

Before and After Pictures

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Before and After Pictures

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Summary

“I think what people are most interested in is whether your game—against each other—changed once you were together.”

They looked at each other. Shaking their heads. It was never going to go away. But they didn't intend to change their approach in keeping some things to themselves.

—————
another story of people trying to find out when it all started.

Notes

A fluffy little way the Centaurs find out it's been the whole time.
Of _course_ Lisa and Wyatt watch Columbo!

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Shane was in his sixth week of playing on the Centaurs team after the whirlwind summer of their marriage. The league's PR department had asked them to do this short interview with a trendy podcaster to help with the league's image now that they were out and married and playing together on the Centaurs.

They had almost refused. Indeed, they *had* initially refused, but Farah had felt it was an olive branch from the league that could help other marginalized players by using this popular podcaster. She felt it was fairly safe, given Nicole Reed's fanbase and her position as an independent podcaster and not a network that could survive shenanigans. They had agreed in advance that it would include questions about improving the league's stance on queer players.

"Thanks for sitting down with us, Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov." Nicole Reed of the SportsCorner podcast said to her guests as they sat in the white leather chairs.

"How are the Centaurs doing so far this year?" Reed asked.

"We are 6 weeks into the season and we are looking good in the stats. The team has come together well with the roster changes this year—" Ilya paused as Nicole's body language telegraphed that she wanted to add some color.

"Especially the addition of Shane Hollander on the second line?" She interjected.

"Yes, as well as the two rookies we picked up from preseason." Ilya finished reporting on his team.

"We're certainly seeing a different kind of play from the team with the new depth in center." She pivoted to Shane. "Shane, how has it been learning the team's system?"

Shane had his earnest media face on. "It's been terrific working with this team. There is a lot of trust between the players themselves, and also with the coaching staff. The Centaurs are a great team. It's been very smooth for me."

Shane dared to look at Ilya, knowing he was laughing at Shane's media face—the thoughtful eyes, the earnest attentiveness. Shane was not embarrassed. He did it on purpose. The face worked. It kept the media serious, unlike Ilya's chaotic antics that invited the media to ask whatever they wanted. As he looked up, he confirmed Ilya's mirth at Shane's expense. It was all he could do to not break character and stick out his tongue in playful retaliation. Which Ilya could probably detect. Because his mouth pinched, biting back a smile. Shane demonstrated his superior control by keeping a straight face and called it a win.

"I'd like to ask about diversity in the league." Nicole set up the next topic. "With your announcement and marriage, you have doubled the number of out gay players in the league. What are some of the steps for improvement of league culture that you would like to see?"

"I honestly wouldn't know," Shane said. Ilya looked at him, surprised. "I didn't know, anyway, and that's kind of the point. Look, we were both immersed in this. This—the way the league behaves— was our normal, since we were kids."

At this, Ilya nodded, understanding where Shane was going with that.

“Is true. We would not be the ones with best knowledge. We put up with everything we thought was normal. Wrong, but normal.” Ilya added.

“It *was* wrong,” Shane continued, “but we didn’t know what should be the norm, really. So, for ourselves and our team, we sought outside expertise. From people who *didn’t* think homophobia in the workplace was normal. This was community groups, queer workplace consultants, people who had seen what an inclusive workplace could produce.” He paused and looked at Ilya.

“They gave us advice on bringing up inclusivity around the team,” Ilya said the word slowly, and Nicole smiled at his effort with the unfamiliar English term. “Early in the season, and directly from leadership, so that all of players, support staff and coaching team all knew this was the expected— from the owner to the box office.”

“Even though the team already has a positive atmosphere,” Shane nodded at Ilya.

“We found there was still a lot to learn for all of us. A lot of language we had to—examine,” Ilya added.

“We are glad to share how this works for our team with others in the league.” Shane took over again. They hadn’t planned this switching between them, but they were both glad for a chance to talk about it, and it was working. “But the most important is for the leadership to be clear in wanting and expecting a normal workplace, not what we currently have. League-wide, we mean. Team leadership and league leadership.”

