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# The hit TV show that no one saw coming

How a Canadian hockey drama, “Heated Rivalry”, has inflamed the hearts of viewers

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PHOTOGRAPH: SABRINA LANTOS/HBO MAX

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LEADING UP TO the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics on February 6th, two actors served as torchbearers. They were perfect for the assignment. The ice-hockey playing stars of “Heated Rivalry”, a gay drama showcasing rivalry on the ice and revelry in the [bedroom](#), have already brought fire into the lives of millions of viewers. Jimmy Fallon, a comedian who interviewed Hudson Williams, one of the actors, compared female fans’ reaction to him to that of famous musicians such as Harry Styles.

“Heated Rivalry” first debuted on Crave, a Canadian streaming network, in late November and has since become its most-viewed original series ever. It is the second-most “in-demand” TV show globally, according to Parrot Analytics, a data firm, popular in America, Australia and the Philippines. Even in Russia, which has repressive anti-gay laws, it is an underground sensation—currently the highest-rated TV show of all time on Kinopoisk, the country’s leading film database.

No one in Hollywood expected this. When Jacob Tierney, a Canadian director and producer, asked Rachel Reid, a [romance](#) novelist, about adapting her book, no big American studios were interested. Ms Reid, a mother in Nova Scotia, had started writing “out of boredom” while raising small children; her readers, overwhelmingly straight women, were rather fond of what one review tactfully called “loads (and loads, literally) of sizzling hot hate sex”.

So are viewers, apparently. The show now averages 8m American viewers per episode. A third of them rewatch episodes; 15% have watched five times or more. Professional hockey is even seeing a “Heated Rivalry” effect. On StubHub, a ticket resale platform, hockey ticket sales have surged 40% since the show’s debut in America.

In Asia shows about men loving other men have long been popular among women. It is a newer phenomenon on screen in the West. In book publishing male-male romance has become one of the fastest-growing romance subgenres. Whether on the ice or in the bedroom, women love cheering on characters as they score. ■

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