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Monday, June 24, 2024



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Simply Red

His influence alive and well

Bill Burt

Red Auerbach passed away in 2006.

And there were two spans – the John Y. Brown ownership and Rick Pitino presidency – in which his input was overruled.

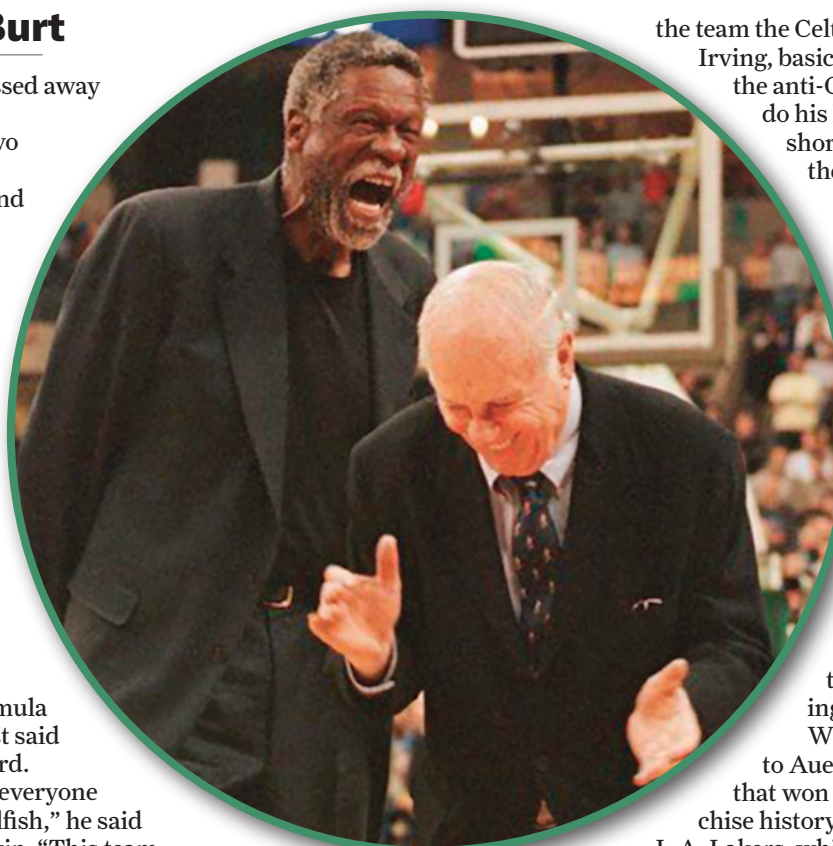
But here we are 74 years and counting later since Auerbach was hired to turn around the flailing Celtics franchise and they are celebrating another championship, this time No. 18.

The best part, though, was the formula used in 2023-24, best said by veteran Al Horford.

"We won because everyone on this team is unselfish," he said after the clinching win. "This team was committed from the start to win ... that's it. We all wanted to win ... That's the way it is here in Boston with the Celtics."

This title reeked of Auerbach's influence, which warranted players that wanted team glory over personal glory.

Not only did then-Celtics president Danny Ainge coyly draft his two biggest superstars in consecutive NBA Drafts in 2016 (Brown) and 2017 (Jayson Tatum) with the third picks in those drafts, but Ainge's replacement as president, Brad Stevens, acquired the underrated Derrick White, a 7-foot-2 talent that hadn't found his way in Kristaps Porzingis and former champ/point guard Jrue Holiday for, essentially, a bag of basketballs.



WINSLOW TOWNSON
Celtic legends Bill Russell (left) and Red Auerbach in 1999.

All three came to the Celtics assuming lesser roles from their previous employers.

And presto, they won 14 more regular season games than the second best team in the Eastern Conference and those same 14 games more than their eventual foe in the NBA Finals.

It wasn't always pretty, at least according to the experts, with Tatum, their top guy, struggling with his outside shot. But it didn't matter as the Celtics win 16-3 when it mattered most.

Ironically, one of the best players on

the team the Celtics finished off, Kyrie Irving, basically admitted he was the anti-Celtic, saying he didn't do his homework before his short, two-year stint with the Celtics.

Irving had no use for Celtics Pride or the Celtics Mystique, and admitted he didn't have a problem saying it.

Celtics fans didn't appreciate the way he left, sending the franchise in a two-year struggle, and they made sure he knew it. The anti-Celtic had three really bad games in the finals, all in Boston with fans tormenting his every move.

Which brings us back to Auerbach and the team that won the 18th title in franchise history, one more than the L.A. Lakers, which would've been a big deal for the most cherished Celtics employee.

It was almost as if Stevens was carrying the same baton that Auerbach had in his back pocket for most of his 56 years with the Celtics franchise, taking over as coach in 1950.

He got the right players with the right modus operandi.

How fitting was it that the Bill Russell Finals MVP Award, was given to Celtics forward Jaylen Brown, who didn't score the most points or get the most rebounds.

Obviously, Auerbach would've been proud. Even better, though, is his legacy is alive and well with no end in sight.

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PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

Young Celtics duo Jaylen Brown and Jayson Tatum were key players in the Celtics winning banner number 18.

THE BIG TWO

Tatum, Brown accepted the challenge

By Nick Giannino

» North of Boston Media Group

“The Celtics need to split up Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown.”

“There is an inner competition and bitterness between Tatum and Brown; they don’t get along.”

“Boston will never win another ring if they hold on to both of them.”

All these sentiments and more were expressed

repeatedly over the past seven seasons by an abundance of doubters — both the casual fan skeptics and those with a platform.

I admit, at times throughout the Celtics’ strenuous and seemingly never-ending journey to Banner 18, I started to think that those naysayers may have a point.

But looking back now after the all-star duo led Boston to a long-awaited championship trophy with

one of the most dominant postseason runs in league history, the notion that two versatile players of their caliber would fail to coexist is laughable.

“We heard it all, but we just blocked it all out and we just kept going,” said Brown. “I trusted him. He trusted me. and we did it together.”

Not only are Brown and Tatum both generational talents with similar skill-sets and a willingness to

step aside and let the other cook when it’s his night, but they’ve become true friends with that one common objective in mind: win.

“The main goal for us was to win a championship. We didn’t care who got Finals MVP,” a sincere Tatum exclaimed after his partner in crime Brown was handed the Bill Russell Finals MVP trophy last week.

See **BIG TWO**, Page S6

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» Big Two

Continued from Page S4

"I know that I need him through this journey and he needs me."

The Celtics selected Brown with the third pick in the 2016 NBA Draft. A year later, they chose Tatum in the same spot.

Even before they were signed to one of the most renowned and accomplished franchises in sports, the duo was familiar with each other's games thanks to AAU ball, high level showcase events, camps and the like. During the 2023-24 NBA Finals, Brown recalled a phone call with then-Celtics president of basketball operations Danny Ainge, where he fully supported a looming decision to draft Tatum.

"It was like 4 a.m. ... Danny calls me and asks me, 'How do you feel about Jayson Tatum?'," said Brown. "He was my roommate at the KD Elite camp. We played on so many teams ... I had a lot of experience with him. There was a lot of respect. So I said, 'I think it's a great choice.'"

"Fast forward from there, we've been winning ever since."

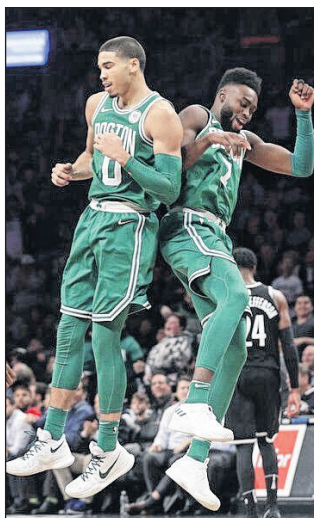
Yes, it took Brown and Tatum longer than many people may have hoped to hoist that previously evasive Larry O'Brien Trophy. But in the history of NBA basketball, they actually got the job done rather quickly.

