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Eligibility questions continue to surround Shabazz Muhammad

By Eric Prisbell

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Shabazz Muhammad, the elite basketball prospect who is expected to make UCLA a national contender again this season, will not travel with the Bruins during their upcoming exhibition tour of China as the NCAA continues its eligibility review of Muhammad, according to a statement released by the school Wednesday.

At issue is whether Muhammad compromised his amateur status because of financial connections to Benjamin Lincoln and Ken Kavanagh. Lincoln is a North Carolina-based financial planner who helped pay for some of Muhammad's unofficial visits. Kavanagh is a New York-based financial adviser who has told CBSSports.com that he has donated money to Muhammad's summer basketball program, Dream Vision.

Reached by phone Wednesday by USA TODAY Sports, Lincoln politely referred comment to his attorney, **Bill Trosch**, who said in a phone interview that Lincoln is cooperating with the NCAA and that Lincoln "hopes the NCAA's investigation can be completed as soon as possible and Shabazz can begin playing for UCLA."

When asked whether Lincoln denies the allegation that he helped pay for multiple recruiting trips made by Muhammad, **Trosch** said: "I am not going to go down that road because there is no way to answer that without giving more information than I am authorized to give ... We all want what's best for Shabazz, and part of that is not talking out of turn."

Trosch said Lincoln was quoted accurately in the statement Lincoln gave in February to CBSSports.com, which first reported that the NCAA was investigating the relationship between Muhammad's family and the two financial advisers. Lincoln's brother, Geoff Lincoln, is an assistant coach for at Bishop Gorman, Muhammad's high school team in Las Vegas. Lincoln told CBSSports.com that he has been close to Muhammad's family for nearly five years and that as Muhammad began to explore his college options "I offered to help ... the family take unofficial visits to two colleges. I simply was trying to help the family I care so much about. It is important that this be resolved quickly and not negatively affect Shabazz in any way."

Trosch also said Muhammad's father, Ron Holmes, was quoted accurately when he said in the same Feb. 29 CBSSports.com story that Lincoln offered to pay for the plane tickets and hotel room for Muhammad's visits to Duke and North Carolina. Holmes said "we filled out the NCAA compliance forms and fully disclosed that our family friend, Benjamin Lincoln, had paid for the trips ... I don't think we have done anything wrong."

The NCAA does not comment on specific investigations. But NCAA officials told USA TODAY Sports last month that it was investigating several summer-league basketball programs as it

attempts to curtail the influence of third-party individuals who often donate money to AAU programs in an effort to gain influence over top players.