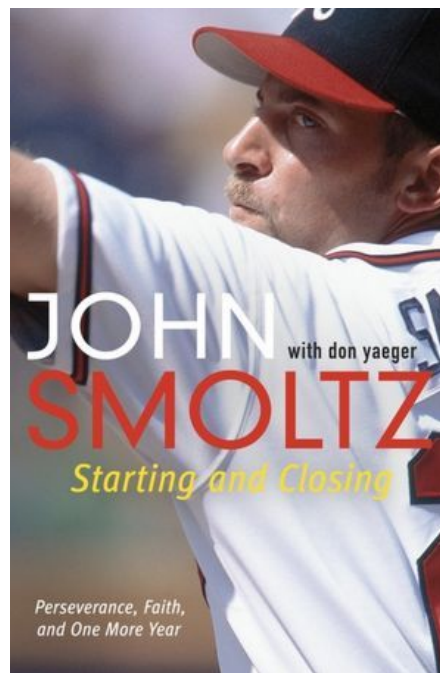




Starting and Closing: Perseverance, Faith, and One More Year

John Smoltz , Don Yaeger

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John Smoltz was one of the greatest Major League pitchers of the late twentieth / early twenty-first century—one of only two in baseball history ever to achieve twenty wins and fifty saves in single seasons—and now he shares the candid, no-holds-barred story of his life, his career, and the game he loves in *Starting and Closing*.

A Cy Young Award-winner, future Baseball Hall of Famer, and currently a broadcaster for his former team, the Atlanta Braves, Smoltz delivers a powerful memoir with the kind of fascinating insight into game that made *Moneyball* a runaway bestseller, plus a heartfelt and truly inspiring faith and religious conviction, similar to what illuminates each page of Tim Lincecum's smash hit memoir, *Through My Eyes*.

Starting and Closing: Perseverance, Faith, and One More Year Details

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From Reader Review Starting and Closing: Perseverance, Faith, and One More Year for online ebook

Michael J says

At first I thought it was kind of boring, but then I realized that I only held that opinion because I was accustomed to reading gripping biographies of Christian martyrs like Dietrich Beonhoffer and Corrie Ten-Boom. If you imagine John Smoltz just relaxing in your living room after eating a good dinner telling you his life story, it becomes an enjoyable read.

Kristin says

Growing up in a Braves family (for example -- I have lots of memories of watching the Braves on TBS; my great-aunt had a photo of Maddux in her family pictures!) I grabbed this book when I saw it at my local public library. I was able to follow along with the baseball (particularly the Braves part!) but the rest of his baseball career was interesting as well.

The entire book talks alot about what he overcame to do what he wanted to do. It was very inspiring!

Marie says

I am a huge Braves fan, but I think this book is for everyone. It reads just like Smoltz is talking to you. He talks about his internal drive and refusing to fail through his many surgeries and comebacks. He talks about his faith in a non-preachy way. Many of his points apply to challenges that we all face.

Melissa says

I grew up a die-hard Atlanta Braves fan. Though I don't follow the game nearly as much as I used to (I used to record the team's stats and maintain a binder for a few years -- I was very serious!), I am still a Braves fan at heart. I've long been a fan of John Smoltz, as well. I had the good fortune to interview him in the Braves dugout for a summer project I worked on in 2002, the summer after my junior year at The College of William & Mary. (The project was a statistical analysis of the Braves current ballpark, Turner Field, versus their old stomping grounds at Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium -- taking a look at whether or not Turner Field was more of a pitcher's park and AFC Stadium was a hitter's park, which were the reputations each field had gained. The long and short of it, there was no statistical difference between the two parks despite obvious opinions and impressions that the two stadiums were completely different parks with respect to how they "played.")

My project aside, the one thing I came away with from my interview with Smoltz (and a few other players and coaches) was what a genuinely nice guy he was -- willing to take the time to answer my questions honestly and fully. It was an experience I'll never forget. So, when I learned that Smoltz had co-authored a book documenting his final year in the Major Leagues, I was anxious to get my hands on it, both from a personal standpoint and with the thought that it would be a departure from my usual reviews. (Not to

mention that both my husband and my dad will likely enjoy reading this book.)

Starting and Closing proved to be a very interesting read. And though I admitted yesterday it was slow going for me (compared to when I read fictional works), that certainly doesn't mean that I didn't enjoy this book. Smoltz's personality really shines through the pages of this autobiographical account. It's his voice you hear, evidenced much by the colloquial writing and heartfelt sentiments throughout. Until reading his story, I wasn't really aware that he was a "born again Christian" or that his faith played such a strong role in his life and his baseball career. By the end of the book, I had a new perspective on Smoltz and it was fun to see a more personal side, beyond the man on the pitcher's mound.

