

RUNNING ON EMPTY

The Newsletter of the Bendigo University Athletics Club

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Running the mean streets of the USA

File under the heading of "Only in America....." This story recently appeared in an American running magazine.

"As runners we are frequently out alone in lonely places. Running is usually a safe pursuit. You can make it even safer with a little knowledge. This article will give you some suggestions on how to both avoid confrontations and behave skillfully if faced with a dangerous situation.

The natural world can be broken down into two categories: predators and prey. When lions hunt, they sneak up on the herd and scare them into running. By making the prey flee, the predators get a chance to identify the easy targets. They are looking for any irregularities or timidity that would identify an easy victim. Human societies have predators that behave in much the same way. Prison studies with criminals have shown that they always choose certain people as victims. They are looking for the same signs as the lions. They use individual presentation to find the easy victims and avoid the targets that will put up too much fight.

As runners we need to ensure that while we may not be the lion, we avoid being the zebra. All predators are looking for a set of traits in a victim. A good candidate won't see the attack coming or put up resistance. The skills that make you a better runner will also make you a safer runner. Running with good posture, keeping your head up and your body relaxed with a long confident stride is probably your best defence. A predator will take one look at you and decide to wait for easier prey.

People who have been attacked always say the same two things: "I never saw it coming" and "It happened so fast". Awareness is developed through practice. It starts simply by always knowing what is going on around you. A distracted runner is an easy target, so leave your phone and headphones at home. Keep an inventory of the people around you. Know who is around you in much the same way you see cars at an intersection. If someone is menacing or dangerous, you will see it. If you see them first they may go somewhere else. If you are attacked, you will know if there is help around. Be aware of your environment. Are there "blind spots" on your run? We are not trying to make you paranoid, but if you know what is around, you can make better decisions.

Two of your awareness skills are your intuition and your fear. They are never wrong! Intuition and fear are parts of your brain speaking to your conscious mind and they exist to keep you safe. We are the only animal that feels fear and ignores it or tries to rationalize it away. If you have nagging feelings, persistent thoughts, doubts, hesitations, or suspicions, pay attention to what they are trying to tell you. Do not try to explain your feelings, act on them. Something is going on and your conscious mind has not seen it yet. This brings us to the next awareness skill: flexibility. If something does not feel right you need to be willing to change. Alter your route. Would you rather feel dumb because you changed your running plan based on an uneasiness, or really stupid because you did not and got mugged?

It is possible that you might do everything right and still face confrontation. You need to accept it. If you are thinking "This can't be happening to me" then you can't deal with it. One of the best, though difficult, ways to do this is to try to enjoy it. Even if you get hurt, it is a chance to learn something about yourself and the world.

Relaxation is the holy grail of self-defence. If you are relaxed you can make good decisions and keep control of yourself. To relax quickly you need to breathe, and in particular, exhale. When you panic you hold your breath and everything tightens up. When you are in stress, self-defence or otherwise, take a long slow breath. As you exhale, allow your body to drop. Bend your knees, flex your quads, drop your shoulders and smile to loosen your jaw. Now you are ready to react.

Your goal is to get out of the situation without having a physical conflict and time is on your side. The longer the confrontation, lasts the more likely it is he will get caught. In determining your attackers motivations you will need to abandon some normal social conventions. It is a good idea to be abrupt and even rude. Being rude to a stranger won't turn him from a good person into a bad one. Remember that "No" is a complete sentence and you do not need to justify it to anyone. Say it with conviction and be very wary of anyone who tries to negotiate it.

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BUAC members visit:

www.bendigouni.com

To view all of last months results.

Do not just concede once the attacker makes his wants known. Remember the power balance. You can use the situation to create an escape or exit. If someone is demanding your IPOD, toss it on the ground away from you and run. This forces the attacker to choose, and if he really just wants your IPOD you will never see him again. If he chases you and leaves the IPOD at least you know you are dealing with a physical assault and can be prepared for it. It is also never a good idea to be in the same place as an attacker, your car, and your keys. Do not ever get in the car and go somewhere of their choosing. Give up your car and throw your keys as far as you can, running in the opposite direction.

There is nothing wrong with asking for help if you feel threatened. The problem is that people will try to avoid getting involved in situations they do not understand. If you ask for help be very specific about the predicament. Saying things like "I do not know this person and he is attacking me" are much more effective than "Help me". People also respond well to being told exactly what to do. If you point at someone and say "Call the police now" or "Come stand next to me" they probably will. An interesting aspect of this phenomenon is that people who define themselves as outside society are more likely to help you than more mainstream people are. If you are being chased, running into a gay leather bar is probably safer than a restaurant. If you need help and there is no one around, do not just run and scream help. You will be ignored. Yell "Fire!" instead. Everyone is concerned about fires, and someone will come out to investigate.

