"An immersive adrenaline rush"

Heated Rivalry breakout leads discuss their overnight success, the fans' butt tweets, and the stories behind viral moments

Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams share the context behind their viral wrap party dance, show moments like the chair drag, and what it's really like to film sex scenes.

By Nick Romano | December 11, 2025 11:00 a.m. ET

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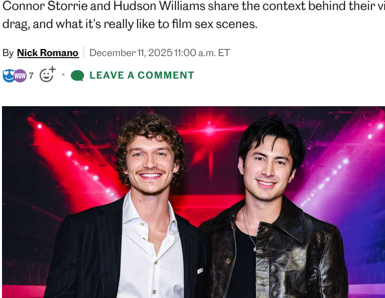

'Heated Rivalry' stars Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams.
Credit: Harold Feng/Getty

"Vivid and visceral" ASSOCIATED PRESS

KEY POINTS

- *Heated Rivalry* stars Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams dig into the show's runaway success.
- "I think I saw someone say that I am 'America's ass,' which I was not expecting that at all," Storrie says.
- The pair share the stories behind viral moments, including their interpretive dance at the wrap party. "Very plainly spoken, me and Hudson are freaks."

Shortly after landing in Los Angeles this week, Texas native Connor Storrie and Kamloops-born Canadian Hudson Williams surprised the patrons of Hi Tops, the gay sports bar in West Hollywood, during Tuesday's trivia night. It was a chance for the two breakout stars of *Heated Rivalry* to thank all the legions of fans for making their steamy hockey romance an overnight sensation.

"Thank you for tweeting about our butts," Storrie told the crowd.

The gents behind Ilya Rozanov (Storrie) and Shane Hollander (Williams), two rival professional hockey players who succumb to their sexual attraction, are only now coming to terms with the drama's runaway success. The modestly scaled six-episode first season, based on Rachel Reid's *Game Changer* novels, was initially produced for Canadian streaming platform Crave but quickly went international. They have a fervent romance-loving BookTok crowd and an HBO Max rollout to thank.

Storrie and Williams are now taking their show on the road amid the hype. Among a string of Stateside press interviews, the pair speaks with *Entertainment Weekly* about their new star status, all the thirsty online responses, what it's really like for them to film sex scenes, and the stories behind viral moments.

Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie) on 'Heated Rivalry'.
Credit: Sabrina Lantos

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY: It's been so entertaining following the show because, as both of you have realized, fans have no chill when it comes to tweeting about it online. What is the wildest compliment you've received on social media since the show came out?

CONNOR STORRIE: Well, first of all, my butt has been a big topic of conversation.

HUDSON WILLIAMS: It's a great butt.

STORRIE: I think I saw someone say that I am "America's ass," which I was not expecting that at all. But, yeah, I love it. I'll take it. Feels good.

WILLIAMS: Some people feel like they were Shane. Some people felt like they were Ilya and they had a Shane. People who reach out and privately disclose something about how they don't really cry during shows or films, and then they're finally just a wreck during this one. And we're only three episodes in. Those ones are just wild to me because, as an actor, as someone who loves stories like these, it's what you dream of being a part of.

I feel like everybody has a different way of processing the show's success. François Arnaud [Scott Hunter] has said that he likes to take periodic social media breaks. Robbie G.K. [Kip Grady] isn't really doing a whole lot of interviews at the moment. You two seem to be having a ball taking the show on the road. So how would you both describe just existing in this world right now when the show has all of this intense affirmation?

WILLIAMS: Yeah, it's weird. Connor and I were talking about this, but it sort of feels like we were doubting the reception of it because we were like, "We're just in some bubble. This is just what we're hearing because we're in it. Our algorithms are just catering to us." But I'm in L.A. now and we've been stopped in the street. And then I was recently in Whistler in Vancouver and people are coming up. It's now starting to hit that maybe it's not a micro-bubble and it's becoming this bigger thing, but even then I can't really fathom it. But it sure means a lot.

STORRIE: Exactly the same thing.... Even before the show was coming out, my algorithm, anything online has been so geared towards *Heated Rivalry* that I've convinced myself this is just my device. Then the moment I came back from Canada, every single day I feel like someone's stopping me and being like, "I love the show."

Heated Rivalry

Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov on 'Heated Rivalry'.
Credit: HBO Max

How would you describe, I guess, the mental whiplash? 'Cause, Hudson, to your point, there's a large section of fans of this show who are gravitating towards the emotional elements. Then, Connor, to your point, there's a whole other faction from the romantic BookTok crowd who love the sex scenes.

