

Overheated Rivalry

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Overheated Rivalry

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Summary

Who even are Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander if they aren't competing against each other? The sports world doesn't know what to expect now that the two superstars are married and playing on the same team. Surely, now that the rivalry has ended, their performance will struggle.

Notes

Long Game Spoilers

June 2022- Ottawa

“I never would have believed this team would make it all the way to the Cup, let alone win it.” Nels Hartington said to a TV audience, as he announced the game from the press box of Ottawa’s arena. The final buzzer rang and the score for game seven was 4-2, Ottawa. “This is a first in franchise history.”

“When this season first started, there was a lot of discussion about what it would mean to have Hollander and Rozanov not only playing on the same team but married. The fans wondered if the rivalry was cooked, now that they played together.” Ivan Clarke bantered off his co-host.

“And there we have it, Hollander and Rozanov are on the ice together, celebrating. They have been absolute professionals all season.” Nels Hartington Volleyed. “I keep thinking about Scott Hunter’s Iconic moment a few years ago.”

“This is the first time we’ve had a married couple playing on ice together, and they first time they’ve won a cup together.”

“These two mean have changed the narrative in hockey.”

“And I think we can officially say they’ve out done Scott Hunter. That is one hell of a kiss.”

The camera panned to where Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov are standing at center ice, deep in a kiss. The team is still throwing off their helmets and clapping each other on their backs, but Hollander and Ilya Rozanov take a minute to celebrate together at center ice before joining their team in celebration.

January 2022

The NHL has announced that the All-Star Game will be North American versus European player. -ESPN

Host One: The league is totally setting up a Rozanov/ Hollander rematch. Now that these two have been on the same team, the league is looking for any excuse to have them go up against each other again.

Host Two: These two are hotter than ever since they’ve gotten married.

Host One: And they've both had their best season yet. They've already outscored their record at the mid-season and Ottawa is a favorite for the playoffs.

Host Two: But now that they have played together, can we still trust them to play against each other. Is the Rivalry dead?

Scott Hunter was waiting on the bench as Shane Hollander made his attempt at the breakaway challenge. When Scott thought of creative hockey, he didn't necessarily think of Hollander.

It didn't help that Ilya Rozanov was animatedly yelling something in Russian from the opponent's bench. Scott wasn't sure if it was words of encouragement, good natured trash talk, or something else entirely.

"That was interesting." Scott said as Shane skated back to the bench. "You understand anything Roz was yelling at you?"

"Some, not much. Mostly he was yelling on about if I used his move, he'd never forgive me."

"I'm a little surprised you signed up for this one."

Shane nodded towards the European player's bench. "We've always signed up for the same challenge, and this year Ilya chose what we were doing."

"How did that happen?" Scott asked. "No offense Hollander, but this doesn't seem like your sort of challenge."

A flush appeared across Shane's cheeks.

"You know what, forget I asked." Scott back tracked. "It's just odd that you picked something that's essentially a popularity contest versus something more concrete, like speed or accuracy." Scott was referring to the fact that the breakaway challenge was judged via text message by the audience.

"We've been playing hard all season, and it seemed like we should take break from how... cutthroat everything is."

"So, the Rivalry that everyone thinks is dead and buried..."

Shane shrugged. "Stronger than ever."

"But now it's just all the time." Scott pieced together. "Doesn't that get exhausting?"

Shane gave a choked laugh. “No, I’ve never been happier.” Scott could see the sincerity from Shane. The kid wore everything on his sleeve. It was amazing he had been able to keep Roz a secret all those years.

“I’d ask about what Roz thought about this, but he thrives on chaos. Nothing more chaotic than playing with your husband on the same team.”

Shane paused and turned his attention to the ice where Ilya had skated out to take his turn. Scott watched a near repeat of the move Shane had perfectly executed a moment before.

“Fucker,” Shane yelled into the ice. “We were supposed to do our own thing.”

Ilya skated towards the North American bench and said, “No, you promised you wouldn’t copy my move.”

“Yup, that answers my question.” Scott said as Ilya skated back to his bench.

“What?” Shane asked.

“That married life has been good to both you and Roz.” Scott shrugged. “It’s not easy being.” He motioned between himself and Shane. “In the NHL...But you two have managed pretty well.”

“We have.” Shane agreed.

October 2021

“This might be Philly’s home opener, but all eyes are on the Ottawa team.” Nels Hartington explained from a local TV station in Ottawa.

“That’s right, this is the first time we’ve seen Shane Hollander in an Ottawa Centaur’s jersey and the first time we’ve had a married couple on the ice together, playing for the same team. A lot of firsts for Ottawa. It’s a shame they weren’t able to play this one at home.” Ivan Clarke batted back.

