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Teen 'Sopranos' actor arrested on robbery, drug charges

This time, Robert Iler is in real trouble.

The 16-year-old, who plays the pot-smoking, trouble-prone teen son of television mob boss Tony Soprano, was arrested early Wednesday on two counts of second-degree robbery. Iler was also charged with unlawful possession of marijuana after police found a bag containing the drug in his pocket, according to court papers. If convicted of the robbery charges, Iler could face up to 15 years in prison.

Iler pleaded innocent to the charges at his arraignment Wednesday night. Bail was set at \$2,500. Surrounded by family and friends, he was led out of a Manhattan courthouse through a crush of reporters and photographers and into a waiting vehicle.

"Robert is tired and Robert is happy to be leaving," his attorney, Steven Mintz, said after the arraignment. "It's been a long day, it's been a long night. And him and his family were happy just to get out of here, and get in the car and go home."

Over the show's three-year run, Iler's character - Anthony "A.J." Soprano, Jr. - has repeatedly found trouble: smoking pot in the family garage, vandalizing his high school gym, and cheating on a test.

Iler, of Manhattan, was picked up by police with three other youths for allegedly robbing two teens of about \$40 just after midnight on Manhattan's Upper East Side. A 15-year-old boy was released to the custody of his parents and his case will be handled in Family Court.

The other two - Michael Cournede, 19, of Queens, and Alban Selimaj, 16, of Manhattan, were also charged with two counts of second-degree robbery. Cournede was also charged with criminal possession of a weapon for having a box cutter, which was not used in the robbery.

None of the four teens has a criminal record, police said.

Cournede and Selimaj also pleaded innocent at their arraignments, and bail was set for each of them at \$2,500. Selimaj posted bail Wednesday night but Cournede did not, Mintz said.

According to court papers, Iler and his three friends approached two 16-year-old boys at

the corner of East 74th Street and York Avenue shortly after midnight, and surrounded them. One of the victims later told police he was from Brazil and was just visiting the city.

Cournede allegedly told the victims to give him their money. The other three allegedly said "Give me your money, you want to die?" according to the papers.

One victim gave the defendants \$30 and Cournede then took \$10 from the wallet of the other boy, the court papers said.

The foursome ran off, and the victims immediately flagged down a passing police car, got in, and canvassed the area when they spotted the group sitting on benches in nearby John Jay Park. All four were arrested and taken to Manhattan's 19th Precinct, where they remained in a holding cell for nearly 12 hours before being transferred to Central Booking.

Prosecutors said the charges were serious and had asked the judge to set bail at \$7,000 for the defendants.

"What we have here are three kids who thought it would be fun to go out and commit robbery," assistant District Attorney Robert Wallack told the judge during arraignment. "They had the size and superior numbers."

Wallack also said one of the three had admitted to the alleged crime, but wouldn't identify which one.

"My client didn't threaten anybody, my client didn't hear anybody threaten anybody, my client didn't hear anyone ask for money," Mintz said. "Robert didn't hear anybody or see anybody receive money. And he only learned what had happened much later when he was picked up."

Iler started his show business career when he was 6 years old. He was hired to appear in a Pizza Hut commercial. He appeared in his first film - "The Tic Code" - when he was 10 years old, and several more commercials. In 1999, he landed the role of A.J.

According to the official Web site for "The Sopranos," Iler's favorite sport is football and he loves to hang out with his friends.