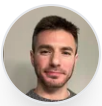
QUEERTY*
Free of an agenda (except that gay one)

ENTERTAINMENT

fake as f

Hot for hockey? NHL tries to jump on the *Heated Rivalry* bandwagon... but forgets the most important part



Alex Reimer
October 1, 2026, 12:00 pm PDT



Stephen R. Sylvanie-Imagn Images/Heated Rivalry. Cr. Sabrina Lantos © 2025

Buoyed by the success of *Heated Rivalry*, the NHL is using the steamy hockey romance as a blueprint on how to better markets its own versions of Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander.

Except they're leaving out a vital part.

With a new season starting this week, the NHL unveiled its "Hot for Hockey" campaign. The goal is to capture gay and female fans who flocked to the ice last season after watching Shane and Ilya get it on in the locker room showers, private hotel suites, and yes, the now-iconic Cottage™.

For the initiative, the NHL intends to release its own version of hockey smut... minus the smut. ***Sports Business Journal* has more**:

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> The NHL is rolling out a series of short stories on audiobook platforms throughout the season that present real-life NHL storylines in the style of romance novels. The league has contracted popular hockey romance authors to write and narrate the 60-to-90-second pieces, which will direct listeners to tune in to upcoming games to see how the stories play out on the ice.
>
> The stories put out by the NHL won't feature any actual romance between real-life NHL players. The presentation, however, winks at the genre.

Yeah, that last part is going to be a problem. Imagine if Shane and Ilya only winked at each other?

Their love story would lose its lust!

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People are just realizing François Arnaud starred in this bi-conic Orville Peck music video

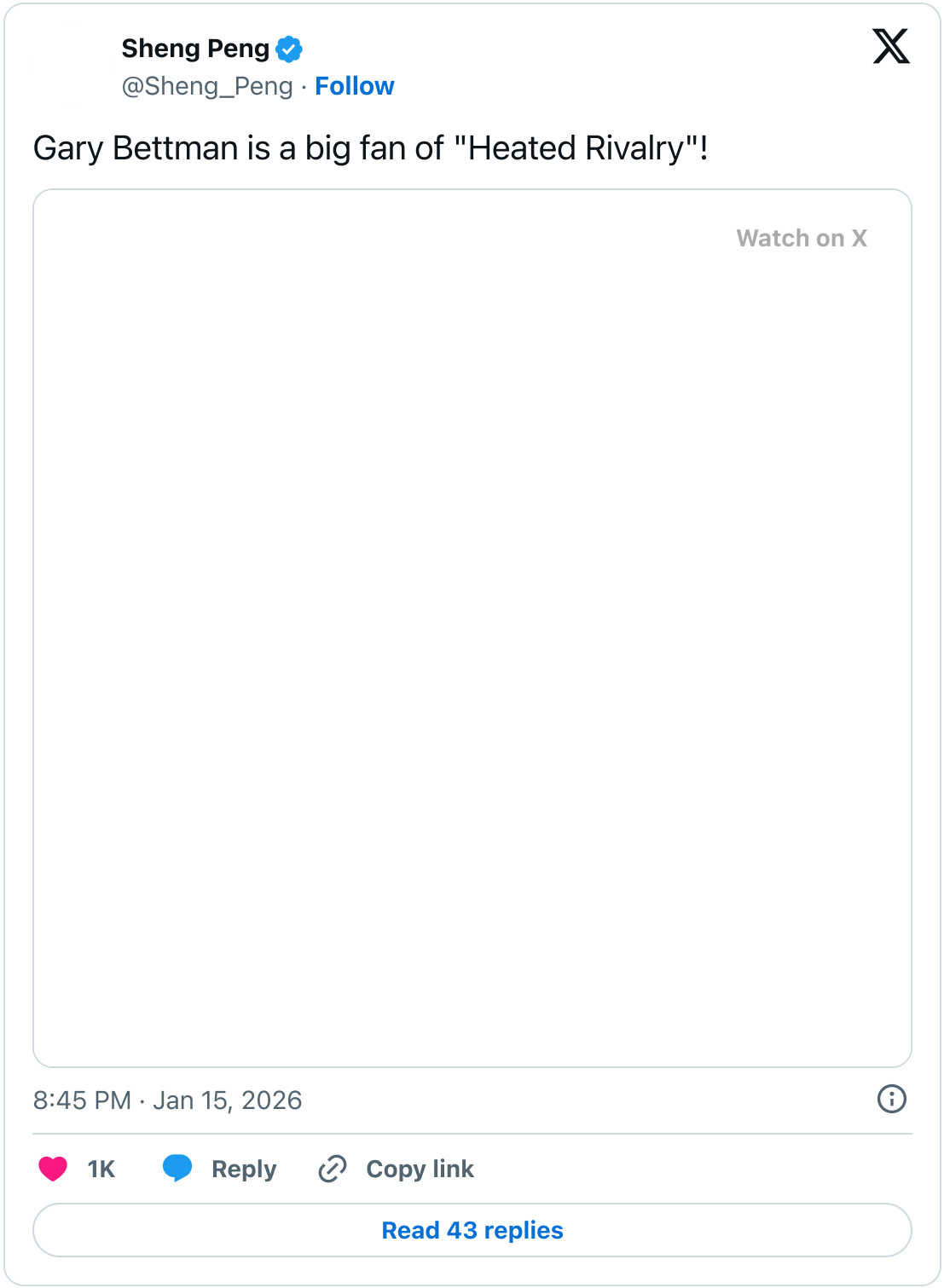
How hot is this?

