

two-man advantage

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Summary

Two-Man Advantage: At Home with Hockey's Biggest Power Couple

by Matthew Cooper

Their on-ice rivalry turned into the NHL's most unexpected love story. Now, Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov say they have no plans to slow down.

the GQ profile fic.

Notes

this fic is set in summer 2022. I've done my best to make the dates as accurate to the book timeline as I can, but if you spot something off, consider it a creative liberty

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

Two-Man Advantage: At Home with Hockey's Biggest Power Couple

by Matthew Cooper

Their on-ice rivalry turned into the NHL's most unexpected love story. Now, Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov say they have no plans to slow down.

[Image description: Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov on a couch in their Ontario cottage. Hollander is sitting upright on the left end of the couch, smiling politely. Rozanov is stretched out across the whole couch with his hands behind his head, grinning. His feet are crossed in Hollander's lap, and Hollander's hand rests on his shin.]

"I'm going to fucking destroy you, Hollander."

"In your dreams, Rozanov."

This kind of trash talk ought to sound familiar to anyone who's watched Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov face off against each other over the past decade. Before they made shockwaves as the NHL's first couple, they spent years being known as two of the fiercest on-ice rivals in hockey. They've butted heads dozens of times in the League, at the IIHF World Championship, and at the Winter Olympics. Even now, a year after their marriage—and a full season since Hollander joined Rozanov on the Ottawa Centaurs—it seems that the competitive fire burning between them hasn't cooled in the slightest. The two superstars trade verbal jabs (or "chirps," in hockey parlance) as they prepare to go head-to-head with their greatest opponent once again.

But they're not at center ice right now.

In fact, they're not even near a rink. They're at their lakeside cottage in rural Ontario. And the battleground is—

"Ha!" Rozanov throws his arms in the air as he sinks the foosball past Hollander's plastic goalie. "I win!"

Hollander rolls his eyes, not without affection. "You got *one* point, asshole. The game is to ten."

"Yes, but I thought I would save us the five minutes it would take for me to do that nine more times." Rozanov spins a handle on the foosball table cheerfully. "Let's make dinner."

It's as if a switch has been flipped when they cross from the games room into the kitchen; the partners slip seamlessly from adversaries to allies. Making dinner becomes a show of teamwork. It's nearly a dance as they maneuver around each other effortlessly—Rozanov putting a freshly-washed sweet potato down on the cutting board just as Hollander has picked up a knife to chop it, Hollander dodging to the side as Rozanov bends down to put a tray in the oven.

It's the same chemistry that let them dominate on the Centaurs' league-leading power play last season. And it's that partnership that's the reason I'm here at all.

Last April, Hollander and Rozanov were infamously outed—both as gay and bisexual respectively, and as a couple—when a FanMail video recorded by Hollander's former Montreal Metros teammate Hayden Pike accidentally captured the two kissing outside Pike's home. After such an unintentionally public debut, the couple, both 31, have (understandably) been tight-lipped about their relationship in public. Though they shared a few wedding photos last July, neither Hollander nor Rozanov have spoken to reporters about their relationship in the past year, refusing to comment when asked.

That is, until they reached out to *GQ* and asked if the magazine would be interested in profiling them.

"We wanted to take some time for ourselves, and we wanted our next steps to be on our own terms," Hollander explained to me shortly after I arrived at the cottage on a sunny July day. "We want to be able to show people that hey, yes we had this big scandal in these very dramatic circumstances, but we're just a normal couple."

Rozanov snorts. He's got his arm wrapped around Hollander's shoulder; the two are nearly crammed onto the same cushion of an enormous leather couch. "We are not a normal couple."

Hollander swats playfully at Rozanov's hand. "You know what I mean."

Rozanov's right, though. Next on the agenda is a house tour, and everywhere you look there are reminders that these men are two of the most talented athletes of their generation. Like in this living room: jerseys hang side-by-side on one wall, one Canadian, one Russian. "From 2008 World Juniors," Rozanov explains to me. "First time we ever met." He pairs the statement with a fond, nostalgic glance toward his husband.

What was it like, the first time you met?

