

Sage Advice for the Dog Days of Summer

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Nothing puts a damper on a good workout like losing a leg to a Pit Bull. But although common sense can prevent most attacks, since dogs are not "natural" creatures--we've selectively in-bred them to the point of comical excess (Ever seen a Chihuahua try to "get friendly" with a great Dane's hind leg?)--they're apt to behave in somewhat bizarre and unpredictable ways. In any case, there are a few things you should definitely NOT do when confronted by a Kamikaze canine charging at you like Dennis Rodman on crack. Among these:

1.) Ignore the owner- Do NOT pay attention to anything the owner says or does--this is between you and the crazed beast--the dog, that is. I once lost a good-sized chunk of hip flesh to a German Shepherd who's owner assured me that "Princess" wouldn't bite--that she was just "playing." Playing, in this case, meaning locking on to a terrified 12-year-old's hip and shaking vigorously until beaten off with a flurry of fists, feet, elbows and knees. It may be embarrassing for you to beat a dog senseless while the owner stands by with mouth agape, but Zen-like focus on the task at hand has kept me bite-free ever since.

2.) Face the music- Never "Play Dead" or turn your back on a dog. Unlike bears, who'll just swat you around a bit like you see them do in the old Bugs Bunny cartoons, the typical genetically-scrambled mutt will only become confused by such behaviors and mistake you for a giant, cowering salami.

3.) You ain't no rabbit- If it's just you against Fido, never ever try to outrun the dog. I'd put my money on a blind, three-legged Pekinese against Michael Johnson every time. ANY dog can outrun ANY human any day of the week. Research has shown that to 43% of unchained dogs, a brightly-colored pair of rapidly departing running shorts is indistinguishable from a rapidly departing Frisbee, and will elicit an identical "Jump and Chomp" response; 34% will mistake you for a flying two-legged salami, while the remaining 23% will be asleep on the porch--no doubt dreaming about chewing on your leg like an old soup bone.

I could probably go on forever here: Never go running or walking with your cat on a leash; never use Alpo in the place of Vaseline as a pre-workout lubricant; never exercise with pork chops in your pockets... But it's probably more beneficial for most people to know what they should do if they're ever confronted by that deranged Doberman down the block.

Now don't quote me on this stuff: I'm not getting paid for this, and I'm not an AKC-Certified Dog Wrangler (although I do play one on television). But the following are some things that have worked for me in the past--proven strategies that may help you to remain bipedal for many years to come... Probably... Well, maybe... If you're real lucky... And you don't go anywhere near the house at the end of my street where the two Satanic Labradors live--the ones who ate the replacement UPS driver last week....

1.) Be the Top Dog- When a Menacing Mongrel comes bolting at you with fur and fangs flying, run directly at the dog, yelling maniacally and waving your arms like Jack Nicholson escaping from a straight jacket. These belligerent beasts are used to being the aggressors. When they see that you are bigger, louder and more serious than they are, they'll usually back down. (Amazing but true: We've so screwed up dogs' natural instincts that they actually do take Jack Nicholson very seriously.)

2.) Every man for himself- If and only if you're with training partners, use them as human shields/sacrificial lambs and run like Gilligan when his pants catch on fire at the end of the "Attacked by the Head-Hunters" episode. Your mantra should be, "I don't have to outrun the dog, I just have to outrun my friends."

3.) Smash 'em!- If you have enough time, grab a good Goliath-slaying-sized rock or a hefty stick, and try

your best to merge it at high velocity with the dog's frontal lobe; where the "kill" impulse originates. It's amazing how quickly this will communicate the message that you do not wish to become his rawhide chew toy at any time during that particular workout. Even if you miss (and you're real lucky) you may be able to trigger the bonehead's human-induced "fetch" response, instantly transforming the evil cur into a tail-wagging, spit-slobbering Pavlovian marshmallow.

4.) Try "The Poitras"- I wouldn't recommend it, but if you have The Gift you may want to try the "Poitras": I was training with Canadian Olympic racewalker, Tina Poitras, and two of my US team training partners in LaGrange one day last year, when we were suddenly charged by an enraged Rotweiler. I was ready to employ strategy #1, Ernesto* looked like he was going for #3, while Wolfgang looked like a deer caught in the headlights, ready to try the Wet-My-Pants-and-Hope-the-Doggie-Stops-to-Sniff-the-Puddle Method. Tina, instead, simply held out her hand and began cooing "Good boy! What a good doggie you are!" in her French-Canadian accent. Amazing stuff at work here, folks: the brute stopped instantly to let himself be scratched and stroked while we stood and watched in amazement. Even Wolfgang was ready to roll onto his back for a good belly rub.

5.) Pepper spray- Finally, as a last resort, mace the little &@\$\$+@&% to Kingdom Come. It didn't work for the UPS guy, but then again, he had his hands full at the time with those 40 lb. crates from the Salami of the Month Club....

*Note: Some names have been changed to protect the timid.

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