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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

'Heated Rivalry' Boss Jacob Tierney on Season 1's Finale & the Slap Shot That Blew Him Away

Damian Holbrook • December 26, 2025, 1:00 am



HBO Max

WHAT TO KNOW

- Shane and Ilya's Ottawa getaway gave way to a deeper connection than ever.
- Season 1 ended with Shane's parents making a massive discovery.
- Creator Jacob Tierney spoke with *Swooon* about Shane and Ilya's evolution at the cottage, the book's epilogue, and the future of the show.

[Warning: The following contains MAJOR spoilers from *Heated Rivalry* Season 1.]

Did *Heated Rivalry* just give us the greatest Christmas gift ever? Because from where I see it (through happy, tear-rimmed eyes), that season finale was 51 minutes of everything we've been hoping for ever since pro hockey stars and fervent sheet-scorchers Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander (**Connor Storrie** and **Hudson Williams**) first soaped up. *Before* their rookie season, as Shane's mother, Yuna (**Christina Chang**), would remind us. It's like Santa knew we all needed a trip to "**The Cottage**" this year.

Opening shortly after the self-outing of their equally closeted fellow blade runner Scott Hunter (**François Arnaud**), the sixth episode of this overnight sensation, based on Rachel Reid's *Game Changers* book series, leaned even further into the fantasy it's selling, and we're happily buying. Having won the Stanley Cup, Scott had bravely called his shredded barista beau, Kip (**Robbie G.K.**), down from the crowd to join him on the ice for a celebratory tongue bath surrounded by his teammates, as well as cameras broadcasting the moment to millions of hockey fans watching at home. But rather than the social media pearl-clutching and corporate boycotts that would likely erupt if this really happened, Scott is proudly letting his rainbow freak-flag fly at the podium of an awards ceremony where he's been named MVP (Most Vers Player?) as Kip lovingly watches from the bar.

With that cold open handled and the offensively attractive **#Skip ship** set in place, the rest of the episode was free to focus on Shane and Ilya's multi-layered evolution. Tucked away at Shane's cottage for what was supposed to be a private summer getaway, the two did what they do best — several times — while also trying a new position: Shane suggests they use this time to be honest with one another about how they're feeling. This emotional flipping requires some easing into it, but by the time they are curled up on the couch and bathed in sepia tones, these guys are whipping out girthy truths all over the place. Shane's worries about Ilya also liking women, Ilya's desire to leave the Boston Raiders for a team closer to the Montreal Metros, and how they can switch the narrative of their perceived animosity so they can be seen together (start a charity together!). It's all clicking and, thanks in great part to the Storrie and Williams' unflappable chemistry, we get club-level seats to watch the men lock in to an actual relationship.



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Then they got caught. For real, our stomachs hit the floor faster than Shane's knees did back in Room 1410 after his father, David (**Dylan Walsh**), unexpectedly shows up at the cottage to spot them playfully grabbing each other's sticks. In keeping with the show's aversion to cliches, what follows is not the expected angst of parents scandalized by their child's secret. Nor did the writers go with the played-out idea of them being more concerned with their cash cow's career than his happiness. No, instead, the biggest issue they have is that their son has fallen for the nasty Russian from the Boston Raiders.

Of course, there's also Yuna's heartache over feeling like she didn't make Shane feel safe enough to come out, which is handled so beautifully by Chang and Williams in a scene not included in Reid's novel. But what the reveal really leads to is one of the loveliest of dinner-table conversations filled with attempts at understanding, often cheekily open communication, sweet parental encouragement, and, in a moment that probably surprises the Hollanders as much as it did viewers, a tender show of true partnership from Ilya as Shane spirals into a minor panic attack. It's the most affectionately connected we have seen Ilya all season, and an all-star setup for the guys' happily ever after drive away from David and Yuna's place over the closing credits.

If the show were to end with them riding off into the sunset, it would have been romance perfection. But as *HR* diehards know, the **puck doesn't stop here**. So since this is the season of giving, we happily present to you this conversation with show creator Jacob Tierney about **what's to cu...er, come**.

Congratulations on all of the success. It's so exciting to see it happen, and it must be so cool for you because this is a big swing. It's the show we needed 30 years ago when I was a kid, but it's here for younger gays now... and for all the straight women.

Jacob Tierney: Their moms. [*Laughs*]

Exactly. And everyone who's now at the gym working glutes because all of a sudden it's all about butts.

Tierney: Just trying to do my bit, you know what I mean? Making asses fatter all over North America.

Yes. Thank you for your service. Were there any scenes in the episode that got cut for time? Because I know there were parts in the book not featured, including a hookup on the dock and — here's my journalism degree at work — a bit of anilingus.

Tierney: [*Laughs*] I didn't have a dock!