“So,” she said, looking at the main camera, “learning about how to improve inclusion in the league from the Centaur’s locker room.” She turned back to them. “Thanks for this discussion. I have one more thing.” The curtain behind their chairs opened to reveal a wall filled with photos. Photos of the two of them, at games and events throughout their careers. Nicole’s smile brightened more, if that was possible.

“We put together a wall of photos showing your careers in the NHL. Let’s take a walk down the row and reminisce.” She stood and walked over to the right-hand end of the row of photos. The ones that were the most recent. Shane and Ilya stood and walked over also. Nicole stood back and waved them ahead to look at the pictures.

Ilya smiled at one of the photos; one of Ilya checking Hayden against the boards, with Shane in the foreground. He pointed. “Remember that game? Hayden coughed up the puck when I checked him and you scored off the bar.”

“Your loss for checking him” Shane chirped back.

“Oh,” Shane pointed to another, further along, “that was the All Stars when Antton Niskanen stopped your slap. You just got lucky Rooney missed, too.”

“Was skill, not luck. Besides, Niskanen is a beast in goal.”

“You skillfully made Rooney miss his shot from where you were standing?”

Ilya stepped to the next photo, waving his hand to dismiss the topic. They kept walking down the line as they remarked on games. Nicole smiling behind them.

“Ugh,” Ilya grunted when he got to *that* photo. “I do not want to see that check. I really never want to see it again.” He moved on, quickly.

Shane pointed to another and looked over at Ilya “Was that the night of that snow storm? The stands were half empty. I was told Boston was hardy!” Ilya elbowed him.

They were nearly at the end when Shane leaned in and shook his head, looking at the last picture.

“God, you look so young. Were you ever really that young?” Shane looked at Ilya and then back at the picture, comparing the man before him with the boy in the picture. He shook his head again, smiling, as they turned back to the chairs.

Nicole stepped forward, stopping them from returning to their seats.

“There’s one question we all would like to know though - where on that wall are the before and after pictures? We’ve got your whole NHL careers up there. At some point on the wall you were not involved, and then at some point you were. Care to walk us over and show us Ilya-before-Shane and Ilya-after?” She smiled at Ilya like this is the best question ever. Then she shifted to Shane. “Or Shane-before-Ilya and Shane-after?”

Shane started to look mad about the question. But Ilya just started smiling into his hand. Shane battled between grimacing and smiling— lost his pout and coughed into his hand.

The interviewer looked confused and tried to smile it off. “I take it you know exactly where it was,” she prompted.

They did not answer, just looked at her. Their brief smiles gone; Shane’s face annoyed, Ilya’s cold.

“Do you— are you not okay answering or do you want to go look again?”

“Nope,” ground out Shane, popping the p.

“We really wish you did not find it so exciting to get into bed with us,” said Ilya, one eyebrow raised. “It is really not our thing to have you there.”

Shane snorted.

“I think what people are most interested in is whether your game—against each other—changed once you were together.”

They looked at each other. Shaking their heads. It was never going to go away. But they didn’t intend to change their approach in keeping some things to themselves.

“Do you really,” Ilya leveled a cool look at her, “want this to be the last question we ever answer for you?”

Nicole took an involuntary step back. She shook her head. She got the message.

“Our game never changed.” Shane said. “We’ve always played ten tenths. Every game. That has never changed.”

“Is a nice picture gallery,” Ilya looked back at the pictures, offering Nicole a way out.

“Yes,” Shane inhaled and put his media face back on. “It was fun walking down memory lane. Thanks for that. Could we take the pictures when we go? My mom would make a great collage out of that. Seriously.”

“I think we can arrange that.” She smiled gratefully at their retreat from anger.

“Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov everyone. Thanks for watching our show, wherever you get your podcasts. Please visit our sponsors to show your appreciation. We’ll see you next week on SportsCorner.”

“Thought you were going to rip off her head.” Chouinard walked in the door of the locker room and fist-bumped Rozanov when he arrived at practice. “I’m a little disappointed, I gotta say.”

Tanner jumped up. “That was an epic fucking slam! ‘Do you want this to be your last interview?’ Make good choices! Oooh yah!”

