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BookCon 2026: Authors Rachel Reid, Stephanie Archer talk hockey romance and how it could change the sport for the better

"We're writing the world as we want it to be."

By Samantha Mangino on April 19, 2026

Credit: Samantha Mangino / Mashable

With the fervor of *Heated Rivalry*, there's a fierce desire among book readers for even more hockey. On Sunday, April 19, at BookCon, the "You Had Me at Hockey: A Look at One of Sports Romance's Hottest Genres", authors Rachel Reid (*Heated Rivalry*, *Game Changer*), Emily Rath (*Packing Around*), Ngozi Ukazu (*Check Please*), Stephanie Archer (*The Wild Card*), and Kate Cochrane (*Wake Up*, *Nat & Darcy*) were joined by moderator and fellow author Bal Khabra (*Collide*) to discuss the rise and continued success of hockey romance.

Khabra kicked off the panel, asking just how hockey became so popular. Ukazu joked that it was as if the genre "escaped containment," like when the Omegaverse went mainstream, while Reid described the mystery around hockey, saying, "what [the players] are doing seems impossible." Archer also added that the sport itself is exceptionally hard on the body, and the celebrity around players, especially in Canada, is fun to play with.

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But there's more to the genre's success than the tropes. "It has to be said," Rath argued, "that the cornerstone of why this is so popular in publishing is racism." She went on to say that straight, white women's voices dominated the romance genre for so long, pointing out that hockey is also the whitest sport. Among major league sports, the NHL is the most predominantly white. In 2022, ESPN reported that 8.6% of league players and staff were white, compared to the NFL, where 25-27% of players are white, or the NBA, where white players make up 17.5% of the league.

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Zooming into the genre, the authors also spoke about the writing process. They dove into the deeper aspects of their work, even the smut. Rath said, "I think the least sexy thing you can ever do is write a sex scene." A similar sentiment came up during Reid's Saturday panel, where she described using the sex scenes to further the emotional arc. When readers ask authors if they can skip the spice, Archer says of her own books, "No, you can't skip the sex scenes. You're missing so much character development if you don't go on the journey with them."

The panel turned to the future, too. Many of the authors write BIPOC and queer representation into their novels, in a genre that often centers on whiteness and homophobia. "We're writing the world as we want it to be," Rath said.

Reid has found that there is progress toward a future that these authors and their readers want to see, saying that the NHL is interested in working with them. "People on the inside, they really want to work toward change and want to make this happen."

With the hockey fandom at an all-time high, there's a whole team behind these authors ready to drive change.

Samantha Mangino
Shopping Reporter

Boston-based Shopping Reporter, Samantha Mangino, covers all things tech at Mashable, rounding up the best products and deals. She's covered commerce for three years, spending extensive time testing and reviewing all things home, including couches, steam irons, and washing machines. She thoroughly vets products and internet trends, finding out if those cozy gamer chairs are really as comfortable as TikTok claims.

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