

saturday night & the rest of your life

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saturday night & the rest of your life

by [eemolu](#)

Summary

When I set out to write an article about the complicated history of bisexual men in sports I thought my research would take me all over the place, to different leagues, generations, cities. I was prepared to spend my time cobbling together stories to create a mosaic of an experience that not many people are willing to talk about. I thought I'd have to really get deep in the weeds with my editor to make this the kind of story that anyone was willing to print. Instead, I spent most of my time in Ottawa, of all places, because when it comes to bi athletes, all roads lead to Ilya Rozanov.

(ilya rozanov and the gay magazine profile he so dearly deserves)

Notes

had this idea while walking around in the rain listening to olivia dean. it was really fun to write. i tried to give it a kind of new yorker feel but more fun. and gay. so!!!! hope you like ig

oh also this is canon for the TV show and then anything after the timeline of the first season, i took from the long game. so it's kind of a hybrid i guess, i'm not sure. anyways if i messed anything up canon-wise or with the timeline or whatever, no i didn't. we're all pretending no i didn't because it's more fun that way.

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

Saturday Night: The Impact of Ilya Rozanov

Profiles, March 2022

When I set out to write an article about the complicated history of bisexual men in sports I thought my research would take me all over the place, to different leagues, generations, cities. I was prepared to spend my time cobbling together stories to create a mosaic of an experience that not many people are willing to talk about. I thought I'd have to really get deep in the weeds with my editor to make this the kind of story that anyone was willing to print. Instead, I spent most of my time in Ottawa, of all places, because when it comes to bi athletes, all roads lead to Ilya Rozanov.

Upon first meeting, Rozanov was utterly charming. He has a crooked smile that manages to skirt the line between warm and mischievous. Like all hockey players, he has an impressive physique that was evident even underneath all the layers he was wearing to protect against Canadian winter weather. He himself was born in Moscow in the early '90s, his father well positioned within the Russian police. He started playing hockey internationally in his teens, winning several World Junior's medals before he was the NHL's number one overall draft pick a few weeks after his nineteenth birthday. These were all facts I learned before meeting him and seemed a little absurd as he shook my hand and offered to buy me a coffee, more man than phenomenon.

We chatted broadly about his history: the Stanley Cups he's won (two, one with the Raiders and one with the Centaurs), the awards he's received (league MVP twice, although he missed out on Rookie of the Year), the records he's set (he's held the record for most goals in a single season for the past two years, although he thinks he won't have it much longer). I learned that several of his teeth are fake and that his dentist has been begging him to stop getting into fights on the ice. And when the small talk had run its course and I told him about the reason I was writing this article, his face lit up.

I'm sure the story isn't unfamiliar to anyone reading—it was some of the biggest news in sports three years ago—but the long and short of it is that a video leaked showing Rozanov kissing Shane Hollander, who at that point was the captain of the Montreal Metros. Both men came out in public statements, Rozanov as bisexual and Hollander as gay. By the end of that summer, they were married. Shortly after, Hollander declined to renew his contract with the Metros and instead signed with the Ottawa Centaurs. This is their third season playing on the same team, and the first time they've finished as league champions.

Rozanov spoke candidly about his experience: "I did not like the way people found out," he told me. "Not because I did not want them to know, but because of the way people talked about it like it was some big secret. It was not secret, it was my life."

Soon after the video, which had been sent to a fan by Hollander's Metros teammate Hayden Pike ("Was not his fault," Rozanov said when asked about Pike's involvement, "but I still do not like him"), went viral on Twitter, a joint statement was released by both Rozanov and Hollander in which they came out and requested privacy. Their request was, largely, ignored. Everyone wanted to share their opinion on the two men's relationship and sexuality, even more used it as an excuse to accuse them of playing poorly on purpose to let each other win. Even when people were supportive, Rozanov still described how much the intensity of the scrutiny on his life made him feel as though he was in a zoo. Despite people referring to attending a hockey game as "visiting the boy aquarium," the audience typically stops watching when the players get off the ice. In the months after he was outed, Rozanov was followed by paparazzi, had reporters digging through his trash, and was on the front page of every major Canadian newspaper.

