



Hard Hitter

Sarina Bowen

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He's a fighter in the rink, but he's about to learn that playing nice can help you score...

As team captain and enforcer, Patrick O'Doul puts the bruise in the Brooklyn Bruisers. But after years of hard hits, O'Doul is feeling the burn, both physically and mentally. He conceals his pain from his coach and trainers, but when his chronic hip injury becomes too obvious to ignore, they send him for sessions with the team's massage therapist.

After breaking up with her long-term boyfriend, Ari Bettini is in need of peace of mind. For now, she's decided to focus on her work: rehabilitating the Bruisers' MVP. O'Doul is easy on the eyes, but his reaction to her touch is ice cold. Ari is determined to help O'Doul heal, but as the tension between them turns red hot, they both learn that a little TLC does the body good...

Hard Hitter Details

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Author : Sarina Bowen

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From Reader Review Hard Hitter for online ebook

Jo says

“Patrick,” she warned. “I’m not joking. We obviously have a bit of chemistry . . .” She rubbed a bit of oil onto her fingers and then started in on the muscles just above his knee. He snorted. “We have a bit of chemistry. And hockey has a bit of violence. We practically burned down your bed together.”

I freaking adored Patrick!! I loved that he wasn't perfect. He isn't a charmer, but he was so sexy with his gruff and grouchy personality and his big body and heart. He had a terrible childhood and it made him dislike being touched by others, showing any weakness and it was so wonderful seeing him become comfortable with Ari touching him. I loved how hard he fought for Ari once he gave into his attraction for her and how he wanted to protect her and keep her safe.

Ari was so messed up after her ex and her reluctance to start something with Patrick so soon after her break-up was totally understandable. She loves her job, helping the players keep their bodies and minds healthy for their games, and I loved how patient and understanding she was with Patrick, especially at first when it was so difficult for him to allow her to touch him, but slowly she won his trust, making him like and want her touch and help.

You're everything that I want, and everything I need. You already have my heart, and I don't want it back. You understand?"

I loved the romance and the fact that they were kind-of friends before they became more, and how their attraction to each other just deepened their powerful connection. It was wonderful seeing Patrick who has basically always been alone, and who liked it that way, realise how much he liked having Ari in his home and his life, how much he wanted to have her near him. The sexy times were so hot, especially that massage scene! Yowza ;-D

I love all Patrick's teammates and the other secondary characters and I really want to know what's going on between Nate and Becca!!

I love sports romances and this author's writing. She writes so much depth to her romances, and I adore that. My only complaint is that I would have liked a HEA ending instead of the HFN we got, but for these two characters the ending was perfect for them. If you love sport romances, then this is the book for you. Highly recommended.

Christie«SHBBblogger» says

[Yes (hide spoiler)]

Sabrina says

Ari is the Brooklyn Bruisers massage therapist and yoga instructor, which all the players thought was pointless until she got her hands on them. Especially Patrick who ducked as many appointments with the easy-on-the-eyes masseuse. But once he gets on her table he never wants to leave, and he definitely doesn't want her to stop touching him.

I actually wasn't sure how I felt about Patrick O'Doul when we were first introduced to him in *Rookie Move* but after getting to know him more in his own story I am definitely Team Patrick. I really liked him and Ari together since she, in a way, calmed him down some. He could come off as a little abrasive but with her he wasn't like that. It made me love his character so much more.

Ari was a great character to read about also and I liked that she always had a free-spirited attitude. Even when she was stressed or worrying about something you could still tell that she was a very easy going person. I liked that the author could take those two conflicting emotions and have them work well within one character.

Bottom line, this is a book that needs to be read if you're a sports romance lover like myself. I'm already bouncing up and down with excitement for the next installment so I hope it comes soon.

ARC kindly provided in exchange for an honest review.

JewelsyGoolsey says

3.5 Stars

Sarina Bowen is the queen of sweet heroes! And this H did not disappoint.

I normally eat up my sweet heroes up like a phallic shaped appetiser, and although this H was textbook sweet, quiet and caring - and the h was textbook likeable with genuine fears; I wasn't able to feel any huge bolts of electricity or heart thumping connection between the two.

This book also took me a little longer to get through. Nothing wrong with the story, plot or characters at all. Just a little more detail-heavy on the hockey and everyday activity front, which dragged out the pacing of the story slower than I like. STILL, if you're a hockey or general information junkie who devours well researched details, you're gonna wanna get stuck into this. If not; you're still gonna respect the crap out of this author for her amazing attention to detail and ability to build scenes and backdrops.

The ending felt somewhat pieced together in a hurry, with a HFN that wasn't as satisfying as I hoped. Also underwhelming for me; was revisiting the MC's from book #1 (*Rookie Move*). Like this story; *Rookie Move* ended in only a *slightly* better HFN (which I accepted at that time in high hopes of seeing a swoony, wedded, loved-up, sexy, post bliss HEA in this book) however, it was more casual and meh than anything else...

