Major player

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From 1996 through 2004, Doug Glanville patrolled center field for the Philadelphia Phillies, Chicago Cubs and Texas Rangers. From this position, he had the whole game in front of him. The first African-American Ivy Leaguer to play major league baseball, he didn't miss much — on the field or in the dugout.

In "The Game From Where I Stand," Glanville hits for the cycle with an elegantly written, up-close-and-personal, deliciously detailed, side-splitting and sad account of the day-to-day life of a journeyman ballplayer. He doesn't shed much new light on the social issues confronting the sport: race relations, unions, salary caps, and steroids. But, he reveals, as no one before has, what it's like to be a "boy of summer."

Players in the big leagues, Glanville reveals, live on "Temptation Island." Everyone wants their autograph. Pretty women want their bodies. Manufacturers want to give them bats and gloves with their names on them. Resembling the staff of a five-star hotel, locker room helpers pack their equipment bags, clean spikes, get extra tickets for friends, make dental appointments, and prepare and serve scrumptious meals. If a player takes a basketball shot at the hamper and misses, he can't even think about getting a rebound because it was instantaneously tipped in by an assistant clubhouse manager.

Feeling flush, often for the first time, players will buy just about anything, including enormous homes with no one living there all season long. It takes "a lot of introspection," Glanville writes, to realize that "as this particular home plate keeps moving, teasing you into needing to go just a little farther," an invisible peak is on the horizon. And that chasing illusions takes a man away from his true self and the relationships that really matter.

Although they're pampered and well-paid, ballplayers live with fear in "the theater of self-doubt," Glanville says. They are afraid of aging, injuries, getting traded, giving up the number on their back to a new teammate, or losing a job to a faster, stronger youngster "with better sound bites and a lower salary." Every career "is a blink in a stare," moving inexorably toward a time when the player goes "from chasing the dream to running from a nightmare."

For Glanville it started with a trip to the disabled list with a torn tendon and a request that he mentor a new kid, Marlon Byrd, "so he could replace me." Glanville retired at 34, "following a season of sunflower seeds and only 162 at-bats." He had been a starter the year before.

And, alas, Glanville reports, retired major leaguers rarely experience a soft landing.

Missing the only thing they've ever been good at, and feeling forgotten, players don't know what to do with their time or how to be "consistently present" to family members who've become virtual strangers. Glanville cites the claim of one organization that fully 80 percent of professional athletes are divorced and $250,000 in debt within a few years.

Fortunately, Glanville wasn't one of them.

As his career wound down, he "exhaled" and absorbed his "amazing journey," getting autographs from players he admired, talking to the ball boy, answering fan mail and visiting his favorite restaurants. After he called it quits, he took pride in the time he had spent between the foul lines, became a dad, used his engineering degree from the University of Pennsylvania to launch a home-building business, and wrote an online column for the New York Times.

It wasn't a storybook ending. He no longer gets the VIP treatment. But it was enough. And enough is as good as a feast.

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