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now they want us... **The NHL wants a piece of the *Heated Rivalry* hype... if only it weren't still dealing with its homophobia problem**



Alex Reimer

December 23, 2025, 5:00 pm PST



Unsurprisingly, the NHL is trying to capitalize on *Heated Rivalry* and turn the show's fervent viewers into hockey fanatics. But the league's efforts are being blocked like a limp shot on net.

When faced with the choice to side with its gay fans or homophobes, the NHL opted for the latter. Two years ago, the league banned players from wearing speciality jerseys, including uniforms with Pride colors.

The edict followed a smattering of controversies in which a **small number of players refused to wear** rainbow warmup jerseys during their respective team's Pride nights.

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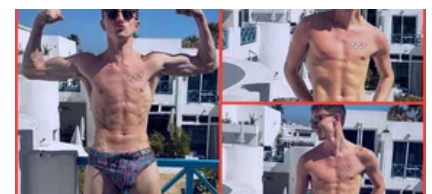
calling them out

Jay Jurden's six-pack has a message for RFK Jr. & other fragile meat bros



ally

Spanish soccer star Aitor Ruibal stands up for gay people & shows what it's like to be a real man



big boy!

Olympian Jack Woolley's body is bulging in new speedo pics

The 99% of players who showed support for the LGBTQ+ community were disregarded, along with queer hockey fans.

People don't forget!

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This week, an NHL rep **cooed to *The Hollywood Reporter*** about how the steamy HBO hit is resonating with the masses. "There are so many ways to get hooked on hockey and, in the NHL's 108-year history, this might be the most unique driver for creating new fans," the person said. "See you all at the rink."

Through the 2010s, the NHL made a concerted effort to appeal to LGBTQ+ people, like other sports leagues and corporations. But the initiatives expanded beyond Pride nights and other forms of rainbow capitalism. There was a personal element to the NHL's outreach.

After the out gay son of a legendary league exec **died in a car crash**, the NHL partnered with You Can Play, an effort to end homophobia in sports.

When seven players refused to wear Pride-related warmups, however, the league didn't take as strong of a stance. The NHL discouraged queer visibility with a memo before the 2023-24 season, banning rainbow tape and jerseys.

The ban on tape was rescinded when a brave player for the Arizona Coyotes defied league policy and **displayed his allyship anyway...**

The speciality uniform ban remains in place.

At the time, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman **said** the onus fell on LGBTQ+ people to accept bigoted viewpoints.

"You know what our goals, our values and our intentions are across the league, whether it's at the league level or at the club level," he said. "But we also have to respect individual choice. And part of being diverse and welcoming is understanding those differences."

Related*

[NHL bows to homophobes & officially bans players from wearing Pride jerseys or using Pride tape](#)

The National Hockey League says players should not be forced to participate in "special initiatives" they don't agree with.

People can debate whether wrapping hockey sticks in rainbow tape or wearing rainbow regalia ultimately makes much of a difference. Some say the gestures are performative, while others contest that any sort of visibility matters. But that's not the point here.

When a tiny bit of heat was turned on the NHL, the league folded. Anti-LGBTQ+ backlash was fomenting in the lead-up to 2024, and several sports leagues and teams were faced with similar controversies.

But not all of them backed down. The Los Angeles Dodgers, for example, **re-invited an iconic drag group** to their Pride night after outcry from Republican senators. (The back-to-back World Series champs wound up winning 100 games and leading the league in attendance.)

On X, many fans were quick to remind the NHL of its cowardly path.

 **Rachel Kryshak** 
@RachelKryshak · Follow

If you're going to say this...then maybe allow Pride jerseys to be worn. You can't say this and ban Pride jerseys at the same time. That's not how this works.

 **Buzzing Pop**  @BuzzingPop

NHL rep hails 'Heated Rivalry' for igniting fresh interest in hockey:

"There are so many ways to get hooked on hockey and, in the NHL's 108-year history, this might be the most unique driver for creating new fans. See you all at the rink." (@THR)

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 **Mike Bartner**  
@MikeBartner · Follow

Banned Pride warmups bc they were "causing controversy" and now dropping statements like this.

