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TV

This Pre-Fame *Heated Rivalry* Interview With Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie Feels Like a Time Capsule

From the *Teen Vogue* vault, we present the *Heated Rivalry* stars' first-ever in-depth joint interview, conducted before the show even came out.

BY MAX GAO

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Editor's note: This interview with Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie about Heated Rivalry *was originally conducted on November 11, 2025, for this story, published on Nov. 20. It is now being reprinted in its entirety, edited only for clarity.*

Last April, I began to hear the first rumblings of a low-budget Canadian gay hockey romance that was being filmed in Toronto, about a half hour away from where I grew up. At the time, *Heated Rivalry*, a TV series based on the second book in author Rachel Reid's *Game Changers* series, was in the nascent stages of being adapted by Jacob Tierney—one of the creative forces behind the cult favorite Canadian sitcoms *Letterkenny* and *Shoresy*—for a little-known national streamer called Crave.

For the next few months, I kept a close eye on the groundswell of support around *Heated Rivalry*. The initial casting announcement in June delighted book readers, many of whom could scarcely believe that their favorite smutty gay hockey romance novel was being brought to life. The first glimpse of Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie as Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov—the characters whose clandestine love affair would drive the arc of the first season—only stoked the growing fan frenzy.

Read more: Inside 'Heated Rivalry,' the Gay Hockey Romance Series Changing Queer TV

By the fall, it was clear to me that the *Heated Rivalry* team was about to strike gold. (My editor at *Teen Vogue*, thankfully, was on the same page.) Despite the fact that the show had yet to find a distributor outside of Canada, I reached out to Crave in early October to negotiate writing the first major story about *Heated Rivalry*. After weeks of back and forth, I landed two interviews—one with Tierney alone, one with Williams and Storrie paired—in early November.

On November 11 at around 1 p.m. ET, less than three weeks before the first two episodes were slated to premiere, I found myself on a three-way video call with the stars. I was calling in from a location a couple hours outside Toronto; Williams was at home in Vancouver; and Storrie, who had been shooting his directorial debut, was taking a quick break at his home in Los Angeles. Storrie was dressed in a black T-shirt and donned a baseball cap with the word "MALIBU" emblazoned on the crown; Williams wore a cozy-looking lilac hoodie. Before I pressed record, they confessed that they had yet to do an extended interview together. (In retrospect, I may have been preparing them for the whirlwind press tour they would embark on a week later.)

Williams and Storrie were articulate and earnest, even as they navigated the delicate task of discussing their shared intimacy on screen. Despite their limited experience with the press, their connection translated through the screen; even on Zoom, I could see glimpses of the crackling chemistry that had originally sealed the deal for Tierney and the production team. But none of us could have predicted how quickly the show would hit the cultural zeitgeist.

In the two-and-a-half months since that conversation, Williams and Storrie have found themselves at the center of a pop culture phenomenon. They have carried the Olympic torch in Italy, made their late-night talk show debuts, presented at the Golden Globes, and walked into industry parties where their peers—the artists they grew up idolizing—are making a beeline to talk to them. Only Williams and Storrie can truly understand just how profoundly their lives have changed. They're already a world away from the people they were when we first sat down for the chat, below.

***Teen Vogue*: Jacob Tierney, the creator of *Heated Rivalry*, told me that he knew that you were the right actors to play Shane and Ilya as soon as you guys read on Zoom together. It's hard to gauge chemistry on a video call like the one we're on right now, but what specifically do you remember from that process of reading together?**

Hudson Williams: I remember the first read with Connor because he was the second actor I read with. I was briefed that he was American, but as soon as I got in the audition room with him, I thought I was talking with a Slavic Russian boy. I thought his parents must be Russian because everything he was doing was so perfectly Ilya. I had already read lots of the book at that point and knew the characters, and his face was so hard to read. [*Storrie breaks out into a shocked smile.*] It was frustrating for me because he was going off script a little bit. He wasn't always smiley, and then sometimes if I really got to him, it would just be like a [*imitates slight curve of the lips*]—that's all I got.

Connor Storrie: [*Laughs.*] I was not expecting that as an answer to that question.

