

As Letheren spoke, Johnson was already on his way home. He and his entourage checked out of their hotel in the middle of the night, leaving behind a messy room of forgotten luggage, flowers and congratulatory messages.

By the time reporters caught up with him at Seoul's Kimp'o Airport, he was surrounded by a phalanx of police who were charged with escorting him to his New York-bound plane.

Johnson was soon gone from the Olympics, but aftershocks rocked Seoul for days.

The Korean Herald, one of the country's two English-language newspapers, came out with a two-page extra edition. The screaming headline said it all: "Ben Johnson Stripped of Gold For Dope; Medal Goes to Lewis."

Johnson's reputation was quickly being torn down like a condemned building.

A banner hanging from one

balcony in the athletes' village read: "From Hero to Zero in 9.79." Johnson jokes quickly made the rounds, most of them racist and many of them questioning the man's intelligence.

In the past year, the shy, Jamaican-born sprinter has been through an emotional upheaval sparked by what may well be remembered as the biggest drug scandal in amateur sports.

The International Amateur Athletic Federation, the world governing body of track and field, dealt Johnson another crushing blow Sept. 5 when it voted to strip him of his 1987 world record.

Despite the best efforts of those around him, Johnson has been unable to run away from the notoriety that has haunted him since Seoul.

When he resumed training last November at Toronto's York University, he had a mi-

nor run-in with a photographer.

In May, there was a charge against a man who was involved in an altercation with Johnson outside a trendy Toronto bistro. The incident left Johnson with a broken tooth and swollen jaw and his mother's car with a smashed windshield.

Then one month ago, Johnson was given a conditional discharge and placed on probation for one year after pleading guilty to assault. That charge stemmed from an incident in which Johnson pointed a starter's pistol at another motorist on a Toronto highway two weeks after he returned from Seoul.

"A certain degree of compassion must go to Mr. Johnson," Judge Ian MacDonnell said in handing down the sentence.

During testimony at a federal

inquiry into drug use in amateur sport — an investigation spawned by his positive test at Seoul — Johnson cited a Jamaican proverb when asked about his life now.

"If I've lost friends now, they were friends I didn't need," he said. "In Jamaica, we say there are two types of friends — the ones who help you plant trees and the ones who just come to sit under them."

Those closest to him are hurdler Mark McKoy and sprinter Desai Williams. In August, a tuxedo-clad Johnson served as an usher at Williams' wedding.

Except for two television interviews in Europe — for which Johnson was paid — the sprinter has heeded the advice of his lawyer and Justice Charles Dubin, head of the federal inquiry, and not spoken on the record to the media.

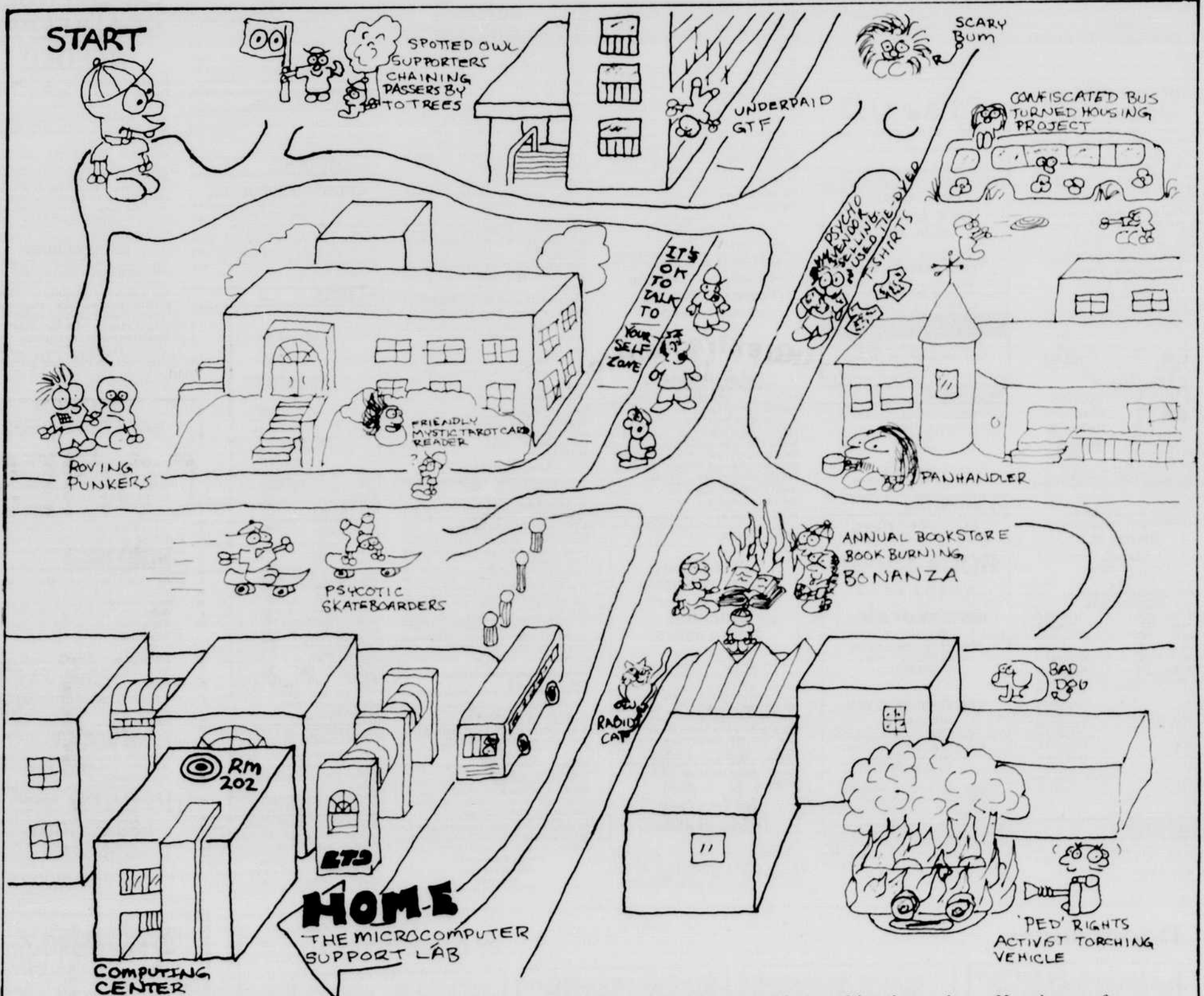
Johnson is, however, taking

his anti-drug crusade to the public. Sunday, exactly one year after his race at Seoul, he, McKoy and Williams were part of a police anti-drug campaign at a Toronto shopping mall.

Johnson looks trim and fit and his physical appearance has changed little since Seoul. He maintains 175 pounds on his 5-foot-9 frame and is still capable of bench-pressing 420 pounds and squat-lifting 660 pounds.

In the months after Seoul, three youngsters sent Johnson gold medals they had won. His oldest sister, Dezeine, answers fan letters and Johnson has signed more than 2,000 posters to mail to children who have written him.

"I want to tell them to be honest," Johnson said. "Don't take drugs. It happened to me. I've been there. I know what it's like to cheat."



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