

Still Buffering 465: Heated Rivalry (2025)

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Sydnee: Hello, and welcome to Still Buffering: a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Teylor, it's been a heavy week. Has all this happened in a week?

Taylor: Uh... well, that's a... it's happened in a week and it's also happened in several years. So it depends on what the—[crosstalk]

Sydnee: Decades, I guess.

Taylor: There's a lot leading up to where we're at. Um...

Sydnee: I feel like we've been, like, hit hard and fast, though, in the last week with, like, a lot of different stuff.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: You know what I mean?

Taylor: America is an increasingly terrifying place to live in.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And before we talk—'cause, you know, we usually open, we talk about a different thing. Our subject today is Heated Rivalry, and we will talk about that.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: We wanted to have some space to talk about what's going on in our country right now. Totally understand if that's not where your headspace is,

so we wanted to give you a fair warning about that. And if you just want to jump ahead to, like, the 20-minute mark, if you want to not hear that right now, again, totally understandable. Do what you need to do today. But, uh, I think we both needed some space to sort of process and, you know, get our thoughts together.

Sydnee: Yeah. It's, I mean... you're right in that things have been bad, things have been happening for a long—gosh, the entire history of America, right? So not new in that respect. And not—it shouldn't be shocking or unexpected. If you're shocked that this is where we are, you probably weren't paying attention, or maybe you voted very differently than we did.

Taylor: I don't know how you're still listening to this show if you did. I mean, you know, open mind, that's good. We could use more of those.

Sydnee: That's true. Uh, but I really... and it's one of those things, too, where I think because of the work that I do working in homelessness, like, I've been seeing firsthand. If you could—there is a graph of the number of people we serve at our shelter, and since Trump took office, there is just this steady uptick in the number of individuals that we're serving. Meaning more people are experiencing homelessness. And, like, we had a gigantic spike in the last month specifically. So I'm—part of, I think—I'm seeing it, like, on the ground visually, names and faces every day, of the policies that are destroying this country.

Um, and then last week, or was it early this week? That the, um... that RFK Jr. has changed the vaccine recommendations so that now very critical childhood vaccines that absolutely are necessary for our health and public safety and for the lives of children, are no longer required or recommended, but are a shared decision-making thing, which just basically means you're gonna have to go to your doctor and talk about it. Fewer people are gonna get vaccines. More people are gonna get sick. More kids are gonna die. That's what it means. That's what it means. More kids are gonna die.

So, like, there's that. And then... and also, there's an illegal war with Venezuela. I don't even know how to get into that. That's happening. And then I think most importantly we saw a federal agent murder a woman in

Minnesota. I think that was sort of the culmination of "Everything is terrible." Maybe in a more predictable way, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Maybe, like—I mean, I think these things... when I found out, like, "Oh, we're going to war for oil again? Well."

Taylor: Yeah. We do that every five to ten years.

Sydnee: Yeah. That's the US. That's what—regime change to a dictator that's more in line with our interests. Yes, we—that's our—we do that routinely. That's not shocking. I mean, it's wrong, it's terrible, it's bad, but it's also part of our playbook. We knew that RFK Jr. was gonna devastate public health and the CDC and vaccine policy. Like, we knew that. We knew he was gonna do all that. Um, we knew that the economic policies of Trump were gonna destroy this country. We knew that.

I don't—I don't know that I was prepared to see federal agents murdering people in the streets.

Taylor: Well, it's with the added hit of the President of this country, um, vilifying the dead woman. And the Vice President saying that these agents have total immunity. Which then, you know, just a day later we have two more people shot. At a "border," quote-unquote, in Portland, which is... I was not aware was a border town.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: That is a rise in the seriousness of what's happening.

Sydnee: I also think what we've seen is we always know—we knew that Trump lied. He's always lied. He's always lied and conned. We've known that. It's been—prior to his political career, he lied and conned people. Um, but the lies used to be more subtle. Uh, you know? And the Trump administration was better at sort of, like, couching a lie in a truth so that it took you a little longer to explain why it was a lie, and by the time you got to that, they had shouted you down and you couldn't say anything.

Um, now we're just seeing, like, "I know you're looking at this video and seeing one thing, but I'm telling you you're not seeing it. I'm telling you your eyes are wrong and that there's another truth."

And I think that's a level of dystopia that we hadn't... you know? I don't know that we had quite reached that yet.

Taylor: No. Well, that's, um... I mean, if you've seen the video, and it's disturbing but there is, you know, body cam footage of this woman being gunned down, and it is very clear, one, that she was driving her vehicle—I mean, to say driving I think implies some speed at all. She was... it's like about the speed you'd pull out of a parking spot, away from the officers. And yet the interpretation is that she was using her vehicle as a weapon, and that this was self-defense. Which is just not—there's—it's a clear angle. There's no question. It's no, you know...