Tatum is only 26, Brown 27. That's younger than all-time greats Shaquille O'Neal (28), Kevin Durant (28), Hakeem Olajuwon (31), Dirk Nowitzki (32) and even Michael Jordan (28) were able to accomplish the feat.

Was it a learning process for the young duo as they navigated the intricacies of the association and grasped what it truly takes to be a champion?

Absolutely.

But nothing spectacular ever comes easy, and the way Tatum and Brown stood together and



FRANK FRANKLIN II

Jayson Tatum (0) was a rookie here and Jaylen Brown (7) only a "sophomore" as they celebrate after Tatum scored during a Celtics win in 2017.

collectively attacked their goals is praiseworthy in the highest degree.

As partners both on the court and off it, they found a way to breach the outside noise, make each other better, and most importantly, make the team better.

Tatum was named to his second All-NBA First Team this season and was in the running for league MVP. His nightly playoff averages of 25 points, 9.7 rebounds and 6.3 assists can be stacked up against any number of Hall of Fame champions who came before him. Brown was an all-star for the third time, became one of the league's best defenders, and elevated his game in the postseason en route to Eastern Conference Finals and NBA Finals MVP honors.

When Tatum zigged, Brown zagged. They took on different roles on different nights, executing a true winner's mentality and honing in on the task at hand until the final buzzer sounded.

Now with a championship finally in hand, it's undeniable that Tatum and Brown are a match made in heaven with the potential to go down as one of the greatest two-man tandems to ever do it.



Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown helped the Celtics bounce back from losses all season long.

PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

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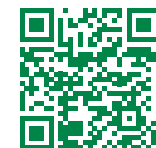
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SCOUT'S VIEW

Nelson: Holiday, White were difference for Celtics

On Pro Basketball

Bill Burt

Local NBA scout Jeff Nelson, of Bradford, who has spent parts of the last 15 years scouting with four different NBA franchises was asked about the Boston Celtics chances a week before the season started.

He figured they would be a top contender for the Larry O'Brien Trophy.

Then, two days before pre-season camp broke, Celtics team president Brad Stevens dealt away Malcolm Brogdon to the Portland Trailblazers for Jrue Holiday, who had been part of the big Bucks trade with the Trailblazers for Damien Lillard.

"That was it," said Nelson. "That move made the Celtics, in my opinion, the best team in the NBA. Getting Kristaps Porzingis was huge. He offered the Celtics length, another 3-point shooter and guy that could defend some of the bigger guys like [Nikola] Jokic, [Joel] Embiid and Giannis [Antetokounmpo]."

"But Holiday gave the Celtics a true point guard, with championship pedigree, who could defend every position on the floor," said Nelson. "When Brad made that deal, the Celtics were the team to beat in the NBA."

Now that it's over, Nelson said the Celtics performed to expectations, box to wire, a rarity most years.

In retrospect, Nelson believed that Derrick White's bigger role and teaming with Holiday in the backcourt, was the



Up until the playoffs ended, Jrue Holiday was the only player on the Celtics with a championship ring.

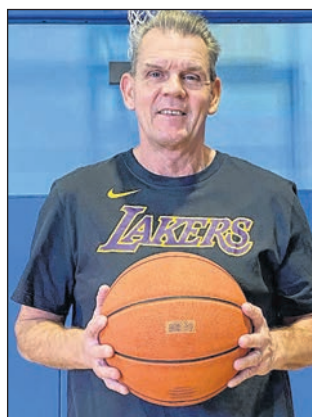
difference.

"Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown are the stars and they've been building this, together," said Nelson. "What we saw in the playoffs, every series, that Holiday and White were what got them over the top. They are both high character team players who play on both ends of the floor."

"They," said Nelson, "made the Celtics a nightmare to guard on offense, and we know how good they both are on defense."

Nelson points to early in Game 5, when Holiday scored the first three baskets playing in the "center" position, down low, as an example of the Celtics mastery this season.

"The Celtics showed they could win without Porzingis, who became a luxury rather than a necessity," said Nelson. "And the genius of the head coach Joe Mazzulla and his coaches was they would put Holiday and



Former Lakers scout, Jeff Nelson, now with the Phoenix Suns.

sometimes, White, in that 'dunker' position.

"When Brown or especially Tatum would drive, if Holiday's man would help, the ball would go to him to score or he'd hit someone open for a three-pointer," said Nelson. "The Celtics just had too many options for Dallas or really any team to handle."

While there is debate



STEVEN SENNE ? ASSOCIATED PRESS

Celtics guard Derrick White celebrates after hitting a 3-pointer against the Dallas Mavericks during the second half of Game 2 of the NBA Finals.

on the Celtics MVP in the playoffs, Nelson said the real MVP this season was Stevens.

Not only this year, but two years earlier acquiring White, who was thought to be expensive (\$17M per year) on a losing San Antonio team.

"Brad had the vision to understand that Robert Williams, Malcolm Brogdon and Marcus Smart couldn't get them to where they wanted to go. Those there were all good players, but had taken the Celtics to their highest point."

"He gets Porzingis for Smart, who was a popular guy here and he stole Holiday," said Nelson. "That move was like trading Joe Barry Carroll to the Warriors for Kevin McHale and Robert Parish. Those kinds of moves win championships."

Nelson also credited Mazzulla for improving greatly as the head coach on and off

the floor.

"He created a culture in which he was able to connect to all of his players," said Nelson. "He makes it a point to touch base with each player on an individual basis, which is important these days with young players."

"The fact that they added assistant coaches like Sam Cassell and made Jeff Van Gundy a consultant helped a lot," said Nelson. "It seems like every decision made was the right one."

The Celtics did have a little luck, especially in the finals, with Kyrie Irving struggling in three of the five games. But in the end, you can't win with relying on 20-year-old players on the bench.

"The Mavs had Dereck Lively, who is going to be good player, but he wasn't ready to win a championship compared to say," said Nelson. "Al Horford, who has played in nearly 200 playoff games."

Nelson believes there was only one team that could've pushed the Celtics to the brink and it's probably not a team you'd expect.

"The New York Knicks had the length and strength to bother both Tatum and Brown, if they were healthy, which they weren't," said Nelson. "Julius Randle and O.G. Anunoby could've been tough. And, of course, Jalen Brunson. But it never happened because of injuries."

In the end, Nelson believes the Western Conference was not as good as everyone thought.

And the disrespect the Celtics got from national pundits, which most picked the Mavs to win the series, missed the boat on how good this Celtics team really was.

"In the regular season they dominated start to finish," said Nelson. "All teams have flaws, whether it's players, coaching, whatever. The Celtics didn't have any flaws. People knocked them that they couldn't close out games, but they didn't have any."

"They had one close game in the playoffs and Brown hit the tying shot to force it to overtime," said Nelson. "If you watched from Montana, you turned most of the games off at halftime, because the Celtics led by so much."

As for the future, Nelson expects a few teams to improve and make a run, but as of today, his money would be on the Celtics to repeat.

"If they're key players are healthy," said Nelson, "with everyone back, they are the dominant team next year, too."



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Breaking down the Celtics' CHAMPIONSHIP RUN

Boston's run to championship glory was nothing short of dominant. The Celtics went 16-3 throughout the playoffs, including a sweep of the Indiana Pacers in the Eastern Conference Finals and a 4-1 title clinching triumph over Dallas in the Finals. Here's a breakdown of the authoritative postseason journey to Banner 18.

— Nick Giannino



AP PHOTO

Celtics guard Derrick White dribbles as Miami Heat center Bam Adebayo (13) defends during Game 4.

Eastern Conference First Round

Boston Celtics 4, Miami Heat 1

Top players: Jayson Tatum (21.8 ppg., 10.4 rpg., 5.4 apg.); Jaylen Brown (22.8 ppg., 7.0 rpg., 2.2 apg., 1.0 spg.); Derrick White (22.4 ppg., 3.2 apg., 1.0 bpg.).

