

Kuhn, Bowie. *Hardball: The Education of a Baseball Commissioner*. Times Books, New York, 1987. Pp. 453. Pictures, \$19.95.

Written with the editorial assistance of Martin Appel, *Hardball* is Bowie Kuhn's account of his service as commissioner of baseball from 1969 to 1984, a period of enormous change in the national pastime. After a brief sketch of his origins and early life, Kuhn devotes twenty separate chapters to a variety of issues including franchise shifts, labor relations, broadcasting, and race relations. This autobiography frankly reveals Kuhn's feelings toward the personalities and issues he encountered and offers a great deal of detail on the inner workings of major league baseball.

When Bowie Kuhn is recalled, one of the first phrases to come to mind is Charels O. Finely's biting description of him as "the village idiot." In *Hardball* Kuhn shows that he was no idiot, rather he reminds one of a recently ousted ex-mayor, sitting on the city hall lawn and seeking to remind all who will listen of his accomplishments and bitterly denouncing those who opposed him. The book is an apology in the formal sense—a detailed defense of Kuhn's terms as commissioner.

Bowie Kent Kuhn saw his tenure as a time when sportsmen like himself, who sought the best interests of baseball, were opposed by hustlers, agitators, and men selfishly grasping their own narrow financial interests. A distant relative of Jim Bowie, Kuhn is not above using a verbal knife on those who crossed him. His fiercest foes are depicted in animal terms: Charlie Finley is ferret-like and Marvin Miller a "fox in the hen house." Kuhn believes himself correct in most disputes that befell him and that his ouster was an unfortunate victory for a small group of intransigents who failed to recognize his contributions.

Kuhn sees his greatest accomplishments as his work to revive interest in

baseball, insure orderly administration, and preserve and enhance the image of the sport. He is especially proud of his work to raise the status and authority of the office of commissioner. Kuhn is short on specifics to substantiate his role in all but the last of these achievements, and critics will note some glaring inconsistencies. For example, Kuhn's repeated assertions that he was a "fans' commissioner" despite club interests are contradicted by his efforts to limit the television superstations which brought baseball to millions of viewers previously ignored by the major leagues.

Much of this volume deals with labor relations, and here Kuhn is most controversial and least convincing. Marvin Miller is portrayed as a man of "never ending slyness" whose "left-of-center views are deep-seated." To the commissioner, the head of the players union lured Curt Flood into challenging the reserve clause and manipulated the players into and through the strikes of 1972 and 1981. "The players, young and less experienced, have always been much more easily lead." This view is difficult to sustain when other sources like Flood's *The Way It Is* and Lee Lowenfisch's *Imperfect Diamond* are examined.

Kuhn also leaves the erroneous impression that labor problems arose only with the 1960s ignoring the bitter Brotherhood battle of the late nineteenth century and the growing unrest of players starting in the 1940s. Surprisingly, he continues to assert that his opposition to uncompensated free agency was an effort to maintain competitive balance, despite the overwhelming evidence of a greatly increased balance and diversity among pennant winners since free agency. Perhaps most controversial, is Kuhn's assertion that the press largely favored Marvin Miller and the players and his claim that this favorable press treatment resulted from Miller's leaking of inside information to writers such as Red Smith and Jerome Holtzman.

Although caustic towards labor, *Hardball* is also critical towards some elements of management, charging, "most of our owners have little time for even the most important subjects, they are easily tilted by whoever gets there first with some adroit factual embroidery." Kuhn especially faults owners for inflating the prices in the free agent market after 1975.

Kuhn divides his world into good and bad owners, and his sympathies lie with traditional men such as Calvin Griffith, Ruly Carpenter, and Philip Wrigley. Criticism is aimed at the likes of Ted Turner, Bill Veeck, and especially Charles Finley. Beyond agreeing or disagreeing with the commissioner, Kuhn's criteria for judging owners seems hard to follow. One wonders if the long-suffering Cub fans would see Wrigley's quaint traditionalism and support for Kuhn as adequate compensation for his team's consistent mediocrity from 1945 to the 1980s. Moreover, Kuhn's frequent conflicts with Veeck and Finley blind him to the skills of these mavericks in player assessment and to the host of innovative ideas they espoused. For instance, Kuhn takes understandable pride in his efforts to increase and equitably divide television revenues and his work to encourage clubs to improve their marketing techniques. Yet, he makes no mention of Veeck's pioneering work in both these areas.

Hardball adds significant detail and a noteworthy vantage point from which

to view major league baseball during the 1970s and 1980s, but the uninitiated and those wishing a more comprehensive picture will be well advised to consult David Voigt's third volume of *American Baseball* to balance Kuhn's partial account. Baseball historians can only begin to assess Kuhn's impact. Obviously Kuhn's closeness to the baseball establishment and consistent support of the company line promises him quick installation among the executives at Cooperstown, but one suspects that history will see Marvin Miller and perhaps other of Kuhn's contemporaries as far more significant to the development of the game. The book should enjoy a wide audience among casual fans and scholars. This reviewer hopes that other key figures such as Marvin Miller and Lee MacPhail will contribute their own accounts. The ten pages of photographs, a full index, and an attractive format enhance the volume's value.

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