HW: But that helped me because I had to win your approval.

CS: Wow. That was crazy. I don't know how I knew it was him. I had read with two other guys before that and they were good, and I was like, "OK, cool." But then he was the final one, and it was just head and shoulders above the rest. It was just an organic thing. I feel like also there's something with acting, there's something about pace and tone that you can kind of direct into that, but we naturally were on the same pace and tone, which made it click really well. I felt like we were of the same universe, or we had the same understanding of what the moment needed to look and feel like.

***TV*: Do you remember which scenes you read together in that chemistry read?**

CS: There's one where I'm talking about Russia, where we're having a heart to heart about why we can't do this or why this can't make sense.

HW: Yeah. It's the scene where [as Shane] I come to his hotel room, and I'm coming out to him with my full understanding of myself. And then you're saying the reason why we can't do this and why that's impossible because of Russia and everything. And then our other scene was the scene that we did in the bathroom. It was right after the award speech, and you kind of just showed up late. We hadn't been texting for months, and you're a little bit of a sh*t.

***TV:* What do you think Shane and Ilya see in each other that makes them question everything they thought they knew about themselves? Why are they so drawn to each other in the first place?**

CS: Ilya likes Shane because Shane is very earnest. He's very easy to read, and I think that's really charming and very different from Ilya. Ilya has that hardened Eastern European thing where he's not going to let you know exactly what he's thinking, because he's not going to let you be in control of the situation. He sees Shane try so hard, be so earnest, and give everything his 100% openly, which is, whether he means to or not, a sense of vulnerability. I think he probably finds that very charming. And, also, if he likes being the best at something, then he's going to be turned on by someone who is the best.

HW: Yeah, I would agree with that last statement too. I think that's true for Shane as well—Ilya is his counterpart and is sort of like his inverse. He's just as good as Shane and sometimes threatens him—maybe he's better than him, but he goes about it in a completely different way. I think some of it helps Shane see hockey and life in just a different way, that there's another way to go about it that's so different. They've arrived at the same spot [professionally], but Ilya is the party animal; he's the playboy. Shane is just pure discipline and focus. I think someone else proving that you can go about it a different way is just so alluring to Shane, both as a person and a competitor.

***TV:* There's a question that I always love asking actors who play love interests in a project, because the answers are sometimes very different. Between Shane and Ilya, who do you think fell first, and who fell harder?**

CS: I think that Ilya has more life experience, so his definition of love and appreciation is probably a little bit more profound at first. And also, I think just culturally, there's an intensity—it's kind of like making friends in Europe. Here in North America, we're very nice, but we're not always kind. We can be like, "Hey, how are you?" But when it comes to coming over to someone's for dinner, everyone's like, "OK, then let's do it." And then you're kind of like, "Oh, OK… Are we *really* going to do it?" In Europe, someone won't talk to you for a week straight, but once you're their friend, they're going to be like [*slips into Ilya's Russian accent*], "If you need to come to my house [for anything], you can do it." Once Ilya is locked in, he's locked in. I think Ilya liked Shane at a higher level earlier. I think Shane started feeling romantic first, but once Ilya felt that, it went through the roof.

HW: In the book, Ilya sees Shane's freckles. There's something about it that's immediately alluring, and I think Ilya has less walls up in the sense that he can just kind of be okay with that feeling arising, whether or not it leads to infatuation or something. But I think there's something a little bit more chaotically kinetic in Shane because there's the intense sort of attraction. He doesn't know what it is. But then there's also the internalized homophobia that just wants to punch whatever it is back down and into place. I think that sends Shane into a little bit more of a panic.

CS: Totally. We talked about how [when] it starts out and it's sexual or whatever, Ilya is comfortable with that. He can deal with that domain, because it's a surface-level thing. He has no qualms about his sexuality and what that means—which is not the same for Shane. But then when it comes to romance, Shane is pretty emotionally regulated in that sense, even if he's not very experienced. He's at least upfront and honest about that. But then that's when it gets too much for Ilya. So there's this dance that happens [between them].

