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WHY IS "HEATED RIVALRY" SUCH A CULTURAL PHENOMENON?

9 HOURS AGO



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Everyone wants to come to the cottage, and here's why.

Recently, the series Heated Rivalry, created by Crave Originals, has taken the world by storm, with episode five ranking amongst the highest-rated episodes in television history on IMDb. The two faces of the show, Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams, have become two of the most talked-about people in Hollywood seemingly overnight. Here is an honest review regarding how the show gained so much publicity and why people feel so connected to it.



For some background, Heated Rivalry is a gay romance novel written in 2019 by Rachel Reid that gained traction due to its slow-burn and enemies-to-lovers tropes (and, of course, for its explicit content). The novel follows a "situationship" spanning multiple years involving two hockey players: Shane Hollander, who plays for the Montreal Voyageurs (Metros in the series), and Ilya Rosanov, who plays for the Boston Bears (Raiders in the series).

As popular as the book is, it does not compare to the publicity of the series. Although the show contains only a few episodes, it packs over eight years into just six. The series closely mirrors the novel in its sequence of events: it starts with the two hockey rivals meeting before their rookie season and progresses to their clandestine meetings, portrayed as purely physical. As the show continues, the audience gets to watch the sexual relationship transform into an incredibly intimate emotional bond. This is what makes the show so singular: the chemistry is so intense and passionate that viewers can feel it through the screen. The superficial physicality turns into deeply meaningful conversations about topics the characters only feel comfortable speaking about with one another. The story explores themes of identity and the star athletes coming to terms with theirs whilst under the public eye. The characters are faced with the fact that they must confront their public image and their desires in their personal lives as well as how to balance the two.



This show has become unimaginably popular due to its honest and vulnerable depiction of athletes struggling to come to terms with their homosexuality. It is important for there to be this representation in the world of television for people—especially gay athletes—to look to for support. In fact, hockey player Jesse Korteum recently came out as gay to the public, crediting Heated Rivalry as his inspiration. What also stands out about the series is how confident and secure the two actors are when speaking to the press about Shane and Ilya's story. It is refreshing to see two men so comfortable embracing their friendship, femininity, and passion and dedication to the characters they portray. Hudson Williams embraces the fact that Shane Hollander is a canonically neurodivergent character, drawing inspiration from his father, while Connor Storrie works with a dialect coach to perfect his Russian dialogue. The effort the two put into their performances automatically draws people to them as actors.

On top of the commitment seen by the actors, there is also something to be said about the fact that the show has all fresh faces—the audience has never seen these actors before, which captivates the audience with true, raw talent and completely new perspectives. Viewers are not just watching the series for the actors; they are watching it for the story. In addition to the brand-new talents, the series was shot in only two months on a lower budget coming from a Canadian company, which sets it apart from most other popular television series.

Jacob Tierney, the director who pursued the story as a passion project, has also stated that the intended demographic is women. This leads viewers to question why women, especially heterosexual women, are so drawn to the series. The answer is simple: women like to read and view stories of sex and romance where there aren't any hierarchies and gendered power dynamics—just pure and unconditional adoration that is reciprocated from both sides. Most heterosexual relationships in media are presented in the male gaze, or with the man having the upper hand. Heated Rivalry subverts this theme by offering a romance in which both parties view each other as equals.

Ultimately, the series is so popular for its depiction of non-toxic masculinity and heartwarming romance while also interpreting the deep-rooted anxiety of homophobia in men's sports, which is rarely portrayed in the media. The yearning seen in the series and the passion embodied by Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie solidify Heated Rivalry's spot in television history for a long time to come.

- CONNORSTORRIE CULTURE ENTERTAINMENT H2P HEATED RIVALRY HUDSONWILLIAMS LOVE PITT POPCULTURE TELEVISION TV



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Sydney is a freshman at Pitt majoring in Media and Professional Communication with a focus on Corporate and Community relations. In the future, Sydney would like to be a Human Resources or Corporate Communications manager and would like to travel as much as possible. In her free time, Sydney enjoys reading, writing, exercising, spending time with friends and family, or trying out different coffee shops. Her favorite things to write about are entertainment topics.



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