

Hollander and Rozanov: In Their Own Words

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76695121) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76695121>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander , Hayden Pike , Scott Hunter (Game Changers) , Zane Boodram , Troy Barrett , Ryan Price (Game Changers)
Additional Tags:	Minor Original Character(s) , Traditional Media , Shane and Ilya talk to a reporter , post The Long Game , Canon Compliant
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-30 Words: 2,051 Chapters: 1/1

Hollander and Rozanov: In Their Own Words

by [sixteenmarinas](#)

Summary

With prompting from Farrah and Yuna, Shane and Ilya sit down with a reporter to tell their story. Here's the outcome.

Notes

Wacky idea I had today then proceeded to write the whole thing. It's written as if you're reading the article. Enjoy!

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

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[photo: Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander in their backyard, dressed casually, smiling at one another and holding hands]

Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov. Legendary rivals since their rookie seasons [Ilya was the first pick, Shane number two]. Now teammates and...husbands.

Long assignments like this are pretty rare and can be pretty miserable depending on the subject. That is not the case here. Over the last few months, I learned a lot about Hollander and Rozanov, a lot they have not shared publicly before now. They graciously had very few requests for me: they could not sit for interviews on game days or long trips, they'd steer me away from anything too personal but promise to be open. Easy peas in terms of rules, and spending time with these two certainly was.

I met them for the first time at a restaurant in Ottawa. They're there before I get in, and are squeezed into a private booth, speaking to each other in Russian. "I've gotten pretty good," Shane tells me after introductions. "I used to listen to Russian language podcasts on the drive between [Ottawa] and Montreal."

Montreal, his former team, drafted Hollander and he'd won three cups there turning them into a veritable dynasty. Then he'd signed with the Centaurs, leaving the team many thought he would spend his career with. I ask if it was to be with his husband. "Yes and no." He's running his hands through his hair then, Ilya rubbing his back. I catch that I've stumbled into something sensitive, but he keeps going. "I did it all there, and I would have kept doing it. There's only so much of myself I could give, though."

"Hmm, very diplomatic." Is all Ilya adds.

[Photo: Shane Hollander's last team photo with Montreal]

Shane Hollander's exit from Montreal came on the heels of a playoff loss against Ilya Rozanov and the Centaurs. A loss due to Shane tripping and giving Ilya a clear buzzer beater shot into the net. Internet speculation flew that he'd done it on purpose. Reporters on the Montreal sports beat reported that the sentiment was also in the locker room.

The Centaurs had been on a tear since January of that year. Turning their losing record into an undefeated one in the run up to the playoffs. "I was tired of losing." Ilya who—did move to Ottawa for Hollander—tells me, casually. "We all were, so we got our shit together, things clicked with Barrett, and no one could stop us." Shane reminds him Scott Hunter and the Admirals did stop him. Ilya lets it roll off his back. "He's been playing for 80 years, it's luck. It happens."

It's cocky and it's signature Rozanov. Full of just enough charm that he still draws you in. Well, maybe not Scott Hunter who calls him a "little shit."

“I hate losing to him.” Is Shane’s response when I ask about their competitiveness with each other. “Our competition on the ice was always real. Maybe not to the levels everyone thought but, god every time he wins, and I never hear the end of it.”

Ilya’s laughs “Beating Shane Hollander is a big deal!” He quickly informs me that it’s not hard to beat his husband. Just satisfying. “It’s better now, we play together.” Ilya kisses his husband, suddenly making me feel like an intruder on a private moment.

Hollander and Rozanov are in this mode a lot. Teasing and competitive then adorably sweet. They call each other a string of Russian pet names, though sweetheart is a favorite. As are dickhead and asshole.

[photo: Rozanov and Hollander on the ice as Centaurs after their first win of the season]

I attend a couple Centaurs practices where the partners are once again on separate teams. Ilya, team captain usually leads half the team, with Shane on the other side with the alternate captain Zane ‘Bood’ Boodram. From what I can see it’s intense.

“It’s like being caught in a shootout while you’re out shopping.” Bood tells me when we get a chance to chat after one of these practices. “Always at 110%, they’re exhausting.” The smile on his face betrays any actual frustration. The other teammates I speak to echo the same sentiment. Although Coach Wiebe has a different perspective of the two All Stars—“We have two MVP caliber players on this team and their drive is outstanding. It keeps the morale up.” And if he’s worried about a locker room with a married couple, Wiebe doesn’t let on. “Their resumes speak for them. Front office is on the same page; we fully support them and they’ve more than delivered.”

It’s February when I get the chance to visit the Hollander Rosanov residence. It’s a stunning modern structure, with a large backyard. The setting is picturesque, as are the newlyweds with an adorable dog, Anya, who never strayed too far from her dads. Hollander’s real estate portfolio has been covered extensively but “This was all Ilya.” He’d simply moved into his then Fiancé’s home after his final season in Montreal. We stop by their trophy room on a brief tour, and it’s astonishing to see their accomplishments in one place like this.

“I can’t wait to win the cup again,” If the Centaurs make it, it will be the first for the organization in decades. Also the first trophy Ilya and Shane win together. “It will go right here.” Ilya points to an empty spot next to the miniatures of their previous cups.