***TV:* Both of your characters have such a fascinating interior life that is immediately clear, just from the first two episodes that I watched. Shane has this very clear need for control and structure in his life—and it's something that Ilya gives him a hard time about in both of their books. By contrast, Ilya has a tendency to do or say the opposite of what he really means, and it's not until later in the first book that he is able to open up about his difficult upbringing. How would you characterize your character's inner struggles? Why do you think there may be a disconnect between how they're feeling on the inside and how they present themselves to the world?**

HW: There's a scene in episode six that I think is hitting the nail on the head for what Shane's struggle is. Everything needs to be perfect. It needs to be dialed in. I thought there was a comparison to be made with a Sidney Crosby or a Kobe Bryant in the sense that everything has to be regimented. I think, yeah, part of the internalized homophobia—[his sexuality] doesn't fit his idea of "perfect," because of his own internal biases that he might've not even recognized. I guess he adopted [these biases] without really consciously choosing to adopt these beliefs. So I think being perfect and being gay for some reason—for Shane, those two things don't fit. So the first time he falls in love is with Ilya, there's so many things to reconcile that just drive him insane. So I think the presentation of perfection and then really the entire story of *Heated Rivalry*, which is this romance—those two things for Shane are on opposite ends due to his own hangups.

CS: If Shane's thing is being perfect, I think Ilya's version of that is being powerful. Anyone who reads the book knows that his family dynamic, which becomes very important, comes up. I think his situation leaves him feeling very powerless. I think that being in hockey, obviously being a millionaire, being a star, being renowned is a sense of power. We see that a lot in the dynamic between Shane and Ilya. It's like, "I'm wanting to be in power. I'm not going to let you know exactly what I'm thinking, because I want to be in power. I'm not going to give you the time of day at first because I want to be empowered." I think that's his thing, honestly.

This is kind of crazy to say, but I always felt like Ilya doesn't really give a sh*t about hockey, and I'm pretty sure Rachel confirmed that on some level. The difference between Shane and Ilya is Shane loves hockey, [while] Ilya doesn't love hockey. I think it's more so the sense of being really fricking good at something, making a million dollars, and being on top.

***TV*: Jacob told me that, during the casting process, he wanted to give all of the actors who were auditioning to play Shane and Ilya all of the scripts, or at least he wanted to make sure that they knew what they were signing up for, because this show is a lot to ask of a young actor. He also told me that you guys shot a sex scene on your very first day of filming. Is that true? What scene did you shoot?**

HW: Vegas, baby! It's [the] "Show me" scene [in episode two]. It's me on the bed.

CS: No, that was not day one.

HW: Yeah, it was.

CS: Nuh-uh. There's no way. Wait, are we allowed to talk about this stuff? Are we allowed to talk about scenes like this? [*Laughs.*]

***TV*: Yes, you are.**

CS: What was it, Hudson? I don't think we were in Vegas. Because the first day, we did that interview thing [where Shane and Ilya are at a press conference in the pilot]—

HW: And then we went to your Vegas penthouse.

CS: Was that day one?!

HW: Yeah. Someone told me this a little while ago, and my memory is so awful that I just believed them. I could be completely wrong about everything. I'm pretty sure we did the interview first. We did all that stuff. We did all that stuff, and then we went into Vegas.

CS: We did a dramatic conversation, and then—

HW: We did that sex scene.

CS: Wow. I remember day one was really nerve-wracking, but I remember Jacob being like, "Well, there's a little bit of everything, so we're going to really see how this goes." We jumped around. I think we were in five different years or something crazy on day one. I remember doing the first scene of the day—

HW: The foot tap.

CS: Which is in episode one. I remember after we did that, we both kind of looked at each other. It went so fast, and we were both like, "I don't know, are we doing it? Is this working?" And then [Tierney] was like, "Okay, we got it. Let's move on!" And we were like, "Okay."

HW: The fear on our faces was just real fear from that being the very first thing we shot.

CS: I remember being like, "Ooh, I don't know if I'm doing it or not, but you never know."

