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## ‘Heated Rivalry’ is a bare, juicy watch

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January 25, 2026



Credit – HBO Max

I don’t know what rock you would have to be living under to not have heard about “Heated Rivalry.” Based on the book of the same name by Rachel Reid, the new hit show directed by Jacob Tierney is about hockey, but more importantly about the complicated relationship between the two top players in the league. Starring Connor Storrie as Russian player Ilya Rozanov and Hudson Williams as Canadian player Shane Hollander, these breakout stars stun with exceptionally juicy performances.

The cinematography was one of the most captivating aspects of the show, despite the low budget and shooting lasting just 37 days. Two ARRI ALEXA 35 cameras were used for the show, which allows for wider shots, creating scenes with more background that bring the subject closer to the viewer — all adding to the connection. The cinematography was well received, with episode 5 being one of the highest rated episodes of television on IMDb.

Another product of the smaller budget was the lack of extras and B-roll. With many shots in Heated Rivalry using a VFX green screen, they don’t bother with other angles of the locations. As viewers, this makes us feel more intimately connected with Shane and Ilya, with less interruptions to the story.

“Heated Rivalry” is set from 2008 to 2017, and we see a shift in clothing and technology to accompany the time jumps. This attention to detail is commendable, as subtle difference in the costuming and props make the time shifts seem stark. There were some outfits that made me cringe at the trends at the time, but some were missing the small details like skinny jeans, which were popular for most of the 2010s.

The careful period building is also thanks to the soundtrack. The music closely mirrors the characters’ complex feelings while being nostalgic.

One of the biggest discourses around the show are the sex scenes. Recent years have seen growth in the amount of LGBTQ+ sex representation in media, but none feel quite as intimate as those in “Heated Rivalry.”

The attention to detail and realism in this show nearly makes it feel like viewers are intruding on Shane and Ilya, a testament to Williams and Storrie’s excellent performances. Compared to media like “Heartstopper,” “Heated Rivalry” doesn’t feel didactic when representing consent.

In “Heated Rivalry,” sex follows the inverse of the conventional path of a romantic relationship, starting with casual hookups and becoming more emotional with time.

Traditionally, we find sex to be the consummation of a relationship in heteronormative stories and in queer media like “Red, White, and Royal Blue.” However, with the prevalence of hookup culture, perhaps part of the draw of the show is the hope for people’s casual relationships to become more, like it did for Shane and Ilya.

Forbidden love is a popular trope in romance movies and shows, but the obstacle is usually more personal and situational than societal. “Heated Rivalry” is especially gripping as a romance because the systematic social barriers that they must overcome to be together have been largely internalized and made profoundly personal.

The direct rivalry between Shane and Ilya further complicates the romance, as rivals of any gender aren’t expected to be entangled. This layer of nuance on top of the personal and familial factors preventing their relationship adds even more tension.

Tierney portrays this beautiful story with accompanying cinematography and music that stands out amongst popular TV shows today. Performances from Storrie and Williams are raw and intimate, adding to the allure. For those who haven’t seen it, “Heated Rivalry” is worth the watch.

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