The sides have seemed close before, only for the talks to break down. It was the system issues earlier this month, followed by the split last week after three days of mediation.

NEW YORK (AP) — NBA owners and players called it an early night Thursday, with both pointing toward Friday as a decisive day for big moves to end the 119-day lockout.

Or not.

After two days of talks about the salary cap system, they will turn their attention back to the division of revenues, which derailed the negotiations last week.

This time, Commissioner David Stern said the talks had produced enough familiarity and trust "that will enable us to look forward to tomorrow, where we anticipate there will be some important and additional progress — or not."

"But I think (union executive director Billy Hunter) and I share that view, and we're looking forward to seeing whether something good can be made to happen."

The sides again said there was some minor progress on the system issues after about 7 1/2 hours of talks. They decided to wrap it up and get some rest following a marathon 15-hour session Wednesday, and with union economist Kevin Murphy unavailable Thursday to discuss finances.

Hunter said he thought the sides were "within striking distance of a getting a deal" on the system, but there's still no indication either side is ready to make the big move necessary to settling the BRI split.

Owners have insisted they're not going beyond 50-50, which means the sides are still about $100 million apart annually, based on last season's revenues. Players have proposed reducing their guarantee from 57 percent down to 52.5, but they're unlikely to go much further without some concessions on the system issues.

"I think we're within reach and within striking distance of getting a deal," Hunter said. "It's just a question of how receptive the NBA is and whether or not they want to do a deal."

Asked when the significant move would happen, Hunter noticed Stern sitting in the back of his press conference and said to ask the commissioner.

"Tomorrow!" Stern yelled out.

"There are no guarantees that we'll get it done, but we're going to give it one heck of a shot tomorrow," Stern said a few minutes later in his press conference. "I think that Billy and the union's negotiators feel the same way. I know that ours do."

If they don't, Stern will have to decide whether to add more cancellations to the two weeks that have already been lost.

A full season might be difficult even with a deal this week. It takes roughly 30 days from agreement to games being played, so it's uncertain if there's still time for any basketball in November even before examining arena availability. But 82 games would be a boost for the players, meaning they wouldn't miss the paycheck that seemed lost when the first two weeks were scrapped.

It was widely expected Stern would announce further cancellations this week after talks broke down a week ago. Instead, the sides were in communication the next day, staffs met Monday, and they were back at the bargaining table Wednesday, acting on Hunter's recommendation to "park" the revenue split and focus first on the system issues.

Players want a system that looks a lot like the old one, where teams have the ability to exceed the salary cap and where contracts and their raises are guaranteed. Owners are seeking changes that they believe would create more competitive balance by removing the big market teams' ability to spend freely beyond the cap.

They have attempted to do that by increasing the penalties teams would have to pay for exceeding the tax level. Players argue the taxes are too punitive and would scare teams from spending, thereby creating a hard cap.

"Our position hasn't changed much," union president Derek Fisher of the Lakers said. "We're just trying to make sure that players have an opportunity to have a market for themselves and for their services, the same way we're trying to meet the league and our teams on all 30 teams being competitive."

Players have said the issues of the system and split are largely tied together, though Stern and Deputy Commissioner Adam Silver have said they believe they are separate.

The key question is whether owners will insist on having both — and it sounds like they might.

"We need to resolve both issues and both issues are critical," Silver said. "One is not dependent on the other."

The sides again met in the small-group format that has been most successful in the lockout, with Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban and union vice president of the Knicks Roger Mason Jr. also joining the talks.

The sides have seemed close before, only for the talks to break down. It was the system issues earlier this month, followed by the split last week after three days of mediation.

They are hoping a deal can be completed by early next week, with the union believing if so there would still be enough time to reschedule the canceled games. But they've now arrived at what might be the toughest part, because it always seemed these talks would come back to money.

"We're working at it," Fisher said. "It's a tough process and as we move through and try to close the gap in as many places as we can, it gets tougher towards the end."