The top-seeded Celtics opened the playoffs with the first of four convincing series wins, doing so against their newfound rivals — a team that had their number in recent years and ousted them in Game 7 of the 2023 East Finals.

Yes, the Heat were without the services of Jimmy Butler. But considering the way Boston established themselves early and often, it likely wouldn't have mattered even if he had played.

Boston took Game 1 at home, 114-94. The Heat bounced back to take Game 2, 111-101, but it took a franchise playoff record 23 3-pointers to do so. Celtics big man Kristaps Porzingis was injured in that loss and didn't return until Game 1 of the NBA Finals before ultimately suffering another injury.

Even without their 7-foot-2 defensive anchor, Boston rebounded loudly from there, winning Games 3 and 4 on the road by 104-84 and 102-88 scores, respectively. The Celtics then closed things out at TD Garden in blowout fashion, 118-84.

Bam Adebayo was a force offensively for Miami throughout the series, averaging over 22 points and nine rebounds. But he got little help from a supporting cast that included sharpshooter Tyler Herro. Boston's gritty defense held Miami to an average of just 92.2 points per contest, limiting the Heat to 43.8 percent shooting from the field and 32.9 percent from beyond the arc.

The Celtics got the proverbial monkey off their backs against the Heat, and it set the stage for a confident and determined run to Banner 18.

Memorable performance: Derrick White exploded for a playoff career-high 38 points in the Game 4 win. He knocked down 15-of-26 shots and hit a playoff career-high eight triples to boot. Defensively, White added three blocks. He played a team-high 41 minutes and largely carried the load in the decisive victory.



AP PHOTO

Boston Celtics forward Jayson Tatum drives against Cleveland Cavaliers guard Donovan Mitchell.

Eastern Conference Second Round

Boston Celtics 4, Cleveland Cavaliers 1

Top players: Jayson Tatum (26.8 ppg., 10.4 rpg., 6.2 apg., 1.6 spg.); Jaylen Brown (23.4 ppg., 6.2 rpg., 2.8 apg.).

The first two games of the Celtics' battle against Donovan Mitchell's Cavs largely mirrored that of their first round series with Miami. Boston rolled to a 120-95 win in Game 1, but were run out of their own building in a 118-94 Game 2 loss.

At the time, this reoccurring theme of dropping the ball in Game 2 at home concerned fans and media alike. But it proved to be an outlier as the Celtics roared back to win Game 3 (106-93), Game 4 (109-102) and Game 5 (113-98), to advance to the Conference Finals.

Mitchell injured his left calf towards the end of Game 3 and was out for the remainder of the series. Boston took advantage, and even with Cavs' rising star big man Evan Mobley (21.4 ppg., 9.4 rpg., 1.0 bpg) doing his best to fill the void, the Celtics' depth and 'finish the job' mentality proved too much.

Memorable performance: In a pivotal Game 3 triumph that helped Boston regain control of the series for good, Jayson Tatum (33 points, 13 rebounds, 6 assists) and Jaylen Brown (28 points, 8 rebounds) led the charge statistically. But it was Jrue Holiday who arguably made the biggest impact.

The first-year Celtic broke out offensively, scoring a then-playoff high 18 points to go with seven boards. He was efficient, too, canning 7-of-10 shots from the field and drilling three of his four attempts from distance. Holiday seemed to come into his own (at least on the offensive end) that night, and he remained a key factor on that end of the floor for the remainder of the playoffs.

Continued on Page S14

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AP PHOTO

Indiana Pacers center Myles Turner drives against Boston Celtics guard Jaylen Brown during Game 1 of the NBA Eastern Conference finals May 21 in Boston.

Eastern Conference Finals

Boston Celtics 4, Indiana Pacers 0

Top players: Jaylen Brown (29.8 ppg., 5.0 rpg., 3.0 apg., 2.0 spg.); Jayson Tatum (30.3 ppg., 10.3 rpg., 6.3 apg., 1.3 spg.); Jrue Holiday (18.5 ppg., 7.3 rpg., 5.8 apg., 1.5 spg.)

Larry Bird Trophy ECF MVP award: Jaylen Brown

Basketball fans were hoping for a matchup between the Celtics and New York Knicks in the conference finals. Instead, the high octane Pacers — who boasted the league's highest scoring offense *ever* — outlasted Jalen Brunson's Knicks to set up what wound up being Boston's toughest test of the postseason. Yes, the Celtics ultimately swept Indiana, but it didn't come easy as virtually every game could've gone either way.

In Game 1, Boston was given a gift from the basketball gods. Indiana held a three-point lead on the road with 8.5 seconds remaining, and all it had to do was inbound the basketball, make a free throw and the game was over. Instead, they suffered an untimely turnover on the ensuing inbounds pass and Jaylen Brown proceeded to drill a ridiculously difficult, well contested corner 3-ball to knot things up. Pacers guard Tyrese Halburton's prayer at the regulation horn was off the mark, and Boston ran away in overtime for a 133-128 win.

As deflating as the Game 1 defeat was for Indiana, the underdogs didn't quit. Brown tied a playoff career-high with 40 points in a 126-110 Game 2 win, but both of the next two games were as close as it gets.

In Game 3, Indiana built 18-point leads in both the second and third quarters, only to watch Boston roar back down the stretch. The Celtics bore down defensively, holding Indiana scoreless for the final three minutes and 33 seconds of regulation. Jrue Holiday came up with a go-ahead three-point play and sealed the deal with a clutch steal and a pair of free throws in the final second to secure a 114-111 win for Boston. Before the Pacers scoring drought, they held an eight-point advantage heading into those final three minutes.

Game 4 was just as nerve-racking. Indiana built an 11-point lead early in the fourth quarter, but Boston proved their mettle by making the big plays in crunch time yet again to prevail, 105-102, and punch its ticket to the Finals. The Celtics used a 15-4 run late in the fourth quarter to pull away for good, with Derrick White capping it off with a game-deciding triple with 45 seconds left.

Memorable performance: Game 3's improbable Celtics' victory — they outscored the Pacers 33-21 in the final quarter — was a true team triumph. All five starters scored in double figures, but it was Jayson Tatum who put the biggest stamp on the win.

Tatum dropped a near triple-double, going for 36 points with five triples, 10 rebounds, eight assists and two blocks. His drive and behind-the-back kick-out pass to Al Horford for a corner three late will go down as one of the most awe-inspiring, memorable plays of the entire postseason.



Dallas Mavericks guard Luka Dončić, top, and Boston Celtics guard Jrue Holiday, bottom, land on the parquet as they vie for the ball during Game 5 of the NBA Finals June 17

AP PHOTO

NBA Finals

Boston Celtics 4, Dallas Mavericks 1

Top players: Jaylen Brown (20.8 ppg., 5.4 rpg., 5.0 apg., 1.6 spg.); Jayson Tatum (22.2 ppg., 7.8 rpg., 7.2 apg., 1.0 spg.)

Bill Russell Finals MVP award: Jaylen Brown

The Celtics opened the Finals like they did in each of their previous three rounds: with a dominant win. Mavericks superstar Luka Dončić led all scorers with 30 points and 10 boards, but Boston held Dallas to just nine (!) assists en route to a wire-to-wire 107-89 victory.

Game 1 was the Kristaps Porzingis Game. The big man returned to the lineup after more than a month off with a calf injury and exploded for 18 first-half points as the Celtics built a 21-point lead at the break and cruised to the finish line. Six Celtics players reached double figures in scoring (all five starters plus Porzingis).

Game 2 was more of a test, as Dončić turned in a 32-point, 11-rebound, 11-assist triple double. But Boston stayed the course, erasing an early deficit to take a three-point half-time lead and hold on down the stretch for a 105-98 decision. Jrue Holiday was massive in the win, dropping 26 points on near-perfect shooting (11-for-14) to go with 11 rebounds. Tatum struggled with his shot but dished out a game-high 12 assists.

