

'Heated Rivalry' scores big with romance in the rink

Alexis Crochiere, News Editor • January 20, 2026



The end of every year comes with a new round of favorites. It could be a favorite book from 2025, a favorite artist or new recipe, but for a favorite show, "Heated Rivalry" is definitely my winner. By looking at its debut week count of [30 million streaming minutes](#), I cannot be the only one.

Adapted from author Rachel Reid's sports romance series "Game Changers," Canadian streaming service [Crave](#) partnered with writer and Director Jacob Tierney to bring a nearly decade long love story between two professional hockey players to screens across the globe.

Crave offers exclusive streaming of all HBO content and originals which brought the Canadian show to HBO MAX and viewers in over [100 countries](#) around the world.

"Heated Rivalry" follows a Canadian and a Russian hockey player as they move from their junior leagues to national ice. They cross paths in hockey matches against their respective countries and a draft, multiple seasons and events in a fictional comparison to the NHL.

There is a strangely accurate rivalry that is described between the players because of their major league hockey teams' home cities, Boston and Montreal. On top of the tense competition between the two personally because of their first and second round draft picks, there is steaming chemistry.

There is nudity, sex scenes and profanity, however, there is all intimacy, vulnerability and passion.

Though some of these terms can go without the other, in this show they are not exclusive.

Because of the leading characters, Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie), you can see their relationship grow throughout these intimate moments and the love and respect they have for one another as characters but also as actors.

It does not just add to the story, but it is crucial to the plot to see one another grow emotionally and into their sexuality while juggling being a professional athlete and hiding a big part of who they are.

However, these explicit scenes have brought a characterization of this show that just does not accurately represent the depth that it has. It's not just a show filled with sex between these two men, and it's certainly not the most impressive parts of Williams and Storrie's performances.

These two took on something that is so difficult to get right, bringing a romance novel with [over a half a million copies](#) sold and hundreds of thousands of readers and portraying it accurately on screen.

In the show Hollander comes out to himself as well as his family, while Rozanov also deals with family trauma and grief. The intimacy and caring for one another carries itself throughout over eight seasons in their professional careers, which is so much history wrapped up into a six episode series.

They brought the emotion, they made fans including myself fall in love with them as they were falling in love with each other, and that takes so much more than a couple sex scenes.

In an interview with Variety, an interviewer went as far as to ask Storrie's co-host of the actor Award Nomination Ceremony, Janelle James, when after seeing him and these scenes and then in real life, what thoughts were going through her mind.

James answered without skipping a beat.

"That's not what I'm thinking about, I'm thinking about his excellent Russian accent that he does, I'm thinking about his characterization, I'm thinking that he is adorable, he looks like a leading man and I am excited to see where he goes next," said James.

A full Variety article focusing on Storrie's halloween costumes remains online, but the short clip with Variety's Marc Malkin, James and Storrie's interview has circled on social media platforms like [TikTok](#) and [Instagram](#) enraging fans.

A major factor in the sexualization of this show is because of its queer identities, which sets it apart in a great way as it starts to pave way for queer leading role representation in media but also leaves it open for critique and hate.

Though it can range to different extents there are sexual scenes in plenty of modern shows like "Game of Thrones," "Lucifer" and "[The White Lotus](#)," which have not been scrutinized to the same extent as being watched only for the sex scenes.

The story started off on a completely different art medium, it was a book in a long series of intertwined love stories for the purpose to entertain romance readers. Its audience followed it to the big screen and gained other viewers as it became accessible to new audiences and from there this relationship and story between Shane and Ilya became loved by so many.

A single viewer's perspective cannot speak for an entire fanbase, but watering the actors' chemistry and the writing of "Heated Rivalry" by Reid and Tierney down to a couple naked scenes does not do the show or anyone who worked on its set justice.

Leave a Comment

Donate to The Suffolk Journal

\$195 Contributed \$1050 Our Goal

Your donation will support the student journalists of Suffolk University. Your contribution will allow us to cover our annual website hosting costs.

[Donate](#)

More in Arts & Entertainment

- 'Stranger Things' Finale: The Abyss of Plot Holes
- Brighton Bazaar gets cozy with it's 'Snug Life' thrift
- SpringFest returns to campus for its 52nd annual show
- Winter interactive Boston: Art installations are back for a third year
- Timothée Chalamet rules box office as 'Marty Supreme'
- Dazzling holiday lights spread cheer all throughout Boston

More in Film

- Jeremy Levine and Rachael DeCruz share clippings of their film NINE at West Newton Cinema
- Yorgos Lanthimos' 'Bugonia' buzzes with power and paranoia
- 'Hamnet' paints a beautiful portrait of Shakespeare's family.
- Explore an uneasy motherhood story in the new comedy 'If I Had Legs I'd Kick You'
- 'The Black Phone 2' calls fans back for a chilling sequel
- New documentary 'Cover-up' unmask's Seymour Hersh's story.

More in Showcase

- OPINION: Not loving the 'I Love LA' hate
- OPINION: New Year's resolutions should not be rooted in self hatred
- Suffolk sports unable to weather the storm as spring semester begins
- Women's hockey falters on home ice with four-goal loss to Colby
- Suffolk, Boston Police respond to bomb threats at Suffolk, other area institutions and hospitals

About the Contributors

- Alexis Crochiere, News Editor | she/her
Lex Crochiere is a Broadcast Journalism major with a minor in Public and Professional Writing from Taunton, Mass. When she's not writing for the Journal she can be found in giving a Suffolk tour, reading a book, or watching hockey!
- Michaela Buckley, Arts & Entertainment Editor | she/her
Michaela is a senior from Braintree, Massachusetts, majoring in print/web journalism. When she's not writing for the Journal, you can find her listening to music, hanging with her cats, reading, or going to the movies. She's a big fan of live concerts, vinyl collecting and dabbling in new hobbies during her free time.