As of July 1st, the NBA became the second major franchise to have a lockout in effect, but Boston Celtics fans should be worried about more than just a delayed free agency period.

By JAMES W. WADE III

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The NBA locked out its players Friday when its collective bargaining agreement expired, becoming the second pro sports league shut down by labor strife.

The labor deal ended at midnight after players and owners failed to reach a new contract. The

two sides remained far apart on just about every major issue, from salaries to the salary cap, revenues to revenue sharing.

The long-expected lockout puts the 2011-12 season in jeopardy and comes as the NFL is trying to end its own work stoppage that began in March.

It is believed to be only the second time that two leagues have been shut down simultaneously by labor problems.

As of July 1st, the NBA became the second major franchise to have a lockout in effect, but Boston Celtics fans should be worried about more than just a delayed free agency period.

The end of the current big three era is looming, and there's every reason to believe that the next season might be their last real shot at another championship. If the lockout ends up in a shortened season, or no season at all, it could mean that we've already seen the last hurrah for Boston's big three.

Could the NBA lockout stem from the decision? The making of Miami's Heat three. Could the league not appreciate what LeBron James and Dewayne Wade and Chris Bosh did this past year?

But unlike with the NFL's players and owners, who most experts project will resolve their differences before the start of the upcoming season, the NBA could face a much longer and more painful work stoppage. The two sides remain deeply divided over what percentage of revenue the players should receive, whether teams should have a hard cap on payrolls, and how owners should share their money.

The last NBA lockout, which began in July 1998, did not end until January 1999, and the season was shortened to 50 games. In the end, when this lockout is finally over, the players will still be getting millions of dollars. The owners will still be rich as all get out. Each side will ultimately get what they want, which is a boatload of money that they can pretty much spend on whatever

they want. When all is said and done, everyone will get what they want, except the fans.

It's the fans, the die-hard NBA fans that eat, drink and sleep basketball, that are left out in the cold during the dog days of summer while millionaires fight with billionaires over what to do with our money. I mean, this money that they're all fighting over isn't growing on trees. It isn't falling from the sky and into the pockets of every person associated with the NBA. It all comes from the consumer, the fans, us. Basically, we as consumers are being tossed aside while the owners and players scratch, slap and pull each other's hair out over our hard-earned dollar.

You'd think the NBA would have learned its lesson. The NBA reached the height of its popularity in 1997 and 1998, thanks to some guy named Michael Jordan and his team in Chicago. Then some arguing over money shortened the 1998-99 season to 50 games. Two of the most famous and talked-about NBA Finals series ever featuring the Bulls and the Jazz was followed by one of the most forgettable NBA Finals in recent memory between the Spurs and the Knicks. The NBA thought it could do whatever it wanted and that the fans would come storming back.

They didn't. Not for a while. It took years of the league searching for and doing everything in its powers to market the next great superstar, from Shaquille O'Neal to Allen Iverson to Kobe Bryant to Dwyane Wade to LeBron James before fans finally helped build the NBA into the immensely popular business that it is today.