Sydnee: No. There's no question. She put her vehicle in reverse initially, and then turned away from the officers to try to steer away from them, to intentionally not strike them with her vehicle, and move her vehicle out of the way, which I think is what they wanted her to do initially. There's also a lot of assumptions being made about all of her actions. We don't really know. I mean, it was her neighborhood, as far as we know. So, I mean, there's a lot of assumptions about, "Well, she was blocking the way, and she'd been following ICE agents around."

All these things that are being said without any evidence, without any... but this is a case that the state is building to pin—to follow up on. The President called her a domestic terrorist, and now they have to build a case to support that. As opposed to the way things are supposed to work, where you, you know, you actually look into what happened. You know, you do your due diligence, you investigate, and then you come to a conclusion. The federal government had their conclusion. Now they have to create evidence to support it.

Taylor: Exactly. Well, and I mean, I don't know. What is the—it's the over-quoted quote about the, you know... tell you to deny what you see, and, you know, deny what you hear. And, like, that is... so many people have fallen in

line with believing this based on what Trump has said is the truth and not what actually happened. Just because he said this is what happened. Even though you can—you can use discernment. You can look at that video and understand for yourself what the reality is. And that's... it's not a new terror. I think we've been moving to this place where truth is negotiable. Truth is the most—whatever the people in charge agree is the best truth is the truth.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And that is... that is something that's always been the agenda of the current administration.

Sydnee: Yes. Well, I mean, that's why... I don't understand, you know, why you don't see—so, every government official, every elected official should have come out en masse in reaction to this and said, "This is wrong. This is bad, this is wrong."

And you see hesitancy on the right, because they're not sure what they're supposed to say yet. They're waiting to hear what story they're all supposed to tell, and then they're gonna tell that story. Um, which should be a clue that it's a story, that it's not the truth, that it's just whatever... I don't know. It's a shame that we overused and misused Orwellian for so long.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Because I feel like when you say something's Orwellian now, it's like—I don't know. What does that mean anymore? Because we really—we've been using the term Orwellian... gosh, I don't know, since 1984?

Taylor: [laughs] Just about.

Sydnee: [laughs] Right? And so this is actually Orwellian. We are seeing the truth. You can look at it. This is what happened. And you've got the President saying, "No. That's not what happened."

Taylor: Two plus two equals five. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yes. And that is actually Orwellian. That is Orwellian.

Taylor: Well, I think it's an important... I mean, I've... the brutality of it and the clarity of it is what makes it so striking. But... I think it's also, uh, important for us to be aware of that this is the kind of devastation, lives have been being destroyed by ICE, like... already. Thousands of lives, tens of thousands of lives. People that have been disappeared. People that have been murdered. People that have gone missing.

This is in, you know, HD, and let's be real, it's a citizen, it's a white woman, it's a mother. It's a lot of things that have been very protected in this country. But she is also a representative of all of the bodies that have been considered less than that have suffered similar fates.

Sydnee: Well, and I think that is—that is part of the point of this, unfortunately. And let me say, I don't think... I don't think any of this was running through the head of the ICE agent who committed the murder.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: Um, but when the state allows this to happen, part of the point is to have a chilling effect on other people who may choose to—who traditionally have been in a position of privilege, who have been more protected from, you know, this sort of violence. It's supposed to have a chilling effect on the rest of us. Like, "Don't protect your neighbors. Civil disobedience—the result of it isn't going to be a few hours in jail anymore. The result will be we'll murder you."

Taylor: Well, and not only will we murder you, we won't mourn you. We'll villainize you. We'll write a whole new story about who you were, and the vast majority of people will believe it.

Sydnee: Yes. And then instead of Renee Good, who was, you know, a mother, and a member of this community, and somebody that a lot of people cared about, instead she is becoming, in the eyes of the state, a domestic terrorist.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: We'll repaint your entire story. And that's—I think that's why—I mean, first of all, we should all be... we should be shocked by this, and we should be terrified by it, and we should all be called to action by it. We shouldn't just be afraid. I mean, it's normal, I think, to be afraid. But then we should all be pushed to action. But I think what's scary is, I have, in the past, willingly put myself in between, you know, danger and more vulnerable people, understanding my privilege, specifically as a white person, understanding my privilege.

And I have done that knowing that, well, the worst that's gonna happen to me, typically, in this society, because of my social power, is that I, again, maybe I do get put in handcuffs and taken to jail for an hour, and then my husband comes and gets me, and it's on my record, and then I have to deal with that.

Not ever thinking I might get murdered. And now—I mean, and that's what they want people like us to worry about now. To stop us from doing it. And so then it's like, I don't know.

Taylor: It's an—hmm.

Sydnee: What—what responsible action can we call each other to? 'Cause we need to continue to call this out for what it is. This was murder. This is wrong. ICE—I mean, to say they've gone too far, the whole thing is ridiculous. The whole concept of rounding people up who live in this country, who work in this country, who contribute to the fabric of American society on a daily basis, the whole idea of rounding them up and deporting them is ridiculous and terrible and inhumane.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: So I'm not saying, like, "Now they've gone too far." But, like, if this doesn't make us demand something different, I don't know what will.

Taylor: I hope that there is an awakening, an awareness, specifically—I mean, I think specifically among protected classes, among white people, that every protest you've gone to—I mean, you know, I marched during the Black Lives Matter protests. And, you know, every protest now that's, you

know, people out in the street protecting immigrants, that every person of color that's marching out there has always had that threat over their head. And I don't think we really think about that enough. That now it's like, "Oh god, if I go to a protest, they could shoot me and they won't even care."

There have been so many people that have been putting themselves out there on those lines knowing that. And that's, I mean, not just recently, for decades, for centuries, in America. So if anything, you know, there's a possibility for a type of unity in this action that maybe we have not had the understanding of in the past.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Well, and for... I mean, for those of us on the, you know, who are politically aligned, who think about things in the same way that we do—and I think that's probably the majority of people if not all the people listening—um, it is—I think that we always were against these actions. We were against what ICE was doing from the beginning. So, like, to continue to be against it is nothing new.

But my hope is that for people who haven't been politically like-minded, who haven't been so concerned about this, if the government can murder this woman for no reason, because they decided she was in their way and they had something they wanted to accomplish, and they can murder her for that reason, they can kill anyone for any reason that they deem necessary. They can come to your house. They can decide they don't like whatever you're doing. They can take you away. They can take your guns. They can take your property.

I mean, that's the next—they can do all of that. And if that is your concern, a government that can overreach and take things from you, and take your freedom, well, that's exactly what we have.

Taylor: Yeah. And then they will carve a narrative into truth that justifies their actions after the fact. 'Cause that's the thing. It's a fallacy now, that "But I'm a good, law-abiding citizen, I wouldn't do any of that." That does not matter.

Sydnee: No. No. None of that matters. I do think it's always useful—I know we were talking about this. If you're, like—for me, this filled me with a great

deal of despair. The video of the doctor trying to go help, and they wouldn't let him in, really, like... whew. Sorry. That struck a chord. 'Cause I was thinking, like, "Oh, god! What if she was still alive?"

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: And I don't know. I don't know any of the medical facts. But it really hit me. I mean, I've seen people bleeding in the field, and I know the importance of, like, you can save a life if you act fast, and not being able to... just screw those ICE—anyway.

Taylor: Well, [crosstalk]. The cruelty is the point.

Sydnee: Yes. I mean, it was just—it's so devastating. And then I think, like, god, what do we do? Um, we do—I will say, it is important to understand that you still do have rights when it comes to interacting with ICE officials. Um, I know the ACLU, you go to their website, they have everything spelled out very clearly, exactly what you can and—do and do not have to do in terms of giving information. Everyone in the United States is protected by the US Constitution, not just citizens. Everyone is.

You have the right to remain silent. You do not have to answer questions from immigration officials. You do not have to. And they cannot enter your place of residence, your private home, without a judicial warrant. They do not have a right to enter. You do not have to open the door and let them in. You do not have to.

Taylor: There's another form that says something about deportation on it that they've been whipping out. That one doesn't count. It's gotta be a judicial warrant, signed by a judge.

Sydnee: Yes. So it's important to know your rights. I know, Taylor, you mentioned that Mamdani had a good video.

Taylor: He does. I appreciated his response, 'cause he's got a whole breakdown of everything that you should prepare yourself to do. Every—you know. And it's dual—it's in English and Spanish, which is good. It's up on all of his platforms.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I don't—I would never advocate for somebody to put themselves in harm's way. As much as I believe in standing up for each other, not just for ourselves but for your neighbors, who are more vulnerable than you, as much as I believe in that, I am not advocating "So go put yourself in harm's way." I'm not saying that.

But I do think it's important that we speak out and stand up for each other, and that we know all the legal ways that we are allowed to protect each other, and the things that we do not have to submit to just because someone shows up at your door with a mask and a gun and says "I'm with ICE. Turn somebody over."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Okay. We don't—I feel like...

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: We've reached the 20-minute mark. That's where we said we would stop. I just—I think that it's important that if you have the ability—if you have a platform, if you have a place to call out these actions as evil, and wrong, and bad, and unconstitutional, and contrary to everything we're supposed to believe in and do, unethical, immoral, whatever words you want to use, I think it's important that we do that.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, and then we can talk about the gay hockey show.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Wild transition. There's no good way to do that. That's alright.

Sydnee: You have—I mean, I guess we have to do both, right? We have to survive and exist in this world, and advocate and fight and all of that. And

then also, I don't think it is wrong to find some way to enjoy our existence. I think that that is an important part of fighting fascism, frankly.

Taylor: Absolutely. Gay hockey.

Sydnee: Gay hockey show.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] The fascists would hate a gay hockey show.

Taylor: They would! And it's, like, the number one show in the country right now.

Sydnee: Now, this is based—Heated Rivalry, this is based on a book series, right?

Taylor: It is, yeah.

Sydnee: The book is—it has a different name.

