but he's also extremely relatable. He's good at his job but not the obsessive superstar that Ilya, Shane, and, to a degree, Scott are — not quite exceptional but far from unimpressive, someone who stands out effortlessly when all he wants, at times, is to disappear.

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The same goes for his romance with the overly extroverted and confident Fabian. While no details will be spoiled about *Tough Guy* or how their relationship unfolds, suffice it to say it's night-and-day compared to Shane and Ilya or Scott and Kip, largely because of how comfy Fabian can be. **Ryan's story would allow the show to fully embrace a more overt and proud side of the LGBTQ+ experience**, a much welcome change of pace considering the secretive aspect of both major couples in *Heated Rivalry* Season 1.

'Heated Rivalry' Season 2 Should Introduce Every Book Character

Image via SHOWtime

Heated Rivalry has become a smash hit that could very well go beyond two seasons at this point. Although adapting one book per season seems like a logical idea, it's reasonable to speculate that the show will most likely integrate other characters into its current Ilya-Shane storyline. After all, The *Long Game* is already structured like that, so why fix what's not broken?

With this in mind, **Season 2 of *Heated Rivalry* should truly spotlight Ryan's story**, both during his own romance and what comes after. Season 1 has already depicted one side of the LGBTQ+ experience, the secretive and all-too-relatable aspect of having to hide from a society that often seems unwilling or unable to understand gay relationships — but there should also be space to depict a more open and gentle side, one where romance can thrive under a strong sense of belonging and self-worth, not to mention a healthy dose of experimentation. Introducing Ryan would introduce a new perspective on a classic formula that can only strengthen what *Heated Rivalry* has already constructed with its outstanding first season.

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