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### Boynton Beach student has to work debt off this summer before accepting scholarship to SUNY Buffalo

By Jerome Burdi, Sun Sentinel

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Money can't solve James Potts' problem. Well, it can. It just depends on where the money comes from.

Despite an outpouring of public support — and offers to help the 18-year-old scholar-athlete pay \$4,670 he owes American Heritage School of Boca/Delray for back tuition — the recent graduate, and his immediate family, will have to work off the debt this summer to avoid losing a full football scholarship to the University at Buffalo.

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NCAA rules prohibit Potts from accepting outside contributions to pay off the school.

The prestigious American Heritage will not release Potts' transcript and diploma until the debt is satisfied. Without his transcript, there would be no scholarship from Buffalo.

Public support and pledges of donations poured in on Friday, a day after the Potts' dilemma was reported in the Sun Sentinel. School officials said Potts, who signed a contract to attend the school and to work on campus to pay his tuition, still owed 400 hours of work, equivalent to \$4,670.

On Friday, American Heritage was accepting donations until it learned of the NCAA rule. Officials said the school does not want to jeopardize Potts' scholarship and will return any donations. They also said they would allow Potts and his family to work the 400 hours he still owes.

"It's all good, I'm going to make it in the end," Potts said. "I may have to go to the school and work."

Potts, a running back-defensive back, had hopes of getting to Buffalo this month to start training for football in hopes of starting for the Division I football Bulls. But with his debt holding him back, he'll have to return to the American Heritage campus and work. The 400 hours can be accumulated within weeks, school officials said, getting Potts to Buffalo for the start of the fall semester Aug. 5.

"We were happy to help him achieve a high school diploma and get into a nice college," said Bob Stone,

American Heritage headmaster. "He's a nice boy. It's too bad he didn't find the time to do the work. I hope it will all get resolved."

The son of a scrap collector with a criminal record, James Potts turned to academics and athletics to overcome his disadvantaged background. He transferred from Park Vista High School, west of [Boynton Beach](#), to American Heritage at the start of his junior year. He was attracted to the superior academic atmosphere, and also made a name for himself on the football field.

Potts' father, Larry Gamble, could not afford the school's \$27,000-a-year tuition. So Potts arranged to work off his tuition as a janitor and landscaper on campus: 420 hours a year at the rate of about \$10 an hour. It took him until the middle of his senior year, however, to fulfill the hours for his junior year.

The school said it sent monthly statements to Potts' family and met with him regularly to remind him of the debt. But with a demanding schedule of school and football, the work fell by the wayside, said Peter Schweich, a retired vice president of Boston University who wrote a letter that Potts delivered Thursday to American Heritage, proposing the student pay off his obligation monthly over the next four years.

On Friday, the Educated Wealth Center — a West Palm Beach company that helps parents plan for college — was among those offering to help, by matching contributions made to Potts on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Individuals, too, offered to help pay off Potts' obligation to his alma mater.

Among them were Rick Danzansky, 66, of [Boca Raton](#), and his wife.

"We're just aware of the problems associated with education and not having enough money to afford what's necessary. It's a lose-lose right now," Danzansky said before the NCAA prohibition against donations came to light. "That's why I'm hopeful reason will prevail."

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