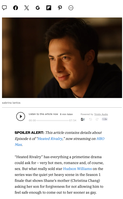
Hudson Williams on the 'Heated Rivalry' Finale, That Improvised Sex Scene and Shane's Talk With Mom: 'That Ruined Me the Most'

By Rory Malone

Dec 28, 2025 2:00am PT



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SPOILER ALERT: This article contains details about Episode 6 of "Heated Rivalry," now streaming on HBO Max.

"Heated Rivalry" has everything a primetime drama could ask for — very hot sex, romance and, of course, sex. But what really sold star Hudson Williams on the project was the emotional connection. The actor finds that shows Shane's relationship with Christian Clergy asking her sex for forgiveness for not allowing him to feel safe enough to come out to her sooner as gay.

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"That scene was the scene that trained me the most when I read the script," Williams tells me. "It was the scene that I was like, 'If I don't get to play Shane Hollander,' it's also a scene that's not in the book, but to me it's the quintessential love story scene to that and for him and his mom. Period."

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For those who may not already know, "Heated Rivalry" is Jacob Tierney's six-episode adaptation of Rachel Reid's romance novel about two men who hide their relationship. The show, acquired for U.S. distribution by HBO Max from Canadian streamer Crave, follows Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie), two superstar hockey players who fall in love as they navigate a secret years-long affair. The show has been greenlit for a second season.

The mother and son scene filmed over two days. "The first time we couldn't get through it because it started raining," Hudson recalls. "And then we came back the next day to shoot it, Jacob goes, 'I rewrote it.' So Christina and I are in the little makeup room of this little crap trailer, memorizing the scene, and it was so beautiful. It was so beautiful and so perfect. And I'm so glad that we did it a month prior should for because there are sentimental notions. There are old school ways of parenting that maybe we can leave in the past. As someone who thinks of raising their kids in the future and wanting to be a father, this is the environment you have to foster."

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We truly don't know until we see her accept him if she is going to accept him or reject him. Will she be like, "You've just ruined your career?" But in the end, she's talking about how this could be good for endorsement deals.

Shane gets a release in a degree, but I'm not sure it's a full one. I think Rozov's still a degree in Shane where it's like, a part of me wanted a bigger release. I remember learning and going, "I wish I could prove myself into I and completely get vulnerable." As an actor, that's never really been that hard for me. I was retrospectively trying to figure out why am I not fully able to get this. But then, I was like, "Oh, I'm not fully able because I'm not fully able." It's a little bit of a release he gets but not until, he's avoiding for a little bit. He can't look her in the eyes and half complaining like he's tired to all the standards of what he thinks this sweetness idea of what a man is between them.

I love that Ilya was the first to say, "I love you." He said it in the Russian monologue, but that doesn't count. Did Shane know exactly what Ilya was saying the first time?

The motherfucker lost me.

Were you surprised he said it first?

Yeah, but even though Shane doesn't say it first, he says all these things that are, if they're not love, what the fuck are they? You know, "Let's start a foundation," it's staying up in the middle of the night plotting their way. When Ilya says, "You think that far ahead, Hollander?" I do about this." Hollander is not a platonic he's a diligent worker. He's someone who is routine — that is, show up. He's a hockey player who has been playing hockey for years in the years. He does hockey player now. It's out of character to let this game plan run so far ahead. But it is because he loves this guy so much. It's think he, even though he didn't say it first, he made that cringe a home for Ilya to be able to say it.

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I thought the cottage was going to be, minus my French, a fuck fest. But this was more about the emotional journey and being a couple.

Jacob Tierney recently said it — it's boyfriend.

But then there's the blowjob scene. That was comedy.

That was improv.

What?

Yeah, to a degree. Connor and I were kind of goofing off in the makeup trailer, which was a cottage that was a two-minute drive away from the cottage, getting ready. I was preparing my monologue the whole morning. I'm prepping it, working it. Then Connor, being the great comedian he is, he's like, "Hey, I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm ready." Then he did something and we were kitting each other, goofing off. Then he's kitting me, kitting me and he did this drag, I was filming myself on my phone doing this. I was like, "Do that again," I couldn't hold in my laughter because it was so brilliant. It's so funny, and it makes sense for where they're at in the story. I remember thinking, I'm like, I'm so fucking nervous about this sex cracking. I'm like, "You have to do that." Then Jacob was like, "Go for it. Go crazy." The first take was the first time I broke forbs because Connor is taking all the liberties. I am shoving him. On slapping him back. I'm parting the phone away to get the groups and moans. I'm so happy with how that scene turned out.

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Shane and Ilya are finally comfortable with each other enough for that. They've let their guards down.

I heard Jacob say earlier today, "That's boyfriends." You know, I'm sure that Shane, Ilya have been, they've been buddy or your friends with benefits. You get that when you're in a relationship. In Episodes 1 and 2, it's hot — it's charged and hot. But now we have humor and levity within the sex.

What was it like filming in the cottage for the first time?

It's when sentimental of the show really matched the sentiment of where we are in filming. We had the last two days of shooting. The last scene we shot was Ilya talking about his mom when he's on top. I remember the first time we walked through there, I was like, "Jacob — this is, this is, this is, this is, this is, this is, this is." He was finally where Shane can be his everything, warts and as fun as he wants. He gets to be everything. They have those two weeks.

And then you literally ride off into the sunset.

It's still bittersweet. A lot of people have said that's a very happy ending, but I'm like, "This isn't a straight story." This is not the happy ending because they're still in the closet. They're not coming out in Reddick, they're not coming out to anyone. They get caught. It looks more like Impressions than gelato. That's where they're at. Forgiveness implies there's something that was wrongfully done.

There's shame around being caught. Just the word "caught" implies something to be ashamed about.

And they were just kissing. They're not fucking butt naked on the countertop.

Do you have any plans to leave the internet?

I have been periodically leaving the internet. I touch into the internet. I try to stay gone, but very luckily, it's been pretty warm. The hateful comments are easy to disregard is a degree because they're coming from such vile places of hate or they're just obsession. It's closer to trolling than it is criticism.

Also, "Heated Rivalry" is not reality. It's like a good rom-com where we get to fantasize about love and romance.

It's optimistic.

It's OK to be optimistic. So many people just want to be negative.

Even queer storytellers sometimes want to double down on pessimism. I think the reason why our show is doing so well is it doesn't want to reinforce the worst fears.

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Do you like buns melts?

I do, but I don't eat carbs or cheese. But as a treat, I'll take a buns melt with a mint brioche.

This Q&A has been edited and condensed.

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