



Opinion

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# Thank God There's Barely Any Hockey In 'Heated Rivalry'

If you're tuning in for the sports, you've been misguided.

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Crave

It can be tough to convince loved ones that you're obsessed with the hot new gay smut adaptation for the plot. But as I've assured friends and colleagues—and will emphasize again here—what makes *Heated Rivalry*, a steamy Canadian TV series based on Rachel Reid's hit 2019 novel, so distinctly glorious isn't just its passion-filled, near-constant sex scenes. It's not just the obvious physical appeal of its leads, Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie. Nor does the show's magic lie in its devotion to (often unnecessary) fade-to-black moments. It's the steady-building, love (not pure lust!) story at its center. Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov's connection is one for the ages, and two episodes in, it's already driven me to tears. (It was the quietly devastating scene when Shane slowly deleted his "we didn't even kiss" message that broke me.) And on top of all that, obviously, the hyperrealistic sex scenes don't hurt.

However, there's one more thing I cherish about this hockey romance series: the fact that there's barely any hockey in it at all. While the plot revolves around high-pressure tournaments where Hollander and Ilya rendezvous, and even though they're framed as the sport's top stars in this fictional universe, thanks to the incredibly speedy game scenes, I have yet to experience any hockey fatigue.



Before watching, my lone, minor hesitation about *Heated Rivalry* was the prospect of sitting through rounds of fake hockey while waiting for the real (off-ice) action. My issue with most sports fiction (barring my beloved *Friday Night Lights*) is that I rarely have the patience to watch actors or body doubles play stylized versions of sports I don't even care for in real life. Of course, occasionally, a sports scene delivers a pivotal injury or dramatic revelation that justifies its existence. However! Most often, they're filled with grunts, body-checking, and indescribable motions—I can get all of that from a sex scene without struggling to piece together what certain plays and positions an eager fake announcer is yapping on about.

That said, I'm deeply grateful to the *Heated Rivalry* powers-that-be for their blink-and-you-miss-them tournament moments. Time spent near the rink focuses more on flirtatious exchanges or plot setup from the sidelines (like that teammate casually revealing he's staying in the hotel room next door to our resident Russian king). For research purposes, I rewatched the first two episodes (a grueling task, obviously) and timed each actual full-out hockey scene. The longest was about a minute and a half—and it was our first glimpse of Shane and Ilya facing off, so I'll allow it. The rest hovered around 15–30 seconds. Which just so happens to be the exact length of time that my attention can withstand sports action before it begins to falter.



Hockey provides an excellent backdrop for *Heated Rivalry's* central romance. It sends our boys to competitions worldwide, and often pits them against each other (love an enemies-to-lovers setup). Most importantly, it places both characters in a setting that's been historically plagued by toxic masculinity, which adds texture and culturally relevant, oppressive stakes to Ilya and Shane's love story.

But the show's writer-director, Jacob Tierney, and the rest of the masterminds at work here made a solid choice, limiting the actual sports content. We only really need to know which half of the couple won each game and then keep things moving. There are far more compelling and expository hotel room scenes that await. But the game scenes are great fare for *Reputation* edits.

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