In Game 3, the Mavericks built a double-digit lead in the opening quarter. The Celtics then flipped the script and seized a 21-point lead of their own early in the fourth quarter. But behind an anxious and fired up home crowd at American Airlines Center, the Mavericks quickly erased that deficit, climbing back to within one point late. But White, Tatum and Brown all made key shots in crunch time to avoid being on the wrong end of history and snaring a commanding 3-0 Finals lead with a 106-99 decision. The game featured 19 lead changes and a flurry of runs by both teams.

Game 4 was all Dallas. Dončić set the tone early and often, scoring 25 points in the first half alone as his team raced out to a 61-35 at the break. Boston never recovered in what was realistically their worst game of the entire season, a forgettable 122-84 setback.

That defeat proved to be an anomaly, however, as the Celtics returned to their home floor for Game 5 and clinched their NBA-record 18th championship banner with a 106-88 win. The decisive triumph was never really close; Boston led 67-46 at halftime and never allowed Dallas to recover, keeping its foot on the gas throughout.

Tatum was spectacular while going for 31 points, eight rebounds and 11 assists, but it was Brown who was crowned Finals MVP. The latter was incredible defensively throughout the championship series, taking pride in locking up Dončić and making life as difficult as possible for the Mavs' superstar.

Many players contributed in the final victory. Holiday was everywhere defensively and efficient again offensively, scoring 15 points with 11 rebounds and four dimes. Porzingis gutted through yet another injury and provided a mental boost, even if his play was average at best. Derrick White hit some big threes, as did Sam Hauser. Even Payton Pritchard checked in with mere seconds remaining in the first half to cash in with one of his patented halfcourt shots at the buzzer and help build momentum.

Memorable performance: The Game 5 clincher has to take the cake. Boston's true team performance was emblematic of their season as a whole. Their cohesiveness, unselfishness and toughness shone bright, and it resulted in the franchise's first title in 16 years.

White chipped a tooth and returned to action without missing a beat; Porzingis played through the pain in the biggest game of his life; Tatum and Brown did their thing, and the rest of the Celtics' group came together to help the Celtics summit the top of the basketball world once again.



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One of best teams ever? Stats say ‘Yup!’

Matt Williams

Hold on to your scally caps and bite down tight on a Lucky inspired corncob pipe, Boston. With Banner 18 on its way to the TD Garden rafters, a difficult conversation must now be had.

Where do 2023-24 Boston Celtics rank in franchise, and professional basketball, history?

In one corner, the old guard. The refrain goes that no one can touch the ‘86 Celtics. The most dominant frontcourt ever assembled, that Boston team was tough enough to stand up to the bullish physical style of the mid-80s. Yet they had enough finesse that watching them run the break or pass the ball around was akin to hearing Mozart for the first time.

Not to mention Larry Bird, the most clutch of the clutch, the man who wrestled three consecutive MVP awards from the likes of Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. A modern team standing up to Larry Legend? Not in this lifetime.

In the other corner, the young guns. These Green Teamers grew up right alongside Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown, parallel with their own lives. Now fully mature, they’re ready to defend their generation’s basketball acumen armed with spreadsheets and mathematical formulas. Advanced statistics, expected field goal percentage, defensive rating, net rating ... they’ve got them all.

Their team also defends the floor like few in franchise history, with no mismatches for any opponent to hunt. Holding Dallas under 100 in four of five Finals games and dominating while not even playing particularly well on offense proves that handily.

In truth, many of these numbers put the recently crowned world champion Celtics among the best teams in NBA history. Forget about your eyes, your nostalgia, the whipsnappers say. We’ve got facts.

Then there’s me, in the middle, playing the role of official in this debate. You can call me Scott Foster because I’m going to be the extender.

Will Banner 18 ever measure up to Banner

16 in the pantheon of Boston Celtics history?

My answer is the three most dangerous words in modern sports writing: I don’t know.

These days, we’re supposed to declare anything and everything the ‘best ever’ or the ‘worst ever’ immediately after the final buzzer sounds. It’s a reactionary vacuum filled by takes in the form of sandcastles; spouted with confidence before the tide washes your convictions away.

World championships are more like concrete ... they need time to settle before what’s at hand can truly set in.

This is the biggest question: How many more championships will a Celtics team led by Brown and Tatum win?

If Banners 19, 20 and perhaps 21 are hung in the years to come, it is very likely that the ‘24 Celtics will be viewed historically as one of the best teams in NBA history.

The numbers back that up. Their 11.6 regular season net rating trails only two Michael Jordan-led Bulls teams. Their 16-3 romp through the playoffs is better than all but one team (the ‘17 Warriors) since the first round expanded to seven games 21 years ago. They won more regular season games than all but two of the Celtics’ other 17 world champs (‘86 and 2008 being the others).

In terms of totally outclassing the Association for one season, few teams match these Celtics. They had a 20-point lead in 50 different games (second team to ever do so). They outpaced the closest competition in the standings by 15 games (one of only six to ever do that). They’re one of only 14 teams to win 80 total games, their winning percentage is the best in franchise history and their 10.7 scoring differential is fifth best all-time.

What goes against the ‘24 Celtics? That they failed in 2021, ‘22 and ‘23? That their path to the Finals was too easy? That they beat a 5-seed in the Finals instead of the defending champion Nuggets? That they got blown out in Game 4 on the road?

In 20 years, no one is going to remember who the second round opponent was; no one



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

Celtics forward Jayson Tatum holds up the Larry O'Brien Championship Trophy after the Boston clinched the NBA Finals with a Game 5 home win over Dallas.

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easy being **Green**.**

**Congrats to the Celts on building another
championship.**



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PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

The Celtics celebrate their 18th NBA title at the end of Game 5 of the NBA Finals at the TD Garden in Boston.

Nick Giannino

» North of Boston Media Group

Fifteen seasons of lengthy, entertaining runs ending abruptly with disappointing, and often times head-scratching playoff losses.

Fifteen seasons of the highest of highs concluded with the lowest of lows.

That was life for Boston Celtics fans as they sat tight for their franchise's first NBA title since a heralded 2008 campaign.

Now, following one of the league's most dominant

campaigns in recent memory, that championship has finally been delivered.

The Celtics, and their fans, had been through it all over the last decade-and-a-half as the team gunned for that ever-elusive Banner 18. There was the post Big-3 era, where team management was tasked with re-tooling their squad following the departure of Paul Pierce, Kevin Garnett and Ray Allen.

There was the Isaiah Thomas era, an inspiring and magical stretch of basketball culminated by a trip

DYNASTY IN DIAPERS

One down, two-plus to go

to the Eastern Conference Finals. Let's not forget the disastrous Kyrie Irving/Gordon Hayward era, too, where fans went from the apex of jubilation upon their arrival to the bottom of a pit as it all painfully collapsed.

Most recently, there was the young Jayson Tatum, Jaylen Brown-led era where at times it looked like they might have had what it took to end the championship drought in Beantown once and for all — until they didn't.

But it wasn't their time yet — now, it is.

Fresh off an impressive gentlemen's sweep of Dallas in the NBA Finals, Tatum, Brown and a revamped supporting cast of versatile weapons have etched their names into the history books with the only thing that truly matters in professional sports: a world title.

