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Dog attack victim, 9, faces long recovery

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Nine-year-old Mason McNary knew his two attackers.

They had played together many times. They had slept with him the night before the attack. One even went to Mason's baseball practices.

But on May 8, like friends sometimes do, they turned on him. Only this turnabout had near-fatal consequences.

Mason was housesitting with his father for family friends in Miami Township, Clermont County. The Blue Ash boy let the family's two American Bulldogs out about 8:30 a.m. in the fenced back yard of the Deblin Drive home and was using a tennis ball to play fetch.

Suddenly the dogs lunged at Mason, ripping off his left ear and shredding his left leg. He had bites on his head, face, shoulder, arms, back, stomach and both legs.

Mason was air-cared in critical condition to Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. Doctors used more than 650 staples to put the blond-haired little boy back together.

He was hospitalized for three weeks and has had five surgeries - one to reattach his ear - skin grafts and other procedures. Another surgery is scheduled in December.

The dogs - 1-year-old Niko and 5-year-old Izzy - were quarantined at the Clermont County Animal Shelter and put down the following week.

Today, more than two months later, the family has no more insight into what caused the dogs to attack Mason. The dogs had great personalities and had seen Mason and his parents often.

"The younger one was around my son all of the time," said his father, Kyle McNary. "He'd lay in bed with him at night."

Niko was the mascot for the Sycamore league's Hawks baseball team, for which Mason was a starting pitcher.

"He's been around that puppy since he was born," said Mason's mother, Amie Burgess.

For all parties involved, it's a painful reminder that you can never be too careful - even around man's best friend.

In 2009, 538 children visited Children's emergency department due to dog bites.

"Dog bites are provoked by something," said Harold Dates, president and CEO of SPCA of Cincinnati. "Dogs don't bite unless they perceive a reason that they should do that. It could be anything from a squeal, a cry, a movement, something that startles a dog or that he perceives as unusual," Dates

said.

He described the American Bulldog as docile dog, but sometimes, dog to dog, they're aggressive.

What happened to Mason is speculation, Dates said, but perhaps he took the ball away from one of the dogs. He might have squealed in fun, but the dogs perceived it as a threat.

If the dogs were competing for attention, competing for one ball, they may have been arguing over the toy. In the dogs' system of play, jumping on each other and wrestling each other, they might have included the child, but in an overly aggressive manner, Dates said.

Routine start to day

The morning of May 8 started out as routine. While his dad laid on the couch, Mason woke up and took the dogs out to play.

Minutes later, the scene was chaotic.

According to a Miami Township Police report, a neighbor, Jessica Duncan, noticed from her kitchen window that Mason was playing with the dogs. Minutes later, Duncan's sister, Kristi, saw that Mason was on the ground and the dogs were on top of him. They both ran outside. Mason was yelling for help.

Kristi ran inside to ask her parents to call 9-1-1. The girls tried to distract the dogs away from Mason. Jessica yelled at the dogs and began screaming to get someone's attention.

Another neighbor, Dennis Lewis, grabbed the dogs and alerted Mason's dad. More neighbors came to the rescue.

Burgess met Mason and McNary at the hospital. The dogs had ripped Mason's left leg to the bone, from his knee to his thigh.

"We were lucky that the hamstring was still attached," Burgess said. "If it wasn't for that, he would have lost his leg."

Mason uses a walker today and needs a wheelchair if he has to go long distances. They won't know if he'll walk on his own again until after the December surgery.

The muscle that's supposed to be growing back and attaching in his left leg is growing back as bone, Burgess explained. The bone has to be removed.

Mason was in a medically induced coma during his first week in the hospital. He doesn't remember what happened while he was in the intensive care unit.

"He remembers the attack, though," McNary said. "But he doesn't know why they did it."

Family, friends rally

Family, friends, classmates, teammates and strangers have rallied around Mason, showering him with more than 1,000 get-well cards and sponsoring fundraisers.

So far, the Miracles for Mason Foundation has raised \$17,000 from two benefits, donations and T-shirt sales. Another benefit is scheduled for Aug. 14 at Logo's in Blue Ash.

"It amazes me that there are so many generous and caring people out there. We have received donations from people and organizations we don't know," said Erin McNary Noble, Kyle's sister, who is in charge of the foundation.

The money will be used to help cover expenses, from time off work to insurance co-pays. Insurance statements show costs climbing to the mid-six figures, and that doesn't include all of the hospital stays, doctor visits and therapists, Noble said.

Before the incident, Mason liked to ride his dirt bike or do anything just to be outside. He'd participate in Cub Scout canoe trips, camping and a summer YMCA camp.

Now, his parents have a hard time getting him to go anywhere.

"He doesn't want people looking at him, because he has to be in a wheelchair when we go anywhere that there's a lot of walking," Burgess said. "He doesn't like being (at the mall) because people stare."

Before the attack, Mason confident and independent. Now, he's more anxious, gets panic attacks and has trouble sleeping, his mother said.

One source of anxiety is school. He'll be a fifth-grader at E.H. Greene Intermediate School in Blue Ash when school resumes Aug. 26.

"He's worried because he's got to go back in a wheelchair, and that's just for his safety," she said. "His balance isn't great yet, and he doesn't have full use of that left leg."

Mason would rather be the center of attention for an awesome baseball pitch, not for the dog attack. He doesn't want his picture taken - by his mother or the Enquirer.

"You're going to be in the paper," McNary said.

"Ohhhh," Mason said, sounding disappointed.

"You're famous now," his father added.

"I don't want to be famous for this."

Additional Facts

About American Bulldogs

The American Bulldog is described by DogChannel.com as a "working dog" that was originally brought to the American South by English working-class immigrants. The breed helped farmers and ranchers with driving and catching hogs and cattle, and guarding property. According to the website, the American Bulldog is still an "all-purpose working partner, guard dog and family companion ... Although its strong protective instincts may cause it to be reserved with strangers and possibly aggressive toward other dogs, the devoted American Bulldog demands to be with its family and adores children."
