

A Disappointing Ending
By Jesse Almeida 6/17/23

After making it to the NBA Finals against Golden State in 2022 and being competitive in the Finals, expectations were high for the Boston Celtics. Expectations immediately turned into championship or bust for the C's. Brad knew this heading into the offseason. He went out and got Malcolm Brogdon, and signed Danilo Gallinari at the beginning of free agency. Brogdon was brought in to be that scoring spark off the bench, along with that playmake for others. Gallinari was brought in to be that 3 point specialist off of the bench. The moves fit what the Celtics needed. Then, it went downhill. Danilo Gallinari tore his ACL in a FIBA World Cup game on August 27th. This injury lead him to being out for the season. Next, Ime Udoka got suspended for policy violations with the team. This left the C's without a head coach with less than a month before the season. Expectations remained the same, but questions started to rise with a new coach with little to no experience, and a valuable wing shooter now out.

The Celtics new motto of winning games was their offense. Their defense was good but not like it was the previous season. Robert Williams was out for a little over half the season due to injuries which would result the step back on defense. The Celtics on offense however was the 4th best scoring teams in the NBA with an average of 117.9 points per game. The story of their offense was the three point shot. Boston shot an average of 42.6 three point shots a game and made an average of 16 threes a game. This would put them at 37.7 percent which was the 6th highest three point percentage in the NBA. The Celtics were second in offensive rating in the league. Even despite the fact that their defense did not look the same, they were still ranked second in the NBA in defense. Boston gave up an average of 111.4 points per game. This was 5th in the NBA. The Celtics finished the season 2nd in the Eastern Conference again, and improved their record from last year finishing at 57-25 this season. For the playoffs, it was a upsetting ending to the season. Boston made it to the Eastern Conference Finals again, but this time lost in 7 games vs Miami. It was the same story last year where Boston made each series hard on themselves and it ended up costing them in the ECF. Home court advantage seemed like a disadvantage as the Celtics went 5-6 at home in the postseason. With a season where the expectations were high after a Finals appearance the year before, not going back to the Finals this year was hard to accept as a fan.

Despite the fact that the Celtics did not make it back to NBA's biggest stage, there were a few players who had a solid season. Malcolm Brogdon who was the Celtics biggest addition in

the offseason was named the NBA's 6th Man of the Year. Brogdon averaged 14.9 points per game with 4.2 rebounds, and 3.7 assists. Malcolm Brogdon brought in elite shooting off of the bench. He shot .484 percent from the field, and .444 from three. Unfortunately, Brogdon dealt with a forearm injury during the postseason and his numbers dropped. But it does not take away from how much he helped the offense.

Derrick White was on the 2nd All NBA Defensive team averaging almost a block a game and .7 steals a game. In terms of the offense for White, he averaged 12.4 points per game, and with 3.9 assists. He shot .462 percent from the field, and .381 percent from three. What makes this even more impressive is that White played in all 82 regular season games. Derrick White was one of the best players in the postseason and proved how important he is to this quest for banner 18. Mostly because Derrick White saved the Celtics season in game 6 of the ECF on a buzzer beater put back layup. During the postseason White averaged 13.4 points per game, 2.1 assists and 3 rebounds. He shot .505 percent from the field, and .455 percent from three. Derrick White showed up when it mattered the most and is a piece this team needs going forward.

Jaylen Brown was apart of the 2nd All NBA team which means he will now be eligible for a super max contract. This was great news for Boston because there were reports of him wanting to be a number 1 on a team. Brad Stevens can now pay Jaylen Brown like he is a number 1 player and attempt to keep the two Jays together. In terms of the regular season, this was Jaylen Brown's best season in his career. Brown averaged 26.6 points, 3.5 assists and 5.7 rebounds. He averaged the most shots per game in a season at 20.6 shot attempts a game and had a .491 percentage from the field. However he had a .335 percentage from three which was the lowest of his career. In the playoffs, Brown averaged 22.7 points a game, with 3.4 assists, and 5.6 rebounds. He shot .496 from the field and .354 from three. Brown was inconsistent throughout the ECF, but the biggest issue with Jaylen all season was that the turnovers were at a career high for both regular season and postseason. Brown averaged 2.9 turnovers a game in the regular season, and 3.3 turnovers in the postseason. The ball handling still needs improvement as well as the shooting consistency. But other than those two things, fans should have optimism that Brown will come back better than ever.

Jayson Tatum was an MVP candidate for most of the season, made 1st All NBA, and has emerged himself in the top 5 discussion. He became the first person in Celtics history to average 30 points or more per game with 30.1 points per game. He had 8.8 rebounds and 4.6 assists a

game. The playmaking improving slightly is a great sign as he is still expanding his game. He shot .466 percent from the field and .350 percent from three. Tatum in the postseason had his ups and downs for sure, however he was the player who stepped up when it mattered. He averaged 27.2 points a game with 5.3 assists and 10.5 rebounds. Tatum shot .458 percent from the field but took a step back from three shooting .323 percent. Fans definitely would have liked the Celtics to make it easier for themselves, but when the Celtics were facing elimination Tatum showed up.

No one will ever forget that 51 point performance in game 7 of the second round vs Philly (which was the most ever in game 7 history in the NBA), and his 4th quarter performance in game 6 of that series. Even in the ECF game 4, 5, and 6 he showed up, but unfortunately for the C's and the fans he had a high ankle sprain in the first play of game 7 of the ECF. Jayson Tatum has shown that he can be the guy, but the next thing for him is can he have that mamba mentality making it easier on himself?

Was the season a failure? No, but was it a success? No. The goal at the beginning of the season was a championship, and the Celtics did not get that. But with a coach who had little to no experience coaching, and injuries the team dealt with in the beginning definitely played a factor. The season was a B- at best but no less than a C. What this team needs is veteran presence behind the young coach Mazzulla. The Celtics have already addressed the veteran presence on the coaching staff in hiring Sam Cassell as an assistant coach and Charles Lee as the lead assistant coach. For the roster, Boston needs a player or two who have that "dawg" mentality, who can teach the young guys how to close out games and can teach them how to adjust. With the new CBA rules in place this might need to be done via trade so Brad will have to pull something up his sleeve in order to keep the identity of this team in tact and be able to add to this core.