The room filled with laughter and cheers. Shane warmed to the easy camaraderie of this team. He didn’t know it could be like this. This was what Ilya had unexpectedly acquired when he moved from Boston to Ottawa. Well, acquired and built. Shane was glad that Ilya had this benefit in the middle of his painful sacrifice.

“I liked what you said about the league needing to learn what normal is, though,” Luca Haas’ quiet voice brought silence to the room.

Shane looked over at him and smiled. “That’s what we hope people take away from that. We’re—the NHL, I mean—we’re not normal. About a lot of things, socially. We need to get normal.”

“Yeah.” Haas nodded and looked down.

LaPointe stood up and walked over to Haas, and put a hand on his back. “We’re with you, Haasy. We know, better than we used to, what we need to do.”

Haas looked up at him with a grateful smile.

“Hear, hear” was repeated around the room.

“Can we get back to how you totally owned that room, though?” Tanner was grinning ear to ear. “You’re usually riling up the room, Rozanov, not shutting it down. That was a shut down! Outta my business! Boom!” he flung his hands apart, fingers wide.

“Maybe a little bit of both, Tanner, okay? Some respect for how far we have to go still. *And some ass kicking on the way there!*” Dykstra finished with a shout.

“Practice, boys,” Weibe called into the room. “Let’s get out there. Don’t make me add a bag skate!”

“Don’t forget—barbecue at my place tonight everyone!” Bood shouted, as the noise of hustling took over the room.

Throughout practice, Hayes kept looking at Hollander and Rozanov, a puzzled expression on his face. It dropped off when a shot was directed at his net, but returned every time he was not an active target.

The team’s chirps took on a decidedly teasing air.

“Are you sure you want that to be the last check you ever give?” LaPointe shouted at Chouinard, who laughed as he skated away with the puck.

“I don’t know why you are so excited to be in the crease with me,” Dykstra said to Shane. “It’s really not my thing having you here,” and he shoved him off from where Shane was camped in front of the net, waiting for a pass.

Shane couldn’t help but laugh. Never. He never had this in Montreal.

“Ten tenths, Rozanov!” Boodram shouted, when Ilya lost a late pass to a defender in the next drill. He picked it up again after clearing past Holmber, but was off-sides as Barrett had not slowed down for the fumble. “None of this nine-and-a-half tenths slacker bullshit!”

“Put a picture of *that* on the timeline!” Troy shouted, when Hayes missed a save against Ilya—it looked to Shane as though he’d been staring at Ilya’s face instead of watching his stick. He noticed Hayes looking at him a lot, too. Eyebrows pinched, like he was trying to put something together, even though the drill was a straightforward one.

Shane elbowed Ilya when they were both back on the bench while the bottom six did a speed drill. “Why does Hayes keep staring at us? He doesn’t look like he’s watching the play sometimes. Just looking at us.”

Ilya grinned and looked fondly at their netminder. “He is thinking. He is figuring something out. He is making his thinking face. I think it is the ‘before and after picture’ question because he is just looking at you and me. Just watch. He will ask a question later. He will say, ‘just one more question,’ and it will be something tricky that you cannot dodge. Then he will

have a whole theory about whatever it is, and he will be mostly right. It is unsettling. But this is the face he makes when he is doing that.”

“Okay, so I need to ask this, just one more question.” Hayes suddenly interrupted the silent relaxation around the fire pit, as if his internal conversation had been heard by everyone.

The whole team groaned in unison “just one more question!”

“About that podcast interview,” Hayes pressed on, undaunted by the mockery, even giving a little bow.

“I could tell what she was doing, she was trying to make you look at the spot and catch you. She knew you wouldn’t answer so she was trying to trick you into giving it away by looking at the last ‘before’ picture. But you guys didn’t even twitch.”

“There was no question in there, Haysey.” Chouinard pointed out. “When you say ‘one more question,’ there has to be a question.”

“I will not be distracted,” Hayes forged on. “She was trying to trick them, but it didn’t work. Not even a little bit.”

“Joke is on her. They did not have the ‘before’ picture.” Ilya says using his hands to quote ‘before.’ And grinning like he won a game.

Tanner clarified, “Well not the exact one, but just sometime before. That’s what she was going for.”

