

Los Angeles Times

SPORTS

USC assistant Tony Bland hires high-powered New York attorney in bribery case



USC head coach Andy Enfield, left, talks to officials as assistant coach Tony Bland stands behind him during a game against UCLA on Feb. 18. (Mark J. Terrill / Associated Press)

By [Nathan Fenno](#) Staff Writer Oct. 2, 2017 4:43 PM PT

Tony Bland, the USC assistant coach charged last week in the college basketball corruption and fraud scandal, has retained a veteran New York attorney who defended John Gotti Jr. and represents alleged drug kingpin Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman.

In his first public comments about the Bland case, Jeffrey Lichtman told The Times the matter has been “heartbreaking on many levels” for the coach.

“I just spoke to him and the guy absolutely loves USC and appreciates everything they’ve done for him every step of the way in his career, even through now,” Lichtman said. “He wants the USC family to know how much he’s appreciated his time there.”

Bland hasn’t made any public comments since the FBI arrested him in Tampa, Fla., last Tuesday. He faces several charges in U.S. District Court in New York, including soliciting a bribe and wire fraud. The charges carry a maximum of 80 years in prison.

Prosecutors alleged Bland received a \$13,000 bribe in exchange for steering USC players to Christian Dawkins, a former agent trying to start his own firm, and financial advisor Munish Sood. Dawkins and Sood were among the 10 men, including four college basketball assistant coaches, charged in the case.

In the complaint, prosecutors also accused Bland of helping funnel \$9,000 to the families of two unnamed USC players. Bland is the Trojans’ associate head coach under Andy Enfield.

Within hours of Bland’s arrest, USC placed the coach on administrative leave and hired former FBI Director Louis Freeh to investigate the situation.

Lichtman said they haven’t been contacted about Freeh’s inquiry.

“We’re concerned about the criminal case first,” Lichtman said.

The attorney doesn’t expect to challenge Bland being placed on leave.

“This whole thing has been absolutely devastating to his family,” Lichtman said. “At this time, we’re focused on his defense and his family. That’s more than he can handle.”

Bland was released on a \$100,000 bond shortly after the arrest. He is permitted to travel only in the Los Angeles area and New York. His next court appearance is scheduled for Oct. 10 in New York.

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