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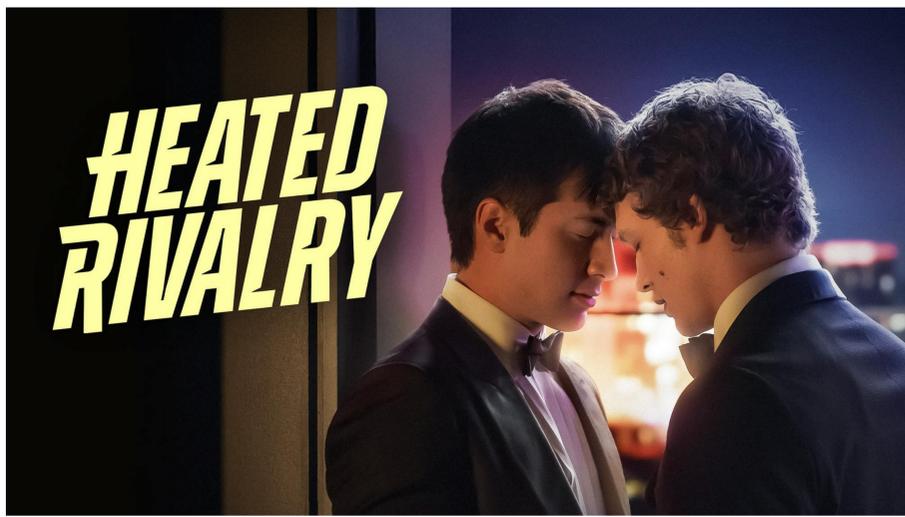


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'Heated Rivalry': A Pucking Good Show

By [Emma Robinson](#)
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READING TIME: ABOUT 6 MINUTES

With the plethora of new television shows constantly being produced, they have to stand up to serious scrutiny to make it big. A gay romance about hockey players? It could be a big hit or a miss depending on the execution. However, the new show *Heated Rivalry* is definitely a hit. It has recently blown up on social media, driving many including myself to obsession. If your TikTok For You Page is anything like mine, then every other video is an edit of the two main characters or some other reference to the show. But what exactly has made this show so successful?

To start with some background on the show, it is based on the book *Heated Rivalry* from the *Game Changers* series by Rachel Reid. This series focuses specifically on gay hockey romances, with the second and sixth books focusing on the *Heated Rivalry* main characters Canadian Shane Hollander and Russian Ilya Rozanov. Reid has also confirmed the upcoming release of a third book about these two characters. The show even includes some scenes of the couple Scott and Kip from the first book in this series, which is a bonus for any fans that have already read the books. The first season of the show premiered over the course of four weeks this past November and December. While unassuming at first, as it was first produced by the Canadian streaming platform Crave, it was then streamed in the United States by the more well-known HBO Max. I personally watched the show because it was free with my HBO Max subscription and I had heard rumors that it was entertaining. I also needed a good distraction from studying for the MCAT and this show definitely did the trick.

As an avid book reader, I was also intrigued by the fact that the show was based on a romance. While the book is relatively highly rated on Goodreads at 4.33 stars, many people fault the book for being too physical. This is also the main complaint from viewers of the show. The show definitely leads with the physical side of their relationship as they spend many years exclusively as lovers due to the fact that they are on rival hockey teams. I would not recommend this show to anyone that is not comfortable with watching sex scenes as that is, admittedly, a large portion of the show.

At first, I agreed that the show was too physical and thought there was not going to be any real connection between the two main characters. However, as I kept watching, their relationship eventually grew from lovers to boyfriends. I appreciated getting to learn more about the main characters and their struggles, such as Shane coming out to his parents and Ilya's manipulative brother. My favorite episode centered on their summer together at Shane's cottage where they really got to spend quality time together.

Another interesting aspect of the show is that the season takes place over 10 years. The first episode opens in 2008, the summer before Ilya and Shane's rookie season. They first meet at a hockey game where they play against each other. While there is obvious tension from the start of that first meeting, the two do not actually hook up until 2010. This is one aspect of the first few episodes that viewers have also taken fault with, due to the skips over large chunks of time. While I would agree it is a bit jarring in the first episode, I appreciate that we only see the important aspects of their relationship rather than random scenes that are not as meaningful. I also think it enables the viewer to see the two characters grow substantially from when we first meet them.

The main draw to the show is the actors themselves. They are truly the perfect picks for both characters. This was a breakout role for both of the stars, Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie, who really committed to their roles and embodied the passion of their characters. Storrie even worked with a Russian dialect coach every day for four weeks for his role. The two also developed an undeniable on-scene chemistry that I find to be a rarity. Some sources state the budget was only \$12 million Canadian dollars and it was filmed over the course of five weeks. This show proves what you can do with two really good actors who are perfect for their parts, even if this is their first big break.

I am sure this is just the beginning of lucrative Hollywood careers for these actors as the two were recently asked to present at the Golden Globes. Williams also opened the DSquared2 show at fashion week in Milan, a clear indication of the show's success across the world. It is clear from their interviews that the two have become good friends over the course of the show and are shocked by the level of fame they have acquired in such a short time.

As a whole, the show provides a revolutionary representation of a gay romance in the sporting world. It exposes the road blocks LGBTQ+ individuals may face in pursuing a relationship in the public eye, while remaining focused on the journey of the characters themselves. Hockey player Jesse Korteum recently came out as gay in a statement on Facebook and credited *Heated Rivalry* for providing the representation necessary for him to take that step. I am personally so excited that they have announced a second season likely coming later this year or early 2027. *Heated Rivalry* is definitely worth a watch, but I will warn you that you may end up bingeing it until 3 a.m..

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