“Joke is still on her”

“Here’s the thing I noticed.” Hayes persisted “You knew that instantly. That they didn’t print one.” Wyatt kept looking at Ilya. “Like I said. You didn’t even twitch.”

“What are you getting at, Haysey?” Dykstra asked

“I just have to wonder how they were so certain?”

“Because there *aren’t any* ‘before’ pictures.” Shane muttered, standing up and closing the gap to Ilya’s chair.

Holmber looked at Dykstra. Chouinard looked at Boodram. Haas looked at Young. All of them looking for understanding from someone else. Then they all turned their heads and looked for a new person to ask with their eyes, someone who wasn’t as confused as themselves, for insight or understanding. And found none. They turned their eyes back to Shane.

Barrett looked at Hayes, eyebrows up in dawning understanding, his mouth starting to smile.

“There is one” Ilya grabbed Shane, and pulled him into a side hug next to his chair. He looked at Shane with the tiniest vestige of a smile on one side of his mouth. “We have it in our house.”

Shane pulled away, and paced to the other side of the fire pit, annoyed again by the interviewer and her attempted trick.

Everyone looked at Shane for his answer

“She said NHL career.”

Everyone pivoted to look at Ilya

“Picture was after we were drafted!”

Everyone looked at Shane

“Are you in the NHL when you get drafted, though? Or when you play your first NHL game?”

Everyone looked at each other again, eyebrows raised, eyes blinking in surprise.

“A lot of guys get drafted and go straight to AHL for the rest of their career” Shane continued. “And we say they never made it to the NHL.”

Everyone nodded, shrugged, and conceded that.

“So that photo is before the NHL,” Shane concluded.

Everyone stared at Shane, doing math with their eyes. Slow blinks. Mouths open.

“Oh, that’s right.” Ilya nodded, agreeably. “No, there are no ‘before’ pictures.”

Everyone looked at Ilya. He stood and walked over to Shane. He grinned smugly and squeezed Shane into his side. “It doesn’t matter anymore. But we still don’t have to tell her.”

Shane started to push away, then looked up at him and instead leaned into the hug, a mischievous grin creeping onto his face.

Boodram put his beer down and placed his hands on his knees. “Wait. Are you saying—”

“We’re not saying anything,” Shane declared, primly.

Ilya leaned over and kissed Shane’s cheek. “They are dying to know the first time I did this —” and he licked Shane’s neck.

“They are perverts for wanting to know that.” But he looked up at Ilya with a fond gaze that said he remembered.

Hayes whooped and stood up.

“So let me see if I understand this, and correct me if I’m wrong here, but I’m hearing that there was no NHL game played between you two before you were involved. Hence no ‘before’ pictures,” Hayes exaggerated the air quotes. “Not one picture, not anywhere. And you know this for a fact because when you stepped onto the NHL ice for the first time Shane Hollander was already involved with Ilya Rozanov. And that fact meant you never had to look at her pictures. You already knew beyond doubt that it was not possible for her to have one.” Hayes looked at Ilya. Looked at Shane.

“What part of that needs correction?” He concluded.

“How ‘bout that barbecue,” Shane deflected, as everyone’s eyes once again returned to him and Ilya, jaws open. “It’s gotta be ready to eat by now.”

“I’m right, aren’t I?”

“Have you been thinking about that all day, though, Hayes?” Shane was impressed.

“It’s the ‘just one more question’ playbook, Shane. You’ll get used to it. It has no timetable.” Barrett shook his head in wonder.

Shane didn’t know what that meant. And apparently his confusion showed on his face because Chouinard said, “You have to watch more episodes of Columbo, Hollander.”

“And you have to watch Columbo with Lisa, really.” Hayes said, “if you want the full effect, with competitive case-solving. She always wins.” Everyone nodded at this.

Harris raised his fist. “Here’s to handling the media like a boss, though.”

All the bottles clinked and empty hands high-fived. The fire blazed as Lapointe added another log. Boodram announced barbecue. Shane loved this team.

End Notes

Hope you enjoyed a little cameo from Time to Shine

I love your comments and reactions— I read every one! Feed me!

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