Boston's 2023-24 group was insanely talented and incredibly cohesive, and considering the ages of their core players as well as president of basketball operations Brad Stevens' keen

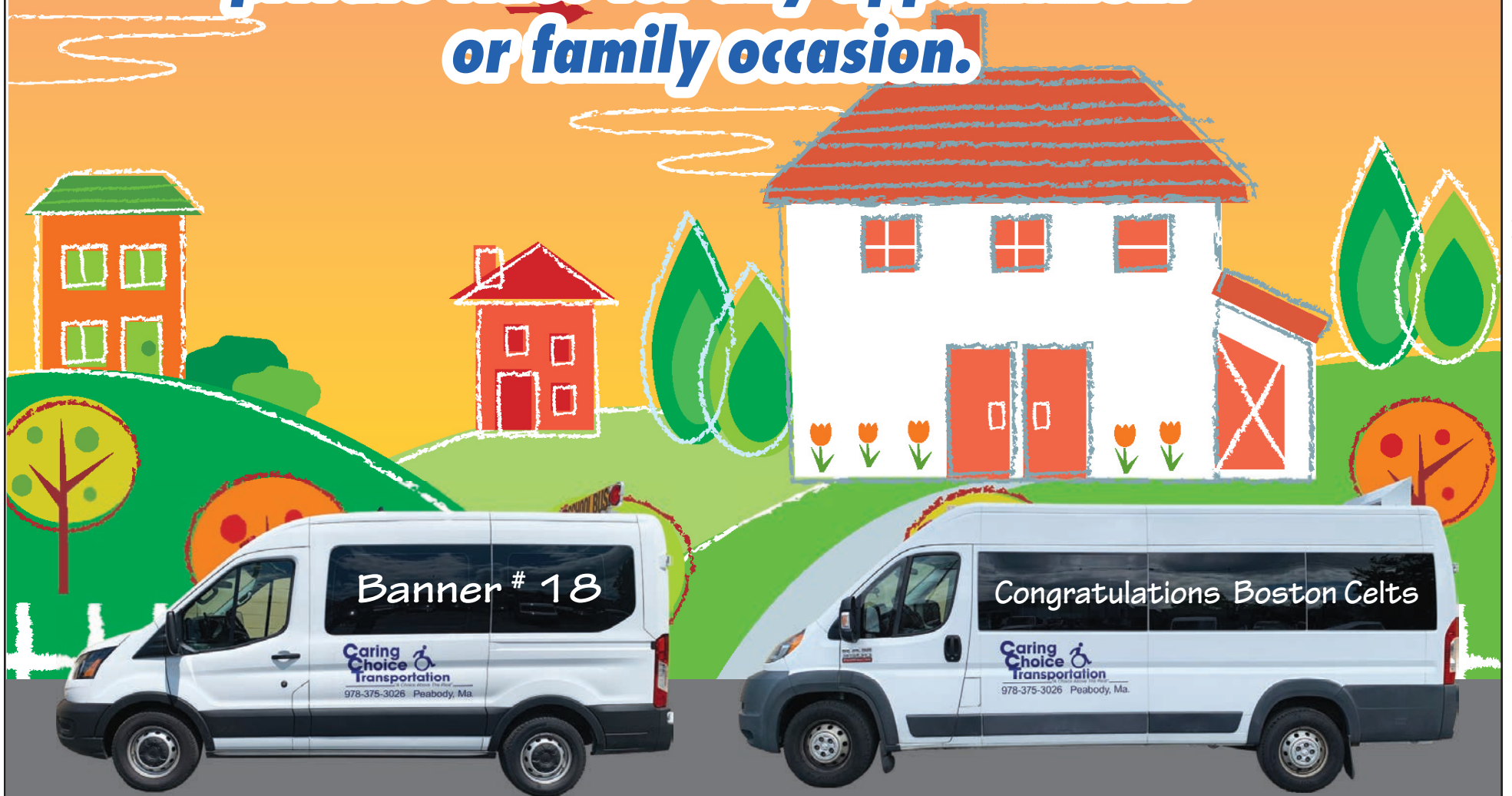
See **DYNASTY**, Page S20

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» Dynasty

Continued from Page S18

ability to build out a roster, it doesn't appear they're going anywhere any time soon.

In professional sports, especially the NBA, it's rare that a young duo like Tatum and Brown hoist a Larry O'Brien Trophy before reaching the primes of their careers. Together, they had to grow, mature and learn on the fly. Like many other all-time greats over the years, they had to fail — numerous times for that matter — before succeeding at the highest of levels.

Today, Tatum, 26, and Brown, 27, have reached a point in their basketball journeys where they've already been through the fire, and they've agonizingly burned with it time and time again.

But with the help of a tremendous group around them — i.e. Jrue Holiday, Al Horford, Derrick White, Kristaps Porzingis, etc. — they finally put out that blaze and got over the hump for good.

"When you look at the Celtics, they lose to the Warriors two years ago. They lose to Miami in Game 7 (last season)," said Mavericks coach Jason Kidd. "So just experience of understanding that you're not promised back, you've got to work. You see the group that is out there today, they know how to play. For great players, you have to fail to understand how to be successful at the highest stage."

After rolling to a league-best 64 regular season wins, fans and media alike still doubted Boston's ability to get it done in the playoffs. In fact, many so called "experts" picked the Mavericks to win it all before the Finals got underway.

All the Celtics did to silence those doubters was go 16-3 in the postseason, dismantling the likes of Miami, Cleveland, Indiana and Dallas along the way.



CHARLES KRUPA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Celtics forward Jayson Tatum savors the moment after the Celtics won the NBA championship with a Game 5 victory over the Dallas Mavericks.

**The Celtics are
set up beautifully
for the future.**

They strung together a franchise-record 10-game playoff winning streak and put the final stamp on an authoritative campaign with a convincing 106-88 trophy-clinching triumph at TD Garden. Whether the national media would like to admit it or not, and regardless of the competition it played, Boston's journey to glory is literally one of the best seasons a team has ever had.

Moreover, the Celtics are set up beautifully for the future.

Brown is locked down in Boston for another five years, Tatum and White are undoubtedly next in line, and Holiday recently inked a four-year extension to remain in Green.

Yes, at 38 years old Horford is nearing the end of his Hall of Fame career, but it looks like he, too, will be back in Green next season to help defend the crown.

There will be plenty of questions this offseason surrounding the future status of an oft-injured Porzingis — but Boston proved that even without him on the court, they were a force to be reckoned with.

Stevens has also firmly established himself as one of the best GMs in sports, and his ability to consistently bring in the right pieces around a superstar core is real.

No other team in the NBA is built for future success better than the Celtics are at this juncture.

So buckle up, because the Celtics are here to stay as the team to beat, and capturing multiple titles with this current nucleus is well within reach.

"You know, you guys (in the media) will probably say we didn't play anybody to get here," Tatum quipped during the Finals. "So we'll just have to do it again next year."

Nick Giannino covers the Boston Celtics for CNHI Sports Boston. Contact him at NGiannino@northofboston.com and follow along on Twitter/X @NickGiannino_GT.



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BORN TO BE A CELTIC BORN TO BE A CHAMPION

Horford finally reaches pinnacle

By Matt Williams

» North of Boston Media Group

Tito Horford realizes his son's final stat sheet, when everything is said and done, will show that Al Horford played a lot of games, most of which were in Atlanta.

But it doesn't change this part: "He was born to be a Celtic."

Dad is being objective here. He played in The Association. He taught his son the game.

"This has always been where he's been happiest," said Tito, wearing his son's No. 42 Celtics jersey. "It's about winning here. That's all he's ever wanted."

In the sea of celebration on the parquet at TD Garden Monday night, the most deafening roar from fans and teammates alike came when it was — finally — Horford's turn to hoist the Larry O'Brien trophy over his head.

For a moment, the golden basketball felt like the Stanley Cup.

It was a scene so reminiscent of hockey's silver chalice being passed first to the captain, then almost immediately to an elder statesman who has held the team together through thick and thin through sheer professionalism and force of will.

Everyone in the T.D. Garden knew what that trophy



Al Horford slams the ball down as Dallas Mavericks guard Luka Dončić looks on during Game 1 of the NBA Finals.

“I never forget what Danny Ainge told me: ‘You can win championships in many places, but there’s nothing like winning in Boston. Nothing like winning as a Celtic.’”