Hollander laughs. "I found him smoking outside the rink in Saskatchewan, and I wanted to introduce myself to be polite. And I went to shake his hand, and he stared at me like I was an alien. And I just remember walking away thinking, *what the hell kind of first-round draftee smokes? What a dick.*"

"And I thought, *who is this dorky little Canadian boy trying to shake my hand?*" Rozanov says. "But I was not trying to be that rude. I just did not speak very much English then."

"You were trying to be a little rude."

"Yes. But only a little."

So it's safe to say it wasn't exactly love at first sight.

"Definitely not," Hollander says.

“I thought he was very cute,” Rozanov adds. “But I was not in love with him yet. That came later.”

Can I ask how much later? When did you go from just being rivals to being....something else?

Hollander and Rozanov exchange a look. “That’s a very long story,” Rozanov says. “Let’s finish house tour first.”

The cottage is modern, all dark wood and floor-to-ceiling windows that take advantage of the lake view. Hollander had it built soon after he debuted in the NHL; he grew up going to his parents’ cottage further down the lakeshore. Now it’s the summer home for both the—Rozanovs? Hollanders?

“Legally, we’re both Hollander-Rozanov,” Hollander (technically Shane Hollander-Rozanov) tells me in the kitchen, where he’s just finished showing me the pantry stocked with organic grains and fifty different kinds of supplements. “That’s what’s on our driver’s licenses and everything. But we decided that in public we’d just stick to our old names, to make it easier for everyone. Pretty difficult for the commentators to call a game where two guys have the same last name. Especially when it’s six syllables.”

Rozanov (technically Ilya Hollander-Rozanov) groans theatrically, bumping his hip into his husband’s. “Is a nightmare filling out forms. Sixteen letters! And a dash! It takes forever.”

Hollander rolls his eyes. “It was your idea to hyphenate, Ilya.”

“Yes! I have many stupid ideas. It is supposed to be your job to talk me out of them. And now I have a last name so long I have to take a break to stretch my wrist in the middle of writing it.”

“Oh, so it’s my fault,” Hollander says.

Rozanov loops an arm around Hollander and smacks a kiss against the side of his head. “My whole life is your fault. Thank God.”

Hollander turns an impressive shade of pink. “The trophy room. Let’s show him the trophy room.”

The mirrored shelves lining the walls of the trophy room upstairs are crowded—much as you’d expect from a couple with four Stanley Cups, two Art Rosses, two Conn Smythes, a Hart, a Rocket Richard, and a Calder between them. And that’s without even counting all the international tournament medals, or the Olympic jerseys on the walls. Pharaohs have been buried with less.

“I’m still waiting on my Lady Byng,” Rozanov deadpans. (Hollander snickers. Rozanov, who spent nearly a hundred minutes in the penalty box last season, is an unlikely candidate for the NHL’s sportsmanship and gentlemanly conduct award.)

This room is full of gold and silver, but something pink catches my eye in the corner. Upon further inspection, it’s two somethings—two plastic heart-shaped rings, one pink, one purple,

that look like they've come from a little girl's costume chest.

What's the story here?

"Sentimental," Rozanov says softly, and neither he nor Hollander choose to elaborate.

The shelves are all symmetrically arranged, except for one. It's the top shelf on the longest wall, the one with the miniature Stanley Cup replicas on it. There are currently four evenly spaced on the shelf, but they're set slightly too far to the left. Like there's a fifth one that's missing.

Do you wanna tell me about the Cup shelf?

Rozanov points to the one furthest left. "That one is mine, from Boston." He indicates the next three. "Those are Shane's, from Montreal."

"And this," Hollander says, gesturing to the empty space, "is where the one we'll win together is going to go."

You guys made a pretty deep run this year. Game 7 of Eastern Conference Finals. Do you expect to be able to make a run all the way to the Cup this year, especially as this will be Hayes's last season?

"I do not expect," Rozanov says. "I know."

"Look at where Ottawa was five years ago—hell, *one* year ago, and look at how we were this year," Hollander agrees. "We—the team, I mean—we're only getting better. And this was our first year playing together, Ilya and me. And we bring out the best in each other as players. So yeah, I think we can win it. I do."

