

Hollywood admits to kidnapping : Sticks by story he didn't take part in teenager's killing

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Testifying in his own defense for the third day, Jesse James Hollywood on Wednesday stood by the claim he never ordered the murder of Nicholas Markowitz, 15.

As for the boy's kidnapping, Mr. Hollywood admitted to being a participant.

The District Attorney's Chief Trial Deputy Joshua Lynn, who is pursuing the death penalty in the case, spent the entire day's proceedings in cross examination of Mr. Hollywood, accused of masterminding a drug-related kidnapping and murder plot in August of 2000. In a courtroom that filled to capacity for the second day in a row, 29-year-old Mr. Hollywood, wearing a tan suit, met the prosecutor's questioning with an intense stare.

On Aug. 6, 2000, Mr. Hollywood and two associates traveling in a utility van rolled up on Nicholas as he walked the streets of the San Fernando Valley, according to Mr. Hollywood's prior testimony. Mr. Hollywood got out the van, pinned the teenager against a tree and demanded to know the whereabouts of the teenager's half-brother, Ben Markowitz, who owed Mr. Hollywood about \$2,500.

William Skidmore, who was convicted in connection to the case but has since been released, reportedly led the teenager to the van, and the group was off to Santa Barbara for Fiesta festivities.

Upon arrival in Santa Barbara, Nicholas was taken to the home of Richard Hoeflinger, where Mr. Hollywood said he saw Mr. Skidmore with the roll of tape in his hands and the victim restrained with duct tape. Mr. Hollywood told Mr. Skidmore to free the teenager, and when Mr. Hollywood decided to return to the San Fernando Valley later in the day, in his mind Nicholas was free to go.

Asked if he told anyone the boy was free to go, Mr. Hollywood said there was no point in doing so, because he was already free. However, Mr. Hollywood could not say how Nicholas knew it was OK for him to leave.

Nicholas stayed in Santa Barbara with Jesse Ruge, a Hollywood associate -- who was later sentenced to seven years to life -- and on Aug. 7, 2000, Mr. Hollywood made a return trip to Santa Barbara to collect some cash from Mr. Ruge, said Mr. Hollywood, a former marijuana dealer. At Mr. Ruge's home, Mr. Hollywood said he ran into Nicholas and offered to take the teenager back home.

"No, I'm cool," Nicholas allegedly responded.

Mr. Lynn asked whether Nicholas could have been apprehensive about getting back in the car

with the same person who pinned him against a tree the day before, but Superior Court Judge Brian Hill sustained an objection to the question from the defense.

On Aug. 8, 2000, Mr. Ruge over the phone requested a ride for himself and Nicholas to return to the San Fernando Valley, according to testimony, but Mr. Hollywood didn't have a car and was going to dinner with his girlfriend for her birthday. Mr. Hollywood instead arranged for a friend, Ryan Hoyt, to go and pick the two up in a borrowed car.

Mr. Hollywood told the prosecutor he figured everything would blow over, and while he thought Nicholas may have eventually told Ben Markowitz, who had made various threats against Mr. Hollywood, he hadn't been worried about such consequences.

Mr. Hollywood described Mr. Hoyt as a storyteller who would not follow through with things and never finished anything. However, he still entrusted him with this task.

On Aug. 10, 2000, Mr. Hollywood was approached by a distressed Mr. Hoyt, who said he and Mr. Ruge shot Nicholas and buried him. Mr. Hoyt questioned Mr. Hollywood on what he thought would have happened if Ben Markowitz found out about the abduction.

Mr. Hoyt owed Mr. Hollywood \$100 to \$200, and Mr. Lynn asked if the debt still existed. Mr. Hollywood responded he was not concerned with that.

Mr. Lynn posed the same question again, and Mr. Hollywood said he did not know how to answer. The prosecutor asked Mr. Hollywood if he had paid his friend for a job well done, but Mr. Hollywood said he did not give him any money.

Believing he would be shot by police on sight, Mr. Hollywood fled the country and wound up in Brazil, a destination he picked after seeing the movie "Blame it on Rio," according to testimony. Mr. Hollywood was captured there in 2005, at which time a woman he had a relationship with was six months pregnant.

Mr. Hollywood's son will be 4 years old in July. Mr. Lynn asked Mr. Hollywood if he knew that if a person has a child in Brazil, he or she would not be extradited. Mr. Hollywood confirmed he knew about this.

Mr. Hollywood at times had difficulties recalling events that occurred around the time of the murder, and at times could not remember testimony presented during the trial. Mr. Lynn asked him if he agreed his memory had been better while he was questioned by defense attorney James Blatt, but Judge Hill sustained an objection from defense attorneys.

Mr. Lynn and Mr. Hollywood became involved in a couple of spats during the proceedings, at one point arguing about the plot of the film "Cape Fear," and Mr. Hollywood once started speaking over Judge Hill, insisting there was no feud with Ben Markowitz.

The attorneys trying the case sparred a bit on Wednesday, Mr. Lynn accusing co-defense counsel Alex Kessel of calling him a derogatory term on three occasions.

Judge Hill called the topic inappropriate, and while the judge said he didn't know if the defense attorney made such comments, he instructed Mr. Kessel to keep his voice down while seated at

the counsel table because everyone can hear him.

Later in the day, Judge Hill reminded the attorneys that the trial was open to the public to keep it fair, and that members of the media were in the audience. He warned the two sides to cease with their comments, and should there be an objection to questioning, to simply make it and it would be ruled upon.

At the end of the hearing, Mr. Lynn said his cross examination of Mr. Hollywood wouldn't last much longer. Each side will have opportunities to question Mr. Hollywood again on re-direct examination, and afterwards, the defense plans to call back to the stand Paul Kimes, an investigator for the District Attorney's Office.

The trial continues Friday morning.

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