



Playing Hurt: My Journey from Despair to Hope

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In *Playing Hurt*, a leading figure in the sports world—the quintessential “man's man,” who seems to have it all—confesses his constant battle with depression and how it nearly cost him his life. John Saunders—stellar athlete and respected sportscaster—welcomes readers into the heart of his desperate struggle against depression: from insights into the illness's root causes to the nature of modern treatments, from both a medical and cultural perspective. His story unfolds as so many of our lives do—among family, friends, and colleagues—but it also peers into places we don't often discuss openly—psych wards and hospitals. Here is the honest story of a public figure facing his own mental illness head on, and emerging far better off for his effort.

Playing Hurt: My Journey from Despair to Hope Details

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From Reader Review **Playing Hurt: My Journey from Despair to Hope** for online ebook

Eric Tsai says

Depression does not discriminate, people do.

John Saunders was great at hiding in plain sight. I read this book and feel like there's this whole story that lays under the public sports celebrity that we know, this story of the battle against depression. We didn't know, how could we know, that the fun and entertaining John Saunders was battling demons. Some of us battled the same demons, but we did it from the privacy of our own homes while John battled while on TV. This book brings that battle front and center like no other sports book before. I'm a little rung out but glad that I read "Playing Hurt".

Claire says

It might be strange that a book about abuse and mental illness (which I have not experienced) made me think so deeply about my own life, but it did. It also made me think about those around me who might suffer from either of the above and what they might need from me. This book. A must read. I wish John were still with us to see how many people his book will impact!

Russ Mathers says

Tough to read the first half of this book about Saunders' childhood abuse and his poor decisions as a young adult. Good to learn about brain injuries and depression, and about Saunders' experiences as a long time member of ESPN.

The book is well written by John Bacon and Saunders mostly before Saunders' death (from enlarged heart and diabetes) and I didn't want to put it down, in spite of the difficult material during his childhood.

Lance says

This is not a typical memoir of a sports figure. In the very beginning, John Saunders talks about his thoughts of suicide by describing a trip across New York's Tappan Zee Bridge across the Hudson River. From there, he opens up about the demons that he lived with while battling depression through his entire life until his death in 2016. This memoir written with John U. Bacon is raw, soul-bearing and a book that a reader will have a hard time putting down.

Saunders was an award-winning broadcaster, best known for his work on the ESPN show "The Sports Reporters." He also covered college football and basketball as well as hockey for the network. The native Canadian was a good hockey player in his youth, eventually playing college hockey in the United States.

When an injury and lack of commitment to the game made him realize he had to do something else for a career, he turned to broadcasting and worked in smaller Canadian cities, Toronto and then Baltimore before ESPN.

Through all of this, Saunders was constantly filled with self-doubt and depression. In the book, he talks of the physical abuse he endured from his father and the sexual abuse from a female friend of his parents. He talks of his hurting himself by burning, his troubles with intimacy that resulted in a failed marriage and the constant doubt he had in both his hockey and broadcasting career. He eventually righted himself to have a good career and a loving marriage with two daughters, but even then he battled demons. If he wasn't doubting himself about being a good father, he sank into depression after reading social media postings criticizing his work. All of this on top of a serious concussion when he blacked out doing a college football show makes his story even more amazing.

What made this book a very gripping read was not only the rawness of this story, but how much he realizes what is happening and yet he feels powerless to control it. He has great respect for the doctors who helped him and much love for not only his wife and daughters but also for his colleagues who showed their support for him as well. It is a powerful work that shows how mental health issues can be hidden from the outside world but can deeply affect the people who are suffering. When Saunders shared his time spent in the psychiatric wing of a hospital and two other patients with whom he formed friendships, it was such a moving message illustrating how people who are suffering share a common bond.

This is a book that must be read – not only to learn more about depression and what it can do, but also to gain an understanding of the man whom many spent each Sunday morning listening to in order to catch up on the sports news. I was always a fan of The Sports Reporters and Saunders, but now I have an even more deep respect for what he did and the legacy he left behind.

I wish to thank Da Capo Press for providing a copy of the book in exchange for an honest review.

<https://sportsbookguy.blogspot.com/20...>

Caleb Parnin says

This book was quite impactful. How many people struggle with depression, 'playing hurt' through life? This book was a sacrifice of privacy on behalf of John and his family in order to truly help readers.

I will close with this quote from President Obama:

"We wouldn't accept it if only 40 percent of Americans with cancer got treated...We wouldn't accept it if only half of young people with diabetes got help. Why should we accept it when it comes to mental health?" (Saunders 279).

Excellent, excellent work.

Mike Howerton says

Loved it. I wasn't aware of what Saunders dealt with in his life. This book was very enlightening. As a sports

fan, the stuff about ESPN was interesting, but the details about his battle with depression were what kept me reading.

