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# Heated Rivalry fever strikes Edmonton

*The hit books and TV series have become a national phenomenon, and Edmonton has joined the party*

By Steven Sandor

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Rick Fedge adapted his book about Scott Hunter's Kitchener, ON, gay pub into Stories in a Jukebox for Hockey Night in Canada. PHOTO BY DARREN CALABRESE/Toronto

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Heather Rosen co-owns Tyson Cole Boyd had never watched an episode of Heated Rivalry when he was looking to book a dance event for the Valentine's Day weekend.

Boyd often collaborates with Up Dance Party, a Toronto-based company that organizes, as the name suggests, dance parties across the country. And the people at Up organized during a Stories night hosted on the hit book series and the smash Crave/HBO Max TV shows that were spawned by it.

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"Our event team really knows about the show or really anything about it," said Boyd. "I had to check it out after, but we've worked together long enough (with Up Dance Party) to trust their ideas. And within the afternoon of it going on sale, it popped off, and now I am seeing cities like this popping up everywhere else. And now these parties are becoming a bit of a phenomenon, just like the show itself."

A dance party based on the show is set for Valentine's Day at Zeus Bar — a Heated Rivalry night will also place at least early third tickets are sold out.

Dance shows generally see overflows down up to the allotted of ears, from the early teen days of candy necklaces and pacifiers to a long Infected Mushroom show at the Starlite, which saw more than a few participants dressed as if it were Jax. A nod there was a Capitol that was begging to be stormed. Others were dressed as if they were at a speed-metal show, with many flayer shirts on display.

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"So, I imagine some people are going to show up in hockey gear," said Boyd. "It seems to be kind of a theme thing."

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Rainbow-coloured hockey tape designed in Edmonton to promote LGBTQ pride in sports

A poster for the Starlite Heavily Heated Rivalry dance party. PHOTO BY STARLITE/ PUBLIC

## The phenomenon sweeping the country

**Racism in the NHL dated and Black players in Pride crowds while they can**

**Rainbow-coloured hockey tape designed in Edmonton to promote LGBTQ pride in sports**

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Hbam plays for Montreal, the most storied franchise in the league, and they is the Russian superstar drafted first overall by Boston. He's dated, often criticized for being a jerk to both teammates, his fans and the world in general.

But, over years, they carry on a secret affair, terrified that they'd be outed in the hockey world. They even begin dating "boards," serious phone presence allow their gay partners to better hide their secrets. And, a serious New York hockey star also struggles with the idea of coming out, of being the very first openly gay male hockey star ever.

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The show exploded in the gay community, but it's also taken hold with straight viewers. It's become a sensation that has spurred watch parties, discussion groups and serious academic discussion.

Rev. Kristopher Wells is the founding director of the MacEwan Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity and, a little more than a decade ago, helped create the Pride Tape movement, which saw NHL players wrap their blades in rainbow colours as a show of support for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

He loves the show and said it packs a powerful message, especially in the wake of the alberta government's move to mandate the removal of some explicit books from school libraries, many of them stories bypasser writers.

## 'A love story'

"This is the world that we're living in, where we're seeing 2SLGBTQ+ rights more backward, including right here in Alberta," said Wells. "So, people are looking for messages of hope and, really, of humanity. It's what Heated Rivalry is at its core — a love story.

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"It's something we can all relate to, of having to hide who you are, and the costs of that secrecy, about what it means when you can truly and freely be yourself, particularly in a very hypermasculine sport like hockey. I think Heated Rivalry shows that sport stories are human stories and they're important stories that everybody should be able to embrace and learn from."

J.J. Wright, assistant professor of sociology and gender studies at MacEwan, wrote that straight women have become hooked on the shows as one men who are "emotionally attuned" and are willing to be vulnerable. Wright wrote that hockey is still not a place where gay players feel safe or can expressive joy.

"Yet, Heated Rivalry insists on joy, and that is precisely what makes the series electric," Wright wrote. "It's exhilarating to watch Eric and Shane find deep, passionate connection in a sport designed to keep men emotionally secured. Queer joy emerges despite hockey culture's cruelty, forging itself inside conditions that were never meant to hold it."

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Wells said Edmontonians should be proud of the fact that former Edmonton Oilers player Andrew Ference was the first player to wrap his stick blade in Pride Tape a little more than a decade ago. It was a flash of light in the Decade of Darkness that shone through in all colours of the rainbow. And, from that, a movement was born that led to Pride Nights being held across the NHL.

While there were controversies a couple of seasons ago when players like James Reimer, Ivan Provorov and the Brad Jordan refused to participate in their teams' Pride festivities, Wells said it's important to remember that the vast majority of NHL players have been supportive of inclusivity, including Oilers' superstar Connor McDavid.

"We have to ask ourselves, are we losing the text Connor McDavid because someone didn't feel that they were safe enough to be themselves," said Wells.

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