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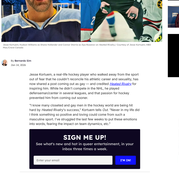
Heated Rivalry inspires real-life hockey player to come out as gay

"It's the outside, it can only be positive. On the inside, I was still that kid in Minnesota hiding," the player wrote in his coming out statement.



Jesse Kortuem's coming-out statement, after the movie Heated Rivalry, inspired a real-life hockey player to come out as gay. Photo Credit: Jesse Kortuem, Instagram; Heated Rivalry, HBO Max; Photo Illustration: Out Staff

By Bernardo Sim
Feb 24, 2026

Jesse Kortuem, a real-life hockey player who walked away from the sport in his teens because he felt unable to be himself, has been inspired by the new cultural phenomenon of gay sports romance, Heated Rivalry. For inspiring him to finally live his life as a gay man, he wrote in his coming out statement to the film, he played himself in the movie, and "your passion for hockey presented him from coming out sooner.

"I know many closeted and gay men in the hockey world are being let down by their organizations," he said in his coming out video. "It's time. We did it. We're something so positive and loving could come from such a toxic, masculine sport. I've struggled the last few weeks to put these emotions into words, feeling the impact or warm dynamics, etc."

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Kortuem adds, "Today, I have the deep it's finally been my hockey journey and my story. I'm beyond grateful for all the positive comments I've received from past teammates and high school teammates."

Read more Kortuem's full coming out statement below, after the image.

Jesse Kortuem, in his Instagram coming out video, and in Heated Rivalry, HBO Max. Photo Credit: Jesse Kortuem, Instagram; Heated Rivalry, HBO Max

Jesse Kortuem's coming-out statement.

At hockey, there is nothing like hitting the ice after the Zamboni leaves behind a fresh, smooth sheet of ice. For many hockey players, the sound of skates cutting through the ice is a sound of freedom and a sanctuary before a game or practice. But for me, it is the sound of a place where I felt I had to hide.

I want to start by saying a massive thank you to The Cutting Edge Podcast for inviting me into the cold sweaters of their Winter Classic on Tik Tok/IG. BC. Standing on the ice, wearing your jersey that represents both my sport and my community, felt like a large being, and I felt a sense of belonging I never felt before.

I am a private person. Those who know me best know that I don't share much if anything publicly on social media, but lately, something has sparked in me (ok – yes credit to #HeatedRivalry). I realized it is finally time to share a journey I have held inside for a very long time.

To any hockey players, the sounds of the rink and the feel of cold air are sacred. The locker room is a sanctuary where we shed our armor, laugh, carving from ice, and the high pitched ping of a puck hitting the post bring immense comfort. For a long time, however, the rink did not feel the same because I could be all of me. I felt I had to take part of myself hide at the rink.

Growing up as the youngest of four boys in the #StraitOfHockey (Newfoundland), I was surrounded by hockey from the day I was very, very young. I was very, very young because I carried a weight that did not seem to fit into that world, and I lived in a constant state of dichotomy.

"I loved the game, but I lived with a persistent fear. I wondered how I could be gay and still play such a tough and masculine sport."

To my younger self that identity could never be revealed. I did not think those two worlds could occupy the same person, let alone the same locker room. Coming out in the 2000s did not feel like an option, homophobia was rampant, and representation was nowhere to be found. I would have been a social disaster at such a large high school. At 7.1 miles long, I walked from the high school team and the brotherhood of hockey was my lifeline. I was terrified of being ostracized, of being alone.

Years later, while living in New York and Atlanta, I found myself stuck on the ice playing at a high level. While I was out to many people around me in my life at that point, I still could not bring myself to be fully out on the ice. I felt the weight of my secret every time I laced up my skates. I felt the weight of my secret every time I put on my jersey. I felt the weight of my secret every time I walked into the locker room. I felt the weight of my secret every time I sat down for a meal with the "gay players" as I never took the chance. I spent every week in a locker room with guys I respected, yet I still did not feel safe enough to tell them who I truly was." I felt the weight of my secret every time I hit the bar, or dating, I would quickly change the subject. It came down to it, I would just tell them I was single, even when I was seeing someone.

"I spent every week in a locker room with guys I respected, yet I still did not feel safe enough to tell them who I truly was."

The road from that teenager in Minnesota to the man I am today has not been so clear of a path. It involved a lot of searching, a lot of struggle, a lot of tears, a lot of soul-searching, a lot of deep dives, and the difficult work of reconciling my past with my truth.