Al Horford

meant to that player.

Only Hall of Famer Karl Malone played had more NBA playoff games without winning a world championship than the 38-year-old Horford. Over 100 of his 186 career playoff contests

came in Boston, the place Horford put on the map when he became one of the first major free agents to sign a gigantic contract with the Celtics in 2017.

“I never forget what Danny Ainge told me in that meeting. He said, ‘You can win championships in many places, but there’s nothing like winning in Boston. Nothing like winning as a Celtic,’” said Horford.

Getting to that championship seven years later took an odyssey. Being one of the highest paid players in the game while not being a perennial all-star or MVP candidate came with a lot of scrutiny, a lot of talk about Horford being a merely average player. He elected to leave via free agency in 2019, and his career appeared over when Philadelphia jettisoned him to Oklahoma City after a little more than a year.

In a stroke of genius, Brad Stevens unloaded Kemba Walker’s bloated contract to bring Horford back to Beantown for the 2021-22 season. He got oh-so-close to winning that championship immediately, but Boston lost to Golden State in the Finals.

If Horford ever feared the day he’d be sprayed with champagne and green confetti might never come, he didn’t show it. As his close friend, fellow Dominican and Boston legend David

See **HORFORD**, Page S24



Fan favorite Al Horford pumps his fist during the Larry O'Brien Championship Trophy presentation following the Celtics' title-clinching victory over Dallas.

PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photos

» Horford

Continued from Page S23

Ortiz did 20 years ago at Fenway Park, Horford kept the faith.

"The first thing you have to do when you come here is you have to embrace that pressure," he said. "Our group, we've had a lot of hardships the last few years ... it's been building up."

Don't think Horford was some kind of sidecar along

for the ride in this championship run, either. Especially with the injury to Kristaps Porzingis in the frontcourt, the 6-foot-9 big man was needed in the starting lineup and delivered.

Playing 30 minutes a night in the playoffs, Horford averaged 9.2 points, was Boston's second-leading rebounder (nearly first in offensive boards) and seemed to hit clutch 3-pointers whenever needed.

"We leaned on him so

much. Probably too much for his age and where he's at. He just delivered," said Finals MVP Jaylen Brown. "So consistent, so disciplined with his body. Never complains ... the only thing he does is add to winning."

This year's Celtics were a consistent, buttoned down operation that dug in on defense. The Green played with toughness, grit, confidence and composure. All of those adjectives perfectly describe Horford.

"Knowing the type of person that Al is, knowing the leader that he is even off the court, the father that he is, just the all-around great person and great human, I'd run through a brick wall for him," said Jrue Holiday, another grounded veteran champion whose personality these Celtics smoothly adopted.

To a man, the Celtics said nobody deserved the championship more than Horford. That's the sentiment around the entire NBA.

Everybody's happy that a smart, faithful, genuine guy like Horford reached the mountaintop.

Here in Boston, we're just glad he did it wearing green. Just as we were when he signed here seven summers ago, we're overjoyed that he's one of us.

"Playing for the Celtics is not to be taken lightly," said Horford. "It's all about winning here. It's all about being unselfish. I just feel like I've always belonged here."

"We leaned on (Horford) so much. Probably too much for his age and where he's at. He just delivered."

Jaylen Brown,
Finals MVP



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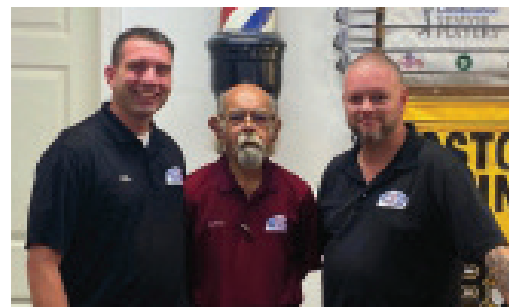
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Joe Cool

Mazzulla's season, exponential growth key to C's success

Nick Giannino

Often times when a star-studded team with high expectations is underachieving for extended stretches, the head coach is the first to get thrown under the bus.

In the case of Boston Celtics' bench boss Joe Mazzulla, a 35-year-old 'basketball genius' — Derrick White's words, not mine — who just helped deliver an NBA record-breaking 18th championship title to Beantown, it wasn't all sunshine and rainbows from the jump. He took his lumps and the early criticism he suffered was, for the most part, warranted.

Last fall, Mazzulla was thrust into a virtually impossible situation, appointed head coach by Celtics' president of basketball operations Brad Stevens following the stunning and abrupt firing of Ime Udoka. At the time, Mazzulla was admittedly in over his head.

The West Virginia product had no prior head coaching experience, consistently flopped in a number of press conferences with the national media, and utilized questionable schemes such as launching 3-pointers at a never-before-seen rate and failing to call timeouts in obvious moments.

Day after day, game after game throughout his rookie season, fans were calling for his job — and it didn't get any better after the Celtics fell to an inferior, yet tougher-minded Miami Heat team in Game 7 of the 2023 Eastern Conference Finals.

But Stevens didn't waver,



Boston Celtics forward Jayson Tatum hugs Celtics' head coach Joe Mazzulla as the clock winds down leading to a Celtics victory during Game 5 of the NBA Finals at the TD Garden in Boston.

continuously voicing his support and belief in Mazzulla. The young head coach responded, showing visible growth from his post beginning on opening night of what became a heralded 2023-24 campaign.

"We all know Joe was thrown into the fire last year, and I felt like he did the best he could," said Al Horford, the lone Celtic who is actually older than his head coach. "But I think this year, everything was different when we came in for workouts before training camp. He really, I felt like, put a sprint on everything how he wanted it to be and how he wanted us to work, how he wanted us to carry ourselves and how determined he wanted us to be.

"That energy that he had

translated to the assistant coaches, to us, to the training staff, everybody ... and we just kind of followed suit," Horford continued. "He truly cares about us, and he cares about what it means to be a Celtic."

Despite Boston's sustained regular season success — it rolled to a 64-18 record and the top seed in the East — fans still weren't sold on Mazzulla.

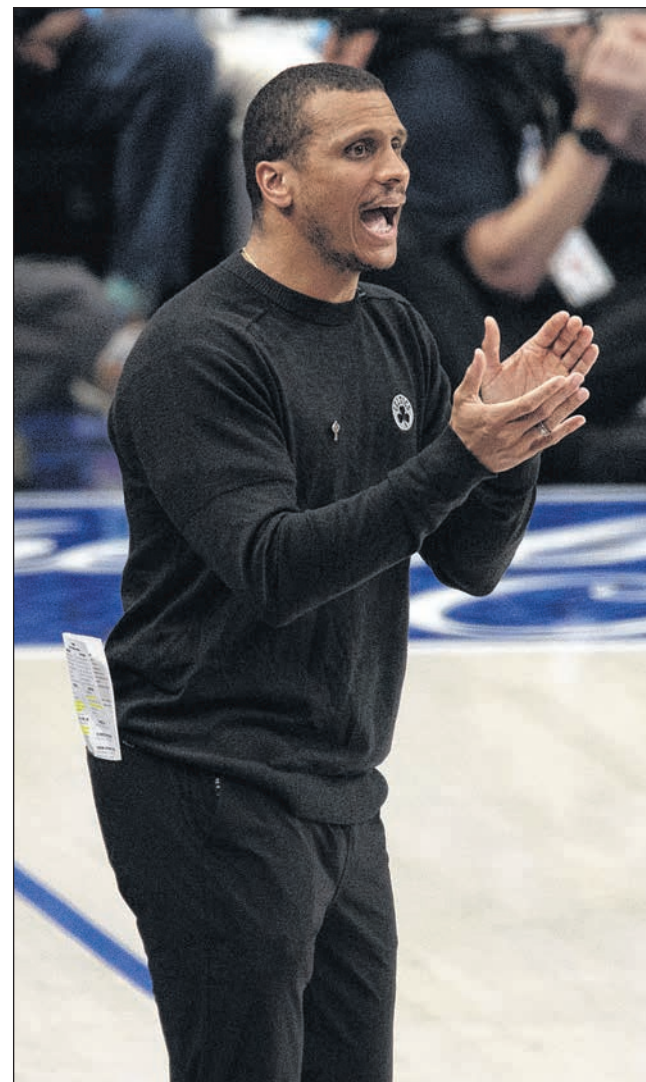
But come playoff time, he was arguably the better coach in legitimately every series. He led the Celtics to a 4-1 win over the Miami Heat and their highly regarded leader, Erik Spoelstra. He out-coached Cleveland's J.B. Bickerstaff in Round 2, helped orchestrate a sweep of veteran, championship winning coach Rick Carlisle

in the Conference Finals, and for all intents and purposes, ran circles around Jason Kidd and the Mavs en route to a gentlemen's sweep in the Finals.