Public opinion, at this point, has shifted. The Stanley Cups probably don't hurt, but Rozanov's real triumph has come from the uninhibited, honest, and frankly hilarious way he discusses his sexuality. He's always had a flirtation with the press—for years he was considered the league playboy, and did most of his post-game interviews shirtless—but since he came out the popularity of his interviews has exploded. A video compilation of him correcting journalists who refer to him as gay, titled "Ilya Rozanov being bisexuality's strongest soldier for seven minutes straight," has 3.2 million views on YouTube. Fan edits of him to songs by queer artists like Lucy Dacus and Lady Gaga frequently make the rounds on TikTok. And he's never afraid to talk about his husband, whether it's how much Rozanov loves him or how boring he finds him in equal measure.

Despite being the kind of famous that transcends the sport in which both Hollander and Rozanov play, they are notoriously hard to interview. They very rarely appear in the press together, and when they do, they won't discuss much that isn't the Irina Foundation, the charity they started in 2017 to support suicide prevention and mental health services in Ontario. As a result, I didn't have much hope when I reached out and asked if I could talk to them about this piece. You've probably already guessed at this point that I was surprised by the answer.

Ilya Rozanov loves his husband. It was evident from the first moment they welcomed me into their home in Ottawa, a beautiful house on a quiet street with plenty of natural light and a frankly startling number of dog toys strewn across the floor. There wasn't one moment while we introduced each other that Hollander and Rozanov weren't in contact. They moved through the kitchen and living room as smoothly and in sync as they do on the ice. And as Hollander was walking me through the topics that were and weren't off limits, Rozanov just watched him, a fond little smile on his face.

They met when they were eighteen and set to play against each other in the gold medal match of 2008's World Junior Championships. Rozanov was smoking a cigarette in the parking lot of the hotel and Hollander "scolded [him] and was annoying," a categorization which

Hollander himself didn't deny. After Rozanov went back to Russia (with his gold medal, which he wanted to be sure I mentioned), they didn't see each other again until the draft. Hollander describes nineteen-year-old Rozanov as "cocky, intense, and beautiful," a description that made thirty-one-year-old Rozanov blush ever so slightly. He's a very physical person, a description I heard from Hollander as well as every current and former member of Rozanov's teams that I spoke to. On the ice he can be affectionate one moment and brutal the next, although off the ice he isn't quite so chimeric.

"He's a huge teddy bear," Wyatt Hayes, the Centaur's goalie, said when I asked about who Rozanov is in private. "Once you're in with him, he's one of the most affectionate people on the planet." He kisses his teammates on the cheeks when they score, he goes forehead to forehead with them to break them out of fights. There's a famous video on the Centaur's official Instagram where he puts Luca Haas in a fireman's carry and carries him around the parking lot before depositing him into the bed of Hayes' truck.

But with Hollander, it was a little more difficult. It took them a long time to work out exactly what they were to each other, which goes with the territory when playing a sport that didn't have an openly queer player until 2017. Despite the challenges, Rozanov told me that he "fell in love fast" with Hollander. The argument this statement started—Hollander reminded Rozanov it took them "years to figure shit out", while Rozanov maintained that once he "decided it was okay to fall in love, it was very fast"—doesn't negate the fact that these two men kept their relationship secret for over ten years out of fear that their sexuality would lead to a forced exit from the NHL. Rozanov was nonchalant when I brought up that fact, Hollander less so. "It's hard to be there for someone else when you feel so scared you can't even be there for yourself," he explained. "We spent a lot of time inside, hiding. I wouldn't change any of it, but it was really hard."

There's also the fact that Rozanov is Russian, although he told me he hasn't been back in years. A law was passed prohibiting the promotion of "non-traditional sexual relationships" in 2013, right before the Sochi Olympics. Both Rozanov and Hollander represented their countries. When I asked how he felt about the legislation, Rozanov's expression turned stony as he hinted at the risks he'd faced as a bisexual teenager in Moscow, but he was also sure to mention the many people he had grown up with who he thinks would have been supportive if he'd been able to come out. "My mother knew, I think," he said. Rozanov's mother died in 2003, when he was twelve. "And my best friend. No one else."