I poke and ask if they’re sure it’s going to happen. Shane’s yes is quick, but Ilya grabs his hand intertwining their fingers. “We will get it, together. It’s not a question.” He kisses the back of Shane’s hand before we make our way out to the patio.

[Photo: exclusive photo of Hollander and Rozanov on their wedding day as they exchange rings.]

“We were married right there.” Shane points to the backyard as we make our way out to the meal that had been delivered and plated by a private chef. *Very little time to cook during the season*, they explain to me.

Being in their home now, it's hard to imagine how this relationship could have baffled so many. When they were accidentally outed about a year ago, most people could not imagine these two together. It was deemed a prank. Then vitriolic homophobia poured in.

It had been a FanMail video recorded by Hollander's former teammate Hayden Pike that popped the lid on their private relationship. But they hadn't been a secret for years by then. Hollander's Montreal teammates had known about his sexuality, and a few close friends and family as well. The couple demures when I ask what the early days of their relationship were like. When did it start? They aren't sure exactly. An outtake of the two at an early photoshoot sits on a side table in their living room. It's from a campaign just before their rookie year, the two are in a face off and both mid-laugh. There's this unabashed joy on their faces, a contrast to the intense official shots released from that day.

Somewhere around that shoot, was the last time they were nothing more than the rivals the public expected.

"[The relationship] developed over text, mostly. We were rarely in the same place, we didn't see each other much."

"So when we did it was electric." Ilya earns himself a smack on the chest with that one. It's not hard to imagine what they're describing. Stolen moments when in the same city, coming up with excuses to get away from teammates and friends.

Hayden Pike has had a front row seat to much of it, though he didn't always know. "Shane used to meet up with this 'Lily' every time we were in Boston. They used to text pretty often too." They weren't the most creative with their secret identities, Lily for Ilya and Jane for Shane. Two superstar players in the closet while this thing between them gained steam. The timeline adds color to what they don't explicitly say about what the early days looked like.

Ilya who is bisexual—and has known this about himself for a while—pretty quickly developed a reputation as a player for his first few years, then seemed to disappear from the clubbing scene. For a while, no longterm relationship replaced the string of partners. Shane dated (now close friend) Rose Landry for a bit, a relationship extensively covered by gossip blogs and podcasts.

"I didn't know I was gay for a while." Shane says when the conversation turns to previous partners. He seems to catch himself off guard with the statement. Ilya is quick to check in, pulling him into his side ensuring that he wants to continue. Rozanov, the husband, is attentive and dare I say sweet, a side I doubt many fans see or imagine. "I came out to Ilya first a few years ago, which was..." he makes a face and we all laugh. He settles on "Irony, unnecessary? But I needed to say it."

A major turning point was Shane's injury a couple of years ago, when a collision during a Montreal/Boston game landed him in the hospital with a fracture and a concussion. I don't make the connection until much later, but the Admirals win the cup not long after that, and Scott Hunter kisses his boyfriend on TV.

"We got to spend a lot of time together, not just text." Ilya tells me. "No turning back from there."

[photo: the couple, seated on their patio, laughing at their dog Anya in the distance]

Yuna Hollander, Shane's mother, confirms this. She and her husband David were some of the few who knew about the relationship in the years before the FanMail incident. "The love between them was obvious the first time we were all in a room together. All I wanted was for them to tell the world on their own terms, to be able to live freely as themselves."

There had been a plan. If not for FanMail, the couple was going to come out last summer. "It's a moment I've spent so long catastrophizing, the reality was tough, but nothing compared to what I had already imagined." Shane tells me. For Ilya, it was different "It was freedom for me. I'm not the only one with husband on [the Centaurs]. I've been wanting to tell them for a while. I would have preferred the plan, less stress."

Their sense of relief is evident in the time I spend with them and their close circle. Off the ice, they're never more than a few feet away from one another. I witnessed countless kisses from chaste pecks to more emotional embraces. It's the stuff of fairytales and the effect is not limited to the two of them. They have joined a group of players, coaches, and executives who speak up when the league chooses not to. Their joint venture The Irina Foundation is set to host more hockey camps this summer with proceeds supporting mental health for LGBTQ youth. "Ilya is an even better captain now." Troy Barrett tells me. "He had a huge part in helping me get comfortable with my sexuality, in helping me love hockey again." His sentiment is echoed across their community. Even the elusive Ryan Price chimes in, "Rosanov has always been great to me. It's good to see them happy." As for Shane, an anonymous but vetted source spoke to me, "He's healthier than he's ever been. I used to worry he was punishing himself with his training methods. He's still a health nut, but it does not feel like self-flagellation anymore." Hollander's parents agree: "He's so much happier, less weighed down." His father David shares.

Our final meeting is cancelled due to an emergency with their dog, Anya, but they do email me a response to a simple question, What's next?

"A healthy season, winning the cup, a beautiful summer."

Anya, I'm told, has recovered from a sour tummy and is back to running around.

Note: The NHL and Montreal declined to comment on this piece. All references to the Russian Federation have been deleted per legal advice and mutual agreement.

End Notes

Hope you liked it! This was surprisingly easy to write. The note at the end--just imagine Ilya saying the most heinous shit about his brother and the lawyers got nervous.

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