Opinion

Auerbach would approve of Mazzulla

By NEVE WILSON
Copy Editor

The late legend Red Auerbach is largely regarded as the greatest coach in the history of the Boston Celtics, if not the entire NBA. He won nine championships and played an invaluable role in expanding the professional league at a time when people believed that college basketball was more competitive. Fifty years later, there are many similarities between him and current Celtics head coach Joe Mazzulla that I believe would earn him Auerbach's stamp of approval.

When it comes to coaching, both men place a strong emphasis on team chemistry rather than individual player success.

Auerbach believed that character and chemistry were more important to a team than sheer talent, and that it could be the difference between winning championships or not. "They say you have to use your five best players but I found you win with the five who fit together best," he said.

Mazzulla has also worked hard to create a strong team environment in his first few seasons with the Celtics. "He's gotten everyone on the Boston roster to buy into his system and play some team basketball," wrote Matt Geagan, CBS Boston Sports Producer.

Mazzulla has been praised as a "basketball genius" by starting guard Derrick White, similar to the way that people talk about Auerbach's knowledge of the game and his crafty ideas such as the sixth man. Auerbach is credited with inventing the role of the sixth man, the player who is first to substitute in for the starters and provides a boost in energy and scoring.

"Right from the beginning, Red was an innovator, with a remarkable eye for detail. During his first season, he came up with the idea of a 'sixth man.' Nowadays, basketball people take the sixth man for granted, an accepted part of the game…" wrote John Feinstein in his biography "Let Me Tell You a Story," based on his weekly lunches with Auerbach.

Today, this role continues to be a crucial part of the NBA, so much so that the league established the Sixth Man of the Year Award in 1982. It requires that a player "come off the bench in more games than he started," according to the NBA.

Mazzulla understands the importance of coaching his players in this role. In just three seasons as head coach, two of his players have won the award: New York Knicks guard Malcolm Brogdon (2022-23) and Boston Celtics guard Payton Pritchard (2024-25). They are only the third and fourth Celtics, respectively, to win the award in its 43 years.

During games neither man is afraid to fight referees on calls, sometimes at their own expense. In his book, Feinstein describes Auerbach's relationship with many referees as "long (and) testy."

Following a loss to the Chicago Bulls in December 2024, Mazzulla yelled at a referee after the Celtics received three technical fouls – on Mazzulla himself, Boston Celtics guards Jaylen Brown and Jason Tatum – within the fourth quarter. I was at this game and it was tense to witness, in person, the rest of the Celtics coaching staff having to hold Mazzulla back.

Auerbach also experienced his fair share of fights with refs. He used to frequently get fined by Walter Kennedy, the commissioner of the NBA at the time. "He'd fine me for yelling at referees for getting ejected or for getting into it with fans. You name it," he told Feinstein. He then revealed that he never actually paid the fines and Kennedy let it go.

Mazzulla didn't get off quite as easily, being fined $35,000 by the NBA "for aggressively pursuing and directing inappropriate language toward a game official," after the game against Chicago, according to ESPN.

When asked by the press about what he said to the ref after the game, Mazzulla responded cheekily that he was just wishing them happy holidays. Auerbach would have found that hilarious since he was known for his sarcastic sense of humor.

Mazzulla is often mentioned in the media for the strange answers he gives at press conferences. When asked if he felt pressure for the team to succeed, he deadpanned, "We're either gonna win or we're not, and 40 years from now, none of you are invited to my funeral and that's it."

Auerbach did not care for the media's opinion of him either. During his first season as head coach he received a lot of pushback for not taking Bob Cousy with the first overall pick. "I wasn't interested in making the press happy – I had a ball club to build." Cousy ended up on the team anyways and went on have his jersey retired in Boston and got inducted into the Hall of Fame.



ILLUSTRATION BY JACOB FOWLER

Another trait that the two coaches share is their status as champions.

Auerbach established the Celtics dynasty that continues to prosper today as the team has the most championships in the NBA: 18. The Celtics made the playoffs in each of the 16 seasons he was head coach and went all the way nine times. The team won an additional seven championships while he was president/general manager. So if you're keeping track, Auerbach has been a part of 15 of the Celtics' 18 championships.

In 2024, in just his second season as head coach, Mazzulla led the Celtics to their first championship since 2008 and cemented himself as part of Celtics history. In 2025, it was looking like the Celtics would repeat their success and begin a championship winning streak like when Auerbach was at the helm, until Tatum ruptured his Achilles tendon during the Eastern Conference semifinals.

While both coaches love to win, neither concern themselves with the prestige or accolades that come with it. Despite all of Auerbach's success, he never let it give him a big ego, always attributing wins to his players and other members of the organization, not just himself.

When asked by a reporter for a "favorite Joe Mazzulla quote," White told the story of how he complimented Mazzulla for winning Eastern Conference Coach of the Month in March 2024, and Mazzulla responded dismissively, "Nobody cares." Mazzulla was more focused on the team's success than frivolous individual recognition.

When the Celtics won the NBA Championship later that summer, White wore a T-shirt bearing the quote to the championship parade in Boston.

