BRAYDEN'S BREAKDOWN:

NEEMIAS QUETA'S CASE FOR NBA MOST IMPROVED PLAYER

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The odds are stacked against Neemias Queta to win the Most Improved Player award for the 2025-2026 NBA season, but his phenomenal season cannot be overlooked.

He did not go from scoring under 10 points per game to averaging 20 like Nickeil Alexander-Walker or anchor his team on the defensive end to the number one seed like Jalen Duren, but Queta is one of the many unsung heroes from the 25-26 Celtics.

Despite being on the Celtics since 2023, Queta had seen minimal time in the rotation along with almost zero playing time in the playoffs outside of garbage time minutes. With the departures of Al Horford, Kristaps Porzingis and Luke Kornet however, the 7-footer was thrusted into the starting center role for a Celtics team with lower expectations than normal.

There was no timetable for Jayson Tatum to return from his torn Achillies and the over/under for wins on the season for Boston was between 41 and 43. After dropping 0-3 to start the season, it seemed to be a gap year for the Celtics. Then something changed, and Queta was a huge part of that. The Celtics continued to chip away at the Eastern Conference standings. Boston finished 56-26, owning the second-best record in the Eastern Conference with Queta as a backbone, averaging 10.2 points and 8.4 rebounds per game.

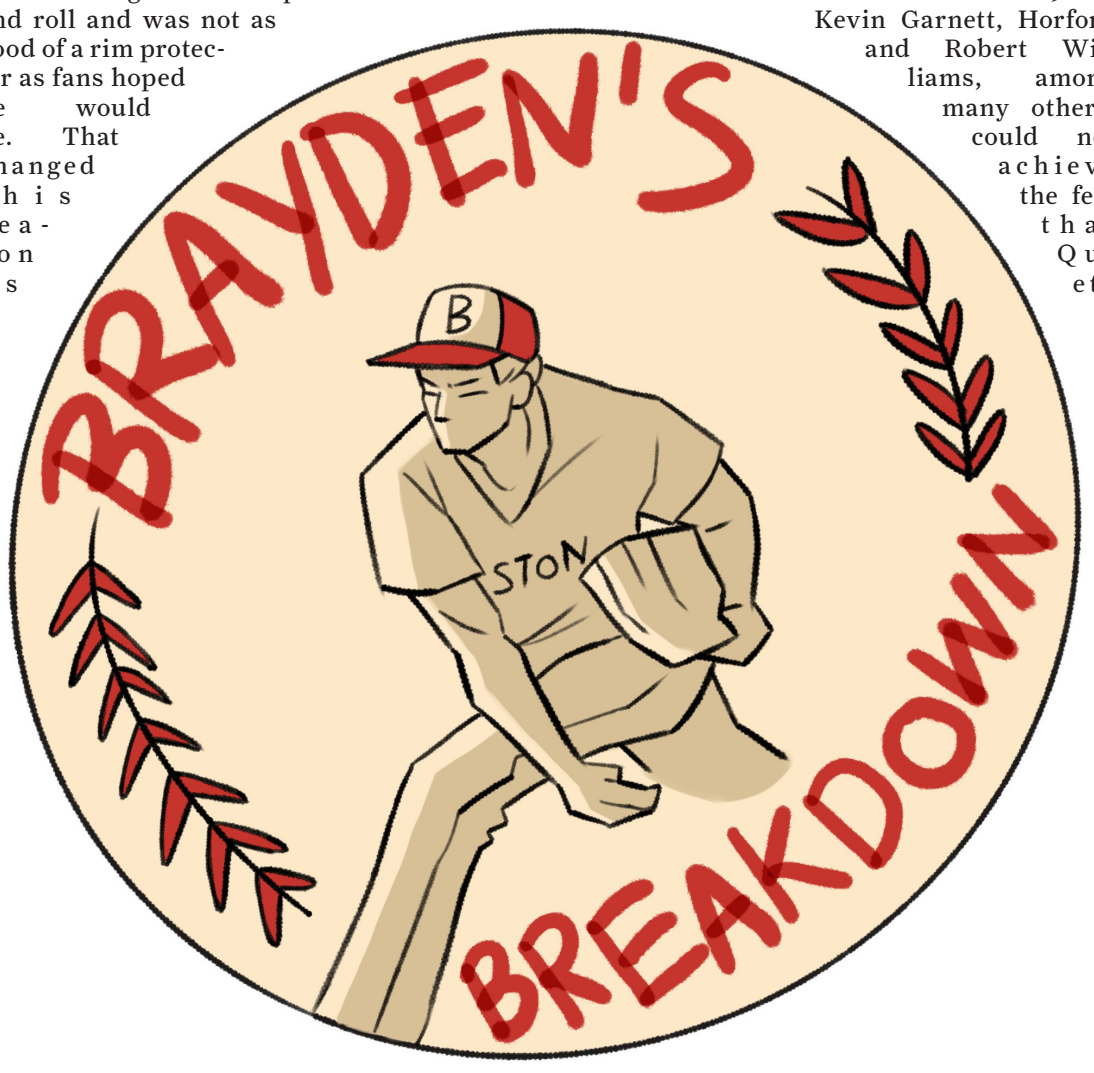
The Utah State product shot 65.3% from the field on the season, good for third best in the NBA. His problem in previous years had been defense. He was not great in the pick and roll and was not as good of a rim protector as fans hoped he would be. That changed this season as he averaged 1.3 blocks per game and 0.8 steals per game.

Queta is the first Celtic since Robert Parish to record at least 600 rebounds, 90 blocks and 50 steals in a single season. Being the first Celtic to achieve these stats since the Hall of Famer Parish is remarkable considering the big men that have played for Boston since "The Chief" in the 1980s. Kevin Garnett, Horford and Robert Williams, among many others, could not achieve the feat that Queta just accomplished.

His numbers have only improved since the return of Tatum on March 6. Tatum's very first assist back from injury was an alley oop to Queta for a dunk, and the two have been a great pairing ever since. Tatum's ity at his size allows Queta to roam free in the paint and get easy dunks. In the six games played in the month of April, Queta is averaging 13.7 points per game, including three double-doubles. He added three more double-doubles in the month of March after Tatum's return, including the game on March 6, where he had 16 points and 15 rebounds in a win over the Mavericks.

The Portuguese center was taken in the second round of the 2021 NBA Draft and not given much of a chance in the league. He played 20 games in two seasons for the Kings before signing with the Celtics in 2023. Queta showed flashes the past two years but did not fully put it together until this season. Him being the starting center on a contending team helped his progression as a player a lot since he needed to be solid in order for the team to win. Joe Mazzulla and the rest of the coaching staff have done a phenomenal job developing Queta these past three seasons and deserve a ton of credit for Queta being the player he is today.

Queta will probably not win Most Improved Player, but he should receive votes. More importantly for Celtics fans, he will be one of the x-factors if this team wants to make a deep postseason run.



LOGO BY SAMANTHA HASS, ARTIST EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS



Boston Celtics' center Neemias Queta dunking a basketball. Queta joined the Celtics in 2023, and has since improved his point average per game from 10 to 20.

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