Fake as F

The NHL found itself in an awkward spot last season: the league that banned players from using Pride tape was benefitting from a TV show featuring gay hockey romances and lascivious gay sex.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman tried to straddle the line. The 74-year-old claimed he binged all six episodes in one night (spicy!) while defending the league's disastrous bans on Pride tape and jerseys.

It was a **failing strategy** that made nobody happy.



Despite Bettman's bungling, nearly 1.8 million people watched the NHL last year for the first time. Naturally, the league wants to capitalize on that.

So they've brought over a new senior VP and chief marketing officer. Sean Eggert, who used to work at Under Armour, **told ESPN** that "people fall for people. That emotive connection is really, really important."

While that's true, any chief marketing officer worth his corporate card should also know that people crave authenticity.

Releasing non-smut smut, with unclear buy-in from the players themselves, isn't genuine.

"The whole "romantasy" space specific to sports and hockey, it's undeniable," said Eggert.

Sounds opportunistic to us!

Nobody is happy

No gay man is going to watch the NHL because the league is releasing smutty(ish) audiobook slop. But in fairness, gay men aren't the primary audience of *Heated Rivalry*. Women **comprise roughly 2/3rds of the series' audience**.

But unsurprisingly, women don't want to be blatantly pandered to, either. Female hockey fans say they like hockey because, well, they like hockey.

What they don't appreciate is the league's apparently shallow view of them.