"And then we will have five Stanley Cup rings in our house, and I will wear them all at once like Thanos," Rozanov adds. The resigned look on Hollander's face tells me this isn't the first time he's brought this idea up.

Rozanov claps his hands together and strides down the hall, reaching for another doorknob. "Come! Let us show you Anya's room."

"It's not her room," Hollander protests. "It's just a guest bedroom."

Before I can ask who *Anya* is, she's already introducing herself—by jumping straight into me. Anya is a medium-sized dog, a multicolored long-haired mix of uncertain origins. Her tail wags hard enough to propel a boat through water as she paws at me.

"Anya!" both men say, though from Hollander it sounds like a scold, and from Rozanov it's more like a coo. Anya reluctantly gets down onto the floor and immediately starts begging Rozanov to pet her. (He obliges.)

"Sorry about that," Hollander apologizes. "We try to keep a handle on her, but she loves meeting new people. She's in obedience school. But she's not doing great at it."

“I was not very good at school either,” Rozanov says. “But look how I turned out!”

“You spoil her.”

“Never.”

“You just called this *Anya’s room*.”

Speaking of...

“Oh, yes, sorry. Come in.” Hollander ushers me inside.

This room may still technically be functional as a guest bedroom, in that there is a bed for a guest in it. But it’s clear what the priority is here. No fewer than fifty dog toys are visible, spilling out of various soft storage baskets or are scattered across the floor. There’s a blanket-lined crate, another auto-feeder (the first one is downstairs in the kitchen), two enormous dog beds, a miniature couch complete with matching pillows, and what appears to be a shelf full of little accessories like headbands and bow ties. It’s like a doggy day care, but only for one single dog.

Wow.

“I know,” Hollander says. “My husband is insane about the dog.”

“I am normal about the dog,” Rozanov says, scooping Anya up into his arms. “It is just that she is the very best dog in the world, so I must treat her as such.”

“She’s fun to run with,” Hollander acknowledges.

“Yes,” Rozanov says. “She is very good for making sure I get out of the house.”

Hollander squeezes Rozanov’s shoulder, absent-minded. “What else is there? The games room?”

Rozanov sets Anya down, and she trots back off into her room. “Is our house so big, Hollander? Have you already forgotten how many rooms are in it?”

“Shut up, I just mean the other guest bedrooms aren’t that interesting. And we’re not gonna give you a tour of our bedroom, no offense.”

None taken.

“Some people would pay a lot of money for that,” Rozanov says thoughtfully. “Maybe we charge. Put it up on OnlyFans.”

“I hope you know you’re not funny,” Hollander says.

“I am very funny. Now let us go show this nice reporter our games room so he can watch me kick your ass at foosball.”

The games room is stocked with rec-room classics—ping-pong, foosball, pool—as well as a huge TV screen with the latest Playstation and a Nintendo Switch. (“Thank God we don’t have neighbors nearby, because I think they’d call the cops if they heard us playing Mario Kart against each other,” Hollander tells me.) There’s also a corner of classic arcade game cabinets—Pac-Man, Tetris, Street Fighter.

It’s here at the foosball table I get to witness that famous rivalry in action, followed by that even more famous partnership in the kitchen.

Dinner is a quinoa bowl with chicken and roasted sweet potatoes. It’s delicious in a health-food kind of way. “Ninety percent of the time, Shane eats like a rabbit,” Rozanov says. There’s a bit of a whistle on the S sounds; he’s had to pop out a retainer with fake teeth on it to eat, and it’s sitting next to his plate. “But I’ve gotten him to relax a little more this year. I tell him you can still be the world’s second-best hockey player even if you eat a cookie on the weekends.”

“And I say, ‘well, you’d know plenty about being the world’s second-best hockey player,’” Hollander adds.

So marriage, being on the same team—it hasn’t dimmed that competitive side at all.

Rozanov laughs loudly. “Ha! Did you see us play foosball?”

Hollander agrees. “We’ve been competing since the day we met. Before that, even, since we were both trying to go first in the draft. I don’t think I’d know how *not* to compete with Ilya.”