HW: But before that, we went through all the sex scenes with our intimacy coordinator [Chala Hunter] and Jacob. We walked through every single one that the show contains, and we went through it just so we had an emotional understanding of the scene and a rough idea of what the [camera] blocking would look like. So I remember, at first, it's very professional, and some people are rushing to you with the robes. I think even by the end of day one, the grips would come back, and then our little costume girl would be holding the robes, and we were like, "Oh, yeah. I guess we'll take 'em." We already got to that point of comfort with each other.

CS: You get comfortable with each other *really* quick. Luckily, me and Hudson get along so well that we're both naturally very comfortable with one another. At first, when you're in your little intimacy outfit, you're like, "Oh, God, here we go. My butt's out." [*Laughs.*] And then really quick, you realize just how much of a job it is for everyone else too. And then it's like, "Alrighty, let's do this."

***TV:* Once you signed on to this show, did you ever feel any trepidation about what you were having to bare physically and emotionally to tell this story?**

CS: I just knew that the Russian thing was going to be super hard. I had 25 pages of Russian dialogue. I was speaking in a completely different accent. That was the one thing where I'm like, "I hope I pull that off." So that was kind of my thing up until the first day of filming. We had spent a week in Toronto before we even started, and we had become friends even before that, and we would check in and it was like, "What are you doing?" And I'm like, "Oh, I'm studying Russian for four hours today."

HW: Four hours! So many four-hour Russian lessons.

CS: So it was just these long lessons, and I did that for two weeks before I left. I think I had Russian sprinkled throughout the first three weeks of the shoot. I think we killed all the Russian within the first month of the shoot. And then, the second half, I was able to not focus on that, and it was a totally different experience. So my fear was, "How do we pull this off?" Because it's the worst when you watch a show or a movie, and you feel like the language or the accent was a second thought. At least for me, I love languages, so I really want to believe it.

HW: My fear was a little different. I've told Jacob this. I think he's going to slap me for saying it again. [*Laughs.*] But no, I was familiar with *Letterkenny* and *Shoresy*. I was a fan. That show was a defining cultural moment in high school too. But those shows have more of a bright sitcom look to them. I remember at one point not knowing how to ask Jacob. And this show—it's moody, it's steamy, it looks beautiful. But at the time, I just felt it was going to look like *Shoresy* for some reason, but then with this sex. So I pictured bright lights, no shadows, like you'd be able to see every pore of me in all these [sexual] positions. [*Storrie and Williams both laugh.*]

So I remember going up to Jacob and going, "Is it going to look like *Shoresy*?" And he goes, "*What*? No, God, no! It's different. It's going to be moody." I was like, "Okay, cool. Good to know." And I think on day one, when me and Connor came back to the monitor after doing this scene [in Vegas] and we watched it back, it was of course dimly lit. I think we both were going like, "I did not think it would look *this* sexy and this moody." [*Storrie laughs.*]

CS: I love how you're not saying it looked so good—

HW: It looked so good!

CS: But you're like, "It was so nice and dark in there!"

HW: Yeah, you can't even see me, which is what I really wanted.

CS: "You can't even see me, which is what I love."

HW: It's a black screen! Yeah, no. I was scared about the look. And then as soon as I saw that day one, all my fears were assuaged, and I was just ready to go.

CS: I think that's a very logical and normal fear too. That happens with anything, unless it's already an established project. Because the look and the feel really informs a lot of the tone. What kind of thing are we making? What is the energy that we're bringing to it? Because there's a reason why *Heated Rivalry* is lit and shot and decked the way it is, and then there's a reason why *Shoresy* and *Letterkenny* have that look. It's a different feeling. It sounds surface level, but underneath that, there's a really good filmmaking fear.

HW: Yeah, and it's a testament to Jacob. Me being just a dummy, I was like, oh, "Both [shows] have hockey, look the same." And no, he and Jackson Parrell, our wonderful DP, tell a completely different story with just the camera. He's just the best.

