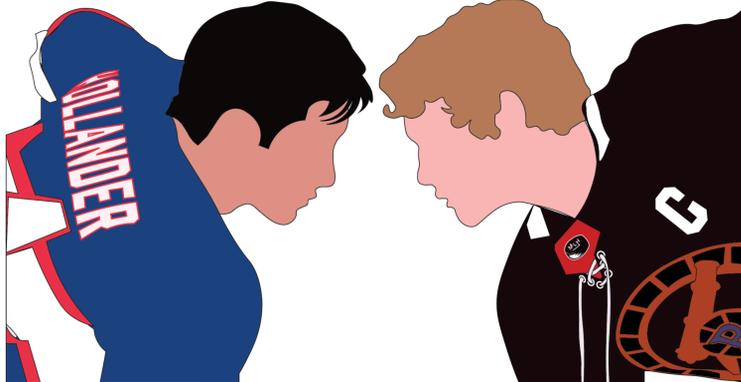




A lesbian takes on the world of 'Heated Rivalry'

By HANNAH WELLS
Posted on February 19, 2026 in Arts



Annie McShane/The Miscellany News.

It would be hard to find something that interests me less than naked men and hockey. Yet here I stand, a lesbian at my historically women's college, about to write a glowing review of "Heated Rivalry," a show that almost exclusively features naked men and hockey.

If "the cottage" means nothing to you and sports still come to mind when you hear "hockey," do not fret: I will fill you in on Gen Z's newest obsession. "Heated Rivalry" is a television series released in November 2025 on Crave in Canada and HBO Max in the United States. It currently has one season with just six episodes. Based on Rachel Reid's book series "Game Changers," the show follows fictional hockey rivals Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie) as they navigate a "heated" secret affair and growing feelings for one another. While the show mainly focuses on Shane and Ilya, there is a side plot about veteran hockey star Scott Hunter (François Arnaud) and local smoothie barista Kip Grady (Robbie Graham-Kuntz). As the show progresses, Scott and Kip's romance acts as a pivotal influence on Ilya and Shane and the development of their own relationship.

I was introduced to "Heated Rivalry" as "the gay porn show," and after watching interviews with the co-stars, I have seen an overwhelming focus on their bodies and the sex scenes in the show. However, watching "Heated Rivalry" without any interest in those parts of the series showed me that, at its core, "Heated Rivalry" is a much-needed story about queer love in the modern day.

Contrary to popular belief, the overlap in experience and culture of lesbians and gay men is slim to none. Personally, I have found that I generally do not relate to the experiences of gay men, which is not to say that you should only consume media that reflects your own experiences. However, I have found that the majority of mainstream LGBTQ+ media is about cisgender gay and bisexual men. Admittedly, I did not think I would gain much from "Heated Rivalry." Despite this, my wonderful best friend promised me that the show was so good that even if I could not relate to it, I would still love it. I cannot say no to her, so I began my journey into the world of "Heated Rivalry" with both low expectations and an enthusiastic bisexual at my side.

The first two episodes were generally what I expected, and I almost stopped watching after the second. The episodes had strong acting and some substance, but I felt that my initial hypothesis, that the show was not for me, was correct. Episodes one and two matched my vision of what a "gay porn show" would be like, which was not exactly appealing for a lesbian. I decided to give it one more try with the third episode, "Hunter." Looking back, the third episode is probably the least thought-out and the most rushed because of the accelerated timeline of Scott and Kip's relationship. The book "Game Changers" focuses on their relationship, so I understand that it is hard to fit an entire book into an episode. Yet, to me, it gave a glimpse into what "Heated Rivalry" would become in its second act.

The third episode turns away from the Ilya and Shane plot and is almost exclusively about Scott and Kip. Here, the narrative favors romance over lust and starts to dive into the complexities of being a gay professional athlete. The pressure and anxiety around coming out are something that binds almost everyone in the LGBTQ+ community. While the "coming out story" is usually prevalent in LGBTQ+ media, I found it interesting to see the way those pressures affect queer athletes, especially for men.

After the third episode, the show reached a new level, with a real focus on the development of Shane and Ilya's relationship and an emphasis on the queer experience. While there are devastating moments, what makes "Heated Rivalry" stand out is its undeniable celebration of queerness, which, of course, hits home for me. There is so much pain and suffering in the LGBTQ+ community, and there are many members who never get their happy ending. People need to understand that. But to watch a series that shows not only the struggle, but also what comes after the struggle, was almost more meaningful. "Heated Rivalry" perfectly captured why all of the hardships and complexities of navigating the world as a queer person are worth it.

While I applaud "Heated Rivalry" for doing an excellent job capturing the queer experience, I was perhaps even more impressed by the show's portrayal of women. The main female characters include a love interest, Rose Landry (Sophie Nélisse), Ilya's best friend Svetlana Vetrova (Ksenia Daniela Kharlamova), and Kip's friend Elena Rygg (Nadine Bhabha). The women in "Heated Rivalry" are all strong and empathetic. They are not portrayed as selfish, homophobic villains who want the men all to themselves: Instead, they are supportive without minimizing their own feelings. The women of "Heated Rivalry" are perfect examples of allies and are sometimes the only characters with any common sense.

I could go on and on about the show itself, but my analysis of "Heated Rivalry" would not be complete without addressing the audience reaction to it. "Heated Rivalry" received overwhelming audience approval, and its popularity extended beyond viewership. There were "Heated Rivalry"-themed look-alike contests, themed nights at clubs, and Williams and Storrie quickly became stars. The two actors even presented at the Golden Globes. I am so happy to see an LGBTQ+ show become truly mainstream, and I am certain that it has changed lives for audiences. For instance, former hockey player Jesse Kortuem [publicly came out](#) after watching "Heated Rivalry," and I am sure he will not be the last.

While I absolutely do not want to take away from the importance of the representation in "Heated Rivalry," I cannot help but wonder why non-male LGBTQ+ media never seems to get similar amounts of attention. Being a lesbian is a unique experience because it requires a complete rejection of male validation and a total decentering of men. This is almost impossible to do as a woman in today's world. Ultimately, it becomes even harder to separate yourself from a male-dominated culture when lesbian media, especially set in the modern day, is scarce and often goes unsupported.

I have noticed that a large fan base of queer male media is women, often straight women. While there is nothing inherently wrong about this, sometimes I worry that the support comes from a place of fetishization of gay men rather than genuine allyship. Not only that, but this same fan base does not seem to show up for LGBTQ+ shows about women. I know there are shows in the works similar to "Heated Rivalry" but about queer women, and I hope that we can give these shows the same recognition.

While I wish there were more female-centered LGBTQ+ shows, that does not take away from the importance of "Heated Rivalry." It is not a groundbreaking masterpiece, but it does not need to be. To have a series that displays the nuances of queer relationships, while also just being a fun romance show, is exactly the kind of representation I have been looking for. Watching "Heated Rivalry" reminded me that representation comes in many forms, and you can find reflections of yourself in places you would never expect. I never thought I would say this, but I am finally ready to admit that I am both a proud sports-hating lesbian and a "Heated Rivalry" superfan.



Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Text area for user comment

Name *

Input field for name

Email *

Input field for email

Website

Input field for website

Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

Post Comment

The Miscellany News reserves the right to publish or not publish any comment submitted for approval on our website. Factors that could cause a comment to be rejected include, but are not limited to, personal attacks, inappropriate language, statements or points unrelated to the article, and unfounded or baseless claims. Additionally, The Misc reserves the right to reject any comment that exceeds 250 words in length. There is no guarantee that a comment will be published, and one week after the article's release, it is less likely that your comment will be accepted. Any questions or concerns regarding our comments section can be directed to Misc@vassar.edu.

To search, type and hit enter

Have a question, comment, or inquiry related to **The Miscellany News**? Reach out to misc@vassar.edu

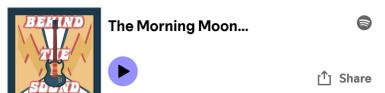
CORRECTION POLICY:

The Miscellany News will only accept corrections for any misquotes, misrepresentations or factual errors for an article within the semester it is printed.

The Miscellany News is not responsible for the views presented within its Opinions pages. Staff editorials are the only articles that reflect the opinion of a two-thirds majority of the Editorial Board.



Our most recent podcast



Subscribe to The Miscellany News!

Every week's articles delivered right to your inbox.

Email

Input field for email

By submitting this form, you are consenting to receive marketing emails from: The Miscellany News. You can revoke your consent to receive emails at any time by using the [SafeUnsubscribe®](#) link, found at the bottom of every email. [Emails are serviced by Constant Contact.](#)

Sign Up!



Sections

- News
- Features
- Opinions
- Humor & Satire
- Arts
- Sports
- Multimedia
- Crosswords

Connect

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- YouTube

Other

- Meet the Misc
- Print Archives
- Advertise
- Contact Us