Hischier Crave
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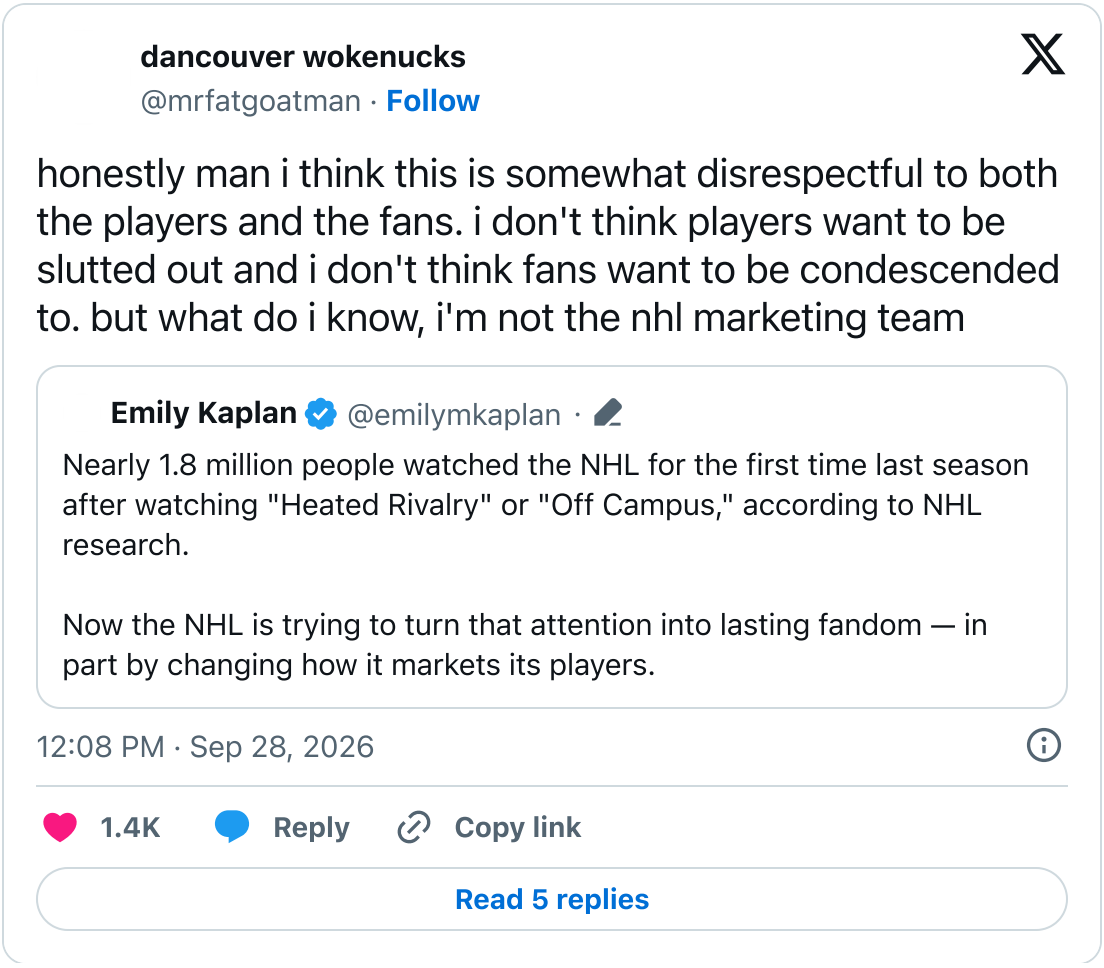
ignoring the neanderthals in the replies i wish sports leagues would stop trying to market to women based on attraction and realize we can like things the way everyone else can lol

> **Emily Kaplan** @emilymkaplan ·
>
> Nearly 1.8 million people watched the NHL for the first time last season after watching "Heated Rivalry" or "Off Campus," according to NHL research.
>
> Now the NHL is trying to turn that attention into lasting fandom — in part by changing how it markets its players.

10:24 AM · Sep 28, 2026

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We shouldn't do this. We should absolutely, unequivocally, without a doubt, NOT do this **https://t.co/YPrif3guM2**

— Opening Night Jess (@EthelSluggs) September 28, 2026

Gaby
@hockeynuisance · **Follow**

cackling at the league seeing explosive growth in their non-traditional fan bases and their response was to hire an elder white millenial that worked for... under armour...

also leaning into booktok after the harrassment Felicia Wennberg went through? sure, okay

> **Emily Kaplan** @emilymkaplan ·
> Nearly 1.8 million people watched the NHL for the first time last season after watching "Heated Rivalry" or "Off Campus," according to NHL research.
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8:42 AM · Sep 29, 2026

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While the NHL seeks to court potential female fans through vanilla non-romances and BookTok, actual women hockey fans are calling for the league to tackle a more important task: taking them seriously.

But that would require some humility.

claire
@clairernak · **Follow**

leagues will literally do anything to attract women fans except fix their rape culture

> **Emily Kaplan** @emilymkaplan ·
> Nearly 1.8 million people watched the NHL for the first time last season after watching "Heated Rivalry" or "Off Campus," according to NHL research.
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Leaning into *Heated Rivalry* is easy. Making true amends with LGBTQ+ hockey fans and treating female fans with respect is much harder.

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How *Heated Rivalry* has spurred straight women to leave their emotionally devoid husbands in droves

"Heated Rivalry's" impact is being felt in straight marriages across the world... and it isn't going well for the guys!

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ENTERTAINMENT

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.

