



Life

'HEATED RIVALRY' SCORES A GOAL WITH AUDIENCES

by **Maleena Muzio**
STAFF WRITER
SHE/HER/HERS
maleena.muzio@uconn.edu

This article contains spoilers for “Heated Rivalry” season one.

Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozonav — two names you probably heard sometime over break if you were active on any social media platform — the names that skyrocketed actors Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie to overnight fame.

“Heated Rivalry” is a six-episode series produced by the Canadian company Crave, which premiered on HBO Max in late November of 2025, with the season finale airing on December 26, 2025. As episodes continued to release over the course of a month, the show gained an incredible amount of traction, making it become a top competitor with other series on HBO, such as “Euphoria” and “The White Lotus.”

The series explores an almost 10-year journey in both Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov’s professional and romantic lives. Shane and Ilya are both famous hockey players, with their incredibly long slow-burn relationship beginning in 2008 during both of their rookie seasons. “Heated Rivalry” also contains a sub-plot featuring a romance between characters Scott Hunter, another professional hockey player, and Kip Grady, a local smoothie shop employee.

Competing against the frequent release of new shows and

premiering during the same time as the final season of the extremely popular Netflix series, “Stranger Things,” “Heated Rivalry” held its own, proving that enormous Hollywood budgets are not what audiences are looking for. So what made “Heated Rivalry” so successful?

The short answer is that “Heated Rivalry” presented audiences with a show that was both raunchy at points and held emotional value. Actors Williams (plays Shane) and Storrie (plays Ilya) have matching tattoos that say “sex sells,” but the show is much more than a sensual display.

“Heated Rivalry,” based on the book by Rachel Reid and directed by Jacob Tierny, puts forth relatable characters to share a captivating story. The series is a triumph for LGBTQ+ media during a political age of persistent struggle, which portrays conflicts that are unique to members of the community. However, it still exemplifies internal struggles faced in relationships or other aspects of life that can feel relatable to a much wider audience as well.

Personally, I know many people who have seen a part of themselves or someone they know within the main characters, whether that be regarding self-acceptance, courage or even dealing with an avoidant partner. The series also places an emphasis on love and romance that we do not typically see in sultry shows. Romance itself has almost become a forgotten genre with the onset of high-production value action films dominating the



Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie in a GQ photoshoot promoting “Heated Rivalry”. The television show has become an almost instant hit following the December release of its finale.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @HUDSONWILLIAMSOFFICIAL IN INSTAGRAM

film industry.

“Heated Rivalry” has transformed the lives of many. Williams and Storrie both worked in restaurants prior to the filming of the show and are now attending world-renowned events like the Golden Globes. Williams shared in an interview with Andy Cohen for his SiriusXM show that closeted professional athletes began reaching out to him after watching the series. One ex-hockey player, Jesse Kortuem, felt inspired to publicly come out after viewing the show.

Achieving immediate success, “Heated Rivalry” was renewed for a second season just weeks after

its initial release, set to come out sometime in 2027. If you are a fan of the show like I am, I suggest re-watching or tuning into the countless interviews Williams and Storrie have taken part in over the last month, such as Williams on “The Tonight Show” or Storrie on “The Today Show.” Or you may be able to entertain yourself with hours of “Hollanov” edits on TikTok.

If you have not already seen “Heated Rivalry,” I highly suggest you do. While nine years may be an awful long time to say “I love you” to someone, I promise that Shane and Ilya’s journey is worth the wait.

RATING:
5/5



ILLUSTRATION BY ESHITHA RAO, CONTRIBUTING ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS