

WEEK-TO-WEEK

# Week-to-Week: The Cold Reality of Heated Rivalry's Award Hopes

And the one U.S. award the show is 100% eligible for



Myles McNutt

27 Dec 2025 10 min



Screenshot: HBO Max

*Week-to-Week is the weekly-ish newsletter of Episodic Medium, featuring observations about TV and the media industries by its editor-in-chief, Myles McNutt. To receive future newsletters and updates on the shows we're covering for all subscribers, sign up now.*

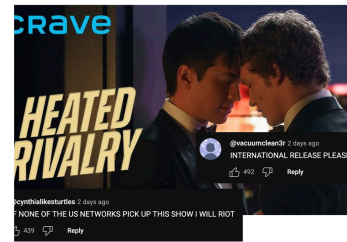
Join Episodic Medium

In October, *Heated Rivalry*'s media footprint ahead of its release was a few exclusives to *Deadline*'s International TV editor tied to MIPCOM and a feature profile at this humble newsletter detailing its Canadian origin story.

### Week-to-Week: The MM Hockey Romance Revolution will be Televised (in Canada)

The producers bringing *Heated Rivalry* to life and the fans trying to help bring it to the world

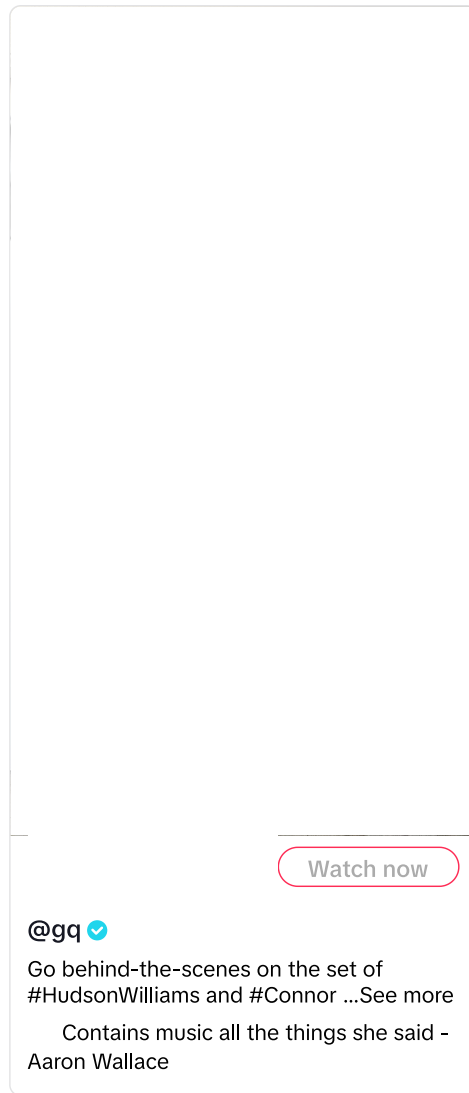
Episodic Medium • Myles McNutt



By the time the finale debuted on Boxing Day (look it up, Americans), *Heated Rivalry* was the most talked-about TV show in North America. Publications that had been caught off guard for the premiere—focused instead on *Stranger Things*—scrambled to get their share of the audience desperate for insights about their new obsession, and I saw signups to read my reviews skyrocket above any show we've covered since 2022.

The story of how that happened has now been told numerous times over, in pieces at every major Hollywood trade publication. And yet as someone who has read all those stories, and who wrote about the social media foundation that has supported this meteoric rise, it still seems surreal. Nothing about this show's origins would have suggested that Reid would become the first author of a book with "Spicy Gay Hockey Romance" in its Amazon title to become a New York Times Bestseller, or that Jacob Tierney would have a launch on HBO Max the service says was comparable to the launch of the Emmy-winning *The Pitt*. And even as someone whose social media algorithms were tuned into the show, I never imagined that every queer male influencer on my feed would make it part of their content, to the point that I saw them copying each other's posts.

The cultural impact of the show will be measurable in many ways in the hiatus between seasons. There's the continued success of the books, with three consistently in Kindle's Top 10 and the other three making their way into the Top 50. There's the fans who'll make art, write fics, and create vids over the next 15-ish months. And there's of course the photo shoots and public appearances for its two young stars, who have gone from tens of thousands to a million followers on Instagram in one short month—if they don't end up presenting an award at the Golden Globes or SAG's Actor Awards, I'll eat my hat. (I hope they don't settle for the Critics Choice Awards before those offers come in).




However, while I expect a combination of monologue jokes and presenter lists will make those award shows a place where *Heated Rivalry*'s breakout success will be evident, **they are also a place where the show itself is destined to fall through the cracks.** In fact, based on a combination of the production's origins and the timing of its release, *Heated Rivalry* is forever trapped in limbo, a surprise so big that (almost) all the systems of recognition we've developed for acknowledging the best a year of TV has to offer have no way of honoring it.