Connect with Alex Reimer:

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mini crossword

Queerty Crossword: Oct. 8, 2026



the fairy follies

Inside the 1930s NYC prison where gay inmates staged the campiest pageant in history



the hot sheet

Chris Colfer weighs in on *Glee* reboot, Trixie's Halloween treat & all the best LGBTQ+ releases this week



monster movies

Andrew Garfield's Sam Altman goes full *Psycho* according to early buzz for OpenAI drama *Artificial*





bottom brigade

A throwback pic of these literary gay “frenemies” has the gays talking



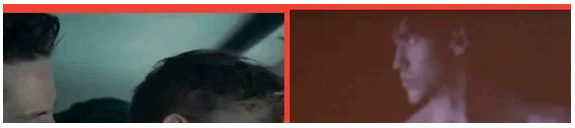
dl dilemma

“Republican women are lesbians”: queer journalist exposes MAGA’s sapphic secrets



lady good-diver

Check out Tom Daley as you’ve NEVER seen him before





queerty query

A WeHo party boy converts a Mormon missionary, a flammable finish & the British *Brokeback Mountain*: Gays name the hottest sex scenes they've ever seen



j'adore galore

Gym crushes, gay Halloween tees & Jonathan Bailey as Dracula: 10 things we're obsessed with this week

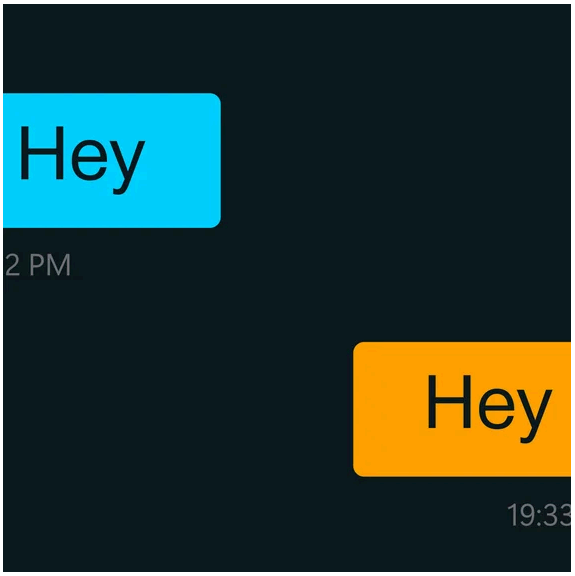


tale of a coat

Antoni's signature leather jacket is apparently in big legal trouble

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Latest*



kind comments

Why is this pleasant Grindr exchange stirring up so much controversy on Gay Twitter™?

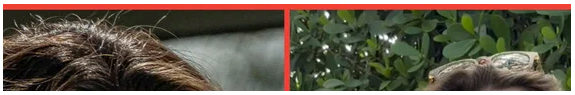
✓ 33 minutes ago



ready for action

This speedy new treatment for ED is now available in the US... and you stick it up your *what*?

✓ 1 hour ago

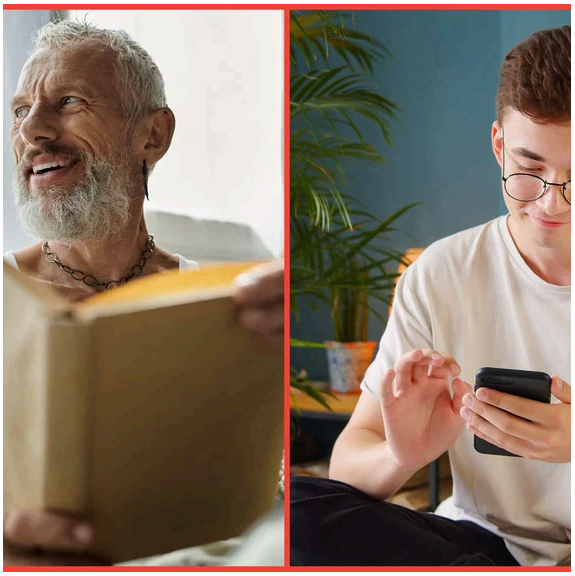




true story

The craziest House race involves a food court fight, a gay slur & *another* Elizabeth Holmes

