

NEWS

A MODEST ATTORNEY'S HUGE CLOUT

BY MICHAEL DALY / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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John A. (Junior) Gotti came to court yesterday in blue suede shoes. "I guess they were his walking shoes," his attorney, Jeffrey Lichtman, said afterward. Lichtman wore lusterless brown shoes with a dark blue suit, something no flashy mouthpiece would do. He is one attorney who has no need for show. He represents a client by actually working at it. "Seven days a week, 16 hours a day," he said. "Hard work. That's all it comes down to.

" In this instance, Lichtman's hard work was pitted against the full might of the federal government as well as six cooperating witnesses for the prosecution. Lichtman was further burdened by his client's surname. "The Gotti name is very hard to overcome," he allowed. But Lichtman fought day after day, working late into the night and through the weekend when a posh lawyer might be sunning on the beach. "Don't get somebody with a \$3 million house in the Hamptons," he advised. "Get somebody's who's hungry, sitting in a 1,200-square-foot apartment with two screaming kids.

" Lichtman was in the lunchroom at Manhattan Federal Court yesterday when he got the call that the jury had reached a verdict after eight days of deliberations. He arrived in his brown shoes at the 26th-floor courtroom at 1:30 p.

m. His client came in from the adjoining detention center with the pant cuffs of his dark suit breaking on shoes no real mob boss would choose. The 41-year-old man they call Junior was graying at the sides and balding at the crown, and his brow was deeply furrowed. He is himself a father of five, but there was still something of the kid about him as he sat at the defendant's table. The reason that came to mind was that he is living a life he inherited, not one he chose. You wondered if those blue suede shoes were his way of saying that if he could not pick his fate, he could at least pick what he put on his feet. The big question was whether he would be following his father's footsteps back into prison for 30 years. The immediate answer as put forth by the jury's verdict sheet confused even the judge. "We're somewhere between a hung jury and an acquittal," Judge Shira Scheindlin said. "They did not say guilty or not guilty.

" The jurors were brought in. They confirmed that they had acquitted Gotti on one count but could not reach a unanimous decision on the other charges. There had been either one or two holdouts against conviction. The judge finally declared a mistrial on the counts where the jury was deadlocked. The prosecution asked that the defendant be held without bail pending a retrial. Lichtman argued that the remaining charges were less serious than the original allegations. The judge agreed. "Now I think the man's entitled bail," the judge said. Gotti's sister Angel clapped and cheered from the third row of spectators. The mother, Victoria, was next to her and sat with her hands in her lap. "Shhhh," the mother said. The judge retired to thank the jury. The mother stepped up to the rail and called to her son. "I love you.

" He was not still so much a kid that he went over to get a hug from Mommy. He did embrace his attorney before heading back to the lockup pending bail. "They'll be coming with another indictment," his mother said. "They're dogs on a bone. There's no letting go.

" Maybe it was his mother or maybe it was just what he had on his feet, but you found yourself hoping the one who is still called Junior in middle age would somehow find his way into a life of his own choosing. Outside the courthouse, as Lichtman spoke to reporters, you stared at what the attorney had on his feet. You considered the irony that an accused boss of an organization that is essentially a conspiracy to avoid honest work had been given a chance at freedom by a lawyer

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snorkeler.

An Australian received a bravery award on Monday for grabbing a 3.7 meter (12-foot) great white shark by the tail as it mauled a

who labors seven days a week, 16 hours a day. Afterward, you walked up Mulberry St. through the Feast of San Gennaro and came to what had been the elder Gotti's headquarters. A big sign outside what was once the Ravenite Social Club bore a single word. "SHOE" You went into the footwear boutique and asked the stylish woman in charge if by any chance she stocked blue suede shoes. "No," she said. mdaly@nydailynews.com

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