

Can Jayson Tatum end up being the Greatest Boston Celtic ever?



NBA Champion Jayson Tatum won his first title eight months ago when the Boston Celtics won a record 18th NBA Championship after convincingly defeating Luka Doncic and the Dallas Mavericks in five games.

The 26 year old has been on the cusp of winning it all since his rookie season having been a part of five Conference Finals and a Finals loss to the Golden State Warriors in 2022, but having finally reached the summit, the inaugural Larry Bird MVP has etched his name as one of the greatest players to don the famous green jersey.

Tatum is a six-time All-Star, an All-Star game MVP in 2023, the record single game points holder in an All Star game with 55 points, a four-time All-NBA player (should have been five but was controversially snubbed in the 2020-21 season due to a voting technicality) with three of those being on the first team as well as being an NBA champion.

Tatum also recently entered the top 10 in points for a Celtic having jumped both Jojo White and Dave Cowens on the same night after scoring 40 points against the New York Knicks at Madison Square Garden.

If Tatum were to retire today he unarguably would be a first ballot Hall of Famer, however he would be far from the Greatest Celtic given that the Celts have a plethora of legends.

Depending on your age, Tatum at best may be the third best player that Bean Town has ever seen behind the great Bill Russell and Larry Legend. At worst he would be outside the top 5 behind names such as Paul Pierce and John Havlicek.

In terms of his accolades and credentials, Tatum has been the best Celtic since Larry Bird retired back in 1992, having usurped Paul Pierce in the eyes of many despite Pierce having a Finals MVP to his name unlike the St Louis native.

In order for Tatum to unanimously be considered the Greatest Celtic in NBA history he would probably have to match Bill Russell for championships (11) and Larry Bird for consecutive MVP Awards (3), both of which are incredibly improbable.

The high bar that has been set for a storied franchise such as the Celtics makes it nearly impossible for anyone to ever be that ball club's greatest player, however if Tatum carries on his current career trajectory, then there is the possibility for a conversation to be had.

Jayson Tatum is a better basketball player than Bill Russell. He is not a better winner than Bill Russell, although nobody is. Russell won 11 NBA Championships in a career that spanned 13 years, winning 8 titles in a row and 5 MVP Awards.

Russell is also one of the best defensive players of his era and is the second greatest rebounder in league history behind longtime rival Wilt Chamberlain.

However The late Bill Russell also retired in 1969 and those who were alive to have witnessed his greatness would be well in to their 60's at the earliest.

The game of basketball was also extremely different. A 3 point line had yet to be invented and the games were shown on tape delay in black and white.

By modern NBA standards, Tatum is an extremely superior offensive player to Russell and if he continues to average 27 points per game as he has done for the past two seasons then he will surpass the Celtic's legend in scoring early next season.

Tatum's more recent competition would be three time NBA Champion Larry Bird. The Hick from French Lick is one of the greatest players to have ever lived and when he retired he was arguably the greatest Small Forward up until the emergence of LeBron James.

Compared to Bird, Tatum's career had a slow start as he only became the Celtic's number one option offensively halfway through his third campaign and didn't win his first Championship until his seventh.

On the other hand, Bird was in MVP contention throughout the first 9 seasons of his career finishing no lower than fourth place whilst being the last player to achieve three consecutive MVP Awards. He ended his seventh season with a third Championship.

This alone should indicate that Tatum achieving the crown of being the Greatest Celtic is largely unattainable, however this iteration of the Celtics are built to potentially win multiple championships and it is entirely possible that Tatum leads his squad to back-to-back chips. Something Bird was unable to do.

Tatum also possesses a multitude of iconic moments; whether it be him posterising LeBron James as a rookie in game 7 of the Eastern Conference Finals, a 46 point display at the defending Champion Milwaukee Bucks in a must win Game 6 in 2022, or solely outscoring the Philadelphia 76ers in the fourth quarter of Game 6 the following season under the same conditions.

That performance against the Sixers was the catalyst for a record breaking Game 7 where Tatum scored the most points in any NBA Game 7 in history with 51 points.

His importance to the Celtics can not be understated. This was evident in Game 7 of the 2023 Eastern Conference Finals, as Tatum rolling his ankle 26 seconds into that game was a huge reason as to why the Celtics fell short in an unprecedented 3-0 comeback against the Miami Heat.

Tatum also has some incredible scoring feats and in 2022 he became the only Celtic to ever average 30 points per game for an entire season.

In 2021 Tatum tied Bird's single game scoring record for the Celtics when the then 23 year old scored 60 points against the San Antonio Spurs and led the Celtics to, what was at the time, the third largest comeback in NBA history when they overturned a 32 point deficit.

Tatum also holds the Celtic's record for the most regular season 50 point games with 5 and is the only Celtic with multiple 50 point games in the Playoffs. He also managed to score 50 points in his only play-in tournament game which still stands as an NBA record.

As it stands, Bird is the Greatest Celtic ever to many fans and pundits, however Tatum is the greatest player to suit up for the C's since the Great White Hope called it quits in 1992.

Whilst there is no debate as of now, a few more All-Star and All-NBA accolades, another Championship, a League and Finals MVP as well as the eventual dethroning of John Havlicek atop the Celtics scoring charts would most definitely spark a conversation.

He is the Best Basketball player to represent the leprechaun this century and given his current trajectory, it is within the realm of possibility that Tatum could be the Greatest Celtic that Boston has ever seen.