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Meet Kyle Swift on *Heated Rivalry*: Matthew Finlan talks his Easter egg-style *Common Goal* role and season 2 hopes (exclusive)

After a lot part in season 1, Finlan hopes to tell the character's romance story in Rachel Reid's books.

By Nick Romano | February 13, 2026 03:01 pm ET

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Matthew Finlan plays Kyle Swift on "Heated Rivalry" season 1
Credit: HBO Max; Spencer Kobayashi

KEY POINTS

- Matthew Finlan appears in Heated Rivalry as Kyle Swift, a small season 1 character who leads his own Rachel Reid romance novel.
- Finlan shares his high hopes for season 2 after learning about Kyle's backstory on the HBO Max series.
- The actor recalls auditioning for Scott and Kip before landing Kyle, and shares the "serendipitous" parallels.

For Matthew Finlan, the success of *Heated Rivalry* "has been really good motivation" for his new year's resolution.

The actor, who played the small season 1 role of Kinghamer bartender Kyle Swift, admits he probably daydreams the most about the future of his character when he's in the gym — especially when he hits that weight training wall where you question whether your muscles can withstand another set. To get over that hump, Finlan just thinks of his season 2 hopes.

"There are times when I'm like, you never know! A character might be focusing on your ass or a little bit," a cheeky Finlan tells *Entertainment Weekly*.

In the *Heated Rivalry* fandom spheres, Connor Storrie (Ilya Rozanov), Hudson Williams (Shane Hollander), Fraser Aimard (Scott Hunter), and Robbie S.K. Ray (Craig) get most of the attention for their standout performances in the hot and heavy backside-taring LGBTQ romance about closeted hockey players finding love behind closed doors. But Finlan's role could be a big hint at what's to come in future seasons. At the very least, his presence is a fun Easter egg.

Based on author Rachel Reid's collection of romance novels, season 1 adapted the main events of Heated Rivalry (2019), the second novel in the series, while episode 2 as well as parts of episodes 5 and 6 told the story of Scott and Kip's first hookup and relationship in the novel Common Game (2020). Kyle is but a peripheral figure in the TV adaptation who pops in and out of Kip's art, but the character has his own romance as one of the two leads in Reid's fourth book, Common Goal.

Matthew Finlan as Kyle Swift in "Heated Rivalry"
Credit: HBO Max; Spencer Kobayashi

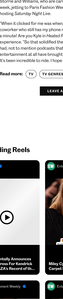
Finlan didn't realize the full extent of Kyle's backstory until he started filming his first appearance on Heated Rivalry episode 3.

"One of our first shots was when Kip comes into the bar and I'm just like, 'Hey, Kip!'" the actor recalls of that day from his family's apartment, shortly after the recent January snowstorm. "Jacob [Tierney, *Heated Rivalry* showrunner] sat me down and gave me a backstory. So, yeah, just to let you know, there's a whole fourth book where our character has a relentless love, will-they-won't-they with Kip, but he's heartbroken, forlorn, and it never really comes to fruition. So if you can put all of that into two syllables, that would be awesome."

Finlan, who also appeared in Hell of a Summer and Dropline First Kill, doesn't know what's in store for Kyle moving forward. Tierney is busy at work plotting Heated Rivalry season 2 for the Canada-exclusive streaming platform Crave (to be released in various international territories, including the U.S., on HBO Max) and the TV creator remains tight-lipped about the process.

However, one big Kyle Swift fan theory posits that there could be a "Skip"-style bottle episode or secondary story arc down the line, even though season 2 will continue to focus on the romance between Shane and Ilya. Finlan makes clear, "I know just as much as you — or just as little, let's put it that way."

At this point, he has read Common Goal and knows the full trajectory of Kyle's story in Reid's books. "Honestly, I'm trying to familiarize myself with Kyle's journey," Finlan adds. "We speak like five languages. I'm like, 'Should I be downloading Duolingo?'... Basically, I'm just at the ready. We're here."



Cover art for "Common Goal" by Rachel Reid
Credit: Carina Press

As Reid writes about Kyle in Common Goal, the character is a graduate student who moved to New York City to invest in broken hearts. Though he promises himself not to get into another complicated relationship, he strikes up a friends-with-benefits "situationship" with Eric Bennett, an older veteran hockey goalie.

When asked about Finlan's role in season 1, Tierney was rather cryptic. "Matthew's character is very long-story-short I feel like," he tells *EW*. "We discussed it previously a lot [Mr. "I don't know what his love life looks like. I don't know what that journey's gonna be or when, but that's the same Kyle for sure."

Finlan nearly turned down the *Heated Rivalry* audition after his team received the character breakdowns for Scott and Kip. The tall and slender 21-year-old had his reservations. "I was like, 'Peace and love, you guys! I'm not Scott Hunter. Let's redact that offer,'" he remembers. His team encouraged him to give it a shot, and though he didn't get the part, Finlan later pivoted to audition for Kip. He clearly didn't get that role either, but felt more of a connection to the smoothie barista.

"[I felt like I had put some really strong work forward, and then nothing came back and I was like, 'I guess that wasn't mine to have,'" the actor reflects.

In hindsight, he feels an even stronger connection to Kyle and finds his personal life parallels "serendipitous." He didn't audition for Mr. Swift, but the casting team, led by Jenny Lewis and Sara Kay, thought he'd be right for the bit part. Finlan was in New York, the stomping grounds of Kyle in Common Goal, when he received the message about playing Kyle. "Literally the night before I had just gone to Stonewall for the first time," he notes.

Matthew Finlan in Heated Rivalry

Matthew Finlan, Fraser Aimard, Robbie S.K., and Brandon Ash-Mohammed in "Heated Rivalry"
Credit: HBO Max

The connections don't stop there. "I found out that I have needed glasses for years. Turns out Kyle also wears glasses. I had no idea," Finlan continues. "He just doesn't wear them at the bar." He also points to his mantle above the fireplace in his apartment, where there rests a framed print of a hockey goalie. The day before his first episode of Heated Rivalry aired, he found this Brown swag relic on the sidewalk.

In whatever direction this journey could take, Finlan just hopes to return to Heated Rivalry in some capacity. He remembers the camaraderie he felt on set, the conversations he shared with his co-stars and how they bonded over hockey up to the small town of Dundas, Ontario, to film Ilya's Rozanov lair scenes; how they would take ice cream breaks together at the shop around the corner; and how Tierney would sometimes use footage of the gang just hanging out together on set for the show.

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The scene in episode 6 where the Kinghamer patrons are watching Scott on TV, for example, are reaction shots of them watching Oscar winner Olivia Colman's BAFTA acceptance speech. "[We were kind of killing scenes keeping Olivia Colman,]" Finlan says. "Oh, gosh. Take it a little bit more seriously," Finlan adds.

Finlan is overwhelmed with pride for the show itself, what he calls this "little indie production" from Canada making it big, as well as cast mates Storrie and Williams, who are enjoying the Winter Olympics (with one week jetting to Paris Fashion Week the next, and soon, for Storrie, hosting Saturday Night Live.

"When it clicked for me was when, to put it bluntly, every hockey or sports movie that I've watched, the protagonist wins the championship. Well, I'm excited for my Kyle in Heated Rivalry!" Finlan shares of his own experience. "So that solidified the impact that this show has definitely had, not to mention podcasts that I listen to that have nothing to do with entertainment at all have brought up the show, too. It's been this wave. It's been incredible to ride. I hope it doesn't stop."

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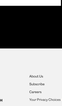

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