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Opinion | Time has passed, and I am still thinking about Heated Rivalry

Madelyn Stewart | Opinion Editor 8 hrs ago



Hudson Williams (left) and Connor Storrie (right) star as Shane Hollander and Ilya Rosanov in hit Canadian series, "Heated Rivalry."

The Canadian sports romance "Heated Rivalry" has become an unexpected obsession for fans online. Based off the popular Rachel Reid novel, the series follows two Major League Hockey players — a fictionalized mirror of the NHL — Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Ilya Rosanov (Connor Storrie) as they navigate nearly a decade of manufactured rivalry, high expectations and a secret romance that keeps pulling them together.

Chances are, if you are alive and, on the internet, you have seen how popular the series has become in such a short amount of time. As someone who had read the book and was patiently awaiting the release of the series, it was unbelievable to see the amount of love being shown for something that people didn't always have a lot of faith in.



The screen adaptation, headed up by actor and director Jacob Tierney, was shopped around to many popular streamers in the U.S. before finding its home at Crave, a small Canadian platform. Many refused to back the show without major changes to the storyline, including axing a lot of the more steamy scenes the show is now known for.

With a microscopic budget, under 40 days to shoot and a catalog of mostly unknown actors, the series relied on the small cult fandom of the book to carry viewership. However, just two weeks before the show's release, HBO Max acquired streaming rights, making it available to U.S. audiences.

Premiering the day after Thanksgiving and wrapping up just after Christmas, the show captivated the internet for five fleeting weeks. It was the thing everyone couldn't stop talking about. Viral videos even detailed the water cooler talk that flooded offices following the season's memorable finale.

It's rare for a show to be both a great adaptation and a great standalone drama, but "Heated Rivalry" manages to stick the landing on both counts. To begin, the show is a masterclass in pacing. Fitting 350 pages of storyline that spans over nine years into six episodes is no easy feat, but Tierney manages to maintain the spirit of the book while bringing in those made-for-TV moments.

Additionally, the series' main actors — Williams and Storrie — gave incredible performances, especially given the fact that up until booking their roles, they were both working in restaurants and living paycheck to paycheck. Notably, Storrie, who is American, had to perfect a Russian accent and syntax, in just a week before filming began.

However, I think where the series shines the most is in its attention to detail. Not only is the show an excellent portrayal of queerness, particularly in the hypermasculine space of professional hockey, but it also explores other elements of the characters' lives that inform their identity.

Through the lens of Shane and Ilya's relationship, we also get to examine Shane's Asian Canadian identity and how the pressure to live up to expectations affects his personal life. Additionally, while the show does not explicitly label Shane as neurodivergent, Reid has said she did not initially write the character that way, later realizing—after learning more through her own experiences—that Shane likely falls on the autism spectrum. The actor, Williams, has spoken about how that piece of the character informed his signature micro expressions, awkwardness and sometimes inability to communicate feelings effectively.

Ilya, on the other hand, is much more confident in himself and his sexuality, but must navigate the toxicity of his home life and the implications of being queer and from a country where that means being physically unsafe.

The characters themselves are fully developed and real in a time where romances typically offer the same old archetypes. Showcased on-screen through their powerful connection, the chemistry the two share just makes the show even sweeter.

Finally, the cherry on top is the generational press tour Williams and Storrie have embarked on following the release.

The two actors, who are best friends in real life, can be seen bopping around late-night TV, Paris Fashion Week and the Golden Globes stage, drawing what Jimmy Fallon called "Beatlemania" level attention. The pair are even slated to be the official torchbearers of the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan.

"Heated Rivalry" is a story about love being told with the utmost care and respect, and it deserves every bit of the attention it has received. Now, if I can only wait until season two.

The opinions expressed by the columnist are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of The News Record. If you have any concerns or feedback, please feel free to reach out at editor@newsrecord.org.

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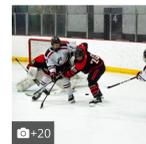
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