Last week, I spoke with friend of the newsletter Katey Rich at *The Ankler*, after we had a conversation on Bluesky about the discourse suggesting the show and especially star Connor Storrie could contend for Emmy Awards. The takeaway is that the show is trapped in a cruel irony: the fact it was purely a Canadian production, given Tierney the freedom to tell the story how he designed it, is also why it is ineligible to be recognized alongside the shows it appears with on HBO Max and within the U.S. market in general.

### I Think 'Heated Rivalry' Deserves Emmy Recognition — Too Bad About This Catch

The breakout drama, streaming on HBO Max and Canada's Crave, might be put in the penalty box for TV's biggest awards

 The Ankler. • Katey Rich



That on its own poured some cold water on fans calling for recognition from the Television Academy, but it runs deeper. First, while the show as a whole is eligible for the Canadian Screen Awards in its home and native land, American *Storrie* is not thanks to a newly installed rule allowing only Canadian residents/citizens to be nominated in their acting categories. Technically the show's Canadianness would disqualify it from the Golden Globes as well, but they couldn't even get that historically unscrupulous organization to bend those rules since they—and the Critics Choice Awards—both closed their nomination processes for 2025 before members would have even been able to see episodes of *Heated Rivalry*. And because the entire season aired in 2025, it also wouldn't be eligible for next year's awards.

The same issue applies to year-end Best of 2025 lists, which were basically already locked by the time *Heated Rivalry* debuted despite it still being 2025 for another month. If the show had been finished, screeners of a full season might have led inclined critics to make a last-minute change, but only the first two episodes were available for review, and few critics even had access to them. Although critics could technically choose to place the show on their lists next year, since there aren't as many "rules" about that as there is for awards, it's still unlikely given the recency bias that can sneak into this process unless you're a January/February show that also happened to sweep major awards in the summer like *The Pitt* or *Adolescence* did.

I don't want to present this as some kind of inherent injustice. Awards and year-end lists are forms of gatekeeping that have historically marginalized queer stories, especially explicit ones, and their validation is not necessary in order for *Heated Rivalry* to be culturally valuable. There are also still awards bodies, like the International Emmy Awards, where the series and *Storrie* will be eligible, and as a Canadian there's at least some part of me that feels pride in the fact that these technicalities underline its national origins for an audience who might naively claim it as an "HBO show."

'Heated Rivalry' Season 1 Finale: Cottage Core | Prestige TV | The Ringer



Watch on YouTube

At the same time, though, the *feeling* of injustice spreading across the internet around the subject of awards and other forms of recognition tells us something about the show's cultural footprint; there's a reason [friend of the newsletter Philiana Ng's explainer about this](#) is the top headline at awards site *Gold Derby*. It's about the way a show operating outside the realm of prestige infiltrated spaces dedicated to more serious critical inquiry, whether it's Alan Sepinwall's newsletter or Ringer's Prestige TV feed. It's how the show's success at penetrating (pun intended) the mainstream registers as the start of something, with the absence of followup in similarly mainstream spaces so at odds with the impact it's had. *Heated Rivalry* doesn't need a U.S. award nomination or a Top 10 appearance to mean something to people, but its complete absence in those spaces on technicalities understandably rings especially false compared to your average snub.

#### How 'Heated Rivalry' conquered winter TV

The queer hockey romance's first season wraps up with a seemingly idyllic getaway



What's Alan Watching? • Alan Sepinwall



This is especially true given that the show's release is unprecedented in ways that the rules for the Emmys in particular were never intended to account for. There has never been a fully foreign acquired production that has been released day-and-date in the U.S. like this to my recollection, and definitely not a Canadian series that due to language has little to no distinction from a series HBO Max might produce itself. As much as we are in a fraught time for Canadian/U.S. relations where HBO Max risks stolen valor by claiming *Heated Rivalry* as its own, the simple truth is that for consumers of television in America *Heated Rivalry* is no just like every Emmy-eligible show. As I told Katey, the Emmys' designation as being a celebration of "national primetime programming" is simply no longer an accurate description of what people

have access to in the spaces where they watch TV, with both national and primetime misnomers on some level. As someone who has had to explain this technicality many times over the past few weeks, it always seems like an affront to the lived experience of the audience.