***TV:* Jacob has remarked that *Heated Rivalry* contains a lot of smut, but the sex scenes are supposed to reveal new sides of the characters and their relationship. How did you think about building and evolving the sense of intimacy between your characters over these six episodes? And how many of the sex scenes from the book did you actually adapt for the series?**

CS: The intimacy to build the connection—a lot of that was a dialogue out loud between us and Chala and Jacob, because, to be honest with you, the intimacy scenes become so choreographed that really when we're in it, we're focusing on a lot of the choreography of it. So [we were] establishing an energy that's going to come out beforehand that we can just make subconscious. I think everything that's in the book, we do [adapt].

HW: Basically everything.

CS: Obviously, they just don't show every little detail that is described. But it's very reminiscent of the book.

HW: I think a lot of people, especially North American audiences, are thinking the sex is just a selling point or the lower brow thing on top of the real story. But, to me, it felt like the blocking of the sex scenes and how those looked, and the intimate scenes, were just as important as the long dialogue scenes. If some people were to think, "Oh, okay, this is the sex scene. I can just turn off my brain and close my eyes," they would be missing the story and a lot of the communication that goes from point A to point B. In every single intimate scene in the show, we start somewhere different than where we end.

There's no sex scene that's like the last one, that's there just to feed people's desires or whatever. It's always in service of the story in really dramatic ways. So I feel like a lot of the times, we were like, "Oh, let's do that again." It was making those moments so dialed-in that they were perfect, or as close as we could possibly get in the time, to telling the story and where the characters are and where they're going by the end of them.

***TV:* You two are playing millennials on the show, but all three of us are Gen Z. This show will likely be consumed by a lot of viewers who are around our age, but at the same time, some recent studies have shown Gen Z don't want to watch sex on TV. Why do you think younger audiences may have an aversion to sex, and how does it feel to bring sex—and more specifically queer sex—back to TV?**

CS: They haven't seen *Heated Rivalry* yet! I'm surprised that Gen Z doesn't like sex on TV.

HW: I kind of take issue with people writing off sex on TV. I'll see those comments. I'll see the people kind of going, "Oh, is there really a need to show this?" And I've always had a problem with that, because, of course, there are the times when it's low-hanging fruit, and people are just using it to sell something and just smack it on there. But since cinema was created, there have been beautiful, usually European filmmakers, a lot of Asian filmmakers, that have a very sex-forward view. Like this show, I also think of *Normal People*. The sex was a part of driving the story forward. It wasn't gratuitous. It was real, it was beautiful, sometimes ugly, but always really story-focused. I feel like our show does the same thing.

So I think as long as filmmakers and artists that come on board something all have a clear view of the writing of the action of these scenes, there's always room for it. I think there's a lot more road we have to pave, because it's not like we've told every story that involves sex. There's going to be a lot more. And as long as everyone's mature enough and smart enough to tell that story properly and make everyone on set feel safe, I think it must still be in shows and movies going forward.

***TV:* The fan response to this show is unlike anything I have ever seen before. Fans are campaigning for distribution deals. You are both developing profiles before the show has even launched. As you prepare to embark on your first press tour, what have you made of the rabid fan response to these characters, and what does it mean to you to bring that kind of LGBTQ representation to the forefront of Canadian—and, ultimately, global—television?**

CS: I think it's beautiful. I think it's really great—the responses that we've gotten so far individually, the messages I've gotten, the comments I've seen. I try not to stay online too, too much just because I go down the rabbit hole, and my dopamine gets all messed up and my brain gets all fogged up. But everyone's been super lovely. I think everyone's just really excited.

Shane and Ilya are really important to a lot of people, and a lot of different types of people feel seen by these guys. I think a lot of queer women, a lot of non-binary people, really feel seen by these people that kind of live in the gray, that live in this underrepresented middle ground that you don't really see in society. So I think it's very relatable to a lot of different people. I think it's really cool to be that and explore that and show a certain facet of that. I think that's why people like it… And the sex! [*They laugh.*]

HW: Yeah, it has been overwhelming. There have been so many people who just send nice messages. And then even some people came up to me after the show wrapped. Some people who are a part of the show were saying just how much the show means to them. Even some people who grew up in sports and felt they couldn't come out or be true to their own identity was a unique thing that the show has going for it as well, that I think is really special that we get to be the ones that share this story.