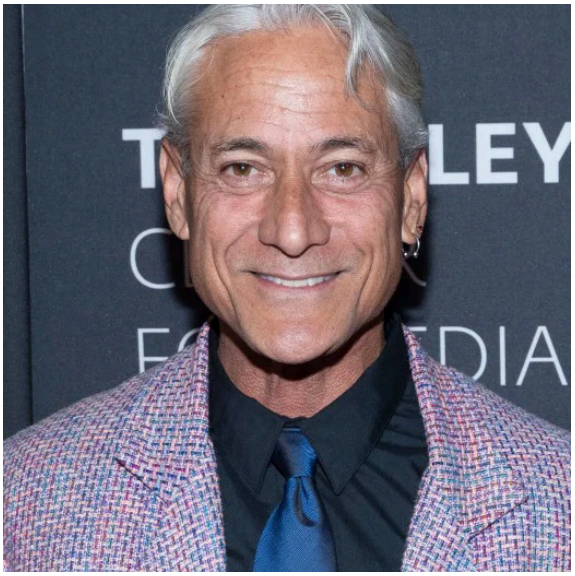
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queerty query

What's the first book you would recommend to a baby gay & why?

✓ 3 hours ago



inner peace

Greg Louganis on the "quandary and challenge" of being a single, older gay man

✓ 4 hours ago





trailer park

WATCH: Dewayne Perkins picks up where *Noah's Arc* left off with wild new "skitcom"

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supreme disgrace

10 comments

Samuel Alito might want to try keeping his mouth shut for the moment

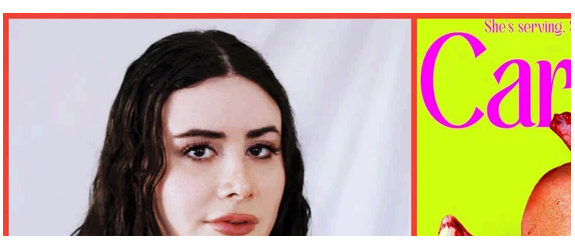
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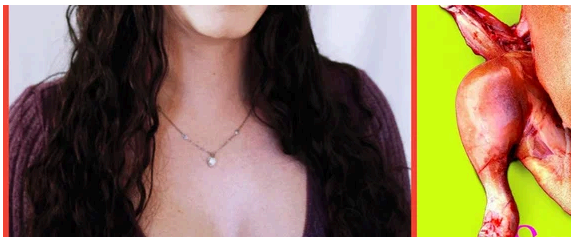


forced fantasy

Who could've predicted the NHL forcing fake *Heated Rivalry* plots onto real-life players would backfire so badly?

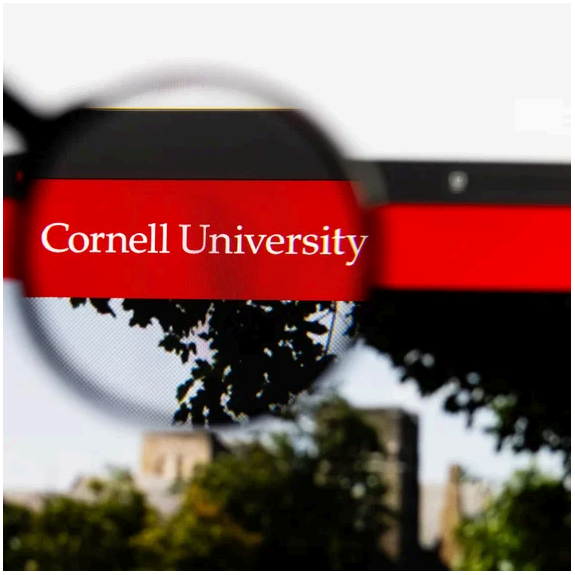
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dishin' it

Samantha Josephs dishes on her unhinged trans body horror novel *Carrying*, getting filthy & *Family Guy*

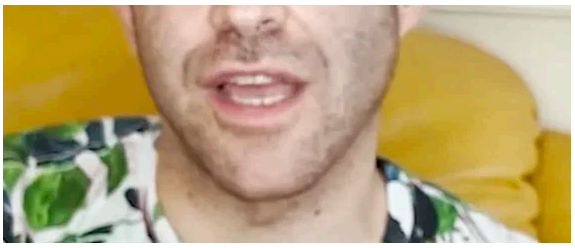


wtf?

Accused Cornell 7 perpetrator appears to take age-old homophobic defense in strange twist

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Outsports



college football

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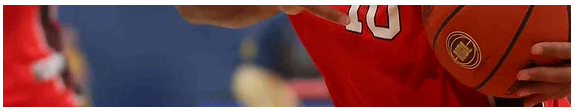
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GayCities



basketball

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