"Man, I love Joe Mazzulla so much," said White. "He gets the job, and he's like, 'You know what? I'm going to start you.' Which I was expecting. He was like, 'I believe in you and I trust in you. This is going to give you the confidence.'"

"And from that moment on, I think it's changed my whole career. I'd do anything for him."

Mazzulla is a different breed. He's not your run-of-the-mill head coach, and he's going to do things a little differently than what fans are used to seeing in Boston. He's a bit eccentric



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photos

Celtics' Head Coach Joe Mazzulla clapping on his team.

— comparing basketball games to UFC fights, regularly quoting the Boston based movie 'The Town', relying heavily on analytics, etc.

But his style works. And once Boston's players fully bought into that, they were off and running to a world title.

"He's definitely elevated my game," said an already well-established player in the league, Jrue Holiday. "Had me look kind of outside of myself and bring something different, you know?"

The Celtics boasted a stacked roster this season, and the additions of Holiday and Kristaps Porzingis can't be understated. But talent can only get you so far at the professional level, and what Mazzulla was able to do to rally his group, forge them

into one unselfish unit, and keep that glue sticking until the final buzzer sounded on an unforgettable championship campaign is praiseworthy at the highest of levels.

He went from an oft-maligned leader seemingly fighting for his job to one of the league's most impressive stories. He's the youngest coach to win a championship since Bill Russell did so with the Celtics in 1968, and a guy that Boston will undoubtedly do whatever it can to lock him up for years to come.

Celtics' fans: rejoice in Mazzulla Ball. Because no other team in the NBA has something like that going for them.

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Celtics 2023-24 schedule/results

DATE	OPP	RESULT	TOP SCORER (W)	TOP SCORER (L)
Oct 25, 2023	@ New York	W 108-104	J. Tatum (34)	I. Quickley (24)
Oct 27, 2023	vs Miami	W 119-111	J. Brown (30)	T. Herro (28)
Oct 30, 2023	@ Washington	W 126-107	J. Brown (36)	K. Kuzma (21)
Nov 1, 2023	vs Indiana	W 155-104	J. Tatum (30)	T. McConnell (18)
Nov 4, 2023	@ Brooklyn	W 124-114	J. Tatum (32)	C. Thomas (27)
Nov 6, 2023	@ Minnesota	L 114-109 / OT	A. Edwards (38)	J. Tatum (32)
Nov 8, 2023	@ Philadelphia	L 106-103	J. Embiid (27)	K. Porzingis (29)
Nov 10, 2023	vs Brooklyn	W 121-107	J. Brown (28)	L. Walker IV (20)
Nov 11, 2023	vs Toronto	W 117-94	J. Brown (29)	P. Siakam (17)
Nov 13, 2023	vs New York	W 114-98	J. Tatum (38)	J. Brunson (26)
Nov 15, 2023	@ Philadelphia	W 117-107	J. Tatum (29)	T. Maxey (20)
Nov 17, 2023	@ Toronto	W 108-105	J. Brown (23)	P. Siakam (23)
Nov 19, 2023	@ Memphis	W 102-100	K. Porzingis (26)	D. Bane (30)
Nov 20, 2023	@ Charlotte	L 121-118 / OT	L. Ball (36)	J. Tatum (45)
Nov 22, 2023	vs Milwaukee	W 119-116	J. Brown (26)	B. Lopez (28)
Nov 24, 2023	@ Orlando	L 113-96	M. Wagner (27)	J. Tatum (26)
Nov 26, 2023	vs Atlanta	W 113-103	J. Tatum (34)	T. Young (33)
Nov 28, 2023	vs Chicago	W 124-97	J. Brown (30)	C. White (19)
Dec 1, 2023	vs Philadelphia	W 125-119	D. White (21)	P. Beverley (26)
Dec 4, 2023	@ Indiana	L 122-112	T. Haliburton (26)	J. Tatum (32)
Dec 8, 2023	vs New York	W 133-123	D. White (30)	R. Barrett (23)
Dec 12, 2023	vs Cleveland	W 120-113	J. Tatum (25)	D. Mitchell (29)
Dec 14, 2023	vs Cleveland	W 116-107	J. Tatum (27)	D. Mitchell (31)
Dec 15, 2023	vs Orlando	W 128-111	J. Tatum (30)	J. Suggs (19)
Dec 17, 2023	vs Orlando	W 114-97	J. Brown (31)	P. Banchero (36)
Dec 19, 2023	@ Golden St.	L 132-126 / OT	S. Curry (33)	D. White (30)
Dec 20, 2023	@ Sacramento	W 144-119	D. White (28)	D. Fox (29)
Dec 23, 2023	@ L.A. Clippers	W 145-108	J. Tatum (30)	P. George (21)
Dec 25, 2023	@ L.A. Lakers	W 126-115	K. Porzingis (28)	A. Davis (40)
Dec 28, 2023	vs Detroit	W 128-122 / OT	K. Porzingis (35)	C. Cunningham (31)
Dec 29, 2023	vs Toronto	W 120-118	J. Brown (31)	S. Barnes (30)
Dec 31, 2023	@ San Antonio	W 134-101	J. Tatum (25)	D. Vassell (22)
Jan 2, 2024	@ Oklahoma City	L 127-123	S. Gilgeous-Alexander (36)	K. Porzingis (34)
Jan 5, 2024	vs Utah	W 126-97	J. Tatum (30)	L. Markkanen (17)
Jan 6, 2024	@ Indiana	W 118-101	J. Tatum (38)	B. Mathurin (20)
Jan 8, 2024	@ Indiana	L 133-131	B. Mathurin (26)	J. Brown (40)
Jan 10, 2024	vs Minnesota	W 127-120 / OT	J. Tatum (45)	A. Edwards (29)
Jan 11, 2024	@ Milwaukee	L 135-102	B. Portis (28)	P. Pritchard (21)
Jan 13, 2024	vs Houston	W 145-113	J. Brown (32)	C. Whitmore (22)
Jan 15, 2024	@ Toronto	W 105-96	D. White (22)	R. Barrett (24)
Jan 17, 2024	vs San Antonio	W 117-98	J. Tatum (24)	V. Wembanyama (27)
Jan 19, 2024	vs Denver	L 102-100	J. Murray (35)	D. White (24)
Jan 21, 2024	@ Houston	W 116-107	K. Porzingis (32)	D. Brooks (25)
Jan 22, 2024	@ Dallas	W 119-110	J. Tatum (38)	L. Donic (33)
Jan 25, 2024	@ Miami	W 143-110	J. Tatum (26)	T. Herro (19)
Jan 27, 2024	vs L.A. Clippers	L 115-96	K. Leonard (26)	J. Tatum (21)
Jan 29, 2024	vs New Orleans	W 118-112	J. Tatum (28)	B. Ingram (28)
Jan 30, 2024	vs Indiana	W 129-124	J. Tatum (30)	A. Nesmith (26)
Feb 1, 2024	vs L.A. Lakers	L 114-105	A. Reaves (32)	J. Tatum (23)
Feb 4, 2024	vs Memphis	W 131-91	J. Tatum (34)	S. Phippen Jr. (19)
Feb 7, 2024	vs Atlanta	W 125-117	K. Porzingis (31)	S. Bey (25)
Feb 9, 2024	vs Washington	W 133-129	J. Tatum (35)	D. Avdijja (24)
Feb 11, 2024	@ Miami	W 110-106	J. Tatum (26)	T. Herro (24)
Feb 13, 2024	@ Brooklyn	W 118-110	J. Tatum (41)	M. Bridges (27)
Feb 14, 2024	vs Brooklyn	W 136-86	P. Pritchard (28)	T. Watford (15)
Feb 22, 2024	@ Chicago	W 129-112	D. White (28)	N. Vucevic (22)
Feb 24, 2024	@ New York	W 116-102	J. Brown (30)	J. Brunson (34)
Feb 27, 2024	vs Philadelphia	W 117-99	J. Brown (31)	T. Maxey (32)
Mar 1, 2024	vs Dallas	W 138-110	J. Tatum (32)	L. Donic (37)
Mar 3, 2024	vs Golden St.	W 140-88	J. Brown (29)	L. Quinones (17)
Mar 5, 2024	@ Cleveland	L 105-104	D. Wade (23)	J. Tatum (26)
Mar 7, 2024	@ Denver	L 115-109	N. Jokic (32)	J. Brown (41)
Mar 9, 2024	@ Phoenix	W 117-107	J. Tatum (29)	K. Durant (45)
Mar 11, 2024	@ Portland	W 121-99	J. Brown (27)	D. Ayton (22)
Mar 12, 2024	@ Utah	W 123-107	J. Tatum (38)	K. George (26)
Mar 14, 2024	vs Phoenix	W 127-112	J. Brown (37)	D. Booker (23)
Mar 17, 2024	@ Washington	W 130-104	S. Hauser (30)	J. Poole (31)
Mar 18, 2024	vs Detroit	W 119-94	J. Brown (31)	J. Ivey (21)
Mar 20, 2024	vs Milwaukee	W 122-119	J. Tatum (31)	D. Lillard (32)
Mar 22, 2024	@ Detroit	W 129-102	J. Brown (33)	J. Wiseman (24)
Mar 23, 2024	@ Chicago	W 124-113	J. Tatum (26)	D. DeRozan (28)
Mar 25, 2024	@ Atlanta	L 120-118	D. Hunter (24)	J. Tatum (37)
Mar 28, 2024	@ Atlanta	L 123-122 / OT	D. Murray (44)	J. Tatum (31)
Mar 30, 2024	@ New Orleans	W 104-92	J. Tatum (23)	Z. Williamson (25)
Apr 1, 2024	@ Charlotte	W 118-104	S. Hauser (25)	M. Bridges (26)
Apr 3, 2024	vs Oklahoma City	W 135-100	K. Porzingis (27)	J. Giddey (17)
Apr 5, 2024	vs Sacramento	W 101-100	P. Pritchard (21)	D. Fox (40)
Apr 7, 2024	vs Portland	W 124-107	J. Brown (26)	D. Banton (28)
Apr 9, 2024	@ Milwaukee	L 104-91	P. Beverley (20)	J. Tatum (22)
Apr 11, 2024	vs New York	L 118-109	J. Brunson (39)	J. Tatum (18)
Apr 12, 2024	vs Charlotte	W 131-98	P. Pritchard (28)	T. Mann (19)
Apr 14, 2024	vs Washington	W 132-122	P. Pritchard (38)	E. Omoruyi (26)



