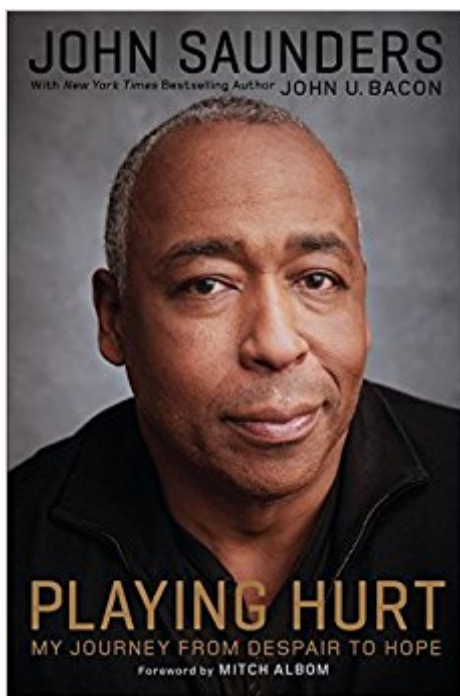


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# Playing Hurt: My Journey From Despair To Hope



## Synopsis

For the first time ever, the popular late host of ESPN's The Sports Reporters and ABC's college football openly discusses a lifelong battle with depression. During his three decades on ESPN and ABC, John Saunders became one of the nation's most respected and beloved sportscasters. In this moving, jarring, and ultimately inspiring memoir, Saunders discusses his troubled childhood, the traumatic brain injury he suffered in 2011, and the severe depression that nearly cost him his life. As Saunders writes, *Playing Hurt* is not an autobiography of a sports celebrity but a memoir of a man facing his own mental illness, and emerging better off for the effort. I will take you into the heart of my struggle with depression, including insights into some of its causes, its consequences, and its treatments. I invite you behind the facade of my apparently "perfect" life as a sportscaster, with a wonderful wife and two healthy, happy adult daughters. I have a lot to be thankful for, and I am truly grateful. But none of these things can protect me or anyone else from the disease of depression and its potentially lethal effects. Mine is a rare story: that of a black man in the sports industry openly grappling with depression. I will share the good, the bad, and the ugly, including the lengths I've gone to to conceal my private life from the public. So why write a book? Because I want to end the pain and heartache that comes from leading a double life. I also want to reach out to the millions of people, especially men, who think they're alone and can't ask for help. John Saunders died suddenly on August 10, 2016, from an enlarged heart, diabetes, and other complications. This book is his ultimate act of generosity to help those who suffer from mental illness, and those who love them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An Best Book of August 2017: For three decades beginning in 1986, John Saunders was a mainstay at ESPN, a jack-of-all-trades providing of thoughtful play-by-play, analysis, and commentary across a wide range of sports including basketball, football, and hockey, as well as anchoring the network's flagship program, SportsCenter. For many, Saunders would appear to be leading an ideal existence – a happy family combined with a career that also happened to align with his passions – but off-camera, he was harboring a secret: debilitating depression that threatened everything he held dear, including his life. In this autobiography (written with John U. Bacon), Saunders lays bare his struggles, and the story is as harrowing as it is inspirational, a journey through our darkest pathways where the only way out is through. Made all the more profound by his unexpected death in 2016, *Playing Hurt* is a testament to human will, generosity, and the triumph of optimism.