While this book does chronicle Smoltz's comeback after shoulder surgery and his perseverance to play one more year, he sprinkles in many stories of his boyhood growing up in Michigan and dreaming to play for the Detroit Tigers, not to mention the years he spent pitching with one of the best rotations in baseball in Atlanta. Though I was already aware of his tendency to be a bit of a prankster and joke around, reading his accounts of some of the pranks he'd pulled, along with other Braves pitchers, made for an often funny read. The book isn't all fun and games, though. Smoltz also chronicles difficulties with injuries throughout his career, challenges he faced with the Braves' upper management, and some personal life struggles along the way.

Starting and Closing really is a genuine look at one of baseball's best pitchers through his own eyes. If you're a sports fan or just a baseball fan -- even if you're not a fan of the Braves -- I think you'd enjoy picking up this book. It's a quick, easy read (unless you have a difficult history with nonfiction like some of us and even then, I got through it relatively quickly) that offers not only a closer look at Smoltz, but some of the other guys he played with throughout his career.

Shane Grier says

HOFer

Precedent. Stoltz takes the reader through out his career in MLB. The highest highs of winning a world championship and the surgeries that took him to his lowest lows. Good read.

Johnvano says

"Staring and Closing" is insightful and motivational, with some fun anecdotes from both John Smoltz' playing career and his post-career (starting a private school, public speaking, and broadcasting). I enjoyed getting to know Smoltz and found him quite transparent. I also appreciated his boldness in sharing his Christian faith in a simple but powerful way. It really is a terrific peek into his motivations and how he turns challenges -- even failure -- into the fuel for success. Some Braves fans may be disappointed that this isn't an in-depth season-by-season account of the golden era of Atlanta baseball - it does touch on the highlights - but is mainly a book of overcoming adversity and starting a new chapter. My rating is closer to 3.5 stars than 4.

Roger says

Enjoyed the background to these important years in Braves history and Major League Baseball history. Very insightful autobiography.

Dylan says

This was one of the best books I read, even for not being a book reader myself. The fact that he always wants to go out and help his team win games inspired me to go out and help others with anything. This book also taught me that no matter what happens, always have a mindset that you can do it. I also realized that if you make mistakes, move on with the knowledge to prevent that mistake. A man from one of my favorite teams was nearly at a career ending injury, but he came back, even though the odds were against him. Even though his last season didn't happen to be with the Braves, he still tried his hardest to win, even if the results were less than satisfactory. Overall, this book had an impact on my views towards how I should do things, and I would recommend this book to lots of people.

Ricki says

You don't have to be a baseball fan to read John Smoltz's book. I've been a fan of his, and the Braves, for a long time but learning personal things about him just intensified my respect for him as a man as well as an athlete. If you are a fan, you'll love the book.

Trish says

Let me preface my review by stating that I'm a huge Braves fan and a huge John Smoltz fan. In the '90s when he, Glavine, and Maddux were part of the rotation, I listened to them on the radio all the time, especially in September when the season would be winding down and we'd be in our huge crunch time at work.

Reading Smoltz account of his time with the Braves, his disaster with the Red Sox and finally ending with the Cardinals, it felt as if he were actually telling me, about it. Because of his broadcast career in the later years I could actually hear his voice as I read.

From his tales of starting as a Detroit Tigers fan, his faith, his lack of respect for the Braves front of office, and how/why games go the way they do ... thoroughly enjoyed the reading. Wish Smoltzy all the best in his future endeavors be it golf, broadcasting or something else.

Kevin McAllister says

Every year when Spring Training comes around I find my self reading a baseball book. So this year when I found out that John Smoltz would be coming to my store to do a book signing and I was able to acquire an advanced copy I thought I had another baseball book I could enjoy. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case. This book just didn't do it for me. First of all, as a dedicated and life time fan of the Mets, I'm going to have a certain animosity toward anyone involved with the Braves. But as a fan of baseball in general, I tried to get past that, and be impartial with my review. But something else also wound up prejudicing my view of this book. And that would be the book I read immediately before this one. I'm still blown away by all the incredible adversities faced by Former Olympic runner Louie Zamperini as depicted in the book "Unbroken". And after reading about Zamperini's adversities it really bothered me just how many times Smoltz used the

word adversity. Sorry John, but whining about your sore shoulder, elbow, or thumb in comparison with Zamperini's being shot from a B-24 bomber, spending 47 days with no food or water on a raft in the Pacific Ocean only to finally be picked up by the Japanese and spend another two years being starved and tortured in a POW camp just doesn't match up with your sore thumb. I respect what you did on the field and admire all the charity work you've done for the people of Atlanta, but your story just didn't move me .

Diane says

John Smoltz is one of the best pitchers to ever play major league baseball. For over twenty years he pitched for the Atlanta Braves, chosen eight times for the All-Star team and winning the Cy Young Award for best pitcher in 1996.

