

# Review | More than just sex, ‘Heated Rivalry’ tells an impactful story



📍 Hudson Williams and Connor Storie in Heated Rivalry (2025).

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The phenomenon of a television show, “Heated Rivalry,” achieved virality almost immediately following its November release. The new series from [Jacob Tierney](#) is based on the novel of the same name by [Rachel Reid](#). Both iterations tell the story of rival hockey players in the throes of a secret love affair. Being a Canadian production, the show’s worldwide success comes with a tinge of surprise. “Heated Rivalry” has amassed a cult following and nearly perfect ratings across various platforms, such as [IMDb](#) and [Rotten Tomatoes](#).

The “Heated Rivalry” discourse generally centers around one aspect of the series — the sex. To be fair, there is a healthy amount of intimacy throughout the six-episode story. In addition to their frequency, these scenes are quite graphic. While certainly intense, the show’s intimate scenes are tasteful. In fact, these scenes serve as powerful vehicles for storytelling, meditating on the developing relationship between two scared, closeted lovers. The main characters, Shane Hollander ([Hudson Williams](#)) and Ilya Rosanov ([Connor Storie](#)), share a beautifully believable chemistry. Their connection feels tangible and real, extending far beyond their sexual escapades. The subtle glances and toe-touches between the hockey stars add realistic depth to their relationship and interaction.

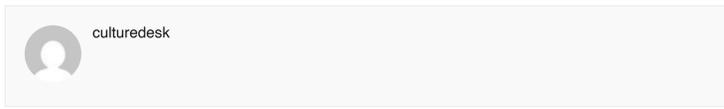
“Heated Rivalry” touches on serious topics of societal standards, familial acceptance and queer pride. With a story based on these ideas, there are many ways the execution could go poorly. It would be easy to misrepresent the niche experiences that, for millions of people, are real and traumatic. The show’s creators ensured that the series is not just a compilation of sex scenes and puck passes, but a life-changing, heartbreaking narrative.

Storie and Williams deliver truly phenomenal performances, especially considering they were essentially unknown prior to starring in “Heated Rivalry.” Though the two actors are in their early 20s, they have the prowess of centenarians. Most of the characters in this series take on extremely vulnerable dialogue and actions, both physically and emotionally. It is abundantly clear that the entire cast gave their all to the show, as it features some of the most genuine, heartfelt performances I have ever seen.

The [dynamic soundtrack](#) plays a huge role in the show’s narrative. Utilizing high-tempo club, indie rock and Russian orchestral tracks, the show’s creators make already emotionally charged moments more intense. In some scenes, the background song’s lyrics say what the characters cannot. The song “[All The Things She Said](#),” by t.A.T.u is featured in one of the show’s most iconic scenes. Ilya and Shane end up in the same club on the same night, and as they lock eyes from across the dance floor, the song’s lyrics paint an emotional picture: “I keep asking myself, wondering how / I keep closing my eyes, but I can’t block you out / Want to fly to a place where / it’s just you and me / Nobody else, so we can be free.” The men stand in complete silence, as they shout their deepest feelings.

In addition to the main love story, Scott’s and Kip’s relationship plays an important role. Scott Hunter ([François Arnaud](#)), a pro hockey player, and Kip Grady ([Robbie Graham-Kuntz](#)), a smoothie shop employee, meet when Scott orders his pregame smoothie. Though limited to an episode dedicated to their story and fragments spread throughout the season, Scott and Kip add a wealth of meaning to the show. The couple’s story shows an often overlooked side of queer relationships. The couple is forced into secrecy out of Scott’s fear of judgment and ousting from the heteronormative hockey community. The exposure of their love could end Scott’s career and exile him from fame and friends. This pain extends to his partner Kip as well. Forced to love in secret, Kip hides a huge part of himself from his friends and family. In the fifth episode, Scott wins the Stanley Cup and beckons Kip onto the ice with him. Kip hesitantly comes down, and the two embrace, sharing a kiss in front of millions of people. Scott and Kip’s story is only one example of “Heated Rivalry’s” transcendence from a horny television show to a historically impactful piece of queer media.

“Heated Rivalry” is a terrific story in any form. The show subverts heteronormative hockey culture in a beautiful, heartbreaking way. Though “Heated Rivalry” only makes a dent in the often exclusionary sports world, it’s still a big step forward. Recently, a popular hockey podcast called “[Empty Netters](#),” hosted by brothers Dan and Chris Powers, has reviewed each episode of the show and heavily praised it. “Heated Rivalry’s” normalization of queer relationships in sports media and in the general zeitgeist makes it an amazing show.



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