“It would be very boring, I think. It is very fun to challenge each other.” Rozanov drops into a stage whisper. “Do not tell my husband I said this, but he is pretty good at hockey. Keeps me sharp.”

Was it difficult, adjusting to being in a romantic relationship after so many years of being purely opponents?

Hollander and Rozanov give each other one of those long looks that you only ever see between married couples—ones where a head tilt or a raised eyebrow communicates a paragraph’s worth of information. Finally, Rozanov gives a tiny shrug, and that seems to settle something. Hollander turns back toward me. “So...I would not say we were ever... purely opponents, no.”

No?

Rozanov stands up from the kitchen table. “Let us get some beers. And let me put my teeth back in.”

We move out to the back deck for after-dinner drinks, which looks out onto the lake. There’s a gorgeous sunset coming down over the trees, and Hollander and Rozanov sit side-by-side in Adirondack chairs, their fingers loosely tangled together between them. Rozanov says something quietly in his native Russian, and Hollander shakes his head as he responds in the

same language. (He'd mentioned earlier that he'd "spent the last few years doing a lot of Rosetta Stone.")

"Alright," Rozanov says. "I am sure you have questions. Shoot."

Okay. Shane, you mentioned earlier that it wasn't love at first sight, but also that you two weren't ever "purely opponents." Do you want to elaborate on what you meant by that?

"I think..." Hollander pauses. "I think no matter what the feeling was at the time, whether it was being rivals at first or...partners, later, we just always had a very strong connection. We were very drawn to each other, I guess. There were other guys in the league I could just be like, 'man, I don't like that guy,' but then that was it, I wasn't ever thinking about him except for when I saw him. But I was always thinking about Ilya."

Rozanov nods. "It was the same for me. Very strong connection, not so simple as all hate or all love, just..."

"Obsession?" Hollander jokes.

Rozanov grins. "Yes. You were obsessed with me."

Hollander rolls his eyes. "So were you, asshole. But yeah. I don't think it's so much that our connection changed as we just...saw it differently, I guess. Or saw a different part of it. But it's been there since the start."

Wow.

"I know."

So at what point did it begin to tip over into seeing that other part of your connection? When did you realize there was something more here than just competition?

"Early," Rozanov says. "More early than people realize."

"I think there are some details that we'll keep to ourselves," Hollander says. "But yes. We started casually seeing each other on and off from around the time of our NHL debuts. And we became an actual couple around 2017."

Wait. So it's been the whole time you were in the NHL?

Rozanov does something like jazz hands. "Surprise."

That's...wow. Do you think that impacted how you played against each other?

"Only that it made us want to play even harder," Rozanov says.

"And when we got outed and told the world we'd been together for a few years, there were a lot of online detectives going through our history," Hollander adds. "To be like, 'oh, you can tell they were together here because he's not slamming him into the boards as hard as usual.' Just totally wrong. Because there is no difference, right, there's not a before and after to

compare. We played hard against each other the whole time regardless of how we were feeling.”

As I’m sure you remember, there was a lot of controversy during the 2021 playoffs over exactly that. When you tripped in game seven—

Hollander is already shaking his head firmly. “Absolutely not. Normal trip. Sucks, but it happens.”

Rozanov’s voice is flat. “If I thought for one second, even once, that he had let me win, I would not have married him. Because that is not...that is not Shane, that is not us. No.”

Alright, message received.

Hollander exhales. “Tell the rest of the world for us, eh?”

I’ll do my best. Going back to what you touched on a moment ago—you two were very famously outed in the background of Hayden Pike’s FanMail. I understand that this might be difficult to talk about, but did you want to discuss what that was like? Either in the moment, or in the aftermath generally?

Rozanov says something to Hollander in Russian. Hollander responds, in English this time: “No, I can.”

He stares off over the water for a long moment. “It is difficult to talk about. Even aside from all of this, I’ve always just been a very private person naturally. But it feels important to talk about it. Because...I don’t know. It was awful. It was the worst thing that ever happened to me, honestly. But I survived it. *We* survived it. And I guess I want other people to know—other players who are in the closet, or just kids who might be scared they’re gay. That the worst-case scenario can happen, and you can live through it. And it can be good on the other side.” He gives Rozanov a faint smile. “It can be pretty great, even.”