Sometimes you can't avoid a physical altercation. Physical self-defence has three goals: cause fear, cause pain, or disable your attacker. The best self-defense techniques do all three. Time is against you in a fight. It is to your advantage to end it quickly because the longer it goes on, the more likely you will be seriously hurt. There is no question of morality here. If you have been attacked you need to use however much force you can bring to bear on your opponent. Do too much instead of too little. This is why it is important to be sure about the situation before the fighting starts and why we do not fight for property.

A lot of physical conflicts are determined by the control of space. A predator will try to control the neutral space between you and put you at a disadvantage by violating your personal space and making you retreat. He will also try to back you into a wall or corner if he can. You need to protect your space by refusing to retreat. Hold your ground, moving only slightly to the side if necessary. It is also crucial that you do not look away or into the attackers eyes. This could distract you and let him land the first blow.

A lot of attacks start with a grab. There is nothing to fear in a grab. In fact being grabbed gives you a number of advantages. He has committed a weapon while you have not. If someone grabs your wrist or shoulder remember that the rest of your body is still completely free. It is okay to move without removing the hand. They have also given you something to damage. If they grab your shirt you can respond by breaking the fingers, wrist, or elbow of the grabbing arm.

In a fight every part of your body is a legitimate weapon. You can kick, stomp, knee, push, punch, elbow, slap, pinch, bite, head butt, or even use your voice. Similarly, every part of the attacker is fair game. In general you want to use hard weapons on soft targets and vice versa. Remember the three goals of physical self-defence mentioned earlier. Targets like the eyes, knees and throat are not well protected by muscle and accomplish all three. During the fight you may find yourself on the ground. This is not necessarily a bad place to be. If you stay relaxed and on balance you can easily counterattack from the ground. Grabbing a leg and rolling is a good way to severely damage his knees and ankles. Going to the ground can be a very smart tactic against high kicks, pushes, and to avoid stronger punchers. In an attack you should feel free to use any weapons at your disposal. Keys, sticks, bottles, fanny packs, or anything else at hand can be a big advantage. Carrying a weapon like pepper spray or mace is a personal decision. If you do carry something, never use it to threaten someone. They will take it away from you. If the situation calls for it, then use it without ever letting them know you have it. You should also remember that it might not work and have a back up plan.

If your attacker has a weapon you need to be very careful. Everything depends on whether you decide he is going to use it anyway. If you do not think they will use it and they are not physically assaulting you then give them whatever they want. If you think they will use it whatever you do (there are crazy people out there) then you have to be patient and try to find a good opening. The only proven suggestion in that case is go in very low and very fast, and be prepared to be cut or shot.

This article started by reminding you that running is statistically very safe. If you stay a little more aware and in touch with your intuition you can make it even safer. Just because you give some thought and preparation to the worst case scenarios does not mean you should develop paranoia or fear of your fellow runners. Even as you acknowledge the dangerous possibilities you should run with all the joy in the world."

Injury Tips - piriformis muscle

The piriformis muscle arises from the sacrum (pelvis), passes through the sciatic notch (an opening in the pelvic bone) and attaches to the bony prominence on the side of the thigh (greater trochanter). The piriformis plays a role in the outward rotation of the hip. The sciatic nerve is formed by five nerves exiting from the spinal cord; it typically passes through the notch in front of the piriformis. In approximately 15 percent of the population, the nerve passes through the muscle.

Problems occur when the piriformis becomes inflamed. This may be due to direct trauma (falling on your behind), overuse, or a sudden, forced rotation of the hip, which may occur when running on an uneven surface. The inflamed muscle may cause pain in the centre of the buttock or may compress the sciatic nerve causing pain, aching or tingling in the leg. Pain may be increased by sitting, climbing stairs, or squatting. Deep palpation of the centre of the buttocks will cause pain, as will sudden stretches of these muscles. Initially you can run through the pain, but in many cases, symptoms become severe enough to restrict activity. The muscle tightens and may even spasm during activities, which can cause an alteration in gait. The affected side of the pelvis is pulled upward, creating a functional leg length difference; stride on the affected side is shortened. These alterations in gait can cause a number of overuse injuries due to poor biomechanics.

Why did you develop this problem? A common finding is tight hip adductor muscles (these are the muscles along the inner aspect of the thigh that pull the leg inward), which override the hip abductors (muscles along the outside of the thigh that pull the leg outward); the piriformis acts as a hip abductor. If your foot excessively pronates when pushing off, your leg rotates inward; the piriformis acts as an external rotator of the hip (turns outward) and contracts in reaction to each push-off.

