

# I'm Not Lion

By Reg P. Wydeven  
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Twenty years ago, the Packers picked running back Travis Jervey out of the Citadel in the NFL draft. While he never started, he is still a very memorable player, and not just because he was a Pro Bowl special teams player.

Jervey is probably best remembered in Green Bay for buying a lion cub with his roommate, LeShon Johnson. Named Nala after a character in 'The Lion King,' the pair bought the declawed cub for \$1,000 in Texas and picked it up at Austin Strabel Airport.

One day, Nala was chewing on Jervey's hat so he tried to take it from her. As a result, "she bit a hole in my arm," Jervey explained. "So then I got freaked out."

Because Nala was only five months old at the time, Jervey "realized that at this point, I could take (the lion) if we had to go one-on-one (in a fight). But I knew that in about another six months, maybe we'd be equal." So Jervey sent Nala to an Oklahoma ranch he claims is designed "for people that were stupid and got exotic animals and couldn't take care of them."

The ranch in Oklahoma sounds like a much better destination for exotic pets than downtown Milwaukee.

The lion roaming the streets of Cream City has dominated headlines lately. The police have received dozens of calls about sightings of a "lion-like creature" running loose in Milwaukee. Many people speculated that a lion got loose from the Milwaukee County Zoo, but all of their animals are accounted for. That leads authorities to speculate that the animal is an exotic pet that either escaped or was released.

Much to Mike Holmgren's chagrin, it is not illegal to own exotic pets such as jungle cats in Wisconsin. Along with North Carolina, South Carolina, Nevada, Alabama and West Virginia, we are the only six states where owning exotic animals is not against the law.

While there is no state law against lions, some municipalities do have such rules. Although the City of Milwaukee doesn't prohibit owning a lion, possessing an animal with a known disposition for attacking or injuring humans or domestic animals, as well as any animal that cannot be effectively vaccinated against rabies, is forbidden.

The federal government steps in, however, if exotic animals are exhibited. The U.S. Department of Agriculture deems lions, tigers, cougars and leopards to be dangerous animals, and publicly displaying them requires a license. There are currently 403 such licenses in Wisconsin, which include individuals and also zoos and exotic animal wholesalers. Licensees are required to have a certain amount of space for their animals, veterinary care, strong cages and clean feeding areas. They are also subject to random inspections.

Professional handlers, however, are asking for regulation. Last year the state legislature failed to pass a bill introduced by Rep. Warren Petryk to ban the sale, breeding and possession of a number of species, including nonnative big cats, bears, alligators, crocodiles and apes. Owners that currently had exotic pets would have been grandfathered from the new rules so long as they registered their animals. In addition, the proposal would have also required owners to notify authorities if an animal escaped.

Therefore, had the measure passed, by process of elimination, authorities could have located the owner of the lost Milwaukee lion. Maybe the elusive cat will cause legislators to rethink exotic pet regulation.

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