I'll steal something that Jacob said from another interview, and he told me this as well before we started shooting: It's a gay story where no one dies of AIDS, and no one goes back to their wives. A lot of the queer representation in films and TV that I've seen—a lot of times, there is a tragic element to it. This story does just drive towards the good. The show is so unabashed. There's no shame. The show is just proud to be what it is. And unlike a lot of things I've seen, I think that's causing a lot of attention as well. It is just really sweet to be a part of, and to have so many good people on board who are all positive and just all really wanting to share in the glory of getting to tell such a beautiful story is just really sweet.

***TV:* When I was preparing for this interview, I was scrolling through your Instagram feeds and found that you both got "SEX SELLS" tattoos. Whose idea was it for you guys to get matching tattoos?**

CS: When I went to Vancouver, I went to visit Hudson for a week. I didn't realize it, but from L.A. to Vancouver, it's like two hours and 300 bucks, so I'm going out there all the time now. We knew we wanted to get a little tattoo together, just to commemorate our connection and being on the show because it's pretty momentous for both of us. We really are just the best of friends, so we were just like, "Let's do it." We had so many ideas before "SEX SELLS."

HW: A clown, hockey sticks, Rachel Reid.

CS: We didn't want to do anything that was too *Heated Rivalry* on the nose, and I think I came up with "SEX SELLS."

HW: Yeah, you did. I think sometimes I'd come up with an idea and Connor would be like, "No," and then you'd come up with an idea, and I'd be like, "What?" He finally said, "SEX SELLS," and my eyes lit up.

CS: I like it because it's on the surface provocative. It's kind of like, "Oh, what is that?" But at the end of the day, we got to meet each other and got to have, for me, one of the coolest experiences of my life doing something on the surface that is based in sex, and what we get out of that, and what people find attractive about that. It's meta for me in that sense where it's, on the surface, provocative. But underneath it, it's about connection and experience. For me, when I make decisions like that, I just go with the impulse and I'm like, "This is what we have to do." And then retrospectively, I can be like, "Oh yeah, *that* is why that felt correct." But in the moment, I think we were both just like, "SEX SELLS," and we were like, "Yep, yep. That's it."

HW: There's a tongue-in-cheek element. It's provocative, but then below, it's—

CS: Meaningful.

HW: Yeah. I think it's sort of a meta understanding of, yeah, we know sex has always sold. But underneath, there's an unwritten understanding there that there's a lot more, that there's a connection. There's so much that comes from a lot of sex on the surface.

TV: Jacob has yet to reveal his plans for future seasons of this show, but he did option all of the books in Rachel Reid's *Game Changers* series, so there is certainly a lot of material that he can adapt; there are characters who appear in the first season who could theoretically become important down the line. Is there something in particular from Shane and Ilya's second book, *The Long Game*, that you would really like to adapt in a potential second season?

CS: I would just love to do that whole book. My controversial opinion is, I liked *The Long Game* more than *Heated Rivalry*. I hope nobody kills me for that! [*Laughs.*] I thought *The Long Game* was great. I would love to do every single second of that thing. I'm so invested in that book for some reason.

HW: I don't want to spoil scenes that people who haven't read the books don't know about. But I would say a particular scene with Hayden's kids would be really rewarding. [*Storrie nods.*] And one scene I just want to get knee deep in and pull up the gloves on is the commissioner scenes. I want to get in that room. I want to be in front of whoever's cast as that commissioner. I want to seethe. I want to see red. I'm going to punch him in the mouth. It's going to be unscripted. The actor won't see it coming. I feel bad for whoever it is. Jacob will disapprove.

CS: For a second, I thought you meant Hayden's kids. I was like, "Oh, who's getting punched?" [*Laughs.*]

HW: I'm punching Hayden's kids! No. [*Laughs.*] Those commissioner scenes are so well-written, and they just piss you off. I think those are going to be really fun in their own regard.

CS: You know what's funny? Whenever we answer these questions, this shows how we kind of are meant to play Shane and Ilya. He always brings it back to hockey on some level, which is so Shane. And I am always like, "Yeah, I want to cry with you." [*Laughs.*] I think that shows our dynamic.

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