Not all pain in the buttocks and legs is due to piriformis syndrome; diseases of the lumbar spine, such as a ruptured disc, and dysfunction of the sacroiliac joints are just a couple of the common causes of pain in this region. Stress fractures of the sacrum or pelvis can cause recalcitrant pain in this region. Continued page four.

Who's running hot, and who's not

Who's hot.....

- Triathletes Brock "Optimus" Prime and Roy Preece, who won their age groups and the South Australian long course titles in the Murray Bridge triathlon in May. The Bendigo Triathlon Club had great numbers last summer, so consider getting to their races once the triathlon season commences.

- Lisa McDermid, who has recommenced running after the birth of Avery. She is an inspiration to anyone who thinks exercising after a lay off is too difficult.

- Shane Freer, who's running red hot at the moment.

Who's not.....

- Terry Wallace, it turns out Terry runs 50km a week (when not at the solarium). He will probably have the plenty of spare time to up his kilometers in 2010.

Future events

Events in Victoria

28/04 - 22/09 - Athletics Victoria Winter Series 3.8-21km
10 run series in Melbourne, open to all levels of runner.

(www.athsvic.org.au)

27/05 - 09/12 - Sri Chinmoy Races 10-42km

(www.srichinmoyraces.org.au)

07/10 - Melbourne Marathon 10/21/42km

(www.melbournemarathon.com.au)

09/01 - 31/12 - Victorian Road Runners 5 - 21km

(www.home.vicnet.net.au/roadrun)

Cool Running Website

(www.coolrunning.com.au/calender/vic)

Local Events

16/05 BUAC Invitational 1/3/4/7.5km - time for our club to shine. All hands on deck for this day.

23/05 Guy's Hill Heartbreak 500m/1/3.75/6.6km - Wayne Forbe's notorious course leaves your quadriceps aching for months afterwards.

30/05 Diamond Hill Dash 500m/1/3/6km - marked by Gary Crouch since the mid 1980s, when tight shorts and mullets reigned.

13/06 Rifle Range Rattle 500m/1/3/8km - a great run around a military no-go zone. Don't get lost or you could get arrested for trespass on government property.

Bendigo University Athletics Club

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Feel free to make suggestions for our newsletter. Ideas, news and the little bit of idle gossip help to fill these pages. Contact Pat Kenny on 5442 3431, or email mpken1@bigpond.com with any ideas or information. The more you contribute, the better this newsletter can be.

Newsletter Classifieds

Wanted: Bulla yoghurt containers for drinking cups (those types supplied with the water, after our races). Must be Bulla types as they are plastic and can be washed repeatedly. See Gavin Fiedler.

Don't forget: Wayne Forbe's training sessions on Wednesday at 6.00pm. Ideal for those wanting to improve their times. See Wayne for details.

Facebook: join "Bendigo University Athletics Club - Uni Pride!", and visit www.bendigouni.com, for all of your BUAC news.

Injury tips continued

If you are avoiding the doctor, you will need to work on stretching your piriformis muscle. Depending on the severity of your symptoms, you may be able to continue running, but will need to decrease your mileage, avoid speedwork and hills or uneven terrain. If you are working on stretching and strengthening, but running has become progressively more difficult, you should see a local sports medicine specialist. The evaluation should reveal a tender area in one buttock. Provocative stretches will cause pain, possibly even symptoms radiating into your leg. Evaluation of your lower back and hip will be normal. X rays and nerve studies will be typically normal. Other tests, such as an MRI, may be used to help rule out other sources of your pain, but results usually are normal with piriformis syndrome.

Treatment may include a combination of physical therapy, anti-inflammatory medications, deep tissue massage, and possibly a cortisone injection. You may need to stop running. Once symptoms subside, you may gradually increase your training. Once you have re-established your base, you can slowly add hills or speed work.

If symptoms are not improving despite all of these measures, surgical release of the piriformis may be necessary; other muscles will take over the function of the piriformis. This treatment is a last resort. Be smart with your training; maintain good strength and flexibility of your trunk and hip muscles to decrease the chances of a nasty introduction to your piriformis.

Media watch



"Step into my tiny, often wet, office!" Multiple copies of this photo were anonymously passed onto the "Running on Empty" office when first printed in the Advertiser last year. Triathlon ace Nick Walsh, with one of the blokes from Status Quo, is proudly displaying a bit of his handiwork.



Michael Hogan working on the "guns" during a heavy gym session. "I'd like you to meet two friends of mine; Des and Troy!"