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HOCKEY ROMANCE IS HAVING A MAIN CHARACTER MOMENT

2 DAYS AGO



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This article is written by a student writer from the Her Campus at U Mass Amherst chapter and does not reflect the views of Her Campus.

Once associated primarily with die-hard sports fans, hockey has found an unexpected new audience: romance book readers and young television binge-watchers. The NHL has begun embracing this new audience by leaning into the culture on social media and during game time. New shows and books following this **hockey-romance craze** are hitting streaming services and bookstores.

HOCKEY IN MEDIA

I have already rewatched *Heated Rivalry* and *Off Campus*, both of which are part of the growing popularity of hockey romance. *Heated Rivalry*, a series which streams on HBO Max, follows an enemies-to-lovers relationship between hockey players Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov. The narrative follows a closeted relationship within the hyper-masculine culture of ice hockey. Their **genuine, emotional vulnerability** highlighted throughout the season grabbed the attention of nearly 10,000,000 viewers per episode (Warner Bros. Discovery, 2026).

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All over my TikTok FYP, I watched as gatherings across the country shouted in unison as Ilya Rozanov closed out Episode 5 with the cliffhanger, "I'm coming to the cottage." This hit series comes from Rachel Reid's second novel in the *Game Changers* series. Now, fans across the world are itching for *Heated Rivalry* Season 2, which is scheduled to air in April 2027.

Earlier this year, *Off Campus*, a Prime Original series, also aired. This show is based on Elle Kennedy's *Off Campus* book series, which follows the men's hockey team at the fictious Briar University. This season of *Off Campus* highlights Hannah Wells and Garrett Graham's fake relationship, which eventually turns into a **real romance**. Fans also hope to watch Dean DiLaurentis (Garrett's teammate) and Allie Haye's (Hannah's best friend) fling develop in the second season. Also, a new hockey-romance show, *The Sticks*, is expected to air in 2027, and fans can't wait (I'm a fan).

Now highlighting book series, I am currently on the fourth book in Elle Kennedy's *Off Campus* series. After finishing the first three over the summer, I can confirm they are excellent beach reads. Although I have not read Rachel Reid's *Game Changers* series yet, I did read the best-selling novel *Icebreaker* by Hannah Grace. Between the books have read and the shows I have watched, it is clear that hockey romance has become more than just a niche genre.

HOW HOCKEY IS RESPONDING

While these books and shows have helped bring the hockey romance into the mainstream, the NHL has also begun to embrace its new audience. ESPN shared that with the rise of these shows, the media is beginning to "humanize" hockey players. The NHL released a new digital series called **"NHL In Focus"** just weeks ago. Including hockey stars such as Montreal Canadiens forward Cole Caufield and New York Islanders defenseman Matthew Schaefer, this series explores players' interests off the ice, with no action shots or uniforms.

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Recently, the NHL also just released "Hot for Hockey," audio shorts on Spotify featuring players such as Connor McDavid, Trevor Zegras and Kyle Connor. Aimed at young, predominantly female demographics, these audio shorts included provocative language describing real-life NHL storylines, without the romance between players.

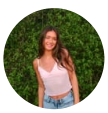
Unfortunately, this campaign was cancelled recently on Oct. 5. Fans reported negative feedback, including feelings of confusion, concerns over the boundaries of objectification and uneasiness over players' safety. It is important to stress that not all of these new campaigns are successful, and it is clear the NHL is still trying to **fully connect with and understand** the new audience they have suddenly gathered over the past year.

Through the many years hockey has been a widespread sport, both romance books and series are definitely one of the most unique drivers for bringing in new fans. Back in August, the Boston Red Sox held a Heated Rivalry Night at Fenway Park and **broke records** with the number of attendees. I would love to see the NHL host similar themed nights this season.

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