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

The Celtics pose with the Larry O'Brien Championship Trophy after defeating the Dallas Mavericks in five games.

» Best

Continued from Page S16

remembers that the '86 Celtics lost by 15 in a potential closeout game against Houston. No one cares that those Celtics essentially quit on head coach Bill Fitch during the '83 season.

Most people razz the Lakers for begging out of the '86 Finals because they knew they'd lose. They don't blame the Celtics for beating the Rockets ... so I don't know why its the modern Celtics fault that a "lesser" Dallas team won the West.

My theory is that if these Celtics win multiple championships, odds are the '24 bunch is the cream of the crop. Kristaps Porzingis looks a bit like Bill Walton, arriving to solidify the rotation. Odds are the next few Celtics championship teams aren't as dominant in the regular season, might face a Game 6 or 7 in the playoffs. With the benefit of hindsight, the '24 run could look more impressive.

If it's the only championship of

the era, however, it'll look like an outlier that benefited from a weak league year.

The '86 squad had five Hall of Famers: Bird, Walton, Kevin McHale, Robert Parish and Dennis Johnson. Its possible the '24 team could have five with Tatum and Brown on that trajectory and Al Horford a maybe. Porzingis and Jrue Holiday would need a lot more in the coming years to get to Springfield, though, so that's probably a checkmark for '86.

There were two Celtics teams on the list of the top 10 teams of all time that the NBA compiled for its 50th anniversary in 1996: the fabled '86 team and the Bill Russell-led champs of 1965 (they, too, had five Hall of Famers).

Almost certainly the 2017 Golden State Warriors and 2001 LA Lakers now have Top 10 status. So, too, might a San Antonio Spurs entry such as 2003 or '14. Based on net rating, the Paul Pierce and Kevin Garnett Celtics of 2008 could be in that group ... but having one title generally keeps them out of the conversation.

So that's 12-13 teams that the '24 Celtics would have to leapfrog to be considered the best ever.

No one is putting them in the same breath as Jordan's Bulls and, at this moment, the '86 Celtics are a tough ask. But, hey, Larry Bird never went back-to-back either. So if the Celtics repeat they'll get one over on the original Big Three.

Still being among the best 15-20 teams in the near 70-year history of the NBA? Top 3-4 in the most storied franchise in the game? That's nothing to sneeze at.

Less than 24 hours after the Larry O'Brien Trophy was awarded under a hail of confetti at TD Garden, we can't say where the Celtics rank in team and NBA history. In this figurative fight, the bell just rang and the scorecards are still unwritten.

I say that's a good thing ... grandfathers, fathers and sons playfully bickering about which generation of champions was best sounds like an awfully fun Thanksgiving.

You can contact Matt Williams at MWilliams@salemnews.com and follow along on Twitter @ [MattWilliams_SN](https://twitter.com/MattWilliams_SN)

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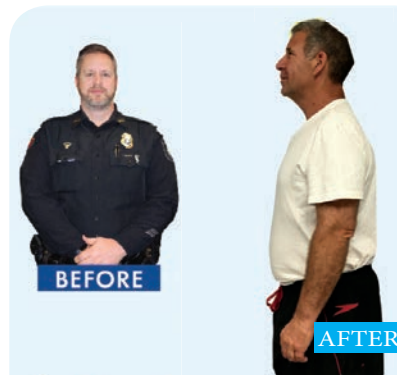
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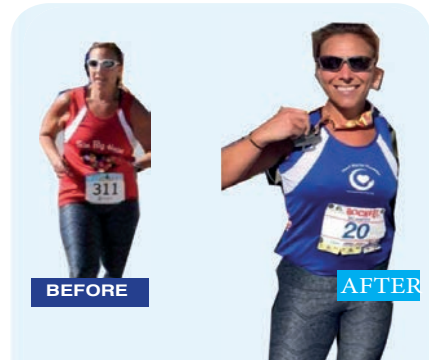
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Boston Celtics' Jayson Tatum celebrates the team's NBA championship during the duck boat parade.



Boston Celtics' Al Horford celebrates with the gathered fans.



Boston Celtics NBA championship MVP Jaylen Brown savors the moment.



A fan holds a sign in Copley Square along the route of the parade celebrating the Boston Celtics' NBA basketball championship win.



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