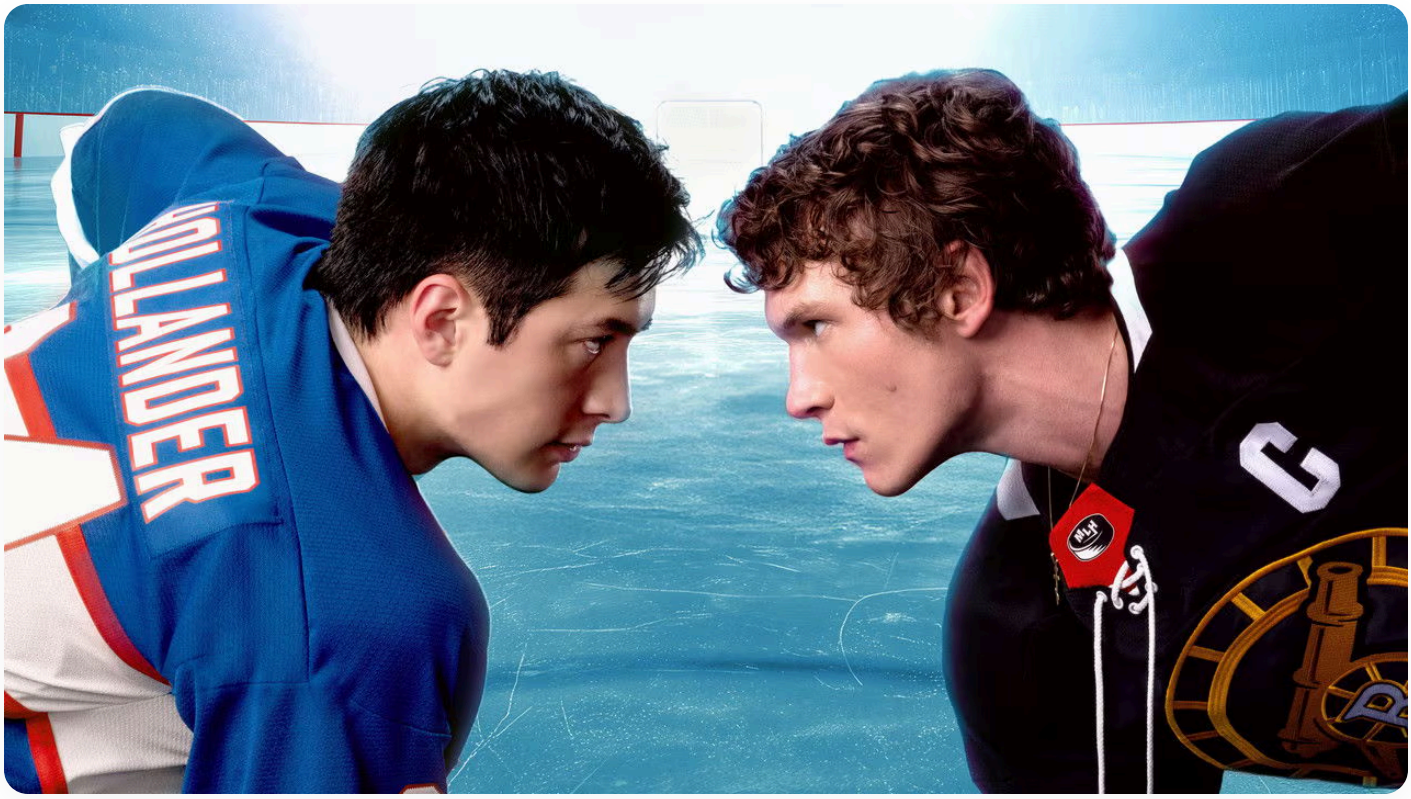
TV SHOWS

Heated Rivalry turned Crave into a buyer magnet, and Hudson Williams' Yaga is the next test

Bell Media's Sean Cohan wants Canada's biggest global hit to become a template, and Yaga is already pre-sold to AMC, Sky and HBO Max



Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie in Heated Rivalry. Image: Crave



By **Veronica Loop**
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When Sean Cohan left A+E to run Bell Media, one of his goals was elevating a Canadian creative brand that, in his words, "has been misunderstood or underestimated." *Heated Rivalry* has become his strongest argument.

Changers novels, has international buyers asking what Crave, the Bell Media streamer that greenlit it, is making next, and Cohan calls it "the biggest global hit that Canada's ever produced."

As Deadline's Stewart Clarke reports, Cohan is now backing Canadian producers to find the next *Heated Rivalry*, betting that Canadian content has become hot international property. The show, which streamed on HBO Max in the US alongside its Crave launch, made global stars of **Hudson Williams** and Connor Storrie, who play rival players Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov. "Why can't we make that in a way that exports around the world? And then we went and did it," Cohan says.



> **'Heated Rivalry' Season 2: Why the Internet Cast Justice Smith Before the Show Did**

The first test of that thesis is *Yaga*, a witchy folklore drama set in a coastal town called Whittock that pairs Williams with Carrie-Anne Moss. Sphere Abacus, the distributor that helped finance *Heated Rivalry* and that Bell acquired last year, has pre-sold the series to AMC in the US, Sky in the UK and HBO Max in continental Europe, among others. Managing director Jonathan Ford says the sales were done off the script and casting, but admits "there's an element of having wind in the sails from *Heated Rivalry*."

Yaga will be heavily promoted at MIPCOM, and the slate behind it includes another *Heated Rivalry* face. Queer softball drama *Slo Pitch* heads to the international market alongside *Meatballs*, inspired by the **Bill Murray** movie and starring *Heated Rivalry*'s Robbie G.K., and *Bulges*, set in a Hooters-like bar with an all-male staff and starring Mark-Paul Gosselaar. "Canadian programming can fit with different audiences," Ford argues, suggesting some Canadian storylines may land with US viewers more easily than some British ones.

Cohan says Crave was historically an under-marketed and under-utilized gem; Canadian originals now set it apart from the US-owned streamers, while HBO programming supplies premium firepower under a Bell pact that he says has been extended into the 2030s. The streamer recorded just

million by the end of 2028, but Cohan wants Crave in one of every two Canadian TV homes by the end of 2029, in a market of an estimated 15.8 million. *Heated Rivalry* itself returns for a second season in 2027, adapting Reid's sequel *The Long Game*. Cohan won't confirm a third run yet: "In success, this show continues."

AMC, Sky and HBO Max have already committed to *Yaga* on the strength of a script and a name made famous on the ice. The heat now falls on Crave and Sphere Abacus to prove Canada can do it twice.

TAGS: ip-strategy, Heated Rivalry, Hudson Williams, Yaga, Bell Media, Crave

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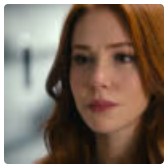
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