The struggle to reconcile these two halves of my life reached a breaking point in 2017. I was ready to pull retreat a coveted player in straight leagues for good, or even worse, hang up the skates forever. I decided to take a leap of faith and reach out to a friend, a fellow hockey player who was the #HockeyDivas, a gay sports event held annually in Las Vegas with the hockey tournament sponsored by the #LABears. I had been to a few events, I had been to a few tournaments, I had been to a few

The tournament would prove to be a paradigm shift. I met a group of guys from across the US and Canada (Las Vegas Boys) who were hockey players, who were gay, who were in the closet, who were in the rink, who never been the same. It has been a long, complicated journey to move past the closeted athlete persona (something I'm still working on today) and find actual peace through the #HockeyDivas (Canada) and across the U.S.

"From that moment forward, my life has never been the same."

This past weekend at Sun Peaks was so much more than just a few hockey games. Standing on that ice, I realized I have finally found my tribe. I have found my family. I have found my home. I have found a community and family for the reminder that there is room for all of us on the ice, in the rink, in life.

This is my story. It is not everyone's story, but for what it is worth, I thought I would share because I want to speak to the athletes out there who are still in the closet or struggling to find their way. I want you to know that there is a community out there for you. There is room for your happiness waiting for you on your path. You will get through this, and it is going to be okay.

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By Bernardo Sim
Jan 31, 2026

François Arnaud on his relationship with Heated Rivalry's success, and male vulnerability. Photo Credit: Instagram/@francoisarnaud

Heated Rivalry star François Arnaud discussed feeling "proud" of his character, Scott Hunter, and argued that the success of the show, which has been a cultural phenomenon since its premiere, is due to the Bare Stomp Bear Hockey and Hudson Williams Shane Hollander performances featured in the first episode. Read Reading. >

Heated Rivalry is a hit show, but does it reignite queer TV?

By Bernardo Sim
Jan 31, 2026

Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander and Connor Storrie (Ilya Rozanov) in Heated Rivalry. | HBO Max Photo Credit

Starring Hudson Williams (Shane Hollander) and Connor Storrie (Ilya Rozanov), Heated Rivalry was turned into a TV show by showrunner Jacob Tierney, based on the Game Changers book series by Rachel Reid, and centered a queer love story between two closeted hockey players going from rivals to lovers. During the first episode, Shane Hollander (Williams) and Ilya Rozanov (Storrie) are forced into a "bare stomp" Brimet — turning to cash mentions the global superstars, selling out all physical copies of Reid's series of novels, and selling up Tierney as one of the most popular showrunners in television. Read Reading. >

Josh Cavallo accuses soccer club of homophobia—Adelaide United responds

By Bernardo Sim
Jan 31, 2026

Josh Cavallo, during a press appearance, in Adelaide United FC, and Tasty Homophobic and making decisions based on "politics," adding that he also embraced "a group chat of teammates mocking a picture of me and my partner," which he said "only added to the trauma." Read Reading. >

Love 'Heated Rivalry'? Don't miss 'Slo Pitch,' Crave's next queer sports show

By Philip Dwyer
Jan 31, 2026

Jay Ellis's Tim and Lucas Jade Zumann's Ben Spiegel in Crave's Slo Pitch. | Courtesy Crave/HBO Max Photo

Canadian streaming service Crave has another highly anticipated queer sports show coming up. Read Reading. >

5 queer athletes with Olympic potential that you should be keeping an eye on

By Jack Alexander Russell
Oct 12, 2021

Kim Jaeth, Elizabeth Wassmann, Ilya Kovalchuk, and Hudson Williams. | Pete Dexter/Getty, Andrew Kelly/Reuters, Sang Hong/HBO Photo Credit

The Olympics have been more and more queer every year. At the 2024 Paris Olympics, there were 193 LGBTQ+ athletes, and this year, we're hoping for even more! Read Reading. >

Heated Rivalry book sequel Unrivaled by Rachel Reid: What we know (so far)

By Bernardo Sim
Dec 11, 2025

Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander and Connor Storrie (Ilya Rozanov) in Heated Rivalry. | Courtesy Crave/HBO Photo Credit

Heated Rivalry's cheated queer hockey players Ilya Rozanov (played by Connor Storrie) and Shane Hollander (played by Hudson Williams) are reportedly getting a new book about their love story, reportedly named Unrivaled, from author Rachel Reid, which would be book 7 within the overall Game Changers series. Read Reading. >

Hudson Williams says closeted athletes have reached out to him

By Marcus Hernandez
Jan 09, 2026

Hudson Williams at Sundance. | Kevin Mazur/Getty Images

Hudson Williams is still grappling with his newfound fame and the success of the wildly popular television show Heated Rivalry, where he plays a closeted hockey player. The Crave/HBO Max series has had definite real-world impact. During a recent appearance on Andy Cohen's SiriusXM show Radio Andy, Williams said he's received DMs from professional athletes who are still in the closet. Read Reading. >