Rozanov brings Hollander’s hand up to his mouth and kisses the back of it.

I think that’s very brave of you.

“It is brave. But it is fucked up that it has to be brave,” Rozanov says quietly.

“It is,” Hollander says. “But yeah. Getting outed was like...it felt like the whole day was just one long panic attack. And what’s funny is that we’d actually been planning to come out that summer. We’d just gotten engaged. We knew it would be controversial, but we wanted to control the narrative. We thought it would be better that way. But we didn’t get that chance. And suddenly your worst nightmare comes true. Suddenly everyone knows your biggest secret that you’ve been hiding for literally over a decade. And a lot of them hate you for it. *And you almost lose your job.*”

Lose your job? Did either Ottawa or Montreal threaten to release you from your contract?

“I was okay. Ottawa is a very supportive organization,” Rozanov says.

And Montreal?

Hollander takes a sip of his beer. “Ottawa is a very supportive organization,” he says diplomatically.

What about higher up? I’m assuming the NHL reached out to you directly as well.

“Ha! Yes, they did,” Rozanov says.

And...?

Rozanov smiles sweetly. “Roger Crowell is my very best friend in the world, and I have nothing bad to say about him.” (Hollander snorts.)

Was your experience the same as Shane’s, in terms of your reaction to getting outed?

Rozanov shrugs. “Partly. Mostly. But I think it was not quite as bad, because I knew I had a very good team behind me. Troy [Barrett] was already out. And I”—he glances at his husband—“I had been ready to come out a little bit longer than Shane. So when it happened, it was like, okay, this is very bad. But also a little bit relief. The Band-Aid was ripped off, as Yuna [Hollander, Shane’s mother] likes to say.”

Are you close to your in-laws, then?

“Oh, they like him more than they like me at this point,” Hollander says.

Rozanov grins. “It is true. I am very lovable.”

“My mom texted me the other day, she said ‘I’m going to the bakery in town, does Ilya want anything?’ Not *do either of you want anything?* Just him!”

“You do not eat chocolate croissants. I do.”

“It’s the principle,” Hollander says.

What I’m hearing is that there wasn’t much of a problem integrating Ilya into the Hollander family.

“Once they got over the initial shock, which took about two minutes,” Hollander says. “And from there it was off to the races.”

Rozanov nods. “It was very nice. Especially because, ah, as people know, I lost my mother quite young.”

Irina. You named your foundation after her. [Editor’s note: Hollander and Rozanov co-founded The Irina Foundation in 2018, announcing a series of charity hockey camps with proceeds going to support mental health organizations. Their mission has recently expanded to support LGBTQ+ initiatives as well.]

“Yes. I miss her very much. But I am proud of the work we do in her name. I think she would be very happy to know I am this happy. Even if I am married to a boring Canadian.”

Speaking of...you didn't play for the Russian national team at this year's Olympics in Beijing.

Hollander stiffens; Rozanov sets a calming hand on his arm. “Let's just say they didn't ask me, and I didn't ask why.”

Do you anticipate a return to international play at any point?

“Perhaps. But not for Russia. I am applying for Canadian citizenship next year.” He elbows Hollander. “Maybe if I am on the team in 2026, Canada will not be out in the quarterfinals this time, yes?”

Hollander says something in Russian that makes Rozanov laugh; from the way he says it, it's presumably a curse word.

Do you miss playing for Russia?

Rozanov shrugs. “Eh. Sometimes. But it is worth the sacrifice.”

Speaking of sacrifice—many people were surprised when you chose to come to Ottawa, which was struggling at the time, from a Boston team you'd won a cup with a few years before. We've since learned why, and you're both there, of course, with Shane taking a bit of a hometown discount on the salary front. Many in the hockey world feel that it gives Ottawa an unfair advantage to have both of you, and to have chosen it for personal reasons.

“Is there a question in there?” Hollander says flatly.

Rozanov waves a hand dismissively. “Every trade has personal elements. I had a teammate back in Boston. Only team that was on his no-trade clause was St. Louis. You know why? Because he thought the big arch was ugly. He hated it. Didn't want to look at it. Every trade is a little bit personal like that. What does it matter that our reasons were different than most?”

