ADVERTISEMENT

ELLE Digital Cover Star: Purbasma Roshan Is Just Getting Started
READ NOW

Top Things To See At India Design ID 2026
READ NOW

4 Street Style Trends From New York Fashion Week That You Can Copy Right...
READ NOW

ELLE Weaves: Inside Swarana's Habutai Silk Collection
READ NOW

LIFE + CULTURE

ELLE Exclusive: Hudson Williams And Connor Storrie On Bringing 'Heated Rivalry' To Life

Ahead of its India premiere on Lionsgate Play India, we sat down with the leading duo, Hudson and Connor, to unpack the phenomenon, and what makes Shane and Ilya so enduring.

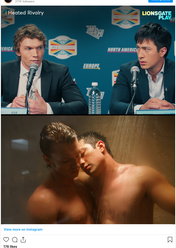
ELLE FEEL ELLE FEEL

As romantic dramas continue to dominate global streaming charts, *Heated Rivalry* starring Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander and Connor Storrie as Ilya Rozanov has emerged as one of the most talked-about series of the year, an adaptation that has not only electrified its existing fanbase but drawn in new audiences with its slow-burn tension and fiercely devoted performances.

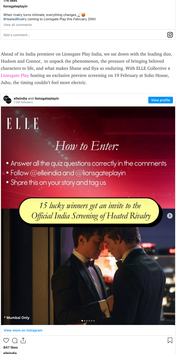
ADVERTISEMENT

via GIPHY

Based on the beloved novel by Rachel Reid, the series first built its cult following through word-of-mouth and online fandom spaces. What begins as a niche sports romance quickly evolved into a cultural phenomenon—fuelled by fan edits, discussion threads, and a growing appetite for layered queer storytelling that centers longing, and power dynamics with nuance rather than spectacle.



Ahead of its India premiere on Lionsgate Play India, we sat down with the leading duo, Hudson and Connor, to unpack the phenomenon, the pressure of bringing beloved characters to life, and what makes Shane and Ilya so enduring. With ELLE Collective x Lionsgate Play, hosting an exclusive preview screening on 19 February at Soho House, Juhu, the timing couldn't feel more electric.



At the center of the phenomenon are Hudson and Connor, whose portrayals of Shane and Ilya have turned fictional rivals into one of the most talked-about on-screen pairings of the year.

ADVERTISEMENT

The Making of Shane Hollander: "A Minor Miracle"

Shane is not a character who explains himself. He internalises. He listens. He absorbs. Which is precisely why casting him was such a challenge.

Storrie doesn't hesitate when asked what makes Hudson perfect for the role.

> *"I mean, Hudson, first of all, is a really good actor. I think people, if you don't know Hudson in his real life, you don't realise how transformative and different Shane actually is. Hudson is so enthusiastic, playful, and nerdy. I mean, he has a lot of the tenacity that Shane has, but it looks very different. So, I mean, I don't know if this makes any sense, but I think just being a really good actor is kind of what makes him the perfect Shane."*

It's the contrast that makes the performance so striking. Off-screen, Hudson is buoyant and playful. On-screen, Shane is tightly wound and emotionally guarded. The transformation is not cosmetic — it's behavioural.

Jacob Tierney the director, expands on why Shane was particularly difficult to bring to life:

> *"What Hudson had right away when I saw his tape was that he had, which it turns out was a totally wrong read on my part about him — being serious. But he is a good actor. In his seriousness, that came through when he read, and he had an ability. Shane was actually a really tricky character to write and a really tricky character to execute because so much of him is internal, and that requires a lot of active listening and a lot of letting your face do the work because he doesn't talk a lot, and I wasn't going to make him talk a lot because that was not part of who he is. And to be had to express a lot of things physically again, and I think that Hudson actually is an incredibly physical actor, and it shine through for Shane and makes it that you understand what he's feeling every step of the way, and that is a minor miracle with this performance."*

In a genre often dominated by grand confessions and sweeping gestures, Shane's power lies in what he doesn't say. The performance demands physical intelligence — the smallest shift in posture, the faintest tightening of the jaw. And it's precisely that restraint that has resonated so deeply with audiences worldwide.

The Making of Ilya Rozanov: The Performance Within the Performance

If Shane is internal tension, Ilya is theatre.

Charismatic. Arrogant. A self-styled playboy. But as Williams points out, that exterior is carefully constructed.

> *"Ilya is deeply sensitive on the inside as much as he doesn't want to show it. And the thing he wants to show is more of a performance in a way, his sort of playboy energy. And I think Connor is very much more adjacent to Ilya's self and, endearing, sensitive side that he didn't have to play. And that's the part of the show that's really going to make it read. And then the sort of showy, arrogant, playboy side was the performance. So that really fit Ilya. And Connor is sort of a bubbly linguist, and he loves languages. He loves accents. Half the time he's talking to you, he's like noticing what your mouth does or where your tongue is in your mouth when you say a certain word. (Laughs). But, it did take a lot of discipline for him to get it right and that pull off."*

What makes Connor's portrayal so compelling is that duality. The softness feels lived-in. The bravado feels constructed — because it is. Ilya's arrogance reads as armour, and when that armour cracks, the emotional impact is devastating.

Connor's fascination with language and accents work adds another layer to the performance. It's not just about delivering lines; it's about intonation, rhythm, tone, and physical speech patterns. That discipline shows. Every word feels intentional.

Why *Heated Rivalry* Matters in India Now

The arrival of *Heated Rivalry* on Lionsgate Play India signals more than just another international show entering the streaming catalogue. It represents a shift, towards romance that prioritises emotional intelligence, towards queer love stories that are not tokenistic but textured, and towards performances that trust audiences to sit in silence.

Globally, the show has sparked conversations about vulnerability in masculinity, about the performance of identity, about how much of who we are is armour. In India release brings those conversations home.

Also, read:

ELLE Exclusive: 'It's Not A No It's A Maybe,' Says Heated Rivalry Author Rachel Reid On More Shane And Ilya Books And The Finale Episode

ELLE Exclusive: 'Episode Three Was A Full 180', Robbie G.E. On Playing Kip In 'Heated Rivalry'

SHARE THIS ARTICLE

TAGS
HEATED RIVALRY

WRITTEN BY
ZAYA MODIA

RELATED STORIES

LIFE + CULTURE
Manifestation Is A Practice, Not A Fantasy
FEB 16 2026 READ 5MIN.

LIFE + CULTURE
Can Technology Decode Love? Inside AI's Growing Role In Relationships
FEB 16 2026 READ 5MIN.

LIFE + CULTURE
Lesbian Pulsar And The Art Of Becoming Ona Camera
FEB 16 2026 READ 5MIN.

ELLE is for women who love fashion, feminism, politics and debate and who are always tapped into the cultural zeitgeist.
SUBSCRIBE NOW

© Copyright 2025 Elle