5 horny moments of Heated Rivalry's Hudson Williams on Tonight Show

By Bernardo Sim
Jan 08, 2026

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Hudson Williams and Jimmy Fallon on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon/ Nate Dwyanig/NBC

It's official: Hudson Williams is a certified superstar. Keep Reading →

Meet every queer athlete on the Olympic women's hockey team

By Erin Macdonald-Gillis Jan 09, 2026

Clyde Barnes, Hilary Knight, and Alex Carpenter / Justin Berl/Getty Images; Harry How/Getty Images; Lotte Devin/Getty Images

The 2026 Winter Olympics are right around the corner, and it's (hopefully) shaping up to be just as queer as the last summer games, where 193 LGBTQ+ athletes competed. Keep Reading →

Sam Kerr and Kristie Mewis tie the knot in 'soccer's royal wedding'

By Erin Macdonald-Gillis Jan 05, 2026

Sam Kerr and Kristie Mewis/ Zylan Wallace/FA Images via Getty Images

One of the most iconic couples in women's soccer just tied the knot. Keep Reading →

Women's soccer GOAT Marta marries fellow player Carrie Lawrence

By Erin Macdonald-Gillis Jan 04, 2026

Soccer players Marta Vieira da Silva and Carrie Lawrence get married. (Screenshots from Instagram video shared by the couple on social media/ Instagram/@mrsmartavieiradasilva, @carrie.lawrence)

Marta Vieira da Silva — best known nonpareil as Marta — got married to fellow women's soccer player Carrie Lawrence on Friday, January 2. Keep Reading →

Heated Rivalry actors, characters, and gay storylines (updated guide)

By Erin Macdonald-Gillis Dec 26, 2025

Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov and Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander on Heated Rivalry season 1 episode 5 / HBO Max/Crave Canada

This sly and extra spicy Crave/HBO Max series Heated Rivalry has had fans losing their minds over weekly new episodes from this epic rivalry to lovers hockey romance saga that quickly became the gay internet's greatest obsession. Keep Reading →

Heated Rivalry: Sexy hockey players fans should be following

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Heated Rivalry: Sexy hockey players fans should be following / HBO Max

These real-life NHL athletes are just as hot as the stars of Heated Rivalry. Keep Reading →

NHL: Heated Rivalry is 'unique driver for creating new fans'

By Erin Macdonald-Gillis Dec 22, 2025

Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander and Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov on Heated Rivalry episode 5, NHL player cameo hockey stick with rainbow tape during an NHL Prize Night game / HBO Max/Crave Canada; Bill Wippert/NHL/ Lou Betty Images

The National Hockey League has issued a new statement acknowledging the impact that the Crave/HBO Max show Heated Rivalry is having on welcoming new fans to professional hockey as a sport. Keep Reading →

Pedro Pascal loves 'Heated Rivalry' just like us, by the way

By Erin Macdonald-Gillis Dec 22, 2025

Pedro Pascal at a promotional event for Eddington during the 78th annual Cannes Film Festival in May 2025; Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams on Heated Rivalry / Gareth Cattermole/Getty Images; HBO Max/Crave Canada

In case you didn't know, Pedro Pascal has been claiming Heated Rivalry just like the rest of us, and fandoms for both the actor and the Crave/HBO Max series are now clocking his sweet and heartfelt reactions to social media posts about the gay hockey show that's taken over the world. Keep Reading →

Love 'Heated Rivalry'? Watch these 9 great queer shows, too!

By Erin Macdonald-Gillis Dec 21, 2025

(clockwise/starting) Heated Rivalry, A League of Their Own/ Prime Video/AJA; HBO Max/Crave Canada; Amazon Studios

If you love seeing queer people in sports, you should add these TV shows to your watch list. Keep Reading →

Heated Rivalry: Robbie G.K. wants more Kip and Scott—and to play a superhero

By Erin Macdonald-Gillis Dec 20, 2025

Robbie G.K. as Kip Grady on Heated Rivalry / HBO Max/Crave Canada

Editor's note: This article contains spoilers for Heated Rivalry season 1 episode 5, "I'll Believe In Anything," now streaming on HBO Max. Keep Reading →

Heated Rivalry: Scott Hunter and Kip Grady's relationship timeline

By Erin Macdonald-Gillis Dec 19, 2025

François Arnaud as Scott Hunter, Robbie G.K. as Kip Grady on Heated Rivalry / HBO Max/Crave Canada

Editor's note: This article contains spoilers for Heated Rivalry season 1 episode 5, titled "I'll Believe In Anything," now streaming on HBO Max. Keep Reading →

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