“Also, I just wanna point out that we might be the first men's players to be doing this, but there are a ton of couples in the women's leagues who play together *and* play against each other,” Hollander adds. “[Julie] Chu and [Caroline] Ouellette, [Meghan] Duggan and [Gillian] Apps, [Marie-Philip] Poulin and [Laura] Stacey. And it doesn't cause issues, it hasn't ruined the game over there or anything. Those players are doing just fine.”

Rozanov nods. “The lesbians are doing very well.”

So you don't think your personal life matters anymore than anyone else's when it comes to your careers, even if your situation is unique compared to other people's.

Hollander raises an eyebrow. “You know what I'd say to anyone who asks if being together has ever affected our performance?”

What's that?

He holds up four fingers. “Count the fuckin’ Cups.”

Hard to argue with that.

“And there will be more,” Rozanov says. “One at least. Probably more. Tell the little DraftKings app people to put it in.”

So that’s the plan for the next few years, then. Play hard and bring the Cup home to Ottawa.

“I think that’s what every NHL player’s plan is,” Hollander says.

“Only difference is that we are right,” Rozanov says, flashing that famous cocky grin.

And what about after that? You still both have many seasons left in you, but what does a post-retirement world look like for the Hollander-Rozanov household?

Rozanov shrugs. “More with the foundation, probably. Maybe some coaching, some more camps. Our own kids, eventually. But that is all in the future. I am not concerned with that right now.”

Hollander nods. “What he said. Right now we’re all in on Ottawa. And we hope Ottawa is all in on us.”

With a season like you both just had, they’d be fools not to be. One more thing—you mention that there have been many women’s players who have been out before, but you two were only the third and fourth male players out. You’ve become role models to a lot of queer people, including to other players. In the last season, five more NHL players have come out, and they’ve all cited you as motivating that decision, along with Troy Barrett and Scott Hunter. What are your thoughts on being called an inspiration?

“It’s funny,” Hollander says. “I never wanted to be a role model, ever. I just wanted to play hockey. But I knew from my first day in the league, from even before that, when I was getting scouted as a teenager, that I was going to have to be one. Because I wasn’t just Shane Hollander, hockey player, I was Shane Hollander, *Asian* hockey player. [Editor’s note: Hollander is half-Japanese.] So I never had a choice not to be one. I was always very conscious of my image, that I needed to be excellent. To prove something. And then I realized I was gay, and it was like—it was too much. I couldn’t be the Asian role model *and* the gay role model. Except now I am, I guess. And I...” He pauses. “I’m trying to think how to say this. I don’t resent it. But I didn’t ask for it, either. But you play the cards you’re dealt. And I’m trying to play them the best I can.”

“And I am proud to be bisexual, and I am glad if it makes it easier for someone else,” Rozanov says. “But I do not think of myself as a role model in any other way. I do many stupid things. You can probably Google them.”

Hollander nudges Rozanov’s foot with his own. “Stupid things like fall in love with your rival?”

Rozanov nudges back. “Yes. That was the stupidest thing of all.”

Okay, last question—is there anything else you want to say to the world? About you two, or just in general?

Hollander considers this for a moment. “That we have every right to be on the ice as much as anyone else. That it makes the game better, and it makes the world better, when people are allowed to be themselves. No matter who they are.”

And you, Ilya?

Rozanov winks. “Go Centaurs, baby. Go Cens. We’ve got a whole lot of games to win.”

End Notes

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the first thing ilya says to shane in russian is something like “you don’t have to talk about anything you don’t want to,” and shane says, “no, i’m okay.” the second thing he says is similar, checking in if he’s okay to talk about getting outed. the last thing shane says in russian is something like “fuck off.”

technically no NHL players went to the 2022 winter olympics because NHLers haven’t gone for the last two. they are expected to come back in 2026, though. i’m pretending this is a world where they went in 2022 (though not 2018, i guess. don’t worry about it. this is already taking place in a world where shane is more emotionally intelligent, so anything can happen).

all the pairs of women’s hockey players mentioned are real married couples. i love women.

comments always appreciated <3

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