Taylor: Does it? [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Is that right? I read this. Hold on, hold on. Heated Ri... Heated Rivalry book. No, it's called Heated Rivalry. I thought it was based on a different... Game Changers. I think that's what I saw. It's in the Game Changers series. That's why I was thinking it was [crosstalk].

Taylor: I'm assuming—is the Game Changers all gay sports books?

Sydnee: I assume.

Taylor: Is it all gay? Is it... I don't know. I would assume it's all gay.

Sydnee: This is—so, I don't know as much. Because the kinds—

Taylor: [simultaneously] There are no fairies involved. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, right. The kind of, uh—the kind of smut that I read is largely fantasy smut. Not much set in, like, the real world, or—you know? I mean, that's not... I also... I'm not, like—man. There's so many books in this series. Um... I think they're all... Heated Rivalry is a 2019 gay sports romance novel. And... yeah. It's part of the Game Changers series, which are all... I think it's—is it all about them? Yeah. [pause] I think so.

Taylor: The whole Heated Rivalry title is about them.

Sydnee: Yeah. Anyway. Anyway, so, I have not—I have not read as much. I am not—I don't watch hockey. This is not—I'm not anti-hockey. I have no problems with hockey.

Taylor: [laughs] Not anti-hockey.

Sydnee: This is not—let me—let me get this out there. There are sports that I do not, um, understand, like golf. I could never watch golf. Like, if golf was on, I would leave the room. I don't... golf courses are an absolute environmental travesty to begin with.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: But... I mean, they are. But aside from that, I find it so boring that it's hard for me to, like, be in the presence of it. And that's just my personal opinion. I'm not saying you can—you have to hate golf. You can love golf. I don't care. Golf courses are still an environmental travesty, but you can love golf.

Um, hockey, if it's on, that's fine. I think it's fascinating that people can ice skate. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: I can't stand and ice skate.

Taylor: Well, I mean, I think being able to ice skate and sport at the same time is really impressive.

Sydnee: It is. It's an incredibly impressive sport. I do not follow it. I know nothing about it. But it does seem to have, like, a particular—like, when I go to the romance section of the bookstore, there are, like, a lot of hockey-themed...

Taylor: Really?

Sydnee: I don't know that they're all—yeah. I don't know that they're all gay. But I feel like there's a lot of hockey romance.

Taylor: Like a lot more hockey than any other sport?

Sydnee: Yeah! Like, I don't see—I'm sure there are baseball and football and, you know, basketball. I'm sure all that exists. But what I see most of is hockey.

Taylor: Hmm, interesting. I wonder why that is. What is the—the inner romantic so attracted to hockey? That's what I would ask. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I mean, I know it's a very—although football is too. I was gonna say, I know it's a very physical sport. Like, there's a lot of fighting, so a lot of, like, tension. You know? Like, a lot of passion that may be part of it. Um, and, like, you're, like, slamming into each other and stuff a lot. It's a very physical thing in a way that, like, baseball isn't. But, like, football is, too.

Taylor: Hmm.

Sydnee: But also, like, American football is such an American thing, and this is a Canadian series, I believe.

Taylor: Is that maybe that it's a—the more international appeal? Like, uh... yeah, maybe.

Sydnee: Of hockey, maybe? Yeah. Why aren't there more gay soccer books? Or are there?

Taylor: I—you're—you're the expert, as far as—between the two of us, on this stuff. I don't spend a lot of time in the romance aisle.

Sydnee: I—so, I'm in the aisle, but I'm not reading these books. So I will not claim expertise on, like—'cause there may be somebody listening going, "There's tons of gay soccer books! How have you not seen them?"

There might be. But I'm usually looking for fairies, or vampires, or dragons, or humans with magic powers.

Taylor: Do you think that maybe this is, like, a matter of because the gay hockey show is so popular, the bookstores are putting all the gay hockey—other gay hockey books up front?

Sydnee: It could be.

Taylor: To try to be like, "Hey! You like gay hockey? We got a ton of it!"

Sydnee: It could absolutely be that. That could definitely be happening, and that there's tons of other—because I do think... it's funny. I watched it, and then I was kind of, because I watched it and engaged with it, all the sudden, all of my algorithms knew. And they were like, "Hey, so you like gay hockey, huh? Do you want to see interviews with the cast constantly, and background stuff, and all this?"

And as I was—I guess there are a lot of athletes who have reached out to, like, the cast members saying, like, "Thank you. I'm closeted."

Taylor: Aww.

Sydnee: "And it was nice to see that—" you know. So I do wonder if part of it isn't, like, uh, especially in, like, men's sports, there can be—there isn't always, but there can be a very, like, macho, alpha, you know, heteronormative, like, sort of thing. And being gay would be dangerous or scary. And so that makes it. That's always something that then feeds into fantasy, right? So you take it into these, like, fictionalized accounts to make it safe. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and that's—you know. I mean, I... it's sad that, you know, that people do have to remain closeted because of the—their sport of choice. But it's believable that that happens frequently.