He pitched in the starting rotation for fourteen years when an injury caused him to move to the bullpen and become a relief pitcher. After three years in the bullpen, he asked to rejoin the starting rotation. Many people, particularly in the sports media, asked him why he did this. His response: Why not?

Smoltz begins the book with three things people need to know about him:

1. All he ever wanted to do was win
2. He's not afraid to fail
3. He never did anything in his baseball career just to set a record, or to be able to say that no one else has done what he has done

Smoltz lived in Michigan, and his grandfather worked at the Detroit Tigers stadium. Young John grew up going to Tigers games, and he loved the Tigers. He was thrilled to be drafted by his hometown Tigers to play baseball, and disappointed when they soon traded him to the Atlanta Braves.

His disappointment turned to happiness when he realized that the Braves were willing to work with him, that they valued their young players and worked hard to make him a successful pitcher. (The Braves are known for their excellent farm system.)

Injuries plagued Smoltz throughout his career, and he pushed his body through the pain, hoping to avoid Tommy John surgery, which could end his baseball career. He eventually had the surgery, but with his amazing work ethic, he began a grueling rehab program and came back to pitch again, although as a closer.

As a person who worked best with a steady routine, Smoltz found it difficult to get used to the unpredictability of being a reliever. As a starter, he knew which day he would pitch, so his mind was set. He could play his favorite hobby, golf, on his off-days. He said that "by going to the bullpen, I sacrificed two things that really helped me tick; knowing what was coming and feeling like I was in control."

Besides baseball, two other things motivated Smoltz: golf and being a born-again Christian. He described the moment he knew that his relationship with God had to change, and how his life changed for the better because of it. He soon became a popular speaker at 'baseball church' gatherings, and later founded a Christian school in an Atlanta suburb.

Now that he is retired, Smoltz has set his sights on joining the Champions Tour in golf , and Tiger Woods has said that publicly that Smoltz is the best amateur golfer he has seen. Smoltz frequently played golf with his pitching teammates, Tom Glavine and Greg Maddux, and you can feel the joy on the pages where describes their bonding over golf.

Smoltz was not re-signed by the Braves after twenty years, and he joined the Boston Red Sox for a final season. He describes the sadness he felt at leaving the team he helped to bring to 14 post-season playoffs, although with only one World Series title. I found his analysis of the toll that pitching in so many consecutive post-seasons took interesting, and I have to say it never occurred to me how damaging it could be.

Boston was a disaster, and Smoltz was happy to be picked up by the St. Louis Cardinals after the Red Sox released him halfway through the season. He was happy to be able to contribute to the Cardinals playoff run, but wistfully says that he wished he could have ended his career in Atlanta.

Starting & Closing is not your typical sports memoir; Smoltz really concentrates on his last season, sprinkling little parts of his life throughout. You get a real feel for what makes this intriguing man tick, why he was so successful in baseball although plagued with injuries, and how his changed relationship with God made him a better man and a better pitcher.

Tara says

I am a die hard Braves fan but have stopped watching in the last few years when all of my favs retired/went to other teams.. I enjoyed reading this book by Smoltz, esp the parts about the joking around!

Andrea says

This book was phenomenal and much more than I expected. John's talk of faith and spirituality was an inspiration that even the non-baseball/Braves fan could appreciate. The book and its events were executed with such grace and respect that furthers my being a fan of superb pitcher and amazing person.

Stoney Setzer says

I'll admit to being a bit biased on this review. The Atlanta Braves are my favorite team in any sport, and John Smoltz is my all-time favorite Brave, so I doubt that there would have been any way for me to NOT like this book. For those who may not know, Smoltz was one of the key figures in the Braves' rise from 1980s doormats to 1990s contenders. He is one of only 15 pitchers with 3,000 + career strikeouts (and the only Brave on that list), has 15 career postseason wins, and is the only pitcher in Major League history with both 200 career wins and 150 career saves. In short, he is a future Hall of Famer.

With that aside, this book is notably different from a lot of the other sports biographies/autobiographies I have read. Interesting, he focuses his book on what would appear to be one of the lowest points of his career, a 2008 shoulder surgery that threatened his career (as it was, he pitched one more year after that, but was only a shadow of his former self). He uses that as a springboard for the book's true message, which is the importance of faith and perseverance under adversity. Since retiring from baseball, Smoltz has worked as a sportscaster and a motivational speaker, and this book is a product of the latter. He highlights his Christian faith, the importance of challenging oneself and goal setting, and how seemingly negative events can strengthen us and eventually lead to opportunities later.

For non-baseball fans, this is a fairly accessible book. There are some "basic" baseball statistics thrown in, such as won-loss records and earned run averages (ERA), but not so extensively as to distract from the books overall message. For baseball fans like myself, it's actually refreshing to read a sports bio that has a slightly different focus. Definitely worth taking the time to read.
