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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

# 'Heated Rivalry' Stars on How Their Personal Love Language Fueled Shane & Ilya's Intimacy

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### WHAT TO KNOW

- The romantic drama *Heated Rivalry* explores the love story between rival hockey players Shane and Ilya over several years.
- Actors Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie spoke with *Swoon* about approaching the show's intimate moments, highlighting the importance of small, intimate gestures.
- Series creator Jacob Tierney also elaborated on the “magnetism” between Shane and Ilya.

### **[Warning: The below contains MAJOR spoilers for *Heated Rivalry* Season 1 Episodes 1-2]**

If you need a moment to wipe the steam off your screen before you read this, we completely understand, because the two-episode premiere of *Heated Rivalry* is so hot we're still catching our breath. (We've already [ranked the sexiest moments](#) so far. It's *that* hot.)

The Canadian series, now streaming on HBO Max, wastes no time cranking up the heat between rival hockey players Shane Hollander (**Hudson Williams**) and Ilya Rozanov (**Connor Storrie**), who have no business being as feral for each other as they are behind closed doors. But in the opening shots of this enemies-to-lovers story, something else — something more subtle — is also at play.

As Shane and Ilya spend more time together, they can't keep their hands off each other — literally. Even when they aren't devouring the other in various ways, they are touching. In Episode 1, when Ilya tells Shane he wants to have sex with him, Shane's hesitation (it's his first time after all!) gives Ilya a moment to just casually graze his bare thigh and plant a gentle kiss on his shoulder. At one point, before their clothes ever come off in another of their many hotel encounters, they immediately put their hands on each other's chests. On the rooftop in Las Vegas, they can't get close enough with tuxedos on. When they finally have sex in Episode 2, Ilya rests his head on Shane's chest, and Shane starts caressing Ilya's arm. Those little moments of intimacy beyond the very athletic positions they otherwise find themselves in came naturally to Storrie and Williams.



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“We’re both pretty tactile people in terms of love languages and how you express yourself,” Storrie told *Swoon*. “We both like physical touch, whether it’s with

friends, family, partners. When these characters are feeling good towards each other, I think we knew consciously to allow that to come out. The fun of that ends up being what it looks like [for Shane and Ilya], and how it is different from us, personally. That's an impulse that is kind of naturally within us. We also became super close, super quick, so that makes it even easier, too."

While Shane and Williams aren't the same person by any means (Williams says he is still getting his footing on the ice, where Shane excels), the need to establish that physical touch to build relationships is very important for both.

"Just with friends, I don't feel like I am fully able to be earnest with them if I don't establish a touch barrier with them — consensually, of course!" Williams said with a laugh. "But the similarity for me and Shane is that, especially when we're in love, there needs to be constant touching even when the scene isn't intimate in that sort of way."

*Heated Rivalry* was always going to be a sexy show if it stayed true to **author Rachel Reid's book**. After seeing the first two episodes, there is no concern that being faithful to the source material will be a problem. But for **Williams and Storrie**, the **intensive sex scenes** weren't the hard part. It was giving themselves over to that language of intimacy in more subtle ways.

"Sometimes, a rough sex scene might be easier than just a conversational scene where you want to kind of touch a leg or touch a shoulder," Williams said. "It can feel like a 10-mile drive to brush a cheek. But we had such a good relationship that I was able to express myself in that way through Shane and with Connor. That was really lovely."

Series creator, writer, and director Jacob Tierney revealed that he had conversations with his stars about those little moments of connection that likely won't get as many headlines but are nevertheless important to building the initially reluctant relationship between Shane and Ilya.

“We talked about how every time these guys aren’t touching, they want to be,” he told *Swoon*. “So the act of not touching should be more difficult for them than touching. They would want to be physical with one another, and that’s part of the public/private dance that they do, and the frustration of being in public.”



HBO Max

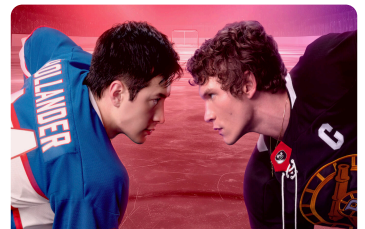
In the premiere, the press conference scene when Shane comes to Ilya’s rescue, is one of the first times they blur that dangerous line between playful rivals and hungry partners. Under the table, they touch shoes as a means of getting even a taste of the other’s support in a shaky moment.

“There’s a magnetism because there are two characters that essentially have this chemistry immediately,” Tierney added. “This magnetic electric thing is happening

between them, and they do not get to satisfy it because they're not allowed to be physical with each other the way that they would like to be in public."

As the series progresses, Shane and Ilya's relationship is going to encounter some rough ice, from their own issues and from the outside world. Inevitably, it makes it harder for them to embrace that quieter physical language. But Williams said they were always talking about the opportunities to bring it out in their characters.

"Even the moments when they're not touching, there's a yearning to touch," Williams added. "There's a good period in the show where they've kind of broken that barrier, and there's a little bit more comfort. But the language of physical communication still has a beautiful evolution where it gets more comfortable by the time you reach the later episodes. It's changes quite a bit, and I think having a great intimacy coordinator and Jacob there, they were able to help navigate us that language and remind us of where it could possibly be harder in moments for Shane and Ilya, and where we can just fully envelop each other with everything we want to do."



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