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Heated Rivalry season 2 expanding its cast is actually great news for Ilya and Shane

Upon learning Heated Rivalry season 2 has added side characters from across Rachel Reid's book series, fans worried what that will mean for Ilya and Shane. But this is a good thing.

By [Reed Gaudens](#) | Aug 14, 2026



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Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander and Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov in Heated Rivalry season 1 episode 5 | Courtesy of Bell Media

In such a short amount of time, *Heated Rivalry* has become one of the most popular and beloved television shows currently on the air. Fans hold the show and its main characters, Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie), with the fierce loyalty of a show that you'd assume had been on much longer. But that love extends from the pages of [Rachel Reid's books](#).

Since the Canadian series broke through with immense popularity, showrunner Jacob Tierney has been insistent that while the show will remain completely focused on the

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casting additions have caused unfair doubt about that assertion.

Heated Rivalry season 2 made the [exciting casting announcement](#) that Charlie Gillespie and Justice Smith will play *Role Model* leads Troy Barrett and Harris Drover, who are also integral characters in the Hollanov-centric *The Long Game*. While these characters were a given going into season 2, the next batch of casting announcements has dusted up quite the stir among fans.

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Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov and Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander in Heated Rivalry | Courtesy of Bell Media

Heated Rivalry season 2 cast announcement creates confusion

The upcoming season [added five new cast members](#): Emily Hampshire as Vanessa, Edwin Ryding as Luca Haas, Robert Naylor as Wyatt Hayes, Sabrina Jalees as Farah Jalali, and Priyanka as Tarek. Since Luca and Wyatt are prominent members of Ilya's new team, the Ottawa Centaurs, these have been highly anticipated castings, though the others seemingly came as something of a surprise.

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has limited appearances as Shane and Ilya's shared sports agent, who they ultimately come out to before the world. For some fans, the appearances of at least the first two characters seems non-essential to Hollanov.

Perhaps what's causing confusion right is the lack of language surrounding the latest cast additions. The group of five new cast members are almost guaranteed to have guest or recurring roles, smaller than Gillespie and Smith's roles, similarly to Nadine Bhabha as Kip's friend Elena or even Callan Potter as Hayden Pike in the first season. That's just how supporting characters work. There's a range.

To be fair, on paper, it might seem like the growing cast could be pushing Ilya and Shane to the side of their own show. There are a lot of new characters, but to also be fair, that was [always part of the deal](#). If you look at the season 1 cast on paper beyond just Williams and Storrie, there are well over a dozen family members, friends, teammates, and other characters who appear across the six episodes.

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Heated Rivalry - (L to R) François Arnaud as Scott Hunter and Robbie G.K. as Kip Grady in Episode 105 of Heated Rivalry | Cr. Sabrina Lantos © 2025

Those characters don't steal any screen time from the two main characters. Even the standalone episode that showcased the love story between Scott (François Arnaud) and Kip (Robbie G.K.) served a significant purpose to get Ilya and Shane to where they need to be by the end of episode 5. This entire universe is interconnected like a Jenga tower, threatening to tumble without one vital piece—which will only make sense if you have read all of the books.

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rumored 12 episodes, there will be at least one or two more side quests to get to know the other *Game Changers* couples. And again, that isn't an affront to Ilya and Shane. It's a necessity and an incredible opportunity.

The development that occurs in *Tough Guy* adds some rather life-changing building blocks for both Ilya and Troy leading into *Role Model* and *The Long Game*. You can't tell one story without the other, and while some viewers might not be particularly interested in the other couples, that's just what happens when a book series is adapted. You're going to get an ensemble.

Tierney never hid his intention to fold in new characters moving forward, and nothing has changed in the way that he's approaching *Heated Rivalry* season 2 or any additional seasons. For a series so championed for its queer representation and queer joy, you'd think the inclusion of more queer characters, stories, and joy would be celebrated, not a source of doubt.

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