 **Buzzing Pop**  @BuzzingPop

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leah/el is BLISSFUL
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remember when they tried to ban pride tape 2 years ago!
don't let the reps fool you! they just want money!



Buzzing Pop @BuzzingPop

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Jo
@puckdrop · Follow



Still flabbergasted how open the NHL is towards the show while openly banning pride jerseys and having a history of trying to ban pride tape

Buzzing Pop  @BuzzingPop

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auddie
@literallysunset · [Follow](#)



Replying to @BuzzingPop and @THR

the NHL does not care about the LGBT+ so pleeeeeease don't be fooled.

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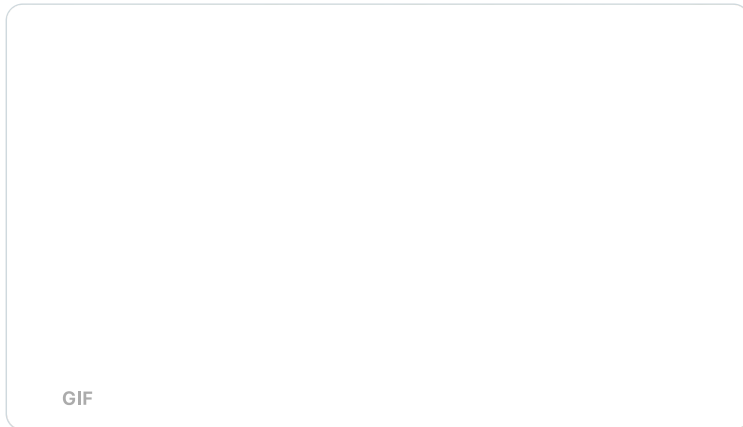
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it's almost like lgbtqia+ hockey fans have been telling the nhl for decades that embracing our community would do more good for the league than anything else , and , well!



GIF

Buzzing Pop  @BuzzingPop

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Uneducated Hockey Stans

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I want the culture in hockey to change so bad. I want it to feel safe and inclusive for everyone. You hire sexual predators & try to ban pride tape but see potential to profit off LGBTQ+ and women so now it's "see y'all the rink"... It's hard not to roll my eyes at this statement.

Buzzing Pop @BuzzingPop

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"There are so many ways to get hooked on hockey and, in the NHL's 108-year history, this might be the most unique driver for creating new fans. See you all at the rink." (@THR)

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With its hot action and gripping love story, *Heated Rivalry* has piqued the interest of girls, gays and theys who previously didn't know whether a puck was puffed or stuffed.

The show has already been renewed for a second season.

Trailblazing ex-pro hockey player Brock McGillis recently told *Queerty* that his fiancé is one of those new fans. "They offer him towels at [Toronto Maple] Leafs playoff games, and he goes, 'I have nicer linens at home,'" he said.

His attitude has completely shifted. "This is going to create a whole new culture of potential hockey fans," added McGillis. "How exciting is that?"

That is exciting! But for queer hockey fans, the NHL's embrace of *Heated Rivalry* would be more thrilling if it wasn't as hypocritical.

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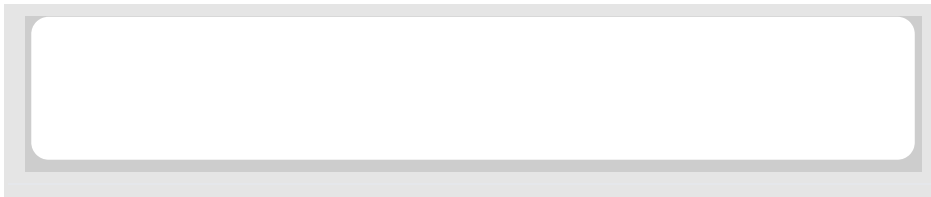
Sports bar patrons go viral with their "insane" reaction to episode 5 of *Heated Rivalry*

Pedro Pascal was among those to comment on the video of the WeHo audience's reaction.

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Alex Reimer is an Assistant Editor at Queerty who writes about sports and fitness, politics and irreverent gay things. In a previous life, he was a talk radio loudmouth in Boston. He currently lives in Chicago.

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