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## Jesse James Hollywood takes the stand in his own defense at murder trial

**He testifies for about an hour about his life prior to the kidnapping and death of 15-year-old Nicholas Markowitz. 'My business was always first,' he tells the jury.**

By Steve Chawkins

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Reporting from Santa Barbara — Looking like a young banker in a dark suit and striped tie, accused killer Jesse James Hollywood testified in his own defense Monday, giving a concise overview of his lucrative marijuana business in the San Fernando Valley.

On the witness stand for a little more than an hour, Hollywood, 29, was polite and well-spoken, answering "yes, sir" and "no, sir" as his attorney, James Blatt, elicited details of his life before the kidnapping and murder of a 15-year-old boy that sent four of his friends and acquaintances to prison.

After the 2000 slaying of West Hills teenager Nicholas Markowitz, Hollywood was the target of an international manhunt. He was apprehended in a Brazilian beach town in 2005.

The case was made into a movie, "Alpha Dog," that was released in 2007.

In response to questions from his attorney, Hollywood said he was earning about \$120,000 a year in the marijuana trade by the time he was 20. He said he owned a home, wanted to build equity and had an excellent credit rating. He said he worked out daily, was obsessive about personal hygiene and took his occupation seriously.

"My business was always first," he told a jury in Santa Barbara County Superior Court.

Portraying Hollywood as a cold-blooded manipulator, prosecutors say Markowitz was abducted and taken to Santa Barbara and shot nine times because his half-brother Ben owed Hollywood a drug debt of \$1,200. The defense says the boy smoked marijuana and drank with his captors and was free to leave Santa Barbara in the three days before he was bound with duct tape and marched to his grave at a climbing spot called Lizard's Mouth.

The convicted triggerman, Ryan Hoyt, is on death row at San Quentin. Hollywood's attorneys have said that Hoyt, who has not testified in the trial that started May 15, killed Markowitz on his own to impress his popular friend Jesse.

In his testimony, Hollywood said Hoyt, a close friend from childhood, was known for spinning self-aggrandizing lies. Hollywood and other friends threw Hoyt a going-away party for being accepted for Navy SEAL training, only to learn that was false. Hoyt also claimed to have a job lined up as a Versace model.

"Hoyt told stories," Hollywood said.

An outstanding baseball player in youth leagues, Hollywood drifted from the sport after an accident sidelined him. He said he started selling marijuana as a young teenager when he was hanging out in a Colorado sports bar owned by his father, Jack Hollywood.

The elder Hollywood, who has been a faithful spectator at the trial, sold marijuana on a large scale, his son said.

However, he never discussed it with his children, Hollywood said. "He was very professional," his son testified.

Testimony is expected to continue today, when Hollywood is likely to be asked for a narrative of the events that led to the murder.

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