You did have a rock, though.

Tierney: Yeah, I did what I could with that rock. I was like, “Well, what are we doing here?” I took things for content. I collapsed things. One of the trickier parts of romance is the denouement, the ending of it. And I didn’t want to repeat myself. There had already been anilingus in the show. There had already been some things, and I was like, “I don’t want to repeat beats here. I want this to be its own unique thing.” And I was acutely aware that I was basically structuring a two-hander, and to go from Episode 5, which is so big, to Episode 6, which is so small, I just wanted to make sure that every little moment added up to where I wanted it to add up to.

So there was no cutting for time. There was never any cutting for time on the show. That’s not a thing. We’re on streaming. I could do whatever I wanted to. I wanted to make sure each episode had the integrity of its own story. And to me, brevity is always the aim. I don’t want the show to be 77 minutes for no reason. It’s stupid. And also, I would say with a show like this, again, there’s not a lot of comps for this show. And I really wanted to make sure that I was not being indulgent or asking too much of an audience that I wasn’t sure was even going to be there at all.

[This episode] is exactly what I wanted it to be. So there were no cuts that were made or anything like that. There was just shaping and kind of retooling and trying to figure out how I could combine as often as possible. And then to make sure that, even though they were just a series of one-on-one conversations, they were amounting to something...accumulating meaning, I suppose.

Obviously, the comfort between Connor and Hudson was just so clear by this point.

Tierney: It was the last thing we shot, too.

Was there anything *they* added to their scenes?

Tierney: Connor added smacking Hudson's face while he was blowing him during that video game scene, which was amazing. That really made all of us laugh quite a bit. And I mean, it was just also such a wonderful touch in the sense that they were, to your point, so comfortable with each other. And they were so comfortable wearing these characters at that point, too. I love the evolution of the sex in this show, to the point where it gets to be in this final episode: incredibly tender and also playful and funny and alive. Because again, as I've said now many times about this show, I get that we knew what we were doing here. It's a lot of sex. It's very titillating. But that's also boring, ultimately. You can **find sex anywhere**. The sex has to be interesting. It has to tell you something about them, and it has to have intimacy.

There is a moment where it was almost unclear that they were having sex because they're speaking so openly about "How did we let this happen?" and "This is real, right?" Them having that conversation during sex, it now means something else.

Tierney: Exactly. And it has to. Otherwise, what are we doing? It's just boring. It's just bodies you've now seen multiple times in different positions. And I think there's something numbing about that in the same way that there can be something numbing about violence or action, where you're just like, "Okay, well, they're just chasing each other around a car again." But that being said, then you have a car

chase at the end of *One Battle After Another*, and you can't take your eyes off. It doesn't matter how many car chases you've seen; you're like, "What is *this* one doing?" It's *new*.



Sabrina Lantos / HBO Max

The Yuna-Shane scene... My god, Christina is so good. But that scene isn't in the book.

Tierney: I think that that's something I just needed to put in there. The Yuna character is so important, and she's so important moving forward. The book does a lot of things internally that I can't do, but I needed to hear them talk out loud to each other. I needed to hear them have this conversation with one another. And I rewrote it on the day, too. I cut things out of it. It was a tricky scene for me because I feel there's a lot in common with actors and athletes. I felt a lot for Shane in the moment of having to say, "I really tried," because I feel like he did really try. And I think that his mother needed to hear him say that, and we needed to see her react honestly to what he's been going through. And yeah, thankfully, I had two actors there who just killed it.

I love that David was more concerned that it was a competitor versus how most TV dads would be like, "It's a guy." Here he's like, "No, no, no, it's a rival. How could you do this?!"

Tierney: “Were there no nice men in Montreal?” [*Laughs*] A city full of very handsome men, too. Dad’s right! No, I mean, it’s very funny, but they’re sports parents, right? That is horrifying to them; they have collectively, as a family, demonized this guy for a decade. And so it’s like, ‘Well, what are we supposed to do? This is now our [possible] son-in-law!’”

There was also an epilogue in the *Heated Rivalry* book. Do you plan on addressing that later on?

Tierney: Epilogues aren’t great TV, so in Season 2, that will happen.

Connor and Hudson have signed on for *three seasons*...

Tierney: Which is just standard, by the way.

Right, so is the idea to do *The Long Game* [Reid’s second book in the series] as two seasons?

Tierney: There’s no idea right now that I can actually comment on beyond that. *The Long Game* is definitely going to be the basis of Season 2 and potentially moving forward. I have not started writing, so I’m not trying to be coy. I don’t actually know exactly. I have a sense of what I’m going to do, but I don’t know all the math yet.

***Heated Rivalry*, Season 1, Streaming Now, Crave and HBO Max**



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