

K-9 bites wrong man in St. Paul

As a cop faced a chaotic scene, his dog slipped away and bit a man. The report said the man was neither suspect nor victim of the initial crime report.

By [ANTHONY LONETREE](#), Star Tribune

Last update: December 20, 2007 - 10:11 PM

With police radios warning of possible gun-toting suspects, St. Paul police officer Isaac Rinehart played it safe when he encountered a group of uncooperative people at a downtown bus stop about midnight Wednesday.

He headed back to his squad car to get his K-9 partner, Sarik, but the dog, apparently eager to get to work, didn't wait to be leashed, the officer reported Thursday. Sarik slipped through Rinehart's grasp and clamped onto a St. Paul man's lower left leg.

Trouble is, Sarik had the wrong man.

Police learned later that the dog-bite victim, Antonio E. Johnson, "was neither a suspect or victim in the weapons call," Rinehart's report said. Johnson, 19, was taken to Regions Hospital in St. Paul, where he was treated for "canine punctures."

On Thursday, police spokesman Pete Crum said that the incident will be reviewed internally "to ensure that all [police] policies and procedures were complied with."

He added that while Rinehart and Sarik still were out patrolling the streets, people attending large events, such as at the Xcel Energy Center, need not fear an attack.

"Remember," Crum said, "dogs are trained to protect their handler."

Efforts to contact Johnson were unsuccessful Thursday. But he told KSTP-TV that he felt he'd been bitten "for nothing" and he planned to speak with an attorney.

The dog-bite incident began with a call to police about a man being chased by eight other men near 6th and Wabasha streets, Rinehart's report said. Minutes later, as the officer headed to the area, the report said, Metro Transit Police also were reporting that two men were believed to have been seen running from the scene with guns.

Spotting a large crowd walking quickly toward 6th Street on Cedar Street, Rinehart wrote that he ordered two groups of people -- one trying to board a bus and the other trying to enter a building -- to get up against a building with their hands in the air.

When only about a half of the people complied, and when a man on the sidewalk also yelled obscenities at him, the officer went back to the car to get Sarik.

The dog slipped away, Rinehart wrote, and by the time the officer turned to call him back, he already had "apprehended" Johnson. Rinehart added: "I immediately removed Sarik from Johnson and held my position until further assistance arrived."

Asked why the dog might have targeted Johnson, Crum declined to comment, saying that it was best to wait for the internal review to be completed.

He added that Sarik was in no danger of being taken off the streets.

"They *do* bite people," he said of police K-9s. "It's what they're trained to do."

Anthony Lonetree • 651-298-1545



Find this article at:

<http://www.startribune.com/local/stpaul/12688352.html?pt=y>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.