

CBS News
Jackson Faces Prospective Jurors
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(CBS/AP) Michael Jackson arrived at court Monday for the start of jury selection in his child-molestation trial as a crowd of fans shouting encouragement pressed against fences to see the pop star.

Jackson, wearing white and shielded by an umbrella, waved to supporters as he walked into court.

After more than an hour's wait, Jackson and his attorney stood and faced the first group of prospective jurors filing into the courtroom.

During the chill morning hours before his arrival fans danced and sang a Jackson song deriding the district attorney and booed a woman who held a sign backing the alleged victim, a 13-year-old boy. Many had spent the night outside the little courthouse.

Superior Court Judge Rodney Melville summoned 300 people to court for the first round of jury selection. Another 300 are to follow on Tuesday, with a final 150 scheduled to arrive on Wednesday. From that pool, the judge hopes to find 12 jurors and eight alternates, but the process could take a month or more.

The pop star defendant himself made some waves in the jury pool, reports **CBS News Correspondent Vince Gonzales**, appealing directly to his neighbors via the Internet for a fair trial.

Early Sunday, Jackson issued a court-approved video statement on [his Web site](#), predicting he would be acquitted.

"Please keep an open mind and let me have my day in court," Jackson said, looking directly into the camera. "I deserve a fair trial like every other American citizen. I will be acquitted and vindicated when the truth is told."

Jackson, 46, is charged with molesting a cancer patient — then age 13, now 15 — after plying him with alcohol.

His publicist, Raymond Bain, describes Jackson as "strong" as jury selection begins.

"He has confidence in his defense team. His spirits are great. He has the support of his family his children, his friends," Bain said Monday on **CBS News' *The Early Show***.

He also denied that Jackson is suicidal.

"Mr. Jackson is very strong. He is very thick-skinned, too," he told **co-anchor Hannah Storm**.

In an interview broadcast by **CBS News' 48 Hours**, his parents defended Jackson.

"We know our son," said his father, Joe Jackson. "We know he's not a pedophile like some of these newscasters are saying. That is not true."

Jackson is opposed by [Santa Barbara County district attorney](#) Tom Sneddon, 61, who has pursued Jackson and what happens at his Neverland Ranch. Jackson has derided him in song as a "cold man" with a vendetta and likened the case to persecution.

Ten years ago, Sneddon tried to build a child-molestation case against Jackson. But it fell apart when the singer's accuser reportedly accepted a multimillion-dollar civil settlement and refused to testify in any criminal case.

Melville, 63, is a veteran of the bench who has refused to tolerate tardiness or even, in one case, a bathroom break for the defendant. At the final pretrial hearing Friday, Melville made it clear that a gag order stands and he won't abide lawyers attacking each other.

In normal cases, courts look for jurors who haven't heard about a case or at least haven't formed an opinion about the accused. This is not a normal case.

"I don't think the court is looking for 12 people who haven't heard about the Michael Jackson case. I think Osama Bin Laden has heard about the Michael Jackson case," said **CBS News Legal Analyst Trent Copeland**. "Everyone involved in this case must come with an open mind."

And that's the hard part, says jury consultant Kathy Kellerman.

"There are any number of people who cannot keep a fair and open mind at this point in time," said Kellerman.

And both sides will be on the lookout for anyone excited to sit on this jury.

"They may want to be on the jury because they're a fan of Michael Jackson and they want to see him survive. They might want to be on the jury because ... they want fame," Kellerman warned. "So there's a series of 'wanna-be' jurors that both sides have to be worried about."

One key question will be whether the prospective jurors can take part in a trial that could last up to five months, reports **CBS News Correspondent Steve Futterman**. The judge will consider any requests to be removed from the case for hardship reasons.

As jury selection neared, competition for a scoop undermined Melville's efforts. The 1,900-page transcript of the case prosecutors presented to the grand jury that indicted Jackson was leaked this month to thesmokinggun.com and ABC News.

Among other things, the transcript included the accuser's testimony that Jackson closed his eyes tightly while molesting him on a bed, and that the pop star ignored the child's warnings that he shouldn't drink alcohol because of his medical condition.

More than 1,000 applications for media access to the courthouse complex have been submitted, some of them from as far away as Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Germany, Canada and Mexico.

Jackson's family members were expected to attend much of the trial, although the judge said he would not permit them in the courtroom when it is packed with prospective jurors.

Jury selection could last a month or longer.

After three days of preliminaries, lawyers will be given time to study prospective jurors' written answers and return to court next week to excuse those who have strong views that clearly exclude them from service. The lawyers will then begin questioning in depth those still in the jury pool.

The challenge facing the court is not to find jurors ignorant of the case but to find those who say they can put aside everything they have heard and look at the evidence as if they had heard nothing.

"This is an extremely high profile case locally, nationally and internationally," Jackson's lawyer, Thomas Mesereau Jr., said in a recent motion. "The publicity is so widespread that there is no jurisdiction in the state or perhaps in this country that would afford Mr. Jackson a trial in front of jurors who have not been influenced by the publicity."