Jewels disappointed face

Fans of this author and series would love this book as a build up to the other secondary character's future books. But don't expect a "stars & lightning bolts" HEA for book #1's story or a life changing love story from this one. Instead, expect a sweet but guarded H, trying to woo a sweet but guarded h, with some shady ex BF suspense and some fun locker room banter. Oh, and there's some pretty hawt nookie (thought I'd throw that last one in there cos it helped me a LOT)

Told in dual POV and standalone story in a series. Definitely gonna be continuing with this series and crossing my fingers for Becca and Nate's story soon.

RentasticReads says

Heartwarming, funny and scorching to the core, Sarina Bowen has stolen my heart and my entire being, yet again, with the Brooklyn Bruisers captain and massage therapist/yoga instructor's tale of love, hope and redemption. She has perfectly set the tone for these two since *Rookie Move* and I must say, when I reached the last page of that book, I was already intrigued by how their story will go. And man, Bowen did not disappoint at all.

Bruisers captain Patrick O'Doul had a very hard and challenging childhood. At a very ripe age of eight, he's already left alone, fending for himself. And this is where all his brokenness stemmed from. Since he was younger, even when he started making a better life for himself going into hockey, he preferred being alone; he valued his peace and solitary space. In fact, he never invited anybody back to his apartment. Even his teammates, who he considers to be his family. He also hated being touched. But all that changed the moment his hip began to shoot pain through his body and bother him. The team wanted him healthy and able to use his skills on ice for far longer so he had to get weekly massages to alleviate the pain he feels on his hip.

Ariana Bettini landed her dream job when she was hired by the Brooklyn Bruisers as their massage therapist and yoga instructor. I loved this woman's outlook in life, but her regrets and problems with regards to her ex-boyfriend ran a mile long. She began to be overly cautious and paranoid at her very own home, and her trust issues ran deeper than anybody else's. Can't blame her though—that guy did a helluva number on her and I felt her agony over it. So when the team's captain began to show her attention and affection, she was hesitant. Regardless of how crackling and explosive their connection and chemistry was, she can't help the doubts running through her head. Being the team's massage therapist, she needs her clients to trust her in healing them. In making them better with the use of her hands. But can she trust Doulie the same way he started to when he allowed her to heal him, and let him in?

Every time these two collided, they burned bright and locked the whole world out of their little bubble. Sarina Bowen nailed their steamy scenes and even took it on a whole other level. I loved the effort and all the tiny gestures Doulie did to win his sweetheart over. He was all too adorable and hilarious at times. His character was priceless and probably shone the most for me in this book, but Ari's wasn't that far behind.

I truly fell head over heels in love with these two. I adored how their troubles, aside from that intense attraction, brought them together and made them both even stronger. The process of how they earned each other's trust, how they were able to build that relationship, drew me in like no other. They sunk their claws in me and never let go until I hit that last page. This book will, without a doubt, go down as one of those I'd certainly want to read time and time again. Right now, I just want to go back and start all over again.

Hard Hitter is just another winner we have from Ms. Bowen. I can't wait for *Pipe Dreams* and figure out how the Bruisers goalie, Beacon, will win over Queen Lauren. Oh, and please tell me Nate and Becca will be getting their own book.

~ Stéphanie ~ Tied up in Romance ~ says

[Yes (hide spoiler)]

Christy says

4 stars!

The moment after I finished the first book in this series, *Rookie Move*, my first thought was - I hope the next book is about O'doul. Patrick O'doul, the keep to himself team captain and enforcer of the Brooklyn Bruisers made quite an impression on me. I was excited to jump into this book and it did not disappoint. I love Sarina Bowen's writing style and hockey books are my favorite type of sports romance so this was a big win for me.

At thirty-two years old he was suddenly more conscious of the toll the game took on his body. And the fighting he did for his team made everything riskier. So much could go wrong in those violent sixty or ninety seconds.

Patrick O'Doul has been in hockey for a long time. He's an enforcer, which is essentially the fighter of the team. He's good at what he does, but it's taken a toll on his body and he's not exactly a spring chicken anymore. With much encouragement from his coaching staff, he goes to see the team's massage therapist, Ariana. Ari is great and O'Doul has always liked her, but he doesn't like anyone touching him. He doesn't let anyone get close. Period.

Ari has just spent the last 8 years of her life with a man she feels like she didn't even know. She is off men for a while and focused only on her job. When Patrick O'Doul becomes a regular on her massage table, she can't help but to feel for him. The more time they spend together, it becomes apparent that they both are developing feelings. With Patrick not getting close to anyone and Ari not wanting to take a chance on love... we are left wondering how things will work for this couple.

