Larry Moffi’s *The Conscience of the Game: Baseball’s Commissioners from Landis to Selig* is not a history of baseball’s commissioners. Moffi acknowledges this, saying that it is a personal reflection on the commissioner’s office and “the best interests of the game.” He says that better historians have written more complete histories of the office, and that a number of commissioners have written books about their tenure. He does not pretend to replace or amend that material; he aims to look at the commissioner’s office now, talk with people who have occupied that office, and reflect upon its past and future through the question, “How well is the commissioner forwarding the best interests of the game?”

Moffi’s method is threefold: interview former commissioners, attend the congressional hearings on baseball, and compare the actions and motives of various commissioners. His interviews can be interesting because he
persuades some former commissioners to speak directly to difficult questions about what they see happening in the contemporary game. His observations of the congressional hearings are interesting yet not very substantial. And his comparisons of the actions of several commissioners can be lively, but a little confusing because they are very personal and sometimes lack focus.

A blurb at the start of the proof pages says that the book is “written in a style at once conversational and provocative.” That description is accurate. The conversational style, however, makes the book quite difficult to read. It is highly discursive, repeatedly following multiple tangents in single paragraphs. The author frequently uses comparisons that lead to long passages describing things that remind him of his main topic; when he returns to the original topic, you often can’t remember what he was talking about. He never says simply that something is out of place, exaggerated, or comic; it is described and re-described by reference to something else that is out of place, exaggerated, or comic.

Not everyone, however, will notice this fault. (I am an English professor). Those who are comfortable with the style may enjoy the personal reflections on the game’s direction since Moffi writes like a fan. Others may enjoy the way that Moffi traces the themes of “the conscience of the game” and “the best interests of the game” across the nine commissioners. Still others may like his reflections on the congressional hearings. The book makes you think about important issues such as the commissioner’s role in governing the game, the
changing nature of corporate baseball, the minor leagues’ future, MLB and drug testing, and many other timely topics.

Most people who follow the business of baseball in the news will be familiar with the book’s topics, such as baseball’s anti-trust exemption, contraction, steroids, and the conflict of interest that arose from the commissioner being an owner. It does not reveal anything that has not been in newspapers and magazines. It does, however, bring a personal view to these issues and it focuses that view on the commissioner’s role in dealing with them in the best interests of the game.

Moffi’s book is a sincere effort to bring these important issues more clearly into the public’s ken. You should not expect a complete history or any startling revelations about the commissioner’s office. It is a fan’s book and should be judged as such.