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A LABOR OF LOVE: Artist Erika King makes collages of the Miami Heat at her studio in Coconut Grove. King has been creating collages for the Miami Heat for 15 years, selling them for \$15,000 to \$30,000 each. Sales spiked this season.

THE FINALS BOOST

■ The nail-biting suspense of the Miami Heat's run in the NBA Finals is paying off for local businesses.

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As Miami Heat fans scramble to snag last-minute merchandise and pray for triumph in tonight's NBA Finals, businesses from sports bars to downtown hotels are already chalking up Game 7 between Miami and San Antonio as a win.

Entrepreneurs, including commissioned artists and apparel designers, are also cashing in.

Artist Erika King's towering collages depicting Heat stars like Dwyane Wade and LeBron James are a bold indicator of where the team stands in her livelihood (as well as her heart.) King has been creating collages for the Miami

Heat for 15 years, selling them for \$15,000 to \$30,000 each. Sales spiked this season: she has been commissioned to complete six collages.

Each contains newspaper clippings and photos of players crouching before shots, sprinting down the court and rejoicing after winning plays. Those pictures blend into a canvas smudged with bursts of rusty red, subdued gold and vibrant blue.

"Taking pictures and juxtaposing them in a way that's meaningful tells a story," she said.

Previous clients include the Florida Marlins and legendary Dolphins quarterback Dan Marino. Heat President Pat Riley has

also commissioned a King collage.

When power player LeBron James was rookie-of-the-year in 2003, King crafted his official collage. She's also become good friends with the family of Dwyane Wade, another Heat superstar.

"They're my boys," she said. "You get so attached to them. Plus, basketball is such an exciting sport," King said.

During Game 6, she nearly had to leave the bar where she watched it. "It made me sick," she said of the suspense.

Though King plans to make a collage for the Spurs in the near future, both she and her agent Cash McMahon have already started preparing for a Heat victory.

"I don't want to think about the

Spurs winning," McMahon said. "We're all about the Heat."

Doral-based apparel company Peace Love World is also prematurely prepping for triumph.

"We've started designing championship shirts," said Alina Villasante, the company's head designer and owner.

Her sports merchandise merges the soul of the person with the loyalty of the fan, she said. At the end of the day, it's about the game — which means it's about the Heat.

"Miami is my backyard. I'm a season-ticket holder, and usually whatever person or team you associate the clothes with experiences the same connection," she said. "The difference here is that

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