

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Navigating Through Mass Attacks

by Matthew J. Numrich, M.A.



Caption: Everything from the movies to unrealistic martial arts strategies would have one believe mass attack defense is easy. Just put yourself in the middle of the group, kick butt and take names. This article paints a different picture, while giving some realistic strategies.

BILLY WHO?

There is one thing which my JKD training has taught me over the years, and that is to train for everything. Leave no stone unturned. As I've dove into many different martial art curriculums, and observed lesson plans from a vast array of arts, I'm amazed at one commonality: People make many mistakes when it comes down to Mass Attack training.

The main two issues I come in contact with when reviewing or being taught these curriculums is that mass attack defense is either non-existent or extremely misleading. I believe it is non-existent in many arts because people have a "non-street fighting" mindset when it comes to real life altercations. The mental picture is always a one on one, and therefore that is what their training centers around.

This mindset is only reinforced by the incredible contributions and popularity of mixed martial arts. The octagon only permits one participant to fight another, which has its merits, but helps self-defense practitioners "forget" that two or more attackers could be bent on your destruction.

For those who do have mass attack lessons, many remind me of a “Billy Jack” (for you older practitioners) or “Matrix like” (for the younger readers) strategy of going back and forth between multiple opponents. A sequence of martial arts photos may show a second or third attacker “frozen in time” as his buddy gets pummeled by the expert, but reality isn’t so pretty. There is this thing called constant movement which these experts need to remember, as a line of attackers won’t take a number to receive their beating.

The fact is that gang attacks, where two or three people attack one person simultaneously is not only normal out on the street, it is a strategy the cowards who do decide to attack others choose in order to raise the probability of their success.

If that is the case, why are so many self-defense curriculums lacking in this area? Regardless of what the excuse is, here is a simple game plan you’ll want to implement into your training regimen.

STEP BY STEP GAME PLAN

I like to focus on three steps or important points to center most of my self-defense strategies around. One step answers would be nice, but many times they lack the need for progression in a defense strategy, and plans to deal with contingencies. Therefore, the three steps in my Mass Attack strategy are no exception.



Left to right: Positioning yourself by putting one attacker in front of the other is key in mass attack survival.

The first step when defending yourself against multiple attackers is to grab an equalizer. A what, you ask? This is how I define an equalizer to my students: Anything you can pick up to throw at your opponents and/or strike them with. Why is this the first step? Because when dealing with more than one attacker you are already at a disadvantage regardless of how tough you think you are.



Left to right: The three steps of Mass Attack apply if you do or don't grab a weapon. 1.) Equalizer, 2.) Zone, 3.) Footwork.

Picking up a tire iron, fist full of gravel, a bottle, stick, or chair will at the very least make the attackers think twice, if not turn them off to attacking you. In full disclosure this may cause them to find a weapon as well, therefore, you must use it immediately if that is the choice they act on.



The other point you must keep in mind is that sometimes you won't have time or the resources to find and/or pick up an equalizer. Either way, the second step is to "zone" around the aggressors where you'll put one person in front of the other. This gives you an opportunity for a short burst of time to take action on just one opponent.



Left to right: Starting in the upper left picture, the author can't find an equalizer, so immediately zones and blocks/destroys the first initial punch – making it easier by taking only one person on at a time. In the second set of pictures, he then has time to take on the second attacker one on one, and finishes him off with a groin kick and head butt.

The worst thing to do is get caught in the middle of two (or more) people. Leave those situations to be played out on the big screen, and treat getting in the middle as a cardinal sin. Because this article is read by a vast array of styles, after you zone properly, I would encourage you to use whatever one on one strategy you employ if you were just fighting one person.



Left to right: Without an equalizer, the author engages the first attacker in the second picture, and throws a knee while putting the first attacker in front of the second. This move gives him space to eye jab the second assailant, and finish him off with some brutal close quarter tools.

Use quick and brutal strikes, and incorporate the final step which is to use continuous footwork to always keep that “one on one stack”. Understand that the second person in line will not wait his turn. Therefore, make your strikes direct and to the point, while continuously zoning to keep one person blocking the other. This is the reason I believe tools such as elbows, jabs and even head butts work so well here.