I loved seeing the soft side of O'Doul. Ari brought that out in him. He became more open, more vulnerable with her. And that transitioned into making him a better captain, teammate, friend and all around man. Ari was a little wishy washy for me, but it didn't bother me as much as it normally would due to her situation. I loved the bond she had with some of the other girls in the series and the friendship she developed with them. What I really loved the most about O'Doul and Ari's relationship is that it showed that the right person really can open you up and change your heart.

Hard Hitter is a wonderful addition to this series. A sweet and sexy slow-burn romance you don't want to miss out on. After finishing this book, you will see why once again- I'm desperate for the next book in this series! I have a feeling Beacon and Lauren's book is going to be just as amazing as the first two in this series! I'm also really hoping for a Becca and Nate book in the future. I know neither of them are actual hockey players, but I know that book would be epic!

Wendy's Thoughts says

4 Healing Hands Stars

*** * * Spoiler Free It's Live!!!**

If ever you want to read a book which feels authentic about any subject... Sarina Bowen is your gal. I have been a long time fan and she has taken me to many a Hockey game in my reading world. She has

shown me how the game works, the manipulations of chemistry on ice and all of the political moves in the front office. But with this book and character of Patrick O'Doul, she has gone deeper into the psyche of the mental game and hardships of what an Enforcer for a team must endure. It was eye opening, thought-provoking and important.

Hard Hitter is the second entry in the *Brooklyn Bruisers series*. This has men and women involved in this new, up and coming team in the NHL. You can read this without reading the first although there are many recurring characters. These characters provide continuity but do not take away from the main story... only add to it. If you have been reading Bowen, then the surrounding characters will be an added benefit...If you dive in with no past history, you will not be lost and still enjoy it.

The set up is very direct; a Hockey team is fighting to get street cred its first year after a move from one location to another. The Brooklyn Bruisers were renamed by its owner, moved to Brooklyn and is working hard to get into the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Every team member knows the score....they need to perform at their best every single game in order to keep in the running.

No one knows this more than the team captain, Patrick O'Doul. He has been in the game for more years than he can count. At the Hockey Old age of 32, he was feeling his hits more and more. During the course of his career, O'Doul had filled the necessary position of not only being a talented skater across the ice, making goals, setting up others for their scores and protecting the his teammates... he was the Enforcer... righting wrongs the other team did during the game. This meant throwing down and fighting... charging; gloves off and making it known...attacks on His Players Would Not Stand.

Side Note:

Now how this practice in Hockey got started... I have no clue... But from the telling in this story, it provided the fans with "Entertainment, Satisfaction, Resolution and maybe the Body Contact" to generate more thrills, excitement and momentum? There was insight to this practice maybe becoming less and less with more skating as the goal.

O'Doul is not feeling the thrill he use to on the ice. He now is having anxiety during every game. It is the pressure of waiting for when the "Fight" is going to take place. With his body not in perfect shape...he will have to figure out how to be aggressive, protect his hip and still come off as healthy, formidable and put the other Enforcer down. With the new element of Social Media, the asshat decided to taunt O'Doul on Twitter...Great, another punk trying to gin up a fight before there is even a reason for one. ...and with the new Blogs which Rate the Fights on Ice... this is just what O'Doul needs.

What he really needs and is not doing ...is showing up for his massage therapy sessions. Time after time, he has been blowing them off. After the most recent game, his coach has made an ultimatum...5 sessions in 7 days...no excuses. Now he is stuck because as Captain and his own work ethic...what coach's says is not up for discussion.

When Ari Bettini was hired as the team's massage therapist, it was one of the happiest days of her life. This position was everything she had hoped for... it proved steady employment in the field she loved, allowed her to make a difference by helping these athletes perform at their best and was emotionally fulfilling. Her career was taking off and she was feeling good about what she was doing. Unfortunately, her long term boyfriend did not see this position the same way. He accused her of behavior she would never do and finally showed her who he really was...someone she needed to get away from. After many years...with him changing from the fun-loving guy she fell for...she took the needed steps and changed the locks.

For the first time, she was living alone. She was focused on work, learning about herself as a single person and trying to feel comfortable in her own skin. As a Yoga instructor and believer...she had all the mental tools to dive deep within and understand herself.

Ari brought all of this talent and knowledge to every mandatory yoga class the team had to take. Nate, the owner, was big on innovative ideas...As a Tech Genius, he had the team doing all sorts of new things; yoga, massage therapy and gave them Katt Phones which were links with all of the organization. It would send Ari messages of who was due for massages and she knew O'Doul now was going to be seeing her whether he wanted to or not...

Patrick O'Doul showed up as required and it was if he was marching to his execution. He was a guy who lived simply...well, now he had all the money he needed and didn't have to worry too much about anything...except staying healthy for the game...But O'Doul kept himself separate from the guys outside of practices, training, games and the late night energy releases at the bars. No one had been in his apartment- ever. He worked out his sexual needs with puck bunnies who shared the mutual take of what both parties wanted...release.

Because O'Doul had a quirk...He didn't like to be touched...At All.
And now he had to have 5 fu@king massages by Ari in 7 days...

