

DOLAN OUT THE DOUGH

MORE IN SPORTS
SEE PAGES 50-53



Manhattan Federal Court jurors said Garden Chairman James Dolan must pay dearly for firing harassed female executive Anucha Browne Sanders (right). Photo by Ron Antonelli/Daily News; sketch by Jane Rosenberg

Scourge of the city must pay for Madison Sleaze Garden

Suddenly it was so quiet now in courtroom 23A you could hear the low hum of the air conditioner, the sound of the jury form being unfolded in the foreman's right hand. You knew what was coming, knew that everything was going against James Dolan and Isiah Thomas and Madison Square Garden.

But it was about to become official now, the worst day the Garden has ever had because of the worst people to ever be in charge of it.

The first question was about the plaintiff, Anucha Browne Sanders, whether or not this jury thought there was evidence that the Garden subjected her to a hostile work environment based on sex.

The foreman, his voice clear and loud even without a lawyer's microphone in front of him, said, "Yes."

Then came the second question, about whether "defendant Thomas" — not President Thomas, not Coach Thomas of the Knicks — discriminated against Browne Sanders by aiding and abetting a hostile work environment based on sex.

"Yes."

There it was in open court, in Judge Gerard Lynch's court: all you needed to know about the Garden and the people who run



MIKE
LUPICA

it. The first question said "MSG," but that meant Dolan. So the owner of the Garden was guilty of sexual harassment and so was Isiah Thomas. The third question was about whether or not the Garden should have to pay punitive damages that would turn out to be \$11.6 million a few hours later.

"Yes."

At this point, even with more questions to be answered, it was game, set and match in 23A. From here Thomas should have headed straight uptown to the Garden to clear out his office, not been put on a private plane that would take him to training camp in South Carolina.

But this is James Dolan's Garden, where 'Dolan' writes an

\$11.6 million check to Anucha Browne Sanders as if paying off another bad power forward, then issues a statement that this is all the jury's fault. Maybe he should get his old man to buy him a new jury.

It plays out this way because nobody believed Dolan as a witness and nobody believed Thomas. Nobody on this jury believed that Dolan, who has done more damage to the Garden in his time running it than any executive the place has ever seen, fired Browne Sanders for anything other than retaliation, because she dared to tell the truth about being harassed, dared to question Thomas' authority.

Fired her for the crime of not being one of the boys.

This was Dolan's Garden laid bare between 11 and 11:30 yesterday morning, a Garden where if you come forward about sexual harassment you lose your job.

"Question Seven: Is plaintiff entitled to an award of punitive damages against defendant Dolan on her retaliation claim . . ."

"Yes."

That was the one word, like a gunshot, that kept coming from this side of the courtroom, on seven of the nine questions. "Yes." In a case that began because Browne Sanders said "No."

They came at her with everything they had, two sets of lawyers and all these Garden vice presidents and presidents, and she took it all. The jury was supposed to go weak at the knees because Isiah Thomas was brought up poor on the west side of Chicago.

But the four women and three men didn't care about that, just wanted Thomas to convince them that he didn't call Browne Sanders a "bitch" and a "ho" or try to control her with sex when his noted charm failed.

When the morning session was over yesterday, outside the elevator on the eighth floor of the Daniel Patrick Moynihan Building, someone said to Browne Sanders that you sometimes start to wonder in our legal system if the good guys ever win one.

"I started to wonder the same thing myself," she said.

Someone else in the group around her said, "The jury believed you, not them. Those people harassed you and then they fired you. Case closed."

She had wiped away a tear upstairs in the courtroom when the morning session ended, and now did that again.

"It's all I ever wanted," she said. "Those people took something from me."

Her job, never her dignity.

In the elevator ride down from the 23rd floor, you noticed again how tall she is, how relevant that seemed on this day, the lowest day for the Garden because of these low people, when she was bigger than all of them.

"This was never about money," she said. "This was about not letting this happen to somebody else. This was about my daughter and everybody else's."

Her teenage daughter wasn't there yesterday, but her sisters were, and an uncle, and lawyers like Kevin Mintzer and Anne Vladek, who have fought this fight before and will fight it again. Isiah Thomas and James Dolan — a coach who harasses women and an owner who allows it — wanted you to believe that Browne Sanders made it all up.

Thomas probably believes that himself, because if she is right then he is wrong and in his world, that can never happen.

Defendant Thomas made one last speech on the courthouse steps proclaiming his innocence, still thinking he could win anybody over. Then his bodyguards got him into a limousine that should have been taking him out of town for good.

To the end, the Garden had it wrong. Thomas was never the one who needed the bodyguards. Anucha Browne Sanders did.