

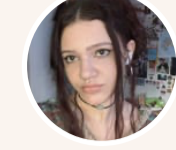


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HEATED RIVALRY-THEMED EVENTS SURGE IN POPULARITY IN OTTAWA — BUT WHY?

9 HOURS AGO



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Student Contributor, Carleton University

This article is written by a student writer from the Her Campus at Carleton chapter and does not reflect the views of Her Campus.

If you've been on the internet in the past three months, there's a high likelihood you've heard of the Crave original series *Heated Rivalry*.

Heated Rivalry is a series created by Montreal filmmaker and actor Jacob Tierney, which was adapted from the romantic sports novel series *Game Changers*.

Through positive word-of-mouth, the mini-series steadily grew in popularity, until now where it has become [Crave's most-watched original series of all time](#) and a worldwide success.

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"When romance novels get adapted into TV and film, they are almost never adapted so ... true to the source material," said Ottawa-based romance author Ruby Barrett, who co-hosts the *Game Changers* podcast Loon Call.

"We're [Ruby and her co-host Ada] just very obsessed with the storytelling," Barrett said, "we were staying up late every night to watch the episodes as they dropped."

The Canadian-produced show follows professional hockey players Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov, who engage in a near decade-long relationship while maintaining a professional rivalry.

Over time, their relationship grows from strictly intimate to romantic, and the pair struggle to stay true to their feelings and be themselves in a work environment that isn't fully accepting of queer people.

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This culminates in the final episode, where Hollander, a Montreal player, tries to convince Rozanov to move to Ottawa and play for the city's team so the two can live closer together.

Ottawa, which was famously named "the city that fun forgot," by journalist Allan Fotheringham, plays a prominent role in the series.

The city is name-dropped multiple times in a romanticized manner by Hollander, who grew up there.

As the show's popularity has grown online, its impact can be seen beyond the screen — including in the Ottawa-Gatineau nightlife scene.

On websites such as Eventbrite, a primary source for events happening in the Ottawa-Gatineau area, partygoers can buy tickets for a sleuth of *Heated Rivalry* themed events.

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These events include *Heated Rivalry*-themed trivia nights, raves, dance parties and drag shows.

On Feb. 26, The Lookout Bar, one of the few gay bars in the capital region, hosted a *Heated Rivalry* themed drag night.

Before the performers stepped foot onstage, episodes of the show were playing on screens across the bar. A crowd of roughly 20 people, a majority of whom were women, gathered to watch the show.

The show was co-hosted by drag performers Elle Faekwa and Steven Tie Her. Other performers that night included drag kings Gay Fieri, BJ Stroker and Caligula.



SABRINA LANTOS/HBO MAX

Steven Tie Her started the show lip syncing to the song "I Don't Care" by Fall Out Boy while dressed in a Boston Raiders jersey — the fictional team Rozanov plays for.

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Some performances had zero connection to the central theme, such as Caligula's lipsync to "Diamonds" by Rihanna. She was dressed in a slip dress and swung her jewel-covered scarf around on stage.

Sky Lounge in Ottawa hosted their third *Heated Rivalry*-themed rave night on March 6. The two previous nights had sold out due to overwhelming demand.

Bartenders were adorned in hockey jerseys and TikTok edits of the main characters played on TV's across the club on loop.

Attendees had the option to purchase special themed drinks for \$15.25. Drink options included the ROZANOV — a mix of rum, Amarula and milk and the Face-Off — a mix of vodka, peach schnapps and soda.

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Attendee Maxime Millaire greatly enjoyed the rave, but critiqued the cost of drinks and the crowdedness of the venue.

"At first, there wasn't that many people," Millaire said, "and then, at around midnight to ... 1 a.m., like, 500 at least."

According to Millaire, a majority of the attendees at the event were women.

"I also ended up meeting a bunch of people that I already knew there. It was a very queer-heavy space," Millaire said.

Event organizer Frabjous hosted an event called Puck Us, Choose Us, Love Us at Room 104 on Feb. 22, which was billed as an event "by queer people for queer people" on Eventbrite.

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Activities included dancing, a look-alike contest, and a snow-cone machine.

When putting the event together, Liz McGregor, director of the Ottawa Frabjous team, said the organization wanted to prioritize having "queer men on the lineup," and giving back to their community.

"We're creating a small economy within the queer community," McGregor said, "So, just getting the opportunity to ... represent our community as well as pay them, as well as connect them, that's ... the object."

Other events in Ottawa that passed include *Power Play*, a *Heated Rivalry* kink-themed event at members-only club Probe Ottawa on Feb. 13. and *Heated Rivalry* trivia night Boston Pizza Barrhaven on Feb. 23.

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The specific reason behind the show's popularity in Canada and the popularity of *Heated Rivalry*-themed events in Ottawa cannot be determined — but McGregor believes that it can be partially attributed to the show's "hopeful" nature and event organizers viewing the show as a "safe" brand.

"These two beautiful cisgender boys are finding love, you know, despite ... geopolitics and personal struggles," McGregor said, "And, that's definitely very real for the community, but ... it has been made palatable for a general audience."

"It's a brand that was very easy for a lot of ... mainstream nightlife places to take on, as kind of a novelty theme without actually being politically transgressive at all," McGregor said.

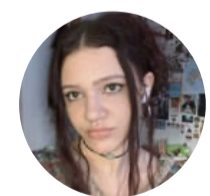
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Michelle Vermette, attendee at the third Sky Lounge *Heated Rivalry*-themed rave, views the show as a "win for Canadian culture," but is unsure that the popularity of the events and *Heated Rivalry* as a whole will last.

"There'll be something else that is more trendy later," Vermette said, "That's how trends work."

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Emily Renae Kapralik is a Canadian journalism student at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario. As a fellow HerCampus chapter member, she enjoys writing articles and essays related to film, entertainment, and popular culture from a female perspective.

In 2022, Emily graduated with honours from the film and media production program at Algonquin College. She has utilized her education experience and passion for the arts and culture across multiple multi-media-related positions, ranging from broadcast television to the non-profit sector. While at university, Emily operates as a volunteer photographer, content developer, and writer.

When she has some time away from school, she can be seen outdoors practicing her photography, going thrifting, writing film scripts, or watching a good movie so she can log it on her Letterboxd. Emily is also passionate about various social causes, such as menstrual equity, food equity, intersectional feminism, and LGBTQ+ rights.

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