Ari was keenly aware of his discomfort and talked O'Doul through the first massage as best as she could. She called him Patrick... no one did that... and for some reason, Patrick liked it. He liked her lavender scent, the way she figured out another way to work out his hip without her touching him there...and once she started talking to him, he relaxed a little bit.

Ari took pride in her work and any relaxation by the big man as a win...When it was over, Patrick told her he was feeling a bit better and agreed to be at the next massage. Ari chalked it up as a win.

For she could use all the wins she could get...because the Asshat would not get his crap out of her basement. She had told him to collect it all and she thought the few times she heard him down there... but after the last visit she became suspicious... Something was not right. This time she changed the basement locks. She had had enough.

Patrick has been going to his massage times with Ari and he adjusted his mind to allow more and more touching by her....Because something more then physical therapy has been going on...Ari has touched his mind and he is feeling connected to Ari... which he has never experienced before. Patrick's childhood was dark; foster care, group homes and ugly situations. No sweet high school girlfriend experiences... no loving family. The only good things in his life was those who taught him to fight and Hockey. They saved him.

Now he is having feelings for this woman...and working hard to keep things professional. Ari too, is feeling the vibe but she is in no place to think about a man...she still has the assbat to deal with and questions her judgement.

Everything changes when those special Katt Phones get mixed up...

There is so much more to this tale then a love story between these two....and it truly is a love story...This Alpha Male, all muscles, strong and sure on the ice.... knows really nothing about love and romance....Oh, he knows how to sex up a woman... his skills are outstanding and his demonstration of quick study in massage is extremely impressive.

No, what warms the heart and this story is his almost innocence when it comes to wooing a woman who is putting up a fight of No Dating. He is free from posturing, free of forceful ego... and willing to be patient for what he wants... Ari. It is his internal surprise and wonder of it all which wraps around our hearts during the reading of it. We already have been told Patrick is not a perfect man; he has made errors in judgement... yet in the here and now...he shines.

Ari goes through a difficult journey. She was with a man who she thought in the beginning was a match. Slowly things changed but she kept trying to see the man he was before. Because she didn't act sooner, it has impacted her whole mindset on what she thinks she needs. She fights this during most of the story... it takes her friends and relatives to steer her clear and see what all her Yoga teaching mean... to apply them to herself and this situation with Patrick.

Bowen used this story to address something which I had not read in any of the other Hockey stories. She laid bare the emotional and physical toll a player can go through. When a player becomes an Enforcer, it is a position which main purpose is to fight...yes, they contribute to the play by scoring, protecting and advancing the puck...but their rep and name is made on these thrown-downs...and after the initial heat of the battle and high from the crowds cheering... it can become something entirely different. It can be a stain on the soul.... how many noses broken, how many careers possibly shorten by his hands... and then the lasting question.... how does management see him...what talents does he possess besides fighting....

On the flip side, from Ari, we learned about massage and the mental game of that, too... About how a person who takes it as seriously as Ari did, felt it was a connection more then the laying of hands on another body. Ari's yoga classes were descriptive and sometimes I had to Google the terms to understand which poses they were doing... especially when Patrick and Ari did a very private session...Grin :D

I would be leaving out a huge important chunk of the story if I did not share how wonderful the other women in the story were. They opened their hearts to Ari and brought her into the fold. They became girlfriends and Ari needed it.

We also were given peeks into the other players and management. I know there are more books coming...One will reveal the whys of Lauren and the other, which I cannot wait for, hopefully will be between Nate, the owner and Becca.

If you like sweet romance, a couple insights into sport, therapy, with a dash of Yoga, a feeling of team and the dollop of suspense then this is your book. It certainly was mine.

Rookie Move (Brooklyn Bruisers, #1)

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Hard Hitter (Brooklyn Bruisers #2)

Pipe Dreams (Brooklyn Bruisers, #3)