And yet, between the rules about international series and the calendar year problem, there are only two semi-major American awards where *Heated Rivalry* could be eligible. The first—and only definitive one—is the Television Critics Association awards, which also happens to be the only one I vote for. It's one of only two awards that follow the “TV season” calendar of the Primetime Emmy awards, and the other—the Gotham TV Awards—has the same rule requiring U.S. co-production as the others. It's also not televised, and in a post-press tour era doesn't even have a formal ceremony, but it features a Best New Series prize for which the show would be competitive, and an Individual Achievement in Drama award that Storrie could very well be nominated for next summer. Unless the Gothams change their rules, which is probably more feasible than the Emmys doing the same, the TCA Awards reflect a viable space of recognition in which the show's origins won't keep it from even being part of the conversation.

### We couldn't verify the security of your connection.

Access to this content has been restricted. Contact your internet service provider for help.

I just wanted to use this opportunity to remind everyone that the Peabody Awards rightfully recognized American Vandal.

The other space would be the Peabody Awards, which honors excellence in storytelling. Although U.S.-based, they have no rules regarding foreign productions being ineligible, and their explicit focus on “stories that matter” means that the cultural impact of a show like *Heated Rivalry* carries weight it might not elsewhere. However, this is another case where the surprise of the show's U.S. release and subsequent success could be an issue, as the deadline for Peabody submissions was on December 18. Was either Crave or HBO Max paying enough attention to those deadlines while scrambling to catch up with the sudden interest in the series? Is this going to be another place where the timing of the show's success robs it of an opportunity to be acknowledged?

Eligibility is no guarantee, of course: if my fellow TCA members are relying solely on year-end lists or the January awards to flag worthwhile content that sits outside of their usual fare, *Heated Rivalry* could slip through the cracks with them as well. What has been inescapable for the chronically online may well have remained a niche affair for those who spend less time on social media, and as always it comes down to a matter of taste: you don't have to be a prude to bounce off some of the show's early pacing, for instance. Much as I don't think *Heated Rivalry* would suddenly be on tap to sweep the Emmys if it were eligible, the fact it *would* qualify for major TCA Awards doesn't guarantee it will.



But as I've dipped my toe into TikTok comment sections and lurked in Reddit threads, it has become clear that the *Heated Rivalry* fanbase wants to believe there is an additional step in the legitimization of the show and its story. And so while petitioning the Emmys to change their rules is something Mallory Rubin floated on *The Ringer's* Prestige TV podcast, and certainly can't hurt, at this stage the TCA Awards are the only space where an awards voter will 100% have an opportunity to acknowledge *Heated Rivalry* below the 49th parallel. I still don't think that recognition is necessary for the show's impact to be felt, but I won't pretend that the layers of technicality don't feel like an unfair barrier to that impact being properly felt beyond the fandom itself.

## Episodic Observations

- Book readers know why focusing on trophies in the context of Shane and Ilya has an extra layer. IYKYK.
- Just to play with the theoretical, while many Emmy categories have seen intense turnover, Lead Actor in a Drama Series wouldn't be one of them: 2025 winner Noah Wyle and nominees Sterling K. Brown and Gary Oldman would all be eligible again this year, while past nominees Idris Elba and Walton Goggins will be back in the running. Combined with *Task* shifting to Drama Series, likely giving Mark

Ruffalo an inside line on a nomination, Storrie would remain a dark horse even if the show were to be eligible.

- By comparison, however, there's only a single nominee eligible again this year in Supporting Actor (James Marsden for *Paradise*), so technically François Arnaud would have the more open category if the show were to (again, theoretically) generate momentum otherwise, even if they backfill more *Morning Show* nominees?
- On the topic of Emmys if not *Heated Rivalry*: while Zendaya's return to the category could prove a spoiler, Rhea Seehorn is finally the frontrunner for an Emmy after playing dark horse with *Better Call Saul* for years.
- I nearly sent a handful of inquiry emails to various people at these organizations/networks, but then I realized it is December 27, and absolutely no one should be working right now just because I am, y'know? So we'll live in the space of speculation as to whether the Gothams would change their rules for next year, or whether HBO/Crave did or did not submit the show for the Peabodys (whose early bird deadline was a week before the show even premiered, and whose final deadline was barely before the finale was locked).
- In the new year, I've got some questions about the *Heated Rivalry*'s path forward—and the first season as an adaptation—that I'm going to try to get answered, so stay tuned.

## READ NEXT



### Review: Survivor, "Did You Vote For a Swap?" | Season 50, Episode 3

I told you last night, no! (I honestly don't remember at this point)

MYLES MCNUTT 11 MAR 2026



### Review: Shrinking, "I Will Be Grape" | Season 3, Episode 7

A quality episode with the enchanting scent of updog

ERIK ADAMS 11 MAR 2026 3 COMMENTS



### Review: Elsbeth, "All's Hair" | Season 3, Episode 12 / Matlock, "The Greater Good" | Season 2, Episode 10

JOSH SPIEGEL 07 MAR 2026 9 COMMENTS

## COMMENTS (13)