Sydnee: Sure. I'm sure there are some where the culture is such that to come out to your teammates may be alienating for you. Like, they may shun you, or just treat you differently. Or, like, I don't know. Something as, like, banal as, like, locker rooms suddenly—you know, I don't know. I haven't had that experience. But I can imagine that that's true.

Taylor: Now, I will say, because we keep calling this the gay hockey show, and the gay hockey—uh, I felt like it was 75% gay, 25% hockey.

Sydnee: I agree. They skip, um, time so much? Like, it's just like, here's a scene, and then we're six months later, and here's one scene, and we're six months later. I don't know what hockey match I'm even watching. Like...

Taylor: Well, and I... this is gonna sound so deeply uncool, but I do not know much about hockey. I was excited to learn some about hockey. And while I enjoyed the show, I watched all of it, I was like, I don't think I know anything more about hockey. Not a bit! [laughs]

Sydnee: No. I don't either. From the beginning, when they're like, "I'm gonna score 50 goals this season."

I'm like, "Is that a lot?"

Taylor: Well, and...

Sydnee: "Or... ?"

Taylor: ... they use the phrase "hat trick" a few times. And my girlfriend, who does know about hockey, I had to ask her, like, what does that mean? 'Cause they said—somebody else—there's a character that doesn't know what that means, clearly, in the show. And then they never tell you what it means. And I'm like, well, alright. [laughs quietly] I'm so used to, like—there's lots of sports anime that, um, not—is not necessarily gay. Some of it is.

But there was always such an emphasis on also educating you about the sport in those animes that I was expecting that. I was like, I'm gonna get a primer on hockey, and then some hot dudes are gonna kiss. And I don't—I guess if I had to choose between the two... I'll take the gay. I'll take the gay first. But, uh... if you are interested in this, but you think you're gonna learn about hockey, ehh. A little—ehh.

Sydnee: I was really... so, I just watched the first episode. And here is—here is what struck me, as somebody who reads a lot of romantasy. I would have to go back and look, but I think almost if not all of the books I've read—I've read a lot—were written by women. And the... for the most part, the relationships are male-female. There are other things thrown in there but, like, a lot of them center on a male-female—even if there are other characters with male-male, female-female, whatever. A lot of them center on a male-female romance.

And they tend to focus a lot on understanding the characters, building a relationship, falling in love, and then you get to the sex.

Taylor: Mm-hmm. Yeah, no, not this one.

Sydnee: No! I was—I, as somebody who reads a lot of that, I was kind of shocked that, like, whoa! Whoa! We're here already! Like, that takes... I mean, I am telling you, so many chapters. Like, you are 50 chapters into a book, some of the books that I read, before you get anything. Before you even get, like, a passionate kiss, a suggestive... touch, or something. Like, I mean, sometimes it's book two before you get to the good stuff!

Taylor: Well, I will say, I think this is far more realistic. Just, you know, as far as how a lot of relationships work. A lot of adult relationships, I think a lot of queer relationships, I don't know. I think, you know, you start—

Sydnee: They move faster?

Taylor: You start hooking up, and then you ask, "What is this?" [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, I also wonder if that's a genre thing. Like, romantasy is supposed to be equal parts romance and fantasy, so building the fantasy, like worldbuilding and understanding the lore, you have to do some of that work. [laughs quietly] Before you can get into any of the smut.

Taylor: Well, I mean, there is a lot—there is a lot of time that passes in this. I mean, you know, I'm going to lightly spoil it, if that's okay, 'cause I did watch the whole thing.

Sydnee: Oh, that's fine.

Taylor: Uh, it continues on that time frame of jumping ahead, like, large periods of time. So it does show a very slow burn romance. Like, it takes them pretty much the whole series to finally realize that they are in love with each other. But they are having sex the whole way.

Sydnee: But they do—like, they do fall in love?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's nice.

Taylor: And there's even—you missed out on the—it's such, like, how I think of, like... like, romantic, like, Japanese manga, like shounen-ai and stuff. That's boy love. Where there's, like, A couple and then B couple. So there's the main couple whose story you're following, but usually the writer will introduce a secondary couple that can kind of, like, add side stories. Usually has a less complex romance, but, you know.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: There is a B couple in this. There is another hockey player who is falling in love with not another hockey player. He's falling in love with his local barista, who's a young, hot grad student. Um, and that's a whole sweet storyline. But it does, like... what I liked about it is it doesn't do the Schitt's Creek thing of, like, existing in a world without homophobia. It does address the obvious, like, Ilya is from Russia, which is a very difficult place to be homosexual. And his family would also be very against that. It does address

that. But there's never the big, like, "Oh, I must leave you, because my family will never understand."

Like, they don't... they drama never gets to the point that you think that they're ever going to never be in each other's lives again. And maybe that's the credit of, like, the long gaps in the time frame. Is like, that's more natural. Like, "Things are weird. I don't know what to do with this. Oh well, I'm not gonna see this person for three months. It's fine."

Like, it's a little bit more realistic in that sense. But I liked that the drama never overshadows the romance.