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

~~~~~ Before Reading ~~~~~

*Exciting Day Today for many reasons...*

*Got to do two things I have been waiting for...*

**VOTED!**

*and*

**Started Hard Hitter (Brooklyn Bruisers #2)- Win/Win all around!**

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*June 22, 2016*

*This cover...*

*The blurb....*

*and all the talent of Bowen....*

*What more do you want....*

*Well, the book, of course!*

**Hard Hitter (Brooklyn Bruisers, #2) January 3rd 2017**

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### Alyssa says

\*\*\*Review posted on The Eater of Books! blog\*\*\*

Hard Hitter by Sarina Bowen  
Book Two of the Brooklyn Bruisers series  
Publisher: Berkley Romance  
Publication Date: January 3, 2017  
Rating: 3 stars  
Source: eARC from NetGalley

\*\*\*Warning: this is an adult book, and for the eyes of mature readers\*\*\*

Summary (from Goodreads):

From the USA Today bestselling author of Rookie Move comes the second novel in the series that s hot enough to melt the ice.

He s a fighter in the rink, but he s about to learn that playing nice can help you score...

As team captain and enforcer, Patrick O'Doul puts the bruise in the Brooklyn Bruisers. But after years of hard hits, O'Doul is feeling the burn, both physically and mentally. He conceals his pain from his coach and trainers, but when his chronic hip injury becomes too obvious to ignore, they send him for sessions with the team's massage therapist.

After breaking up with her long-term boyfriend, Ari Bettini is in need of peace of mind. For now, she s decided to focus on her work: rehabilitating the Bruisers MVP. O'Doul is easy on the eyes, but his reaction to her touch is ice cold. Ari is determined to help O'Doul heal, but as the tension between them turns red hot, they both learn that a little TLC does the body good...

What I Liked:

I haaaaate writing three-star reviews! Especially a review for a book like this one! I didn't dislike this book. Heck, I think I liked it overall. But I didn't love it, and I just didn't care, by the end of the book. It could be my mood? It could be distractions, like the holidays? Who knows. I should have loved this book, but I didn't. Nor did I hate it though. Hence, three stars!

Hard Hitter is Patrick's story - Patrick and Ari's. Patrick is the captain of the Brooklyn Bruisers, and the enforcer. He's thirty-two and just not feeling all the fighting anymore, but as an enforcer, that's what he does. But it's hard on his body, and his latest injuries force him to finally see the team's massage therapist, Ari. Ari is a peaceful and fun person... who just broke up with her poisonous boyfriend of eight years. The problem is, Vince (the ex) won't leave her, or her home (formerly where he lived too) alone. A little romance between Patrick and Ari might be starting from the massage table, but they have bigger problems than a player-employee relationship.

Best part of this book: Patrick O'Doul. Oh my heart. I thought I liked Leo, in Rookie Move? I definitely like Patrick more. He's older than many of his teammates (though thirty-two isn't old), and he's single. He doesn't like people touching him, and he's often alone. He's a loner, and that suits him, except that he's been lonely recently. No parents, no siblings, no family, and no one living in his big, beautiful apartment. Patrick is a quiet guy of few words, who handles his pain internally and doesn't complain. And yet, he's as macho as they come, and deservedly the leader of the team. I. Adored. Patrick. He's such a good guy, under the confident swagger.

So I really enjoyed seeing the progression of his character development. We know he doesn't like being touched from the start, but we don't know why. I like that we discover bits and pieces of him and his past, and then everything comes together. I also love seeing him get romantic! He is the sweetest possible man, as he tries to woo Ari and convince her that he is boyfriend material and that they'd be good together.

Ari... I'll discuss her in the next section. Don't get me wrong, I didn't totally dislike her. In the first half of the book, I thought she was really cool and fun and sweet. She didn't deserve a single bad thing, in terms of Vince and the bad breakup, and my heart hurt for her. It seemed like she hadn't been in love with Vince in a long time. Being with him since age twenty-one meant that there was plenty of time to fall out of love - which is what happened.

I liked the chemistry between Patrick and Ari! At first you don't really get much chemistry because everything is professional in terms of Ari's massages for Patrick. But then those massages start to feel like something else, between the both of them. Patrick intrigues Ari, and Ari intrigues Patrick, and then there is dynamite and fireworks. The chemistry and passion between these two were pretty off the charts!

The romance - well, I liked the romance for the most part, but less so in the second half of the book (and I'll talk about that next). Patrick's romancing was so sweet and thoughtful! I liked watching the pair fall for each other, though I wish Ari would get a clue. I had issues with the romance towards the end, but I liked it overall.

In general, Hard Hitter is a good addition to the series. I liked but didn't love Rookie Move, mostly because I often struggle with second-chance romances. With Hard Hitter, I liked it but was frustrated by the female protagonist at times.

What I Did Not Like:

The first half of the book went perfectly well for me! I was enjoying the dynamic between Patrick and Ari. I was loving how much hockey played into the story - how important it was to every part of the story. I was loving seeing Patrick open up slowly, and seeing him and Ari get their hands on each other.

But something in the second half of the book just didn't go well with me. I sort of stopped caring? Or maybe I starting going through the motions? I remember rolling my eyes quite a bit. This could be a mood thing but... the second half of the book just didn't do much for me.