“A year ago, if you had told me that Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander were both playing for Ottawa, I would be booking my tickets to the cup right now, but there is a real question, will these two be able to maintain their competitiveness as a couple.”

“Their rivalry has been the NHL, at least the Eastern Conference for over a decade.”

“I think we’ll just need to see what happens.”

September 2021

“Bag skates,” Coach Wiebe yelled to the veteran players that had showed up for the second week of training camp. There was a collective groan, but the players lined up at center. “Do not puke on my ice, tap before you do, once you’re done, hit the showers.”

Brandon Wiebe didn't assign bag skates during the season. He was fully bought into the idea that they did little to inspire teams and made for a poor punishment. Really, he wasn't into punishment for bad performance in general, he coached Ottawa after all.

During training camp, before the season started, was a different story. He only had a few weeks to get his players in shape for the season, and he needed to know what he was working with. Sure, they were pro athletes and they kept in shape, but they'd also ensconced to cottages in PEI, Maine, and Quebec for the hottest months of the summer. Mostly away from ice.

Hayes tapped out first, going 15 sets of well-intended, deep sprints. It was more than Wiebe expected from a goalie in full pads. It was a good start.

Bood tapped out next, after a respectable run. Barrett and Haas were still going strong. Hollander and Rozanov were in a different league all together. They were skating next to each other, each skater pushing ahead of the other. Wiebe was impressed. When Hollander's agent had coordinated a meeting, Wiebe privately had reservations. He would have the most unique player relationship the league had ever seen.

Now though, watching Hollander and Rozanov push each other forward, he was unsure what he was concerned about. It helped that both men had shown up to the open skates the past week during rookie week.

Barrett tapped out next, and Wiebe gave him a slap on the back as he headed back towards the locker room. Wiebe was pleased. The playoff performance last year had left the team with a lot of encouragement going into the summer. Hollander joining the team had given them hope that anything was possible. Wiebe was in for a season.

Haas was doubled over on the ice when Wiebe blew the whistle to end the next round of drills. "Showers, now Haas." He called. The kid was done and he'd performed. Wiebe wasn't in anyway disappointed in his performance. They had had a good first practice before the season even started.

Hollander and Rozanov were the last two players on the ice. Neither seemed to be close to exhaustion. Wiebe just crossed his arms and watched as they continued to push each other forward, faster, stronger. *Shit, they were good.* Who thought just not being homophobic would land him not one, but two of the best players in the league. He'd seen both of them play, Roz had been on his team for a year already, but this was another level entirely. Whatever doubts he had vanished. This was Ottawa's year. Now he just needed to get them there.

The door encasing the Zamboni opened and the driver caught Wiebe's eye and pointed to the clock on the score board. They were past their practice time by nearly 30 minutes. Ottawa's practice space was also used by a couple of youth leagues, and they had to yield the rink.

"Hollander, Rozanov, hit the showers." Wiebe called out.

“Not yet,” Rozanov said as he finished his next sprint. “I have not beat Hollander.”

Hollander stopped and skated back towards center ice. “You won’t.”

“Jesus, is this going to be the entire season?” Wiebe asked.

“No,” Hollander answered the same time Rozanov said “Yes.” with a wicked crooked smile.

“Showers, now.” Wiebe said and then he waved to the Zamboni, letting him know he could start on the rink.

Wiebe rubbed his temples. He was probably about to coach the best team the NHL had ever seen and he wasn’t so sure he was going to survive it. Those two were just as likely to kill him as they were to win the cup.

August 2021

Ilya was on his third sun salutation, the actual sun illuminating the glass cottage, giving credence to the sequence’s name. Anya was laying directly in a sunbeam as her dad’s gently moved in the early light. He had tried yoga, mostly as a joke about Shane sticking his ass up in his tiniest shorts. It had been shortly after their wedding.

“You can’t be here if you’re just going to ogle me.” Shane scolded when Ilya kept bending over Shane while he was in downward dog, trying to see if he could see up his shorts.

“Actually, new rule, unless you are doing yoga, you can’t be here.”

“I’m here to do Yoga.”

Shane gave Ilya a glare and if it were a dare, Ilya started matching Shane’s movements. At first, Ilya felt goofy, following the slow scripted moves. Sure, he stretched before and after workouts, but not for 90 minutes at a time and not in these specific flowing movements.

The next day, Ilya returned to the living room where Shane usually did Yoga. “The rule.” Shane reminded him.

Ilya just shrugged, stood behind Shane and followed him through his entire practice.

“Breathe like this.” Shane said on the third day. “In through your nose and out through your nose. It’s called Pranayama.”