Sydney: I would love to know if the book is like that. If you just, like... three months. You know? Like, if it just skips big blocks of time. Because that is—I mean, it is interesting to think about, "Let's just skip the hard bits and focus on the good stuff, because that's what you wanna watch anyway."

I mean, that is a—that's a valid storytelling mechanism. Like, you don't wanna hear all of the, like, this was so hard, and this is so painful, and like, all of the "How can I reconcile who I'm supposed to be with who I am?" You know what I mean? Like, we don't—we've all been through this. We don't wanna talk about it. Let's just get to the good parts. Like... you know? I mean, that's valid.

Taylor: I mean, it's also I think that the—your two main characters have—such a big focus of their life is hockey. Even though you don't—you might not learn a lot of interesting hockey trivia from the show, they are—between their, you know, their romantic dalliances, they're just really focused on the sport they love. And so they've got this other thing that kind of keeps them driven. And so it's—I mean, I think it's a really beautiful story. 'Cause, you know, they have their problems.

They have jealousy, as the other one is more successful than the other at different points in time. They have jealousies when, like, they'll be, you know, connected to different people. Like, one of them starts dating a beautiful actress at one point, you know.

And then the other one's kind of jealous, and realizes—it's an amazing sequence, because it's set to All the Things She Said. You know, the classic gay Russian pop song. Um, but that's all the kind of stuff, again, like, that kind of happens in a relationship anyway, when you've just got a situationship and you're not sure what it means. All the stuff that actually makes you realize, "Huh. If I'm jealous, then I guess that means something." You know?

And then it culminates in them finally figuring out, like, "Okay, yes. We're in love."

And then you get a happy ending, which is just so nice.

Sydnee: Is there—other than—this must be when the books were set. Is there a reason the show needs to be set, like, in 2006 and on? Like, I think that's where it starts is 2006. Does that come into play?

Taylor: I think because it just comes up to modern times.

Sydnee: Okay.

Taylor: Like, you follow them—well, not quite that long. But, I mean, I guess—that's probably the time frame the book was written in. Like, you follow them for over a decade.

Sydnee: I was trying to figure that out. 'Cause it's an oddly—I mean, if that's where the book—when the books are set, sure. But you don't have to, right? Like, the books, in theory... other than I guess maybe the point is it would be easier to be gay now than it would be in 2006? Unless that's the point. Like...

Taylor: Possibly.

Sydnee: 20 years ago, it would've been harder.

Taylor: Well, I... I don't know the state of—I mean, I know the state of gay rights in Russia during this time frame. I'm not sure about Canada.

Sydnee: My sense would be they'd be better.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But that might just be because I assume that the Canadians are always doing things a little better than we are.

Taylor: Just a little bit. I think—I know some Canadian friends that would at least go, "Okay, yeah, a little bit. But let's not let us off the hook."

Sydnee: Other than poutine, guys. Never gonna understand that one. Never gonna understand it.

Taylor: What?! What are you not gonna understand about that?

Sydnee: Don't like it. Nope. Don't like it.

Taylor: Alright. Well, that's nothing. Fries covered in other stuff is... alright.

Sydnee: Cheese curds—cheese curds just—I—don't do it for me. I don't get it. And then gravy, it is very—I have very specific feelings on gravy. That's it. Anyway. We won't get lost on poutine. I'm just saying, I've never quite understood it.

Taylor: I'm questioning all of your opinions now. But, um...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: There is—again, I'm gonna—this is a spoiler. But your B couple, which is an older American hockey player who falls in love with this hot barista, and the barista is very out and proud. And this hockey player is closeted. He's, like, you know, kind of towards the end of his career, and he's always had in his mind that once he retires, then he'll be able to live his life. But because he's met this young man who wants to be out now, that's his conflict. And, like, the—I think it's in the penultimate—I think it's in the fifth episode. He... wins, he finally wins the—what do they win? Isn't that the Stanley Cup?

Sydnee: The Stanley Cup.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's the big one.

Taylor: He leads his team to victory, finally, and, you know, in the—towards the end of his career. And he invites his partner out on the ice to kiss him in front of the whole audience, and on national TV. And that's the event that then the two that are kind of, "Oh, I don't know if this can ever work." They see that on TV, and that's when they're like, "Now we can, too."

Sydnee: "Now we can be together."

Taylor: So, like, the lineup with, like, America's move towards, like, LGBTQ rights and liberation does line up with that nicely. And I do like that, you know, the American guy is kind of a bumbling weirdo, but he does—[through laughter] but he does kiss his partner on the ice, that inspires our other characters.

Sydnee: That's very American.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That also—[laughs quietly] that also sounds like anime, like, depictions of Americans.

Taylor: Yeah, no, very much. [laughs] Like, he's got—I mean, he's kind of, when you're introduced to his character, he's... been in—he's been playing hockey for a very long time, but he's kind of a hot and cold player. Like, he'll do really well, and then he'll just suck for the rest of the season. And so he's really obsessed with rituals. Like, if he does something, and then he wins, then he has to keep doing that thing.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: So he goes to this coffee shop on his run and has a smoothie that's made by this barista, and then he wins. And he's like, "Oh, that was the secret. That's what's gonna make me win."