I also couldn't really stand Ari, in the second half of the book. She refused professional help with her ex-boyfriend left and right, because she didn't want the GM to know her "business". You mean to tell me that you have a stalker, drug lord, and abuser harassing you, and you don't want to accept help because you don't want people to know your "business"? What kind of mentality is that? And believe me, I know this mentality - Trinidadians are like that (I'm Trinidadian). It infuriates me to no end. Logically it made no sense for Ari to be so confident that she had a handle on things (she didn't).

What's more, she started to push away Patrick, because she hadn't been single for so long and wanted to "find herself" (or some similar BS). What???? At first, I sort of understood this. But then I kept thinking to myself,

you love this man, and this man clearly loves you and treats you like a queen, and you're seriously pushing him because you need to "be single for a while"? Again, logical? I think not.

And that attitude, of course, put a damper on the romance, in the second half of the book. I know, I know. Every romance novel has some sort of "break-up" around the climax of the book, and then the couple reunites and makes up and rides off into the sunset. That's a stupid plot that literally almost all adult romance novels follow and I'm sick of it.

What's more, I couldn't stand Ari's high and mighty attitude, at the very tip of the conflict, when she jumps to serious conclusions and shuts down and refuses to talk to Patrick or let him justify himself. Ladies! This is SO, SO stupid. I feel like after the amount of times I've seen this massively idiotic plot device in romance novels, I should never do this in real life. Communicate! Be mad! But communicate! \*tears out hair\*

And in general, this book seriously could have done with all that drama at the end, with Patrick. That really did not feel necessary.

Would I Recommend It:

Meh. I'm feeling a little disillusioned, with Bowen's books. I don't see the "OMG OMG OMG OMG" appeal. I mean, this is only my second book of hers, but dang. They're not that good?

Again, this could just be me/my mood. But I did not love this book, and I really don't recommend it. I liked it, and I adore Patrick, and the first half of the book was great. But Hard Hitter is pretty forgettable, unfortunately.

Rating:

3 stars. I might pass on Pipe Dreams. It features a rather rude female (we see her being rude in the previous two books) and a hockey player with a thirteen-year-old daughter (dead wife). Oh, and it's a second-chance romance. I think I'm good. We'll see though.

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## Talia (Red Hot Ink) says

*ARC received from the author in exchange for an honest review*

"Hard Hitter" was my first book by Sarina Bowen (I'm not counting those she wrote with Kennedy).

I knew it would be good, and it was, but there were a few surprises. Some good. Some bad.

Let's start with the good.

1. The inside knowledge. I always love it when a writer goes that extra mile and isn't afraid to give us details about specific subjects. As someone living in a country where hockey is as popular as gladiator games, I know next to nothing about it. When at first fights were mentioned I was like... What The Hell is going on here? Is this stuff even legal? Why does he have to do it? Bowen did a fantastic job at portraying Patrick O'Doul's mixed feelings towards hockey and fighting. I've read plenty of books about hockey (off-campus series, Him&Us etc) but never once heard of fighting. Plus, Bowen took up yoga lessons to better shape Ari's character. That's some serious research.

2. The sub plot. I've made no secret of my love for stalkers/lurking threats/crazy ex-boyfriends. I'm not gonna get into the details not to spoiler anything, but I was completely satisfied in this regard. The topic was

treated with humanity, no reductionisms, showing the complexities hiding behind situations that to the outsider's eye may seem easily solvable.

3. O'Doul's protectiveness and his being a nice guy through and through. He's like this big, surly bear that's been isolated from the rest of the world (by choice) for almost his entire life. Seeing him opening up to Ari and really pursuing her was a treat to read (I'm a sucker for pursuers :) ).

4. The funny moments. I think the best thing about this book are the group scenes, with all the hockey players, or Ari's friends. Bowen really manages to wring all the fun out of these kinds of writing opportunities. Every character has its own voice and the end result is stunning. There was a scene in particular when I was in serious need of peeing my pants laughing. It was so cute/amusing!!!! If you read it you'll know what scene I was referring to.

5. The build up to their relationship. Patrick and Ari take their time building a foundation of trust upon which to lay a relationship. I will admit that, to my standards, I would have liked to see them together as a couple a bit more, especially around the end, but all in all I thought it was a good choice for them to get to know each other since they start the book as almost strangers.

The things I wasn't very enthusiastic about:

1. Ari's push and pull. On one hand, I totally get where she was coming from, literally, but Patrick was so sweet to her and she pushed him away for too long. Again, I would have liked to see them together sooner.

2. Patrick's little mistake. It was a human thing he did, but he never really seemed too concerned with the consequences. I always felt like he didn't really care 100% about it. Which was weird since almost his whole life rested on it. It lowered the angst, but it left me befuddled about his priorities in life and his future perspectives. It didn't seem like he cared about anything at all if not getting Ari to be with him. For other characters, it might have worked, but not for him, at least in my opinion.

