



Is Heated Rivalry changing the game for queer athletes?

Alexandra Wilson-Zegil • February 18, 2026 • Photo Credit: Corvan Kotch/ Multimedia Coordinator

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The gay hockey romance took the world by storm, LAAG told us more about its effect on queer student athletes

For the past few weeks, it has been hard to get around campus without hearing the words "Heated Rivalry." With parts of the Crave hit filmed in Hamilton and at McMaster – most notably the Pulse – the excitement is justified. Students are making Tiktoks, finding the local filming locations and listening to the show's soundtrack. With all the buzz, it's important to ask how the show is impacting the demographic it features – queer people and athletes.

Julliana Jack, who co-founded the LGBTQ2SIA+ Athletic Advocacy Group at McMaster in her second year, spoke with the Silhouette about the show. She explained that, in her opinion, recognition of queer identities in sports should not feel like "slapping a rainbow flag sticker around something during Pride Month."

For Jack, the release of Heated Rivalry felt different.

"We feel very seen. It's also a very masculine representation of queerness and homosexuality, which I feel like you don't really see explored very often ... I think it's a super crucial time to have this kind of media representation," she said.

Heated Rivalry has been promoted at professional hockey games across North America, catering to an audience that has often been ignored by sports corporations in the past. The NHL's ban of pride tape (a decision that has since been reversed) and pride jerseys during warmups, had further reinforced the idea that men's hockey is an unwelcoming space. In light of the show, the culture around the game might be shifting.

Despite the positive impact of Heated Rivalry, sports organizations might only now be advertising to queer audiences because the show has highlighted them as a new source of profit. The timing raises the question of whether the NHL's celebration of 2SLGBTQIA+ people is authentic.

"I do think it's going to make tough conversations easier in the future, but I think when you have any kind of corporate interest in something, at the end of the day, these big sports organizations are businesses, and they need to make money. And, you know, we've seen it in the past with other Pride advertising, where they're like, 'oh, this is an untapped market,'" said Jack.

While Heated Rivalry is bringing positive exposure for queer identities, Jack explained it does not solve many of the underlying issues marginalized people, like the 2SLGBTQIA+ community or women, are facing in sport.

"It's great that we're getting all this attention and media, but rights are being taken away from us. And it's not even just athletes within our community, it's female athletes as well, it's athletes with PCOS. There's all these other issues that are happening at the same time ... Just because it seems good, there are other really big issues that people are very uncomfortable to talk about," said Jack.

Long before the Heated Rivalry catalyst, LAAG was working towards equity and accessibility for McMaster athletes. Along with their advocacy inside the athletics department, LAAG provides EDI training and hosts a plethora of different community engagement events, like pride games.

"It's very much 'world's your oyster' with us, we do it all," said Jack.

Heated Rivalry has helped promote a more inclusive culture in sports, but it is the work of advocates – like those at LAAG – who paved the way for that to happen.

"Who you are as a person, how you experience being perceived as an individual, your capacity to love those around you – it is something that none of us can be removed from," said Jack.

Now, every time "that gay hockey show" is mentioned, those words feel less and less like an oxymoron. And maybe someday soon, no one will have to hide who they are to be accepted in athletic spaces.

I'll Believe In Anything by Wolf Parade starts to play



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