When I changed the subject and asked what it was like now that everyone knew, I was informed that it was broadly positive. Any homophobia they face in the NHL comes from other teams; the Centaurs, according to Rozanov, are the "gayest team in the league." Their coach, Brendan Weibe, has also publicly identified as bisexual (he declined to comment on this article, not because he doesn't support his players, but because his daughters don't want him to be any more famous and embarrassing than he already is), and several other team members have come out in the last few years. Rozanov is currently their team captain, a mantle he wears well. The only complaint I heard about his captaincy is that he swears too

much, although a few other players mentioned his vocabulary as being a positive facet of his leadership skills.

When Rozanov left the room to top off the ginger ale Hollander had been drinking during our conversation, I took the opportunity to ask him why he thought people were so drawn to Rozanov as a role model. “He’s generous,” Hollander said, after a little bit of time spent thinking. “He gives like crazy. And I don’t know...” He paused at the sound of the fridge door closing in the kitchen. “I can’t believe he has so much to give.”

Like most of the things Shane Hollander has to say about his husband, this was a very true statement. Over the course of my research, I spent five hours talking to Rozanov. For half that time, he was talking about how much the people in his life matter to him. And when I finally caved and went to see the Ottawa Centaurs play hockey, even I could see how deftly and consistently Rozanov was setting up his teammates for success, and how genuinely he celebrated them when they reached it.

There are plenty of other things that can explain the affect Rozanov has on people. Hollander told me he listens to ‘50s Russian love ballads on full volume while he gets ready in the mornings. Cliff Marleau, who was on the Raiders with Rozanov for the first seven years of his career, said he was the first to lead the charge to the club after every win and the life of the party. Haas recalled spending hours as a teenager trying to learn the move named after Rozanov, a wretchedly difficult backhand shot that he makes look as easy as breathing. And, finally, Rozanov himself suggested that maybe it was how beautiful and sexy he is.

I’m inclined to agree with all of them, but particularly the last one—like Helen of Troy, I can absolutely imagine Rozanov’s face launching a thousand ships. In my role as writer, however, I know I must come up with my own analysis, so here goes: As far as bisexual icons go, Ilya Rozanov is an unexpected gift. It would be easy to pigeonhole him into one of the many stereotypes laid on bisexual people; he has been the reckless playboy, the outrageous flirt, and certainly now, after watching him sit on his couch next to Shane Hollander for an hour, I’m confident in calling him a bisexual wife guy.

But the most important thing that Rozanov has been is himself. There is a specificity to him, a realness, that transcends any generalizations people have tried to put on him. And believe me, they have tried. Out of the many descriptions I collected over the course of writing, the best one came from—no surprise here—Shane Hollander: Ilya is like a Saturday night. Full of every possibility, the best part of every week, a constant something to look forward to.

Something that is so important about the queer experience, as I have found it, is the sense of community it brings. In accepting one part of yourself, you get the gift of so many people who have accepted the same thing and can, in some small way, meet you where you are. Coming out, for many, can be like living through a very long, hard week. It certainly was that

way for Rozanov and Hollander, and yet somehow Rozanov is waiting at the end of that week, a bisexual professional hockey player showing how wonderful the weekend can be.

After showing him the first draft of this article, I did what I always do and asked Rozanov for his thoughts. He didn't give me a vague statement of approval or mention being overwhelmed or embarrassed, as most people do when I send them a courtesy read. Instead, he told me he was glad to be bisexual, even happier to be referred to as an icon. He said it was an honor, "like a third Stanley Cup." Saturday night, indeed.

End Notes

i finished this and immediately was like woah i am really obsessed with this fictional guy but i think also i just really love being bisexual and i think it's great and i think that if ilya existed he would be a hugeeee queer icon. and so i wrote it into existence

hope you enjoyed. kudos & comments always make me (◡_◡✿) and so does coming to see me on tumblr (also @eemolu over there) where i am currently posting a lot of pictures of shane hollander next to pictures of snoopy.

that's all! bye

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