



Multiple Attackers: Outnumbered Does Not Mean Outmatched!

By Richard Kay

It is sad but true that a fair fight is a rare thing these days. If officers are faced with a situation in which they need to defend themselves or others from violence, the chances of it being a straight conflict between two people are low. Apart from domestic violence, most fights involve more than two people. What they say about bullies also holds true for violent criminals – they are generally cowards and prefer to go around in large groups picking on smaller groups or individuals that they think are easy targets.





Statistics released from a police crime study a few years back showed that one of the most common physical attacks in unarmed assaults was kicking. This may seem surprising, since most people (even 'trained' people) will often not kick in a fight because under stress they simply resort to instinct and are busy using their legs for standing and moving. What the statistic reflected, however, was that kicks were common not because people liked to kick, but because the most common attacks in modern society are multiple attacker situations where a group targets an individual.

In this scenario, it is common for the outnumbered victim to be knocked down or 'taken' to the ground, where the group can then use their numerical advantage to best effect ... stand around and over the downed victim and kick. Therefore, statistically, the number of kicks in the confrontation increases dramatically.

This type of situation is of particular concern for security personnel who operate in environments that contain large groups of people, such as security guards or crowd controllers working at shopping centres, licensed venues, concerts, or public events. However, this does not negate the need for personnel who work in 'quieter' environments, such as mobile patrols or static guards, as any situation has potential for risk, especially if the officer has no back-up readily available.

A mass attack can happen in a variety of situations, and so quickly and unexpectedly that officers have little or no time to think about it. Multiple attackers mean angles, weapons and levels of attack increase exponentially, not just by the sum of the number of attackers. For example, four attackers do not just mean four times the trouble – there are now 16 times as many weapons to contend with.

As part of a complete operational safety tool kit, it is well worth officers knowing about the specific issues around how to protect themselves and how to prevail against multiple opponents, to give themselves the best chance if the worst does ever happen and they are confronted by a group of people. It is important to think about it now and address this situation in training. It is possible for a single person to prevail against multiple attackers.

General tips:

- Think quickly, keep it simple, and resolve quickly.

- Control your breathing to keep anxiety low and your energy high.
- Adopt a positive, realistic, and assertive mindset – instill anxiety into opponents.
- Move continuously with balance, and position yourself tactically.
- Be proactive and act seriously.
- Use every opportunity to your advantage.
- Be careful not to injure your hands.

Obviously, there are a huge number of variables that come into play here like officer vs. subject skill, and officer vs. subject physical attributes, etc. Officers need to have superior movement and evasion skills, striking skills, and the ability to render opponents unable to continue in the fight. They also need superior verbal skills. Instill fear and doubt into an opponent through verbal means, but do not threaten. This only serves to give away the element of surprise. Do not strike a pose; this gives the group time to think about their response and to fuel their group rage.

Remember, disengagement is a good option. Officers in foot pursuits are usually only successful in capturing a subject in the first 150 to 200 metres of the chase. After 200 metres, the odds of catching the subject rapidly diminish. The same experience should also apply in reverse. If officers can string the group out over 200 metres, they can then engage each opponent separately.

For all the verbal or physical responses to multiple opponents, the general rule is to create an advantage and use it. This may involve using the environment, or more importantly, a weapon. The disadvantages of facing multiple opponents are staggering. In situations with two, three or four opponents against one, it is literally a few seconds before the one defender is swamped by the group. There are theories that say that multiple opponents get in each other's way, but experience shows that moving to line up two of them often ends up moving right into one of the others.

There are a few basic principles, rather than specific techniques, which can make a real difference:

Prevention

Stop the fight before it starts. Positive and assertive interaction with the group may off-set any violence. Try not to do anything that will cause the opponents to escalate. Remain aware of multiple attack dynamics, and try to negate them as soon as possible. Often, there will be

one or two dominant personalities in the group who will attempt to control the situation. This also serves to distract from other group members positioning themselves to surround the victim. Once in place, they can launch their attack from a position of tactical advantage.

Mindset

Deal with reality, not delusion. If you face multiple attackers you are outnumbered and at a severe tactical disadvantage, and there is a high probability that if they attack you will be hurt. Accept these 'facts', but do not let them defeat you. The attackers are human too, and therefore feel fear and pain. Make them aware that you will not stop fighting, that if they defeat you, they will have to work for it, and some of them will suffer too. This is not bravado, it is reality-based psychology that can create doubt and hesitation in their minds.

Mobility

Never get caught up with one person. Keep moving around all the time and immediately disengage into space. If you allow yourself to get caught up engaging with one person, or if you are just very focussed on one of the attackers, then you are effectively defenceless against any of the others.

Stability

Getting knocked down to the ground is a dangerous reality. Kicking might be a powerful attack, but it carries a high risk of getting knocked down if you do not land it perfectly, or if your leg is caught. Keep both legs firmly planted on the ground.

Positioning

Do not get surrounded. The ideal position for a person against multiple opponents is to line up the attackers so that you can deal with only one at a time. The worst position is to have them all in a circle surrounding you. As you continually keep moving, you need to keep this in mind ... 'stack' your opponents in a line, but do not let them 'bracket' you.

Use the Environment

Having your back to a surface can be a good thing. If you have a wall to your back then it is impossible for anyone to attack you from behind, and if you are in a corner then it is very hard for more than one person to attack you at once. If

you are attacked by more than one person then surviving the fight should be your first priority. If there are possible and realistic avenues of escape then you should do everything you can to keep this option open, and should avoid getting trapped. Any obstacle, from a concrete bollard to a car, can be used in a similar way to stop them all attacking you at once, and to stop anyone from being able to approach you from behind. Similarly, if you have 'weapons' (baton, firearm, etc.), strongly consider using these early, perhaps even as a show of force to defuse a situation from escalating. This may seem unnecessarily pre-emptive to some, but if they do attack it is highly likely that they will overwhelm the officer and strip the weapons anyway. If you do not have issued duty weapons, consider what in your immediate environment may be used to give you an advantage, and before they do. Making a choice to use them when an opportunity arises may help you gain control.

Act seriously

Officers should always view striking a subject

as a last resort. However, a multiple attack situation is very serious, and highly dangerous. There is no point in striking your opponent if you have no chance of either winning or getting away, because you will only aggravate them and encourage them to cause more trauma to you. Do not strike for the sake of it, pick your moment and only strike when you think you have a chance of it having an effect. Reduce your opponents' numerical advantage by any means necessary. It is impossible to defend from multiple angles, so you need to be the first to act. Do not threaten or give away your intentions once you have committed to action. Target vulnerabilities to stun, disorient and disable.

Disengage

Unless you are highly skilled or in a situation where you cannot escape, your best option is to disengage. This is less likely going to be a confrontation you are going to win, and will more likely be a fight you are going to have to escape. Head to somewhere public and call for help. Running is also likely to separate your attackers,

making it more likely to be able to confront them individually. However, when running, be extra careful, as they can set a trap for you and eventually surround you.

Like every aspect of operational safety, preparation starts firstly with developing a reality-based mindset, and then engaging in realistic, appropriate and regular training. Officers should incorporate multiple attack scenarios into training, both with and without weapons, and always add the element of the unknown for proper stress inoculation. After all, failing to prepare is preparing to fail!

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