So, what would Mazzulla think of this comparison? He would probably be flattered. He has been outspoken about his admiration for Auerbach and credits the man for bringing Boston sports into his life when he attended the Red Auerbach Basketball Camp as a kid. "Coach Auerbach would talk to the team and so I just fell in love with it," he shared on the Games with Names podcast. "I fell in love with Red Auerbach first, then the Celtics."

Although Auerbach died in 2006, Mazzulla paid homage to him by wearing a T-shirt with a picture of him and fellow C's legend Bill Russell on it. He also quoted Auerbach before the 2024 championship banner-raising ceremony at TD Garden, restating that "the Celtics are a way of life."

As the new NBA season begins on Oct. 21, we will see how Mazzulla and the Celtics perform amidst injuries and key offseason trades and if they can continue to emulate Auerbach and what he did best: win.

The window to the truth

Saving Quinnipiac's birds

By RILEIGH LUTURS
Contributing Writer

One of the best features of Quinnipiac University is its abundance of nature. Walking around campus, you see the Sleeping Giant State Park from different angles, hear the birds chirping from tree to tree, and enjoy the beautiful fountain by the Communications and Computing & Engineering building

The university was founded on Indigenous land and was named after the Quinnipiac tribe that once lived here. The name Quinnipiac means "long water land," honoring the sacred environment. According to Native legend, the Sleeping Giant is the formidable spirit Hobbomock.

Hobbomock would be angry with the university. Birds have been dying from window collisions with university buildings.

When angry, Hobbomock would stomp upon the land and change the course of the Connecticut River. When he felt disrespected, he made life challenging for people. One day, Kiehtan, another spirit, "transformed Hobbomock into the iconic Sleeping Giant, a guardian watching over the land in silent repose."

This past August, the university opened two new buildings, The SITE and the School of Business. They are a great addition to the campus. People are in and out, either studying, eating at the new cafe or going to class.

I myself love the views and study there with my friends all the time. But with these new buildings come new dangers for wildlife. Birds are suffering from The SITE and SOB windows. More than once, I have seen birds die from window collisions. Spiritually, birds are seen as winged messengers in Native American culture. A few weeks ago, during Primary Recruitment, my sorority Gamma Phi Beta, was taking pictures on the South Quad when a turkey flew into one of SITE's massive reflective windows and died. I saw the disturbing incident. It was sad to see campus wildlife drop to the ground because of the new man-made building.

While I was in the SOB, a woodpecker flew straight into the window and died. It died on the balcony facing the Quinnipiac River. Birds cannot see glass. They can't identify it as a solid object and get confused with reflections. Yet, the two new buildings have gigantic glass windows and balconies.

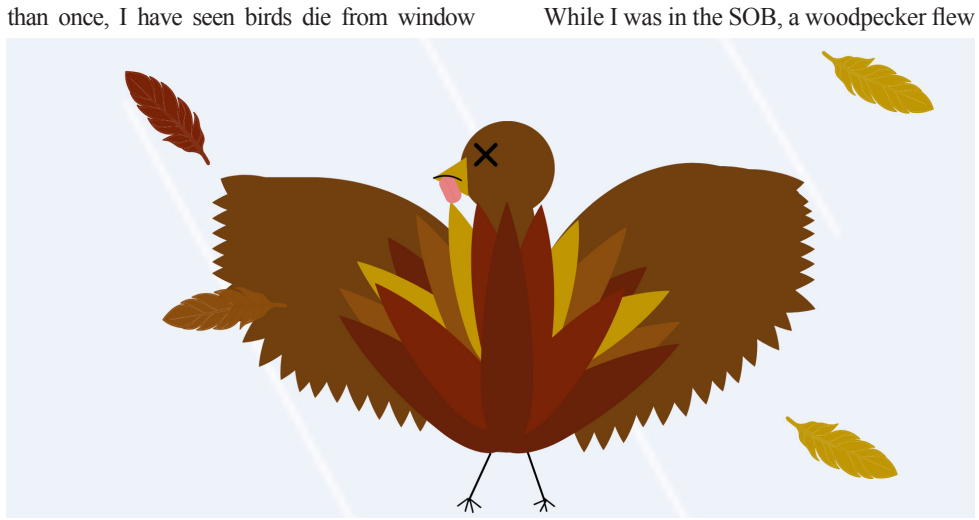
ILLUSTRATION BY LILLIAN CURTIN

Don't get me wrong, the windows are a lovely addition that gives staff and students a view of our beloved campus, but it's dangerous for birds.

Luckily, there is a solution! As author Kaitlyn Parkins of American Bird Conservancy (ABC) says, "The good news is, people can help."

"For existing buildings and homes, the easiest fix is to add inexpensive, commercially available bird-safe window treatments…." she explained. One example of a bird-safe window installation company is Feather Friendly. Recommended by ABC and shown to reduce bird-glass collisions by 95%, Feather Friendly can help QU.

We need to protect the birds. With a simple installation, Quinnipiac can save the lives of many birds we all love to hear on campus. To keep Hobbomock at rest, windows need to become bird-safe.