STORRIE: It's really bizarre. I think the people who are really into these characters and the emotion, they know where it goes. They've read the books. They live with the end in mind. So everything has a double meaning to it. This scene is not just this steamy shower, post-workout scene. This is a moment where this person realizes this. And then I think you have the other side, which is people who are watching this with the context of the TV show, not the books. [The emotion] does land still, but I think that'll really solidify as an emotional journey and not just a physical one as we get into [episodes] 5 and 6.

WILLIAMS: They both feel congratulatory and a celebration from both those sides thus far. That's what really means a lot, whether they're celebrating the more, I guess, surface-level elements versus the story being poignant to a degree. Both are just happy about this show and what it does.

STORRIE: I want to add, also, it's a really interesting experience watching something that is so overtly sexual and has a certain amount of nudity and sex 'cause we did that on set. I don't know about you [Williams], but when I watch it, I'm like, this is really not that raunchy because it's me. So there's not this element of separation, and we were literally doing the actions together. It's like, I remember doing that, but it's hard to remind yourself that anyone else who's seeing this was not there and did not watch this happen.

WILLIAMS: The fans get spontaneity, but we see mechanics. We see technique, rehearsal. We see Chala [Hunter, intimacy coordinator] going, "Knee little higher! Knee little lower! Hide your, like, little ballet slipper."

STORRIE: "Less face! More face!"

WILLIAMS: "More face! More tongue!" So we're seeing take 5 and then an edit, and other people are witnessing two people find a sexual language. So that's an interesting relationship, as well.

There's two videos that are online, both from your Instagram pages: I believe one from the wrap party where both of you are doing some kind of interpretive dance [seen in the above Instagram gallery], and then, Connor, the other one is on your Instagram. You're in a locker room photo shoot doing this pretzel pose with each other. What's the context behind those moments?

STORRIE: Very plainly spoken, me and Hudson are freaks. We're clowns. We just love to riff and have fun and go crazy, and those were two situations where we were caught off guard doing our thing. The wrap party, that was all improvised. I think we were just putting on a show.

WILLIAMS: Also, there might be something else, I think, with we're both very physical actors and movement is a huge part of it. Even with Shane, it doesn't look like he's the most physically expressive, but even then it was a physical choice. I think we both felt locked into our, you know...Like you [Storrie] felt somewhat limited by how Ilya can express himself. I felt very limited by how Shane can move and the fact that we both have the desire just as humans to always move and collaborate and express ourselves freely, it was almost like these movements were a release.

STORRIE: When we're not acting, it's like we have to get this out of our system. But also, that's just kind of how we operate. We're just clowns.

I wanted to ask you about two scenes from the show that people are absolutely obsessed with. Connor, one is when Ilya drags the chair across the room in episode 2. And, Hudson, there's a very small moment where Shane is chewing on the drawstrings of his hoodie. Can you walk me through how both of those happened in the moment?

STORRIE: If I remember correctly, that [the chair drag] was day 1 of filming.

WILLIAMS: Yeah, that was day 1 of filming....

STORRIE: It was like, we need a chair for him to watch. And then Jacob [Tierney, series creator] was like, "And then just pull the chair over that way." We were gonna push it, and then I just took it with one hand. It was very much Jacob and I literally looking at the logistics of [slips into Ilya's Russian accent], "We need chair here. Get chair here." You know?

WILLIAMS: It's a lot less sexy if you pick it up.

Heated Rivalry

Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander on 'Heated Rivalry'.
Credit: HBO Max

STORRIE: It's so hilarious, the things that are important or sexy or interesting. There's so many things that they pick online that when I watch it, it goes over my head 'cause it doesn't even feel like a choice. Another thing that everyone's going crazy about online is Hudson, "Wow, genetic." That line. When I read that and I think of it, it's just a moment of banter or whatever. It's these little things that we're not even aware of that people grab onto, and it's really cool. People are really invested.

WILLIAMS: I remember the drawstrings — I'm getting into a little bit of a double entendre here — I think Shane has an oral fixation. So when there was not a straw in my drink, I would ask them to give me one. If I'm texting, I'm putting the thing in my mouth. I'm always putting things in my mouth! And I'll continue to do that for season...if we get another season. There'll just be more things in my mouth.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity and brevity.

New episodes of *Heated Rivalry* arrive in the U.S. Fridays on HBO Max.

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