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"Heated Rivalry," the steamy romantic ice hockey drama that follows an enemies-to-lovers arc between two ice hockey rivals: Canada's Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Russia's Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie), has taken social media by storm. Media: @PopCrave / X.com

## 'Heated Rivalry's' effect: From low-budget streaming show to social media sensation

BY SAHANA VAIDYA  
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If you've been online at all during the last winter, you've definitely heard of "Heated Rivalry," the steamy romantic ice hockey drama that's taken the internet (especially our TikTok edit folders) by storm. What started as a lower-budget show on the Canadian streaming service **Crave** quickly made a global impact.

As a warning, there are some spoilers for season 1 of "Heated Rivalry" ahead, so stay wary if you haven't caught up yet.

Season 1, which premiered on HBO Max in November 2025, spans six episodes, following an enemies-to-lovers arc between two ice hockey rivals: Canada's Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Russia's Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie).

The show begins in 2008, when Shane and Ilya meet for the first time as rookies. The season starts off with a bang, focusing on the characters' secret fling and obvious chemistry. Some fans were shocked by the forwardness from the start, but it's after the second episode that the emotional depth of their connection begins to shine through.

The contrast between Shane and Ilya's characters sets up for magnetic chemistry and banter. Shane is shy and driven, with parents as managers who help bolster his career. Meanwhile, Ilya comes off as confident and cocky, with a strict father in Russia and a brother who exploits him for his money.

The leading conflict throughout the season is that their relationship must remain a secret due to the stigma surrounding LGBTQ+ relationships on the ice and in professional sports at large. As such, Shane and Ilya have a hard time defining their relationship, watching each other go through different relationships and flings across the course of a decade— acting as the ultimate situationship.

Episode five ends with a shocking hard launch of ice hockey captain Scott Hunter (François Arnaud) and his boyfriend Kip Grady's (Robbie Graham-Kuntz) relationship, encouraging Shane and Ilya to lean into their feelings for each other. Episode five also navigates many of the personal struggles that Shane and Ilya are facing in their own lives, tugging at viewers' heartstrings.

Ilya's monologue in Russian is particularly heartbreaking, as he confesses his desire to leave Russia and to express his love for Shane. This episode snaps back at prior criticism that the show's depiction was purely physical, because these characters finally drop their tough-guy acts and admit hard truths to themselves. As such, episode five has become one of the highest-rated episodes of all time on IMDB, with a 10/10 rating.

The season finale ends on a sweet note, as we finally see Shane and Ilya out of the public eye at the iconic cottage. And, of course, we see Shane's supportive parents' reaction to his coming out and his relationship with his hockey rival.

Just as Scott and Kip's hard launch affected Shane and Ilya's relationship, this show has made similar waves in real life. "Heated Rivalry" inspired real-life hockey player Jesse Kortuem to **come out** as gay on social media, stating, "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."

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Clearly, "Heated Rivalry" is the representation that many have been waiting for, redefining masculinity and gender norms. This show has also been **applauded** by many straight women, likely due to how it portrays men as emotionally vulnerable and in an equal partnership.

Following its mass viewership, "Heated Rivalry" has been renewed for a second season. If you're in need of a bingeable show to laugh, cry and scream at on your next snow day, give season 1 of "Heated Rivalry" a try!



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