

Get the Best Chance at Banner 18

By Jesse Almeida

At this current moment, the Boston Celtics have the best record in the NBA. The C's are in 1st place in the Eastern Conference with a 4 game lead over the Bucks, and a 6 game lead over the 76ers. The goal for this season is to get the 18th banner hung in the rafters. Are the Celtics in a good spot right now? Obviously, but are there any improvements that could be made to get themselves the best chance possible? Absolutely there is. So, what is the current situation, what have the players on this roster have done so far, and what should Brad Stevens do at the trade deadline?

Right now the Celtics have an overall record of 36-11. They are 15-9 on the road and 21-2 at the TD Garden. The offseason moves of Jrue Holiday, and Kristaps Porzingis have looked superior so far. Jrue Holiday has filled in for the Marcus Smart role, but on better shooting percentages, while taking smarter looks. Jrue is averaging 13.3 points per game on 46.1% from the field, and 42.1% from three. Along with dishing out the rock with 4.6 assists per game, and has filled in on the rebounding end as well with 6 rebounds a game. On the defensive end, Holiday is averaging around a steal a game, and .7 blocks per game. Kristaps Porzingis has been the biggest factor to the Celtics success. Kristaps expands the Celtics offense with his post up game, and his versatility by being able to be a threat in the paint along with the ability to shoot from 30 ft for three. KP this year is averaging 19.5 points a game on 52.9% from the field and 35.9% from three. Porzingis has grabbed 6.7 rebounds a game, dished out 2 assists a game, and has filled in Rob Williams role on defense averaging nearly 2 blocks a game.

The Jays have been the Jays. Jayson Tatum is playing at an elite level like always. He is not averaging 30 a game but he is getting his, and making an impact on every aspect of the court. Tatum is averaging nearly 27 points a game on 47% from the field and 36.1% from three. JT this season has grabbed 8.5 rebounds a game, and dishing out 4.4 assists a game. With 4.4 assists a game, he is averaging his lowest number of turnovers a game since the 2019-2020 season at 2.6 turnovers a game. On the defensive end, he has made his presence known. Being able to make it hard on shooters, and has .5 blocks a game, and a little over a steal a game. Jaylen Brown has been having a great season. Just like JT, JB has not been scoring as much as last season. But, he has made an impact on every aspect of the game like Tatum. Brown this season is scoring 22.6 points a game on 49.2% from the field, and 35.6% from three. His three has improved which is great to see. JB has 5.4 rebounds a game and has a career high in assists at 3.7 and his turnovers

are down at 2.4 turnovers a game. The biggest leap in JB's game is his defense. He has been much better at contesting shots, on ball pressure, and holding his own on mismatches. His steals are at 1.1 a game like his previous years, but he is currently tied with his career high in blocks at .6 blocks a game. The Celtics success relies on the Jays and they have done what is needed for them to succeed.

There were two players outside of the Jays who stepped up last postseason for the Celtics. Those players were also not moved this offseason and have also been a big reason to the Celtics success so far. That would be Al Horford and Derrick White. Starting off with Al. When you have 6 guys who are starting caliber players, one player has to sacrifice to help the team succeed. Al took that sacrifice and moved to the bench. Horford has been playing similar to when he was starting last season, and with less minutes to rest him for the playoffs. In 39 games played, Al Horford is averaging 7.7 points a game on 48.3% from the field and 41.1% from three. Despite coming off the bench, Al is doing better at rebounding than last year at 6.8 a game. He has 2.9 assists a game along with nearly a block a game and .5 steals a game. Those are almost the same numbers as last season when he was starting. Al keeps on showing that age is only a number and is a key piece to a contending team. Derrick White has ascended from last season. Derrick has become a fan favorite in Boston. He plays with 110% and makes every winning play. Due to that, White has put himself in the conversation for being an all star this season. Also earning him nicknames like "Hot Hands" for his energetic play. "Hot Hands" is having a career year in just about every category. Averaging 15.6 points a game, 4.7 assists, 4 rebounds with 45.6% shooting from the field, and 39.6% from three. On the defensive end, White is an early candidate for DPOY. Swiping a steal per game and is averaging 1.2 blocks a game. The 1.2 blocks a game as a point guard is ahead of Giannis, Jarrett Allen, and Bam. Will White be an all star? Probably not, but he has propelled himself into a very good player.

The Celtics top 6 players are one of the best if not the best top 6 in the league. If you want a well constructed championship team in the NBA, you need to have a solid 8-9 man rotation. Their best 8-9 players are White, Jrue, JB, JT, and Porzingis, Al, Pritchard, Hauser, and Kornet. Sam Hauser has stepped up averaging 8 points per game on 44.2% from the field and 40.8% from three. He has been great at locking players down on the defensive end as well. Payton Pritchard so far this season has averaged 8 points per game but the shooting has been very streaky. Kornet is averaging 5.3 points a game but has only 3.9 rebounds a game and a

block a game. Having said all of this, what do the Celtics need to put themselves over the rest of the league? The Celtics could use a consistent threat off the bench, and a back up big upgrade to Luke.

Who should the Celtics get, and how so? Right now, the Celtics rank dead last in the league for bench scoring. Bench scoring should definitely be one thing Brad improves on at the deadline. Boston is currently in the second apron. So as of right now they would have to match salary in any trade from dollar to dollar. The Celtics have first rounders and a bunch of second rounders that could be in play, a 6.2 million dollar TPE from Grant Williams, and the guys at the back end of the bench making 2 million dollars that could be on the move for a bigger piece.

If Boston makes any move, this should be the one they make. This trade is very easy to get done and will make a huge impact with bench scoring is Boston trading Lamar Stevens and 2 second round picks to Brooklyn for Lonnie Walker IV. Right now Walker is coming off of Brooklyn's bench averaging nearly 12 points a game on 47.6% shooting from the field and 44.2% from three. A decent defender as well, averaging .4 blocks a game and .6 steals a game. Walker would come in and immediately be Boston's best scorer and shooter off the bench. The money matches, and Brooklyn gets 2 picks to help their rebuild. Boston needs bench scoring, and a more consistent bench weapon, and Lonnie Walker IV fits that need remarkably.

Another trade that the Celtics could do is use the Grant TPE, and trade 3 seconds to Atlanta for Saddiq Bey. Now Bey is not having that great of a year shooting the ball, but has shown that he can put the ball in the basket and is known for his defense as well. This year he averages 13.1 points a night on 41.5% from the field but 30.9% from three. What Bey can also do to help this team is rebound the ball as he is averaging 6.6 rebounds a game. Last year, Bey averaged 13.8 points per game on 42.2% from the field and 36.1 percent from three. This move could benefit Bey where pressure is taken off of him to just play his game and be impactful off the bench on a championship contender.

As for the back up big situation, there really isn't a lot available. This is where the Celtics could look to the buyout market to upgrade this position. One player that the Celtics do have interest in right now if they are bought out that would be a great addition would be Kelly Olynyk. This would be Olynyk's second rodeo in Boston and he would bring something similar to Al Horford. 8.1 points a game, on 56.7% shooting from the field, and 43% from three. He is grabbing 5.1 rebounds a game which would instantly be an upgrade over Luke. The only thing

Olynyk lacks rim protection but Kelly is known for being physical and at 6'11" his presence would be known.

By the end of the deadline, the Celtics could have an 8-9 man rotation featuring White, Jrue, JB, JT, Porzingis, Walker IV, Bey, Al, and either Olynyk, Pritchard, or Hauser in the playoffs. This would make Boston a well rounded team with a bench, and would give them the best chance over any other team in the league to hoist this year's Larry O'Brien Trophy.