Slobodan Jaric (1951–2018)

Dear friends, with great sadness, we inform that an outstanding scientist in the fields of motor control and biomechanics, a true gentleman, Slobodan Jaric, passed away in August, 2018. Slobodan passed away at the peak of scientific productivity, new ideas, and new collaborations. His departure creates a void that will be felt by his friends and colleagues for years to come.

Slobodan was trained as a physicist. From his student years, he was interested in biomechanics of sports and was himself an excellent athlete and a formidable person to work out with. This interest in athletics continued over all his life until the very last years and months when Slobodan introduced novel, important methods in applied biomechanics, in particular as related to testing muscle properties in various sports.

Slobodan's interest in the field of motor control dates back to his first visits to the Laboratory of Gerry Gottlieb in the Rush-Presbyterian St. Luke's Medical Center in Chicago, IL. We were lucky to work in that laboratory at the same time, collaborated on many projects with Slobodan, and, most importantly, became his close friends. At the end of 1980s—early 1990s, Gerry Gottlieb and his colleagues were working on developing the dual-strategy hypothesis for the control of human movements. Slobodan was involved in pioneering studies on the effects of training on the two basic strategies formulated within this hypothesis. At the same time, Slobodan became familiar with the equilibrium-point hypothesis, which was a hotly debated topic in Gerry's Laboratory. Slobodan and his student, Dusko Ilic, were impartial with respect to the equilibrium-point hypothesis. So, they offered to perform an experiment with predictions drawn by members of the laboratory with polar opinions. These predictions were written on a piece of paper and signed. After the experiment was completed, the results were compared with the predictions. At least for that set of data, the equilibrium-point hypothesis won.

Slobodan loved his country and was devastated by the sequence of wars among republics of the former Yugoslavia. Although he had been born and raised in Serbia, he always considered himself a Yugoslav much more than a Serb. His close friends knew that, in some of the official documents, he was an Eskimo. This was a consequence of a protest movement among Yugoslav intellectuals in the 1970s, when President Tito decided to introduce local passports with a line stating the person's ethnicity. Intelligent people correctly perceived this move as a step toward nationalism with possible very dangerous consequences (confirmed in the wars of the 1990s). Faculty and students of the Belgrade University staged a protest by declaring themselves members of most unusual ethnic groups. Slobodan selected to be an Eskimo, and he had Zulu and Mohican friends among his colleagues. At the peak of Yugoslav wars, Slobodan returned to Belgrade and spent many hours marching with his students in opposition of Milosevic and his government. Then, the infamous Kosovo incidents happened, and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) planes started to bomb Serbia including Belgrade. These were probably the worst and most dangerous days for Slobodan who was seen by the authorities as a sympathizer of the Western countries. Until those days, Slobodan had always refused to consider emigration. He could easily obtain a faculty position in a European or American university, but he was deeply attached to his country, extended family, and students. However, when NATO planes started to bomb Belgrade, Slobodan agreed that the best solution for him and his family was emigration.

This was not easy because passenger planes did not fly, and men were allowed to leave Serbia by other means, such as trains and buses, only if they had a personal invitation to an international conference. Two of our colleagues from Budapest, Jozsef Laczko and Jozsef Tihanyi, organized a fake "conference" with two invited speakers, Slobodan and one of us. This plan worked, and Slobodan arrived by bus to Budapest with his wife and daughter, Nena and Mimi. The first job offer came very quickly from the University of Umea in Sweden, and Slobodan accepted it immediately.

During the next few years, Slobodan worked in the Institute for Working Life associated with the University of Umea on a range of projects. These included effects of acute and chronic pain on motor coordination and effects of practice of multijoint synergies defined and quantified within the framework of the uncontrolled manifold hypothesis. Slobodan and his family were brought up in the Mediterranean climate, and it was very hard for them to adjust to life close to the polar circle. Despite the very productive atmosphere in the University of Umea and excellent colleagues, after a few years, they decided to move again, and Slobodan accepted an offer from the University of Delaware.

In Delaware, Slobodan found everything a scientist can dream of: a very friendly group of colleagues, an opportunity to start his own laboratory, very comfortable and relaxed lifestyle, a good school for his daughter, and being close to many of his old friends. Over the next years, Slobodan developed a new line of highly innovative and productive research related to force coordination during prehensile tasks and applied those methods to analysis of movement disorders in a range of neurological patients. His well-funded laboratory became an internationally recognized center for studies of motor control and biomechanics. He trained

many graduate students and postdocs, including many visiting researchers from universities in former Yugoslavia. He was very active as a speaker at numerous conferences all over the world.

Slobodan's decision to retire from the University of Delaware came as a surprise to most of his friends. However, this was an unusual retirement: Slobodan moved to Belgrade and accepted two positions, as director of a laboratory in the Belgrade University and as a visiting professor in the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice, Poland. He was excited about this new stage of his scientific career. And, indeed, it coincided with a peak in the number of publications and the development of new methods to test muscle mechanical capacities, which immediately attracted attention of the scientific community. His future was very bright and, indeed, his best work may still have been to come. Slobodan was optimistic and excited. And then, after only a few months since his return to Belgrade, Slobodan was diagnosed with a highly aggressive form of cancer with no cure. He accepted his fate with grace and dignity.

It is very hard to write about Slobodan in the past tense. He was always full of ideas, smiles, love of life, and very warm attitude to people who were lucky to know him personally. Being among his close friends was a gift, and we will all miss his kindness, great smile, songs, and serious attitude to science.

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