The theater of the absurd taking place in Congress on Wednesday in the form of the hearings over whether Roger Clemens did or did not use steroids and human growth hormone has, if nothing else, made the perfect coda for what has been one of the more interesting off-seasons in the history of major league baseball. In Gary's latest, he says some of the revelations brought forth yesterday leave no doubt. Baseball has now reached rock bottom.

The theater of the absurd taking place in Congress on Wednesday in the form of the hearings over whether Roger Clemens did or did not use steroids and human growth hormone has, if nothing else, made the perfect coda for what has been one of the more interesting off-seasons in the history of major league baseball.

It started mostly with the issuance of the so-called Mitchell Report, the culmination of a lengthy investigation into baseball's steroids era. Beyond confirming essentially rampant widespread steroids use across the baseball spectrum, it also shone a light on the seamy underside of the day to day workings of the average major league baseball locker room. Whatever you might think of former Clemens best friend forever Brian McNamee or New York Mets clubhouse attendant Kirk Radomski, the fact that these two had ready and open access to the players for years is pretty damning evidence in and of itself how tolerant baseball management was of the seedy way in which its business was actually conducted behind the scenes.

One of the more interesting revelations from McNamee's testimony on Tuesday was a comment he related from David Cone in the late ‘90s. Cone was then pitching for the Toronto Blue Jays and was their player representative. According

to McNamee, Cone told him that the owners weren't all that interested in testing for steroids, just that they wanted to appear interested.

It's hard to know, assuming Cone made the comments, whether or not he actually believed that to be the case. But with the huge benefit of 20/20 hindsight, it sure looks like Cone was correct. Baseball both before and under the weak leadership of its worst commissioner ever, Bud Selig, clearly buried their heads in the sand on the steroids issue and their way too late commissioning of the Mitchell Report does little to negate its culpability in that regard.

Selig and the owners can pat themselves on the back all they want about how far they've come, but the truth is that they still have far to go. There still are flaws in baseball's drug testing program and the fact that the owners are not now nor have they ever been willing to draw a definitive line in the sand with the union to get an unassailable program, even to the point of taking a strike if necessary, is really all you need to know about baseball's commitment to rid itself of drugs.

This isn't to let the union off the hook whatsoever, either. Donald Fehr, under the specter of protecting individual privacy, has steadfastly refused to cooperate with the owners on achieving a flawless and comprehensive drug program. In truth, he was protecting the players' rights to parlay their illegal drug use into bigger and bigger contracts. Fehr's conduct at every phase, from repeatedly refusing to discuss the issue meaningfully at the bargaining table to instructing the players not to cooperate in Mitchell's investigation, is all you really need to know about the union's commitment to rid the game of drugs.

In the meantime, while the powers that be have played their wink-and-a-nod game with the integrity of their sport, the collateral damage continues to mount. The one person I felt truly sorry for on Wednesday was the Clemens family former nanny. To bolster a claim that he supposedly was not at a party hosted by Jose Canseco in 1998 when steroids were discussed, Clemens sought out the nanny to back him up. Though he hadn't spoken to her at all since 2001, he spoke to her recently, apparently to test her recollection that indeed Clemens was not there.

Committee chairman Henry Waxman raised the issue that Clemens conduct in this regard seemed a tad inappropriate. As Waxman said, the proper thing would have been to turn over her name to the committee and let them interview her first, implying, correctly, that Clemens may having been trying to coach the witness.

Though this whole party angle is mostly meaningless, it provides incredible insight to what ultimately is likely to sink Clemens-his hyper sense of bravado. Clemens submitted an affidavit that he was never at the party. He then testified similarly several times until finally hedging later. Of course, he had to hedge when it was discovered that Clemens' family was at the party. Clemens then offered that perhaps he stopped by briefly to drop them off and then pick them up. Ok, so he was at the party.

And that's been the pattern throughout this mess with Clemens. He speaks in haughty, definitive tones but then hedges later. He claimed, for example, that he "worked his butt off" (an unfortunate metaphor if ever there was one) and that this unparalleled work ethic is the reason for his success, not shortcuts. In another breath, he admits to shortcuts like a regimen of B12 injections and to popping the painkiller idocaine as if they were tic tacs. He told *60 Minutes* that he was advised not to talk to Mitchell when Mitchell asked to interview him but testified that he was never told Mitchell wanted to speak with him. He claims he was raised in a strict drug-free family but didn't seem particularly outraged at the fact that McNamee administered human growth hormone to Clemens' wife. He appears to vouch for the credibility of his latest best friend forever Andy Pettitte but then says that Pettitte obviously is mistaken when he claims that Clemens told him that he was using human growth hormone. And on and on it went.

The posturing of the various congressmen during the hearing also was interesting with some on the side of Clemens, others on the side of McNamee. It was interesting mostly because it wasn't a time for anyone to take sides in the first place. Assuming that a congressional hearing was necessary to resolve the he said/she said allegations of the two protagonists, a mighty big assumption, the only side anyone should have been on was the truth. But just as it does with most of what it does these day, Congress again lost sight of the objective.

While it is virtually impossible at this point to actually prove Clemens took steroids and human growth hormone, it is instructive nonetheless to point out that if the Mitchell Report and McNamee, by proxy, is wrong on this point, it's the only thing it has been wrong about thus far. As Representative Elijah Cummings asked somewhat rhetorically at the hearing, why would McNamee be truthful about Pettitte and Chuck Knoblauch, for example, both of whom confirmed McNamee's allegations, and be untruthful about Clemens? Clemens, not surprisingly, didn't have an answer, probably because there isn't a good one.

The hearing was a bit of a battle royale between Clemens and McNamee but it's unclear and probably unlikely that it will ever come to full resolution. Surely one of the two committed perjury and even if Clemens' inconsistencies point the finger more toward him than McNamee, the chances that this ultimately becomes a criminal matter seem rather slim at this point. Where this issue will be decided, to the extent it hasn't been already, is in the court of public opinion. And while some may have been persuaded one way or the other by today's testimony, frankly both Clemens and McNamee came off as losers.

McNamee really has been nothing more than a glorified groupie to Clemens, Pettitte and the others who he "helped." His usefulness in that regard now thoroughly compromised forever, he's been discarded like so many other groupies who have come before him and is acting out not partly motivated by revenge. There's nothing honorable in what he did then and certainly nothing particularly honorable in what he's doing now. Remember, this is a guy whose initial default was to lie about his involvement in this whole drug mess in the first place. He only started squealing, like they all do, when the heat was closing in.

Clemens in many ways is just as dysfunctional. His dogged and unrelenting pursuit of pitching perfection blinded him to what was proper and what was right. If he didn't know about McNamee's little side business, then it was convenient and deliberate ignorance. If he tolerated his own wife's use of human growth hormone, then he's a hypocrite to boot. Clemens may have been more media friendly than Barry Bonds, but there is precious other little difference between the two. He is right in one regard, he'll never get his reputation back nor does he deserve to.

As for major league baseball itself, it can't act like this never happened simply by congratulating itself on the completion of the Mitchell Report. Baseball has an integrity problem that is no longer just a mile wide. It's now clear it's a mile deep as well. There is much it can do to rectify the situation, but acting as if this is all now in the past isn't one of them. Baseball has now reached rock bottom. It's time it admitted it and sought help.