

# Santa Barbara Witness Takes Stand In Hollywood Trial

By Amy Silverstein

One of the unique aspects of the August 2000 kidnapping of 15-year-old Nick Markowitz are the witnesses' failure to report the event to the police and the victim's own refusal to try escaping, even though this eventually costing him his life. Now, the witnesses' and the victim's lackadaisical attitude toward the crime also appears to be hurting the prosecution's case against Jesse James Hollywood, who, if convicted, faces the death penalty for allegedly masterminding the kidnapping and murder of Markowitz.

Also complicating matters for the prosecution team — headed by Joshua Lynn, who is aided by Hans Almgren — is the fact that Hollywood was not present for the murder itself. The prosecution is relying on testimonies that portray Hollywood as the boss of his group of friends, able to make others follow his orders even when he was not present. On Tuesday, a prosecution witness testified that Hollywood did appear to be the main person in charge of the kidnapping, but the defense team discredited his testimony in multiple cross examinations.

On August 6, 2000, Jesse Ruge — currently serving a life sentence for his involvement in the kidnapping and murder of Markowitz, who was shot by Ryan Hoyt in the foothills of Santa Barbara — arrived unexpectedly at the Santa Barbara home of his childhood friend, Richard Hoeflinger. On Tuesday in court, Hoeflinger testified that Ruge said he was in trouble and needed a place to stay. Ruge then left and returned later with the Hollywood, Markowitz, and two other young men. According to Hoeflinger, Ruge said that Markowitz was being kept there against his own free will because Hollywood was looking for the victim's brother. The prosecution alleges Hollywood had Markowitz killed over a drug debt owed Hollywood by Markowitz's half-brother, Ben.

However, Hoeflinger chose not to report the kidnapping to the police because he was afraid of Hollywood. The prosecution asked for specific incidents describing why Hollywood was so frightening, but Hoeflinger only had vague answers, responding that Hollywood looked stern, "very angry," and was "barking orders" to "pretty much everybody."

In his cross-examination, the defense read old transcripts from police questionings and previous trials, in which Hoeflinger made no mention of Hollywood's dominant role in the kidnapping and instead alleged that it was Ruge and William Skidmore who ordered everyone around. In fact, Hoeflinger admitted that Tuesday's trial marked the first time he testified with such incriminating evidence against Hollywood. Hoeflinger also admitted that he did not meet Hollywood on the

day of the kidnapping, as he had alleged in previous testimonies. Instead, the two allegedly met six months earlier, in February 2000. When defense attorney Adam Kessel asked Hoeflinger why he lied in his previous statements, the witness once again had a vague response. "I blamed myself for the past nine years," Hoeflinger said. "It's time for the blame to be put where it should be." Hoeflinger explained that he felt safe to tell the truth now that Hollywood was finally in jail.

Hoeflinger also admitted that his memory is affected by his former drug use. Around the time of the kidnapping, Hoeflinger was smoking high-grade marijuana multiple times every day.

On the day that Ruge, Hollywood and Markowitz arrived at Hoeflinger's house, the witness already had plans to attend a barbeque. Though concerned about the kidnapping victim in his duplex, Hoeflinger followed through on his original plans and attended the barbeque anyway. When he returned home later in the evening, he saw that Markowitz was unbound and playing video games with Ruge in the living room. Hoeflinger's roommate and friends went with him to the barbeque. One of those friends, Jaymi Dickensheet, took the stand Wednesday morning.

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