

Bolting court, convict leads downtown chase

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Staff Writer

A platoon of sheriff's deputies and police officers — including the Central District commander — took an unscheduled, midafternoon jog yesterday through the steamy streets of downtown Baltimore.

But it wasn't a physical fitness training session — though judging from the huffing and puffing, it probably should have been. Instead, they were chasing a West Baltimore man who had just been convicted and decided not to stick around to hear his sentence.

The run began about 2:20 p.m. on the fourth floor of the Clarence M. Mitchell Jr. Courthouse, where a Circuit Court jury had just convicted Andre Jackson, 31, of the 700 block W. Lexington St., of heroin possession.

After hearing the verdict, and as Judge Kathleen O'Ferrall Friedman polled the jury, the wiry, 5-foot-4-inch Jackson bolted from the courtroom.

***“It looked like the
Keystone Kops.”***

Unidentified police officer

Jackson slammed the wooden courtroom door against the marble jam with such force that it sounded like a gunshot echoing through the halls.

Women's screams and officers' shouts filled the hallway as Jackson ran down the stairs.

In hot pursuit followed sheriff's deputies, who had been guarding him in the courtroom, as well as city police detectives and uniformed officers, who had been waiting to testify in other cases.

Maj. Frank A. Russo, commander of the Central District, was down the hall, waiting for a hearing on Odell's nightclub to begin, when the commotion began. And, being a sworn

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Convict bolts court, is quickly caught

ESCAPE, from 1E

licer, the major, too, joined the race.

Jackson, who was not in handcuffs or leg shackles, ran down three flights of steps, past the fully staffed courthouse security desk and metal detector, and out the front door onto Jervet Street.

Like a snowball, he seemed to elude other deputies and police officers behind him as he ran east on Fayette Street, south on Guilford Avenue and east on Baltimore Street.

Traffic on city streets screeched to a halt, sirens wailed, and the police helicopter thud-thud-thudded overhead.

"Guy's flying," wheezed one sheriff's deputy, as she rounded the corner of Guilford and Baltimore, following Jackson, who was headed right for The Block.

Thanks to a citizen jumping in

Jackson's path, Deputy Sheriff William Dowling was able to nab him in front of the Two O'Clock Club, just east of Holiday Street.

"He made a cut, and a civilian took him out for me," Deputy Dowling said.

And while fleeing must have seemed like a good idea at the time, as Jackson lay face down in the hot asphalt of a Baltimore Street gutter, he probably had second thoughts.

"Hey, if we had left the guy alone another couple hundred feet, he would have been at headquarters," said a perspiring Major Russo, referring to the police building in the next block.

"It looked like the Keystone Kops," said a smirking Central District uniformed officer who did not participate in the chase, but who arrived after Jackson had been apprehended.

City police put handcuffs on

Jackson, and later slapped on leg irons, before driving him back to the courthouse and leading him back to Judge Friedman's courtroom.

"That was one of the dumbest things I've ever seen," a clearly perturbed Judge Friedman told Jackson from the bench. "Did you think you could just evaporate into the City of Baltimore?"

Judge Friedman sentenced Jackson — who had three earlier drug convictions, though never served time behind bars — to a year in prison on the drug possession charge. She then found him in contempt of court for fleeing and tacked another five months onto his sentence.

Sheriff's Department Lt. Col. Leonard V. Santivaasi, deputy chief of security for the courthouse, said later that escape charges would be filed against Jackson.