But what he realizes is the thing that helps him win is being in love with his—his...

Sydnee: Aww. [laughs]

Taylor: ... you know, beautiful barista boyfriend. [laughs quietly] Also very anime.

Sydnee: It probably was just he played better hockey that day, would be my guess. But... [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, no. That's—okay, don't ruin the magic.

Sydnee: [laughs] I don't know. Whatever. Sports are—I get it. Sports are full of those sorts of—I understand the superstitions of—like, baseball players don't change their socks, or something. Right?

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: That's a thing.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know. I don't remember having those sort of specific superstitions in my sports days. But I will say that I had all through college and med school, any time I had an exam, I had a very specific exam ritual. Like, I had—I mean, I don't typically eat breakfast. I'm just not a breakfast person.

But I would eat on the morning of exam. I would eat, like—back then it was probably just a standard, like, granola bar, one of those chocolate chip granola bars. Nowadays I like a Kind bar. But I would eat a bar and I would drink a black coffee, and I would wear a—our Pawpaw's army sweatshirt.

Taylor: Ah.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I had—man. Actually, this is really embarrassing, and I'm gonna admit this, and I also reject it, but I'm admitting it. At some point in my life, I got a chocolate frog—yes, from Harry Potter.

Taylor: Ahh.

Sydnee: And it had a Rowena Ravenclaw card in it. And of course that's, you know, smart. And I had it in the pocket of that sweatshirt, and so it would be there.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Like wisdom. I'm embarrassed. I'm embarrassed. I shun it. I reject it.

Taylor: It's alright. That was before we knew Joanne was...

Sydnee: Transphobic, yes.

Taylor: The wildest TERF on TERF island.

Sydnee: I didn't know back then. Wouldn't do it now. But I had that. I had, like, a specific pencil. 'Cause back then we wrote with pencils. And, like—so I get it. My point is, I get it. Very superstitious. Very specific ritual. But I got good grades, so I thought it must be working. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, there you go!

Sydnee: It wasn't—it wasn't the absolute, like, hours and hours and hours of my life that I devoted to studying. It couldn't have been that.

Taylor: It's a Dumbo's feather situation, you know.

Sydnee: It was, yes.

Taylor: Something that makes you believe in yourself does have a net good effect.

Sydnee: Loving another person and being loved by another person—even just loving another person does give you a feeling of, like, confidence that would probably make you perform better.

Taylor: Yeah, absolutely.

Sydnee: You know?

Taylor: Well, you know, it's... when you feel like—I mean, I feel like this is true. When the thing that you're doing, especially if it's a competitive thing, is all you have, that's all that defines you, then it almost makes the stakes too high. Like, it's easy to fumble it. But when you think you have something else on the outside that's really gratifying and good, then suddenly it's like, win or lose, this is always waiting for me. And I think that still loops around and makes you better at whatever the thing you're doing.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think that's a really good point. I do. I've heard a lot of discourse, too, about how, um, straight women are interested in this show. Like, are really moved by this show. And I think it's interesting to think about, like, why.

Taylor: Well... I mean, it doesn't—that's not—that's nothing surprising to me. Because again, I spend a lot of time in the shounen-ai, the Japanese BL of it all. And that is largely made by women and consumed by women. And there have been lots of theories on why that's true. I think it's very simple. It's just that it's usually—I mean, it's men being romantic, which is part of the fantasy. You get two. That's great.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Um, it's—I don't know. I mean, I think that you aren't necessarily comparing yourself to whoever the beautiful, impossible woman is in the storyline. So I think that there's a lot that's appealing, there.

Sydnee: And it doesn't restrict you—and I know queer women have also—like, all women have been interested in this show. Queer women, too. I think this applies more to straight women. You don't—you're not tied down to the tropes that straight women usually have to fall into in, like, sex scenes and romance. You know?

Taylor: Well, you can see yourself in whichever character you relate to.

Sydnee: Exactly.

Taylor: Outside of, like, "That's the woman. That's the one that I must relate to."

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah. So I think that makes a lot of sense. It's a really safe thing, too.

Taylor: I will say, on the topic of women—'cause sometimes, like... gay men-centered media can be a little bit dismissive towards women. I do like—there are—the women characters in this show are very much just the supportive best friends. But they're very well-written. They're very—they're enjoyable characters. They're well-rounded, and play important parts in the story, and I always appreciate that.

Sydnee: It really—I mean... [laughs quietly] it's gotta go both ways, right? 'Cause there definitely is plenty of media that has had—it's centered on a straight woman and her romantic quest, and she has a gay best friend.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: Who is absolutely the worst stereotype of—amalgam of what somebody thought a gay man was like, but did absolutely no research, and has never met a gay man, so has no clue. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: So, right? It's gotta go both ways. So, like, yes, women should be represented. Like, you know, in the varied ways that women can exist.