Anyone with someone close who fights with depression should definitely read this one.

Kim. E. says

When I picked this book up at the library based on a recommendation from here, I knew there would be parts that would touch what I call my past world. What I didn't expect was to find someone who understood some of my health issues so well, or that I would cry.

John Saunders was a well beloved ESPN sportscaster that I well remember watching over the years. He earned respect, displayed a keen sense of humor, and knew the sports he was covering, therefore being able to teach his audience. But John lived a very different personal life away from the cameras.

This is not an easy book to read, but it is an important one. John is bluntly honest throughout, not to exploit something explosively, but to help others. John, thank you.

I had a stroke at age 39. I went to bed one night enjoying my life and family and friends, planning a vacation with my daughter. I woke up the next morning with the most intensive migraine possible and people looking at me like I was crazy because my words were nonsense. John didn't have a stroke, but he did have a fall after a game broadcast and suffered another brain issue. His feelings and the experiences he encountered mirror mine, and I found myself wishing I could pick up the phone and talk with him.

John suffered throughout his life in many ways. He lived two lives, and addresses all the complications of this with class.

Randy says

Although this was mostly a sad book to read, it gives an enlightening view into what it may look like to battle depression. John Saunders was a classy professional sportscaster for ESPN, but you'd never know that he was hiding something and battling a constant depression. John gives an intimate view into his abuse as a child, his sexual molestation, his drug use, and other demons that he constantly battled.

If you were a fan of John's sports journalism work, this book gives you a view into his life that makes you further appreciate how good he was at his craft, but also at times makes you feel sorry for him.

Again, it's a mostly sad read, but kudos to John for shedding some light on mental illness and trying to give people a better understanding of how hard it may be to live with it.

Gary Cohen says

A great book for understanding how one person battled depression, even when that person had a very public profile. It's a bit painful to read about all the things that John Saunders went through in his life, but well worth the read to get some perspective on both depression and resiliency, and also to learn a little bit more about a prominent sports journalist who reached extraordinary heights with his work for ESPN / ABC.

Ben A. says

As I watched ESPN for many years, John Saunders always seemed in command. Whether he was hosting Sports Reporters, anchoring studio coverage, or in the play-by-play booth, he appeared smooth, confident, and in control. That appearance of control makes Saunders' story of abuse, depression, and constant self-doubt all the more striking. This book was an eye-opening look into the constant struggle, and yet the hope that remains, when living with mental health issues.

Susi Keffer says

I'm so grateful to John Saunders for bravely sharing his story...

For anyone who suffers or knows someone who suffers from an "invisible illness." While the focus of the book is John's lifelong battle with depression, many of the life lessons he shares are applicable to us all. He tells his story with candor, authenticity, and humility; you can't help but like him and grieve his passing almost as much as his friends and family did.

Do yourself a favor...read this book and share it with others. John Saunders shared very intimate, personal experiences to help others understand mental illness (whether or not they've been afflicted), tell others who suffer in silence they are not alone, and encourage people to get the help they need.

John Saunders was a fighter and continues his fight via the story of his life. Let's fight with him and spread awareness by sharing his story with as many people we can. If even one life is spared because of this book, it's a victory for John.

Reid Roemmich says

What a sad, harrowing story

Dave says

It's really hard to rate books like this -- how can you say you "really liked it" when it is about someone suffering through such a disease?

A couple of guys on my hockey team had read this book so I thought I'd give it a try. I knew who John Saunders was -- hard not to know if you've watched ESPN in the last 30 years. But I knew nothing about the man: not him being a Canadian or a hockey player; how much he actually did on ESPN (I probably just caught him now and then); nor, of course, his personal battles.

A well written book about a disease I know very little about -- not typically a book I would read but I am glad I did and happy that the Saunders family/friends saw fit to complete after John's passing. It's an

important topic, not just for people suffering from the disease but for those who aren't to try and understand just a little bit..

Dwayne Smith says

A great lesson to show us all what may appear to be joyous on the outside one may be in much pain on the inside. What a brave thing for John Saunders to write and expose to the world his most inner struggles. While I admired him as a sportscaster, I have even more admiration for him now. Hopefully, this will encourage those that struggle with mental illness and depression to seek help. What makes it even sadder, is that he left this world way too soon.

Sarah Canfield says

Mental health issues are becoming less taboo in our culture and it is great to see people opening up about the real struggle with depression that is often underlying people that are successful in their chosen profession. In addition to mental health, this book also covers Saunders' early years in Canada and family life and there are many interesting insights about growing up in the 60's and 70's, hockey, being black in Canada vs. being black in the U.S. and how early childhood trauma can impact an adult life.