"A story that merits both sympathy and attention." – Kirkus Reviews  
"An inspiring call to action about mental illness." – Sports Illustrated  
"For sports fans and anyone who has struggled with depression." – Library Journal  
"The book...isn't a puffy portrait of the long-time fixture on ABC's college football coverage and 'The Sports Reporters'—though it's true Saunders was one of the most-liked sportscasters on ESPN through his career. This book explores Saunders' off-camera struggles, which included the events surrounding his life-long battle with depression...Readers will learn so many things about Saunders they would have never expected to hear—and they will also gain a better understanding of the day-to-day lives of people with depression. Saunders proves it's not what you think." – Sporting News  
"In this book, Saunders gives an astoundingly honest account of his lifelong struggle with depression...*Playing Hurt* makes it clear that depression doesn't care who you are. It doesn't care about your race, gender, age, family background, professional success, or anything else like that. This book also does an amazing job of saying to readers who suffer from this illness, 'You are not alone,' which is a message that can never be stated often enough...The honesty of this book, especially for such a public figure (who assumed he'd be alive when it was eventually published), is breathtaking...*Playing Hurt* is a gripping story, it is an emotional story, and above all else, it is an important story. It is not hyperbole to say that this book will save lives. It is a must-read." – Clearing Out the Clutter  
"[A] moving chronicle of [Saunders'] struggle...Readers will ache for him as he struggles to overcome brain trauma while still battling depression. This is a tough read; there's a lot of pain on the pages. But, as Saunders promised in his preface, there's a

kind of hope as well."~ Booklist "This is an important book. Parts will leave you shaken, others will inform you, still others will uplift you. Playing Hurt is the final act of grace in John's remarkable life, so we may learn of the toll of depression, the need for diagnosis and treatment, and the hope that awaits."~ Bob Ley, host of ESPN's Outside the Lines, winner of 11 Emmy Awards "For 30 years, my friend John Saunders earned my admiration for his understated demeanor, his top-of-the-line professionalism, his Old World ways, and his gentle yet warm smile and laughter. I'm sure those who never met him except through TV felt the exact same way. After reading Playing Hurt, my respect for him has increased exponentially. So will yours. Thank you, John."~ Chris Berman, legendary ESPN broadcaster

John U Bacon has written many insightful books about college football but his latest effort is a game changer for how he will be perceived going forward. "Playing Hurt" goes in a completely unexpected direction from page 1 as we realize that virtually all of John Saunders' entire life was an uphill battle towards becoming a confident and emotionally stable human being. We've all read books before about public figures who struggle with their non public personas but the depths of JS's depression is esp. surprising considering what a fantastic career he had as a broadcaster. Credit to John Saunders for having the courage to share his deepest and darkest thoughts with everyone and to John U. Bacon for presenting JS's difficult journey in a straightforward but sensitive way. As much as everyone enjoyed JS's work on ESPN he's given us something even greater after his death; a story of raw honesty about a man who fought mental illness at every turn of his accomplished life. This is a great story for anyone wanting to understand the impact of mental illness and depression on a man's life.

Great Read, very open book about John and his struggle.

This book was great. John Saunders really poured his heart into his story.

This book combines a "good read" with a "good learn". I was engrossed in the struggles John Saunders had, and how he overcame them; and I learned more about how incredibly difficult it is dealing with depression in a society that still places a stigma on concerns with one's mental and emotional health. I had always respected John Saunders when he was broadcasting; now, knowing more about his struggles, I respect him even more. Kudos to John Bacon for helping to bring us a book that shows the true face of a sportscasting icon; it will give a ray of hope to those who struggle

with mental health on a daily basis.

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 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.

John Saunders worked with me at WMAR-TV in Baltimore back in the 80s. As one of his supervisors, I knew nothing about his battle against depression and the other troubles in his life, though I did personally try to help, counsel and encourage him as a fellow diabetic when the disease overtook him back then. The amazing, candid revelations in his book explain so much of what I observed about John but didn't at all understand. It took great courage for him to finally talk about so many difficult topics, and his discussion of depression was truly right on point. RIP John.

Grew up watching John on ESPN and never knew what he was going through until now. So courageous and honest, this book was one of the best I have read. My hope is that others will read this book and be inspired by his courage to put this all out there. Depression is a disease and you can get help. Thank you John for sharing your story with us. You'll be missed,

John U Bacon's best book to date. A MUST read! After reading about John Saunders journey battling depression I was left wishing he was still alive to bring more attention to the disease of depression. John U Bacon did a great job putting John Saunders words to print. Hopefully this book shines light on a topic that affects many.

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