Taylor: And again, light spoiler, but the one character that gets romantically linked to this famous actress, she figures out really fast that he's probably not straight, because she works in Hollywood and she's surrounded by gay men.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And it's not like—I thought it was gonna be a drama point. Like, "Oh no, she's falling in love with him and she's figured out his secret." And she's just like, "Yeah, no worries. We'll be really good friends."

And then she just is for the rest—she's just a really good friend, supportive friend who knows he's gay.

Sydnee: That's nice.

Taylor: It's like...

Sydnee: That's very evolved.

Taylor: Yeah. The whole thing felt evolved. It didn't shy away from the elements of homophobia, but it kind of made you feel safe. Like, "I'm not gonna... I'm not gonna make you think about this too hard." [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I, uh—I really—I enjoyed it. I appreciated it. I thought it was a fun watch. Um, I might watch some more. I think I could be in to see—to follow their story some more.

Taylor: I mean, it's only six episodes, you know. It's pretty short. And I love that it's contained. There's no cliffhanger. There's no, like, one of them is—is, I don't know, dying in a hospital, and the other one is marrying someone else halfway around the world. Like, it's very much like, "Here's a happy ending. They quite literally drive into the sunset." [laughs]

Sydnee: I... I had—I need to watch more of that. For a while, with everything going on, Justin and I were just sort of marathoning old episodes of Below Deck to, like...

Taylor: Oh, I do love that show. I do love that show.

Sydnee: Just to—well, and you can just—although we started watching the season [laughs] of 2020.

Taylor: Oh, god.

Sydnee: [laughs] And I was like, "No! No! Wait! I see what's happening!"

'Cause then they show a date. They're like, February, you know, 25th, 2020. And I'm like, "Oh, no!" [laughs] "I know where this is going! I know how this ends!"

Taylor: You've lived that.

Sydnee: [laughs] Yeah. So I... but I needed to get into shows like this more, and not just disappear into old reality TV.

Taylor: Yeah. This is, uh... this was a pleasant—I will say, there is a lot of—a lot of sex. A lot of sex.

Sydnee: Yes!

Taylor: And it's tasteful.

Sydnee: Even in the first episode, yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. It's tasteful sex. I don't know what that means. All sex is tasteful, I guess. No judgment. No sex shaming. But for what you expect to see in a show that is so popular, it is a lot of sex. That just surprises me now that I can just think that there are millions of people watching gay sex. Like, that is... that is just a lot of people. Anyone that says, "Yeah, I've watched it." I'm like, "Oh, okay. You've watched a lot of gay sex. Alright. Cool!" [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I mean, I—and I think that it is important, as we've talked about a lot on this show, and then I know we've gotta wrap up, uh, that as we move forward in—hopefully. I don't know. We're in a backslide

right now. But if you envision that we will progress in terms of more equality for, you know, people of different genders and sexual orientations, and that everybody will have equal rights, and as we move towards that goal, part of that is challenging toxic masculinity, is fixing... straight cis men. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: You know. And this moves us in that direction, I think.

Taylor: It does. Well, and even—I mean, again, I know we need to go. But, like, main characters, side characters, I just love the details of outside of Ilya's family, you see the two other male leads, their families, their fathers specifically are so supportive and so kind, and such good examples of nontoxic masculinity in how they love their sons, and I really appreciated that.

Sydnee: Yeah. We need that. We need to see that.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Well, I am glad that we watched it, Tey. I think I will embark on watching more.

Taylor: You should. I think you would really enjoy it all the way through.

Sydnee: I will. What should we do next?

Taylor: Uh, well, sort of a throwback, but I just watched the 90s classic Jawbreaker. Sort of the 90s Heathers, I guess. [laughs]

Sydnee: See, I've never seen it. I am very aware of it culturally, but for some reason I just missed it, so I'm gonna watch it.

Taylor: Well, it's a teen movie with a little bit of murder.

Sydnee: Alright. Well, then we will watch Jawbreaker for next week. And in the meantime, Heated Rivalry is definitely for adults.

Taylor: Yes, yes. 100%.

Sydnee: Not for kids.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Very explicit. So, just so you know.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Don't turn it on when the kids are awake. Wait till they're asleep.

Taylor: And, further warning, you won't learn a lot about hockey from this show.

Sydnee: [laughs] Bad hockey show.

Taylor: Bad hockey show! Great gay show. Bad hockey show.

Sydnee: [laughs] Uh, thank you, listeners. You should—thank you for listening to our show. You should go to Maximumfun.org if you want to find some other shows that you would enjoy. And thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby You Change Your Mind.

Taylor: This has been Still Buffering, your cross-generational guide to the culture that made us.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering...

Taylor: And I am too.

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: [unintelligible] talk. Sorry.

Taylor: You quite literally are still buffering.

Sydnee: I ran out of talking right as we finished.

Taylor: No more talk. Gotta go refill talk.

Sydnee: Drink [unintelligible] and refill talk.

[chord]

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