“What language are you speaking.” Ilya huffed, but followed Shane’s instructions, syncing his breathing to the movements.

By day four, Ilya’s hip flexors felt more open and pliable than they had ever felt from any stretch or session with a trainer.

“Here,” Shane stepped behind Ilya, pulling his hips up into a deeper downward dog. Ilya sighed as his lower back released, gently massaging an old injury. He resisted bumping his

hips back into Shane's and instead let his husband guide him through the exercises.

Now, a month into the summer, Ilya made it a normal practice. Shane, who had mastered a variety of moves years ago designed their yoga practice, but Ilya followed. He followed because he liked being with Shane, he liked how he felt and he liked the peace. It was one of the few moments his mind would stand still.

July 2021

Shane liked the Real Canadian Super Store that was about 40 minutes from the cottage. His family had been going there since he was a small child, and no one had ever batted much of an eye as his hockey career accelerated and he was drafted by the NHL. He and Ilya had been shopping together for three summers now. When they walked in for the first time as a married couple, no one paid them any mind.

Ilya didn't hesitate to walk down the cereal aisle. He quickly found a box of Lucky Charms and Cookie Crisp and threw them in their cart.

"These are good before a run." Ilya proclaimed and then added a bag of whole milk and then oat milk to their cart.

"I think I would get sick if I ate those before I worked out."

Ilya shrugged and then added a package of Oreos.

Shane walked through the store, thinking about what he had talked about with his new nutritionist. He had fired the old one after he ate that Snickers bar. He thought through his new rules... not rules...guidelines. Sugar for quick energy before a run, protein after a workout and enough calories to build muscle. The standard 2,000 calorie diet didn't account for the amount of exercise he got in a day. He had to adjust based on his activity.

"We could make banana bread." Shane offered. There were bananas and nuts at least, even if it included white sugar and flour.

"I would like that," Ilya said, placing a hand on his shoulder and giving it a gentle squeeze. "We could make dinner together. Jackie gave me a recipe for a casserole."

"Why are you talking to Jackie?" Shane asked.

Ilya just shrugged. "I was a Montreal WAG for a lot of years."

"A what?"

Ilya just gave a crooked smile, kissed Shane on the cheek and added a few boxes of pasta to their cart. "We need canned soup." Ilya explained.

“I have questions.” Shane said but Ilya had already walked down the aisle to where the canned soup was shelved. He dumped in a series of cans called cream of something or another in the cart. Shane resisted the urge to review the macros on the label.

“We add vegetables, spinach, kale.” Ilya explained.

Nutrition was important but he once again reminded himself that he spent most of his life in some sort of high intensity exercise. More importantly, he remembered how much he liked cooking with his husband. There were more important things than performance diets.

The next morning, Ilya ate a large bowl of Cookie Crisp and Shane made himself a protein shake. It was full of greens and protein. It had been part of his routine for so long that he couldn't imagine changing it.

They then went for their morning jog around the lake. Anya had already had a shorter walk, her little legs too short to keep up for their long summer runs.

Shane kept pace with Ilya for the first 7 kilometers. And then, as they started the 8th, there was a glint in Ilya's eye and he increased the speed. Shane pushed to keep up. By the time they finished their 10K, Ilya still seemed fresh, but Shane was struggling.

“How are you so much faster.” Shane asked, while they were undressing to get into the shower.

“Tiny cookie cereal.” Ilya said. “Lots of sugar.”

“That can't be true.” Shane shook his head.

“Tomorrow, you eat cookie cereal, see how you feel.”

“I'm going to get sick,” Shane said, as he poured oat milk over the Cookie Crisps. There was no way he was holding back on Ilya's challenge, but he couldn't handle whole milk without his stomach betraying him. He would stick with oat milk.

“You will be fine.” Ilya said flatly. “I eat this, I won three Stanley Cups, been to play off many times.”

Shane let Ilya set the pace. The first 7 kilometers didn't feel particularly different but by the 8th, when Ilya increased the pace, Shane kept up. The empty feeling that set in yesterday didn't happen.

“You were faster,” Ilya said, when they got home.

“You went slower,” Shane challenged.

“Check your phone.” Ilya said.

Shane pulled open the app that tracked all of his exercise data. He had gone faster for much longer during this run. He quickly slipped it back in his pocket.

“So?” Ilya asked.

“So what?” Shane asked

“Was it better.”

Shane shook his head. “No.”

“Okay, let me see.”

“Fine. Yes. It was better.”

“So tomorrow?” Ilya asked.

“I’m going to eat the fucking cereal.” Shane said.

“Good, we’ll go longer and faster tomorrow.”

“Are you talking about running?”

“Maybe.” Ilya replied.

Shane just nodded.

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