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Q&A: Gibson Dunn’s Jordan Estes

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Jordan Estes is a partner at Gibson Dunn and former Southern District of New York assistant US attorney. She defended Archegos Capital founder Bill Hwang at his 2024 Wall Street fraud trial and, as a prosecutor, secured the 2022 fraud conviction of ex-Nikola CEO Trevor Milton. She’s currently representing businessman Josh Wander in a $500 million fraud case.

Estes told me how she earned the nickname “sniper” and where to hobnob during court breaks.

MV: Your biggest mistake in early years of practice was—?

JE: Not speaking up. There were many times when I had something to say but I didn’t, because I was insecure about whether my opinion mattered. I remain grateful that after one meeting, a senior attorney pulled me aside and encouraged me to speak up next time.

How much do you consider the specific judge you’re in front of when prepping?

Knowing your audience is key, so if I’m not already familiar with a judge, I spend substantial time researching their approach. But in a jury trial, the judge is not your only audience. Sometimes you need to object for the jury’s benefit, or as a signal to your witness, even if you know the judge will overrule you.

Is it better to be a bulldog or underestimated?

As a petite woman from Mississippi, I’ve spent the better part of my life being underestimated. I use it to my advantage. In the Bill Hwang trial, I handled the first cross, of a bank witness. I’m fairly certain he wasn’t worried when I stood up. That changed quickly. By the end of the cross, my trial team had given me the nickname “sniper.” No one saw me coming.

What did you learn from that trial?

To cross an expert effectively, you have to become an expert yourself. By becoming an expert, you can highlight when expert witnesses get out over their skis.

One of the government experts — a witness from the SEC — testified extensively about trading matters even though she had never been a trader. During cross, I asked her a basic question about Melvin Capital, the hedge fund that famously shorted GameStop. She was forced to concede she had never heard of the fund.

It’s the court lunch break and you’re famished. Where to?

If I’m in 500 Pearl, the cafeteria. I’m a light eater during the trial day — usually a granola bar and some coffee.

But I love the cafeteria for the scene: defense attorneys poring over outlines, civil

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[Jordan Estes]

attorneys preparing for arguments, reporters trying to glean anything they can. My favorite stretch there was the summer of 2024,when three blockbuster trials were happening: Bill Hwang, Senator Menendez, and Miles Guo. The cafeteria was absolutely buzzing.