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'Heated Rivalry' fans in Russia are breaking antigay laws to stream the show

Nothing can seemingly stop the devotion to Shane and Ilya, even Russia's anti-LGBTQ laws.

By Chase DiBenedetto on January 15, 2026

Fans of the hockey phenomenon will do anything they can to watch Jacob Elordi and Connor Storrie's romance. Credit: Crave/Sven Frenzel/Bob Trott/Getty Images (Elordi)

There is not much that can stop a dedicated fandom.

Not paywalls, not cancellations, and certainly not even the wrath of the law in your country. But for the sake of transparency, we should mention that Russian authorities are now actively hunting down people who watch the popular romance series *Heated Rivalry*, which has been banned in the country for being "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations." Hundreds of individuals for the crime in 2025 and imprisoning at least two. Violators can also face fines of 400,000 rubles ($5,110) to 5 million rubles ($63,860). Pinkvilla reported.

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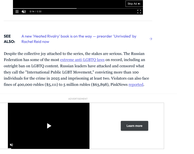

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Despite the collective joy attached to the series, the stakes are serious. The Russian Federation has some of the most homophobic anti-LGBTQ laws in the world, including an outright ban on LGBTQ content. Russian authorities have also used anti-terrorism laws to crack down on LGBTQ organizations, sometimes sending more than a dozen individuals to the prison colony and imprisoning at least two. Violators can also face fines of 400,000 rubles ($5,110) to 5 million rubles ($63,860). Pinkvilla reported.

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As of today (Jan. 15), the government has officially charged Russian streaming services with the crime of violating the country's propaganda laws, which prohibit the amplification of "nontraditional sexual relationships" in Russian citizens. The charges target domestic sites and stood during services like Rostlar TV, Kinopoisk, Wink, Ivi, Amediateka, IptTV, and Digital Television.

The determination of Russian fans to stream the hot new show mirrors a general trend in online fandom and among *Heated Rivalry* fans, specifically, who initially shared ways to torrent the series using VPN services and links online from the parent network, Crave Canada, and licensing network HBO Max US. HBO Max reportedly only signed on to the project after accounting for the enormous viewership when fans of the show's book series. They said they felt they needed to "do their own data" and get the show to the masses.

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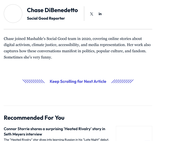

The success of *Heated Rivalry* — and the formidable sports romance book industry from which its source material gained its following — has partially to its compelling, often erotic, juxtaposition of an extremely masculine sport and the emotional stakes of two men falling in love. The series centers on Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov, both NHL stars. Hockey, in turn, is the same brand of masculinity and athleticism that historically offended an audit for sexual exploration, community, and LGBTQ acceptance. Fandom and *Heated Rivalry* show creator Jacob Tierney have explained its popularity with its women is due in part to the ability of writers to ignore the gendered power dynamics of heterosexual pairings and lean into the unity of sexual partners being on equal footing — although much of the series relies on stereotypical tropes that critics say still feds into gender and racial hierarchy.

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Hockey, in particular, is one of the most popular sports depicted in the genre. As of 2019, the National Hockey League had no active out LGBTQ players, be reflecting that reality is partially attributed to being fans, especially those in restrictive, patriarchal environments.

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Chase DiBenedetto
Social Good Reporter

Chase joined Mashable's Social Good team in 2020, covering online stories about digital activism, climate justice, accessibility, and media representation. Her work also captures how these conversations manifest in politics, popular culture, and fandom. Sometimes she's very funny.

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