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The Naked Ambition of the *Heated Rivalry* Boys

Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams were both virtual unknowns when they signed up to take on the lifetime romance of a hockey enemies-to-lovers story for a Canadian streaming service. Now the two have become superstars, from navigating scholarship terrifying (and negotiating contracts) to embracing fame.

By Jason Bailey
Photographs by **Kristian Mattson** (Hudson Williams)
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Heated Rivalry is based on a Rachel Reid novel that just hit the New York Times bestseller list for the first time—a left-wing cover photo of a hockey player kissing another. Like the book, which is centered on Scott Hunter, the hot, charismatic LW, sensitive Jamison Bay Kenner (Storrie), who is stoic and Russian and plays for the fictional Montreal Metros, and Shane Hollander, the Metros' C, who is cold and Canadian and plays for the fictional equally fictional Montreal Metros, Tessa Blake, no camera, no Kissinger is involved, making *Heated Rivalry* a must-watch for anyone who filled Challengers but thought the chemistry was too subtle.

Hudson Williams
Sweater by Miu Miu, Jeans by Dolce & Gabbana, Gloves by Hestra, Sneakers by Nike, Sunglasses by Oliver Peoples, Earrings by Hoorsenbuhs, Other Jewelry and Vintage Jewelry Hudson's Own

None of this was supposed to happen. The more unlikely TV hit of 2025 was initially made for a small Canadian streaming service, Crave, and was shot on a million subscribers. The series premiered on Crave in January, but it wasn't (Nielsen) that sizzlin' hot. And fans of the books—there are six titles in all—started sharing tips on how to pirate episodes. Crave, which had 3.5 million subscribers, renewed the show for a second season, and then, in November, it became the most-streamed series in Canada with 1.9 million additional viewers. The series now suddenly drops into the global spotlight, which may explain why Hudson Williams did multiple on-camera interviews that first week in what can only be described as the highest-stakes *Zoom* call of the year.

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Survival attempts aside, the response was swift. Williams actually thought his algorithm had mistakenly convinced him the show was a hit. But Crave's parent company—Quebecor—is publicly traded, and the stock jumped 10 percent. Bay Kenner's character, Jamie, is a Russian hockey player and enemy of Scott Hunter's character, Shane, who is a Canadian hockey player and teammate of Scott Hunter's character, Scott. Williams's character, Shane,

Our interview is wrapping up but not before a third fan descends on our table for a photo, driving home exactly how odd this moment really is. Storrie and Williams are caught in that rare Hollywood vortex where you're famous but not yet rich. Like most people their age, they have roommates. Storrie still lives in that West Hollywood apartment with his sister; Williams tells me he lives in Vancouver with his mom. Both actors signed on for three seasons of *Heated Rivalry*: Crave has already greenlit season two. Worth noting: The minimum paycheck for a series regular role on Canadian TV could be as little as $6,792 a week.

When asked how bad the money really was, Williams mutters "it's very Canadian," but stresses he would have done the job for free. He says he cried after reading the first six scripts, seeing himself in the pages. Per Reid, the character Shane is on the autism spectrum; so is Williams's own father. And Shane feels a constant pressure from his family to be perfect.

"I could relate with that growing up," Williams says. "I had friends around me that were scholarship athletes. I didn't quite know my lane yet." He was also drawn to the queer storyline.

"I've always loved queer cinema," he says. "I love queer stories. There's something about them that I feel are very universal. *Moonlight* was a movie that shattered me. *Brokeback* was a movie that shattered me. It's the inability to express yourself—that something is so intrinsic in who you are, yet you feel it's inappropriate. You feel it's not celebrated, you feel societally less worthy. It's something very deep that you can't control."

A few days after we talk, *Heated Rivalry* sells in the UK and Ireland. Bloys praises his partners at Crave and Tierney, saying he's thrilled to continue airing the show, which makes sense. *Heated Rivalry* is HBO Max's top-rated live-action acquisition ever. "From an investment point of view," Bloys says, "it was a great deal for us." While HBO is not creatively involved with the series, he tells me he made Tierney one promise: "I did tell Jacob the one thing we would do was have a big, gay premiere in New York."

Tierney hopes to be back in production by the end of the summer, meaning it's unlikely we'll be seeing more of these men and their sticks until early 2027. Storrie and Williams understand how fickle the business can be, which is why they're both at work behind the camera. Storrie just finished shooting his feature directorial debut—a movie about aliens, which he shot on an iPhone. Williams, meanwhile, co-directed a short called *Rancid* that will play the Hollywood Shortsfest next year. A longtime comic book fan, he's also begun openly campaigning to play Nightwing in an upcoming *Teen Titans* project: in early December, he boldly tagged DC boss James Gunn on Instagram with an invitation to get coffee.

"I was just like, I won't really have another time to do this. I think I'm right for the part. Why not throw this shit up?" Williams explains. It's later reported that he's signed with the venerable talent agency CAA. In the past month, both actors have also notably hired stylists; Storrie wore Dolce & Gabbana to that party at the Chateau, while Williams was in Louis Vuitton with Bottega boots.

This is maybe the most obvious point in the world, but like their onscreen alter egos, Storrie and Williams also share a secret: They are the only two people in the world right now who understands what the other is going through. "They're living through a thing right now that is bananas—absolutely fucking bananas—and they're handling it with grace, with humor, with generosity," Tierney says. "They adore each other, which is like, *thank fucking God*."

Storrie admits it's hard to process, revealing he can't have Instagram on his phone. "You know how some people can't drink because they have a drinking problem? For whatever reason, my brain—the dopamine that it gets from being on social media—my body does not like it," he says. "So, I have to get rid of it or else I will be on it for five hours." When he's inspired to post, he downloads the app, then deletes it after.

He had a chance to take those old YouTube videos down ages ago, he says, but his intuition told him to leave them up, almost as a point of pride. "It felt like a full circle-acceptance moment of having these pretty cringey, really embarrassing videos of me being young out there," he says. "I was so embarrassed by them for so long. When I lived in France, I went to that private Catholic high school and I told people I wanted to be an actor." His classmates dug up the videos too, and "ostracized" him.

"It's so cool to be at a different place in my life and be like, *Fuck yeah. That is me. That is 12-year-old me trying something.* I think it's charming and cute."

He shrugs. "I'm an optimistic nihilist. I'm kind of like, Nothing really matters. Nothing is what it seems. Nothing deserves the amount of pressure."

PRODUCTION CREDITS:
Photographs by ***Callum Walker Hutchinson***
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