Left to right: By taking the first initial step backwards and to his right, he puts the attackers in a “one on one stack”. After the jeet tec to the knee cap, he continues to use “footwork” with the first attacker as a barrier against the second while continuing to strike him with knees. After the first attacker is down, he follows up with the second with a one on one match up. A parry, straight arm to the face, sweep and mid section stomp takes the second attacker out long enough for Matt Numrich to escape.

Let's review:

1. First look for that equalizer, which is any kind of a weapon to even up the situation.
2. The second step is to zone around one attacker. This blocks the second attacker by putting the first one in front, and temporarily allowing you to fight one at a time.
3. Even when done successfully, it is important to use the third step which is continuously use your footwork to keep that one on one stack. This does take some multi tasking, but will also save you from defending yourself against the near impossible situation of fighting two people at the same time.

MULTI ATTACKER Q & A

Because Mass Attack scenarios have so many different variables, I get the many questions from my students when teaching about this subject. Therefore, here are a half dozen common questions I get, with some “to the point” answers.

1. Should I attack first, or wait for them to come to me?

After you pick up an equalizer, and/or zone, strike first. Waiting for two or more opponents to close the gap will only put you in a worse position.

2. Who do I zone around first? The bigger guy, smaller, stronger, “loud mouth”?

None of the above. Zone around the closer one first. It is easier, and helps you move through the proper game plan faster, rather than chase after your opponent of choice.



Caption: One can get stuck in the “paralysis of analysis” if they try to assess who is bigger, tougher, or more skilled. Make a quick decision by always zoning around the closest attacker.

3. What happens if I have a third party with me (i.e. loved one, child, etc.)?

Tough question. Get in front of that person, and move them with you, zoning appropriately. Easy to say, harder to do.



Caption: Protecting a third party gets messy. Always put yourself in between the attackers and person you are protecting. Then continue with the game plan.

4. What happens if my opponents drive me into a corner?

Go after the closer one, clinch up with them, and spin them putting you on the outside. The main goal is to get out of that position, even before you take the first opponent out of commission. It is part of the awareness and zoning process.

5. What if one or both attackers have a weapon, and I can't get to one?

This question needs a whole other article to answer it fully. My advice is to zone around the one who has a weapon, and take care of the "more dangerous priority" first. If only one person has a club, zone around (move closer to) that person first. If one has a knife and the other a stick, zone around the knife guy first.

My rationalization for this (backed up by hours upon hours of training experience with non-compliant training partners) is that I never want to lose sight of the person with the more dangerous weapon.

Granted, putting an unarmed defender in front of one who has a weapon doesn't seem smart, I understand. However, weapons provide a longer reach, and closing the gap on the ones who hold them which actually protect you more.



Caption: Taking on an armed attacker would ensure that you deal with the more dangerous person first. The last thing you want is to lose sight of the weapon, and have it "surprise" you.

6. What happens if there are 3 or more attackers?

Same game plan, which makes it easy to train and remember. Equalizer, zone, footwork. Just note that going from one opponent to two does not only double your troubles, it increases the problem exponentially. Going from two to three, or three to four (gulp!) increases the challenge exponentially as well.

CONCLUSION

With early “less than perfect” training in these scenarios, many people become de-motivated to keep on a mass attack curriculum. It is easy for us to train what we are good at, and even easier to stay away from what we are not good at. The goal is to keep on it. Keep training the fundamentals. Breaking this strategy down part by part is a necessary step, and leave the wild and crazy variables out until you have the basics down.

Caption: The goal in Mass Attack is to take one person on at a time.



There is no doubt that fleeing a mass attack situation is the intelligent first choice. However, many times we don't have that luxury. Simply ignoring these scenarios only feeds our weaknesses, but training it unrealistically could put us in just as bad of a place. Using the three steps of Equalizer, Zone and Footwork will increase your chances of survival, which is the main goal of self-defense in the first place.

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