3. Their chemistry. I'm not a massage kind of gal, so it took me a while warm up to the idea of them building trust through them and all that jazz. I still think they're a good match, but at times it felt like the romance was not the focus of the novel. There were too many moments Ari was so overwhelmed by other things happening in her life she didn't even think about O'Doul or couldn't make up her mind about him. It didn't read like an epic love story.

In conclusion, I liked it. The writing was really good, the plot was well-structured and there were moments I oooh-ed and aaah-ed at Patrick's surprising romanticism, as well as funny moments regarding the team, but I can't say I loved it 100%, hence the four stars. It's still worth reading and it made me curious about a possible book about Nate... but I couldn't totally relate to Ari. I felt like she wasn't as taken with Patrick as he was with her, which is a big turn off for me. I love my MCs both smitten to the point of cheesiness with each other.

P.S.: can we please spare a word about how much more beautiful the pastel cover is? It's unusual for me to complain about the presence of hunky studs on covers, but for the kind of book "Hard Hitter" turned out to be, a sweeter cover is way more appropriate. The sexy times were there, but it wasn't mind-blowing or raunchy. Even the hottest scene was still sweet.

Where to find me:

## FMABookReviews says

Whether she writes serious, thought-provoking stories or sweet romance, Sarina Bowen delivers every time.

With *Hard Hitter*, Bowen gives us a slightly tortured hero, with Patrick O'Doul, the Enforcer for the Brooklyn Bruisers. He learned to fight when he lived in group homes in Minnesota. Finally, on his own, he covets his solitude. O'Doul wishes to play Hockey and be left alone. Growing up in group homes, Patrick has known one kind of touch in his life, fighting. Historically, people haven't touched him in a kind, gentle manner. So when the team trainers and coaches require him to obtain massages for his hip, he resists the idea. Until he no longer can.

Ariana (Ari) Bettini, is a massage therapist, and yoga instructor. She is fresh out of a failed 8-year relationship and finds her job the only steady thing in her life. She gets proposed to many times throughout the day as the Brooklyn Bruisers massage therapist. But the last thing she wants is to get into another relationship, let alone one with a player.

*"Be kind to yourself."*

As with the first book in the series, *Rookie Move*, the supporting character's were fantastic. With Castro (whom I LOVED), Leo aka College Boy, Georgia, and Becca, we are given characters which round out the story. Call me crazy, but I would love for Castro and Becca to get together.

A sweet, fast-paced, slow-burn romance with a hint of suspense, *Hard Hitter* placed a smile on my face and left me craving *Pipe Dreams*!

**\*\*I received an Advanced Reader Copy. This did not influence my opinion of the book, nor my review.\*\***

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## ♥Rachel♥ says

### 3.5 Stars

As the rough-around-the-edges team captain of the Brooklyn Bruisers, I was looking forward to Patrick O'Doul's story, and I thoroughly fell for the man! Under all that gruffness, Patrick has a soft center! The romance started off strong with Ari and Patrick's sexual chemistry sizzling and sparking off the page! The massage table scene had me melting and overheated! Along the way, though, I was a little frustrated with Ari pushing Patrick away with the excuse that she was just coming off a long-term relationship. I would get that if not for the fact that things seemed over with Vince, her previous beau, long before they officially split.

Still, I'm loving the series; who wouldn't want a bunch of romances with hot and sexy hockey players?! The recurring characters definitely have me intrigued: Leo and Georgia are going strong, and I'm very interested

in Becca and Nate's interactions! I can't wait for their story (what happened to Becca in the end?) but I guess I'll have to because Lauren, the ice queen, is up next in Pipe Dreams. It does sound like she has some reasons for emitting a chill...

*A copy was kindly provided by Berkley in exchange for an honest review.*

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## **Geri Reads says**

Sarina Bowen has been consistently delivering heartfelt romances with really strong characters, and Hard Hitter is another Bowen book that I enjoyed thoroughly.

Patrick O'Doul is one of NHL's top enforcer for years. But now age is catching up to him. I have to say that Patrick is probably Sarina's most self-contained hero. I found it very hard to get a feel for what he's all about. But I love me some grumpy, taciturn heroes so it came as no surprise that I fell hard for his character, especially his backstory.

Ari is the same thing. I started the book not quite sure what she's all about. At first, I thought that Ari was very much like the hero which worried me a bit because I like it a lot more when there's contrast between the hero's personality and the heroine. Chemistry, opposites attract and all that jazz. But again, Sarina's writing, the way she crafted these characters made a believer out of me.

I absolutely enjoyed reading how they both started to change their perception about each other and their feelings start to grow. The pace of their romance was just right. And like Rookie Move, there are plenty of interaction between Patrick and his teammates. And more Nick and Becca!! Yay!!

I absolutely adored the Nick and Becca dynamics, so much so that I would be bitterly disappointed if Sarina won't write their book!!

Anyway, Hard Hitter is another great addition to the Brooklyn Bruisers series. And despite my misgivings, I'm looking forward to Pipe Dreams. I'm curious about why Queen Lauren is the way she is. Bring it on!

*ARC provided by the publisher*

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## **Stacey is Sassy says**

**So sweet considering it's full of hard hitters and bruisers...**

\*\*\*4.5 stars\*\*\*

Isn't it funny that when the gloves are *on* for a boxer it means the fights on, but when the gloves come *off* in ice hockey, the fights on? You learn something new every day...

