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Start of Hollywood trial rescheduled to April

By Angel Pacheco, News-Press Staff Writer

Accused of masterminding and ordering the execution of a 15-year-old in 2000, Jesse James Hollywood was whisked from court in a convoy of sheriff's department vehicles on Thursday after a hearing at which his trial date was rescheduled to April 27.

In custody and wearing an orange inmate jumpsuit, Mr. Hollywood appeared before Santa Barbara County Superior Court Judge Brian Hill on Thursday in Department 14 with about nine sheriff's deputies standing guard inside of the courtroom. Attorneys for Mr. Hollywood had requested that the trial be pushed back from Feb. 19, and an agreement on the new date was made.

But Mr. Hollywood's next court appearance will be on April 9, when the judge will decide the admissibility of certain evidence, set ground rules for the trial and reaffirm the court dates, among other things, said Santa Barbara County Deputy District Attorney Josh Lynn, who is prosecuting the case.

Mr. Hollywood was the subject of the feature film "Alpha Dog," which was made while he was a fugitive following the killing. He stands accused of masterminding and ordering the execution of Nicholas Markowitz, who was abducted on Aug. 16, 2000, from a street in the San Fernando Valley over a \$1,200 drug debt allegedly owed to Mr. Hollywood by the victim's older brother. The teen was held for days before he was bound and put into a shallow grave that was dug by Mr. Hollywood's associate Graham Pressley. Mr. Pressley was convicted of second-degree murder as an adult but sentenced as a juvenile.

Nicholas was then shot repeatedly by Ryan Hoyt, who has been convicted of murder and is on death row. The shooting took place in the Santa Barbara County front country near a spot called Lizard's Mouth.

Two others -- Jesse Ruge and William Skidmore -- were also convicted in connection with the case. Mr. Ruge was convicted of aggravated kidnapping and Mr. Skidmore pled guilty to kidnapping and burglary.

Mr. Hollywood is being represented by James Blatt, and filling in for him on Thursday was attorney Michael Raab.

Sheriff's deputies kept a tight eye over the brief proceedings, restricting most of the individuals who came to watch to the last row of the public seating area. When the hearing ended, deputies

cleared the courtroom, and a short time later, a white sport utility vehicle transporting Mr. Hollywood drove past the front of the jury assembly building on Santa Barbara Street, where the matter is being tried. To either end of the SUV was a squad car, with the lead vehicle flashing its emergency lights.

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