

We are Now Contenders
By Jesse Almeida 6/25/22

It is hard to believe that over 1 year ago the Celtics were looked at as the most underachieved team in Boston sports. The Celtics were one of the most laughable/discouraging teams in town because of their play. Now, we will look at them as a serious championship contender for the next few years. For the first time since the 2017-2018 season, the Celtics had a very successful season. Yes even though the C's did not come away with banner 18 this year, the Celtics accomplished many things that will help them get to that banner. For the 2021-2022 season, the Boston Celtics get an A- overall.

At the beginning of the season, many analyst, and fans viewed the Celtics at the middle of the pack as a 4, or 5 seed in the Eastern Conference. Before January 8th, the Celtics were trending to be once again an underachieving season. Boston were losing to teams dealing with huge injuries like the Clippers twice, the Suns in Phoenix, and Minnesota. Not only were they losing to teams that were dealing with injuries, but they were also losing to bad teams like Washington, the New York Knicks, San Antonio, and Cleveland. On January 6th, R.J. Barrett, who is a rising star on the Knicks, hit a game winning 3 at the buzzer against the Celtics, and that put Boston at a record of 18-21. The season was just about half way over and the C's were at the 11th seed in the Eastern Conference. At this point in the season, questions arose on whether or not Jaylen Brown, and Jayson Tatum could work together. A lot of people were saying that the two would need to be split up. Marcus Smart looked like he was going to be on the move because of him not buying into his role as a point guard. The Celtics looked like they would be blown up. Well, they blew up alright. Not how everyone expected them to.

After the game on January 6th, the whole team apparently had a meeting to get everyone on the same page. No one knows what was said at this meeting, but you could tell that it held guys accountable, fired up this team, and brought everyone together. As quoted, Jaylen Brown tweeted "The energy is about to shift", and it indeed shifted. From January 8th to right up to the trade deadline, the Celtics went from 18-21 to 31-25 moving them from 11th to 7th place in the Eastern Conference over that period of time. Boston was beating good teams and destroying bad teams unlike before, and now instead of the Celtics blowing the team up and selling at the trade deadline, Boston became buyers to help their team get over the hump. The Celtics went out and traded for Derrick White for Josh Richardson, Romeo Langford and a first round pick in 2022. Derrick White was a great fit because he makes the right plays, he does not need the ball in his

hand to produce, he can make plays, and he brings intensity on defense. White is an all around better player than Richardson is. Then the Celtics traded for Daniel Theis back in exchange for Dennis Schroder, Enes Freedom, and Bruno Fernando. Boston needed a back up big that could protect the paint and Theis fit that need perfectly and has a similar game to Al Horford on offense.

From the trade deadline on, the Boston Celtics turned the switch up even more than before. The ball was moving around, the intensity on defense was massive, and you could tell from watching that Boston was finally playing elite level basketball. It came to the point that the Celtics became the hottest ticket in town. You got excited to watch them play every night and you could not wait to go back to TD Garden again. The Celtics since the All Star break to the end of the season went from 31-25 to 51-31. That is 20-6 over that span. If you want to go back to January 8th when “the energy shifted”, Boston went from 18-21 to 51-31. That is 33-10 over that time frame. It was a huge turnaround for the Celtics and they went from the 11th seed on January 8th, to the 2nd seed at the end of the season. Boston was the hottest team in the NBA however had to meet up with the Brooklyn Nets in the first round.

With how talented Brooklyn was and how well Boston has played, both teams were seen as championship contenders making it the best matchup in the NBA in the first round. For the first time in a long time, Boston did not back down. Tatum makes the game winning layup in game 1, Boston comes back and wins game 2, they hold on in game 3, and then the same in game 4 to sweep Brooklyn out of the playoffs. Boston sweeping Brooklyn had everyone shocked and now saw Boston as a legitimate threat in the East.

Next up was Milwaukee. After going down 3-2 in the series, it looked like the series was over heading into game 6 in Milwaukee. But, Jayson Tatum had other plans. He played his best game ever in the postseason arguably his career with 46 points on 17/32 shooting, 7/15 from the 3 point, 9 rebounds and 4 assists. He took over and now the series was heading to game 7 where it took a team effort as the C’s blew the Bucks away 109-83 to move on to the Eastern Conference Finals. Boston was really looking like a force with Tatum taking over, Brown right behind him, Al Horford reviving his career, everyone has played a role in knocking off the defending champs.

Next up, Miami. Boston won games 4 and 5 to put them up 3-1 in the series and 1 win away from the NBA Finals heading into Boston for game 6. With a masterful performance from

Jimmy Butler in game 6 where he dropped 47 points, the Celtics were headed to another game 7. With a blown opportunity at home, many did not like their chances in game 7. But once again the Celtics proved everyone wrong and won game 7 to head to their first NBA Finals since 2010.

Boston finally got over the hump and made it to the NBA's biggest stage against none other than Stephen Curry and the Golden State Warriors. After a huge comeback win in game 1 and a loss in game 2, TD Garden hosted its first Finals game in 12 years. The fans were loud all night long and the Celtics did not disappoint with a commanding 116-100 victory, and Boston had another huge opportunity ahead to put them up 3-1 heading to San Francisco. However, Steph Curry was doing Steph Curry things in game 4 as he scored 43 points to help Golden State get a huge game 4 victory, and they would not lose a game after that. Boston fell just 2 games short of banner 18.

The season is still a successful season regardless of losing in the NBA Finals. Boston ran into an all around very experienced, and talented Warriors team. Boston was clearly tired after playing in 2 straight series where it went to 7 games, while the Warriors took care of business earlier on in their series. If the Celtics lost to Dallas in the Finals, then it's a disappointment, but losing to the Warriors is nothing to be ashamed of. What hurt the Celtics was their play at the beginning of the season and not capitalizing on opportunities. The season is successful because of the turnaround the Celtics made. The players finally learned how to make things work together and made a huge turnaround from a lottery team in the draft to being in the NBA Finals with as little of time they had. This is the biggest reason the season was a success, and that is they made it to the NBA's biggest stage. Now we know that the core that Boston has can make it to the Finals and compete with anyone in the league. Just being in the Finals is a success because of past seasons where Boston would fall short. In 2016-17, Isaiah Thomas got hurt and even if he wasn't hurt, you are probably not beating LeBron in the Eastern Finals. The 2017-18 season, Irving and Hayward were out for the Playoffs and rookie Jayson Tatum with Brown in his second season, Smart, and Al Horford brought you back to the Eastern Conference Finals and was 1 game away from the Finals. But then Irving and Hayward come back the next season, you have Kyrie's drama and you get bounced in the second round. Then in the 2019-2020 season, Boston looks good but then the pandemic hits. The season continues in Walt Disney World and the Celtics make it to the Eastern Conference Finals once again but this time should get past Miami with their experience and talent. However they fell short in 6 games and it looked as an

underachieving season. In the 2020-21 season the Celtics were a play-in team and could not get past the first round. So with all of the seasons falling short, questions raised as to whether this team could ever compete for a championship. You just wanted to see them in the Finals for verification. Even if they lost, it would still feel good and this core proved that they can get there and compete. Now they have experience in the Finals and with this team as young as they are, the assets to improve their roster, and how better this team could get? The NBA better watch out, the Boston Celtics will be back in the NBA Finals soon and better than before.

Sources:

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