

Witness on Cross Examination Says He Lied To Investigators

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Witness, on cross examination, says he lied to investigators : Admission comes during murder trial of Jesse James Hollywood A day after testifying about driving Jesse James Hollywood from Colorado Springs to Calabasas after the bullet-ridden body of 15-year-old Nicholas Markowitz was found off West Camino Cielo, witness Chas Saulsbury returned to the stand on Wednesday and faced a withering assault on his credibility at the hands of Mr. Hollywood's lead defense attorney.

Attorney James Blatt, during his cross examination of Mr. Saulsbury, got the witness to admit he lied to detectives investigating Nicholas' August 2000 kidnapping and slaying in hopes of protecting his immunity deal.

Mr. Hollywood is on trial for first-degree murder and kidnapping, with special circumstances that could make him eligible for the death penalty in connection with the kidnapping and killing, allegedly over a drug debt owed to the defendant's by the victim's older half-brother.

Four co-defendants have already been convicted. The shooter, Ryan Hoyt, sits on California's death row at San Quentin State Prison.

Mr. Saulsbury previously testified he and Mr. Hollywood -- accused of masterminding the kidnapping of Nicholas from the San Fernando Valley and his execution in Santa Barbara County less than three days later-- became friends when both were 16-year-olds in Colorado Springs, about an hour south of Denver. The Hollywood family moved back to California a short time later, and the two parted ways.

That was until August 2000, when, Mr. Saulsbury said, he went to his mother's home one day and found Mr. Hollywood standing in the doorway.

With Mr. Hollywood making mention of fleeing to Canada or Mexico, the two went on a road trip that led back to the San Fernando Valley, with a stop in Las Vegas.

As Mr. Hollywood got out of Mr. Saulsbury's vehicle after making one of several stops in the valley, the witness sped off and headed home, according to testimony. Soon after he got back, Mr. Saulsbury contacted an attorney and gave law enforcement a statement.

Mr. Blatt produced that police report in court and read a portion that indicated Mr. Saulsbury told detectives he did not know why Mr. Hollywood was in trouble, and he had assumed it was related to a drug debt.

However, Mr. Saulsbury admitted Wednesday he knew about the alleged murder before ever leaving Colorado Springs with Mr. Hollywood.

Soon after Mr. Hollywood showed up at Mr. Saulsbury's mother's home, the old friends reportedly logged onto the News-Press Web site, and Mr. Hollywood read a story that indicated a dead body had been found and two reported associates of Mr. Hollywood -- Mr. Hoyt and Jesse Ruge -- in addition to a 17-year-old, had been arrested.

Prosecutors say the kidnapping and shooting were the result of a drug debt owed to Mr. Hollywood by Ben Markowitz. Mr. Ruge was convicted of kidnapping for ransom or extortion and sentenced to seven years to life in prison.

Mr. Blatt went on to ask Mr. Saulsbury if he had lied because he wanted to look better in front of detectives, and the witness agreed. Mr. Saulsbury said he wanted to get his deal with law enforcement -- one that involved immunity in exchange for testimony, and that he was willing to do what it took.

Mr. Blatt additionally zeroed in on Mr. Saulsbury indicating to prosecutors that during the trip, Mr. Hollywood said an attorney he contacted advised him to kill the boy and bury him. In the course of his cross examination, Mr. Blatt pointed out that by the first time he revealed this information, it was after he had initially been interviewed by detectives and had testified before the grand jury.

Mr. Saulsbury said he supposed he had wanted to protect his friend, but after continued examination from Mr. Blatt, the witness admitted he had been attempting to protect himself.

The attorney asked if he had just lied to the jury, and Mr. Saulsbury replied that he had not. Superior Court Judge Brian Hill, who is presiding over the case, interjected, asking if the witness cared to explain his answer, but he said he did not.

However, Mr. Saulsbury went on to acknowledge the fib, and Mr. Blatt asked why he did it.

"That was a mistake," the witness said.

The examination moved onto something Mr. Saulsbury reportedly omitted from statements to law enforcement: Mr. Hollywood, according to the testimony, told the witness he did not orchestrate the shooting and that he did not want Nicholas to be harmed.

Mr. Blatt asked Mr. Saulsbury why he never divulged this information to authorities, but the witness sat there for a moment without answering. Mr. Blatt continued on, asking if the reason he never gave this information to detectives was because he wanted to save his own skin.

"I don't know," Mr. Saulsbury said.

Mr. Blatt later went on to ask if, out of fear of jail time, Mr. Saulsbury did not want to reveal

information that would be helpful to his client. The witness agreed.

On redirect examination, Chief Trial Deputy Josh Lynn of the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's office asked the witness if he had been confused by the defense's questioning, as past testimony and police reports were all referenced in a quick-fire fashion. Mr. Saulsbury answered affirmatively, and Mr. Lynn went on to ask whether into the later part of the trial's morning session, he had been willing to say "yes" to anything. Mr. Saulsbury again agreed.

Asked if anyone ever told Mr. Saulsbury he would be in trouble if he did not assist in convicting Mr. Hollywood, the witness replied that had never been indicated.

Concerning his first interview with detectives, Mr. Saulsbury agreed that at that time, he did not remember every detail about his trip.

Mr. Lynn also asked about the reported sorrow Mr. Hollywood displayed while the two were on the road, and the witness said the defendant never indicated whether he was sad for Nicholas or himself. Additionally, Mr. Hollywood talked about making a break for Mexico or Canada more than he talked about the victim, according to testimony.

Mr. Saulsbury will be back for his third day on the stand Friday, when the trial resumes at 9 a.m. in Dept. 14.

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