



# GROWTH AND MATURATION IN HUMAN BIOLOGY AND SPORTS

*FESTSCHRIFT HONORING ROBERT M. MALINA  
BY FELLOWS AND COLLEAGUES*

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## GASTON P. BEUNEN (1945-2011)

*Robert M Malina*

The pediatric exercise science community lost a beloved colleague and scholar with the untimely passing of Gaston Beunen in August. Gaston collapsed while playing tennis and subsequently died of coronary complications.

Gaston anticipated participating in the Pediatric Work Physiology conference in Exeter in September continuing his long term involvement with the group. He participated in 18 of the 26 meetings organized by the European Group for Pediatric Work Physiology between 1973 and 2010, including two jointly hosted with the North American Society for Pediatric Medicine.

Gaston devoted his entire academic career to the Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven in Belgium. He completed his baccalaureate and master's degrees in physical education at the university in 1965 and 1967, respectively, and his doctoral degree in 1973. He was intimately involved in the mixed-longitudinal study of Belgian boys 12-20 years of age, part of which formed the basis for his doctoral dissertation. He formulated and directed the comprehensive analysis of the longitudinal component of the study, specifically the adolescent growth spurts in body dimensions and motor performances. After several years, Gaston directed a follow-up study of the longitudinal sample which developed into the Leuven Longitudinal Study of Lifestyle, Fitness and Health, marking a shift (albeit to some extent) to interest in factors affecting adult health. The project is still ongoing. The study of boys was followed by a cross-sectional survey of the growth, maturation and physical fitness of girls 6-18 years of age, the Leuven Growth Study of Flemish Girls.

With the sport sciences moving in many directions, Gaston developed an interest in quantitative genetics and with several colleagues he initiated the Leuven Longitudinal Twin Study. Interests in the genetic domain continued in the Leuven Genes for Muscular Strength project. Finally, Gaston served as coordinator of the Flemish Policy Research Center for Sport, Physical Activity and Health between 2002 and 2006. He became an emeritus professor in 2006, but continued his research activities and collaborations at the university and elsewhere.

Gaston has published extensively not only in English but also in his native Flemish. He regularly reviewed manuscripts for many scientific journals and also served on the editorial boards of several journals. Gaston was a member of the editorial board of Pediatric Exercise Science since the inception of the journal in 1988.

Involvement in professional organizations was important to Gaston. He was a Fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine and the recipient of a Citation Award of the College (2001), a Fellow of the European College of Sports Science, and an International Fellow of the American Academy of Kinesiology and Physical Education and the recipient of the Lynn Vendien Outstanding International Fellow Award of the Academy (1986). More recently, Gaston was the recipient of the Medal of Honor of the University of Ghent (2007).

Gaston was both a student and scholar of human growth, maturation and performance in the context of physical education, the sport and physical activity sciences, and human biology. He consistently asked good questions and more importantly had the scientific and quantitative skills to address the issues. He excelled in analyses of longitudinal data and more recently in applications of advanced multivariate methods to studies of growth, performance and genetics.

Although Gaston's academic career and accomplishments were outstanding and unparalleled by many in our field, he will be remembered for his friendly and human demeanor and his willingness to share knowledge and experiences not only with colleagues but also with many students and emerging professionals throughout the world. Gaston's commitment to students was especially evident in the promotion or co-promotion of 163 master's theses and 14 doctoral dissertations at the Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven.

To me personally, I lost a dear friend, perhaps a younger brother. Gaston and I first met, albeit briefly, at the pre-Olympic Scientific Congress in Quebec in 1976. We subsequently met at several meetings which culminated in an invitation to be a visiting professor at the Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven in 1981, during which time we collaborated on the mixed-longitudinal study of Belgian boys. This marked the beginning of our research collaboration and more importantly a long friendship not only for Gaston and me, but also for our families.