If anyone was to tell me a few years back that I would learn to love sports romance I would have laughed in their faces. I'm loving sports romance, especially ones with ice hockey in them. It could be the buff bodies, charisma and fierce determination of the players that changed my opinion or maybe it was just the authors'

skills. *Sarina Bowen* writes heroes that appeal to my heart, mind and...Ummm, no it's definitely not my soul making me blush.

The *Brooklyn Bruisers* series is really great. There's just something about this team that makes them different from others. The leadership is led by Nate, a tech guru with a love for ice hockey. He owns the Brooklyn Bruisers but doesn't just sit back leaving it to be controlled by his staff. He studies his players, plots and plans for success. He's a little nerdy but I really like him. Under Nate, we have managers, coaches, trainers, therapists and a whole host of other workers. They're a good team and it's great to see them have each other's back.

Patrick, the captain and enforcer of the Brooklyn Bruisers, has been struggling with his role in the team. He's not getting any younger and as the enforcer, his body is not bouncing back from the fights as well as it used to. Bits and pieces of his body are starting to show wear and tear but he thinks (hopes) it will get better. Eventually, the trainers force him to take a break and head to get a few massages. There's a wee problem, though...Patrick doesn't like to be touched.

Ariana is the team masseuse and yoga instructor. She believes that a clear mind and a strong body can make the players better. Luckily, she has the full support of Nate, especially considering he's a fan of yoga. One of the players is avoiding her and she's not sure why. The first session Patrick attends is far from relaxing as he is tense and doesn't let his guard down. Ari is going to have to work to gain his trust.

With time Patrick does start to trust Ari and even likes her. When he finds out that her ex is giving her grief his protecting instincts kick in and he goes out of his way to keep an eye on her. Unfortunately, Ari's ex, Vince knows a secret about Patrick that could end his career.

Ariana regrets the years she had dedicated to her ex. Vince is mixed up with some bad people and it looks like he's involved Ari with his problems. Ariana hates that her private life has invaded her work life. They know of her issues with Vince and hire security to keep an eye on her. Considering the strong feelings developing between Ari and Patrick, he takes it upon himself to protect her as well.

The attraction between Patrick and Ari is sizzling. He is extremely strong and she's extremely flexible...hubba hubba. Ari tries to push him away but when he's in touching distance she finds it hard...very hard. Before Ari, Patrick has not had a relationship. The feelings she brings out in him are foreign but welcome. He will do anything to make her happy.

I really enjoyed *Hard Hitter*. Patrick shows a vulnerable side when he puts his heart on the line knowing that Ari isn't ready for a serious relationship. Ariana is struggling with shame for living with a man who ended up hurting her. She's scared to start a new relationship but with Patrick being so sweet and tempting she just can't help herself. I loved their love story.

I'm addicted to this series and I can't wait to find out who's up next. I really want to know more about Nate, Becca, Castro, Lauren and Beacon. They all need their own stories Ms Bowen...pretty please with sugar on the top.

**I'm an Aussie chick who loves to read and review romance, drink coffee, be a *Style Setter* and stalk David Gandy. To see more of my reviews, fashion, food and pervathons -**



## Eliza says

I'm not sure what it is about a grumpy hero, but they really get my engine revving. Luckily for me Patrick O'Doul falls into this category. If you're already a fan of the series, you'll remember O'Doul as the team captain and enforcer of the Brooklyn Bruisers. He comes across as rather prickly, and socialising with his team outside the confines of the rink is not high on his agenda.

When the skates come on, the gloves are off, but recovering from the hits is starting to take its toll. Rather frustratingly for Patrick it's also something that has not gone unnoticed by the team's management. On top of his identity crisis Patrick now has to deal with mandatory sessions with the team's yoga instructor and massage therapist, Ariana Bettini.

Trust is an important component in a therapy session, and Ari knows she has her work cut out for her. Closed off in body language and his willingness to partake in the sessions, Ari has more to conquer than O'Doul's dislike of being touched.

**On the ice he was flashy and confident. But up close in person he was one of the more cautious souls she'd ever met.**

As time goes on their uneasy routine becomes more tolerable for Patrick, he finds focusing on other things, namely one Miss Bettini make for a more appealing session, and in a huge turn around he soon finds himself counting down the time between each one.

Breaking through with Patrick is not just a career goal but a personal one too. She's intrigued with him in more than a professional capacity, and with so much on her plate, it's as much of a surprise to her as it is to Patrick that he should be the one she leans on.

**"Show me, sweetheart. Wherever you lead, I'm following."**

As Ari heals Patrick's body, in turn he heals her past hurts. The trust that she needed from him is reciprocated and what blossoms is an incredibly sweet and passionate romance.

It's been a brilliant year to be a fan of Sarina Bowens. She has been frequent and consistent with her releases, and I have enjoyed dutifully gobbling them all up. As well as Rookie Move, Hard Hitter is a fantastic addition to a series I have no reservations in recommending. Her characters are always likeable and well thought out and engaging with them and the story is always an immediate and pleasurable experience.