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# What changes will follow Celtics' collapse?



Had the Boston Celtics been swept by the Miami Heat in the NBA Eastern Con-ference finals, as seemed likely a week ago, there would have been undeniable pressure on president of basketball op-erations Brad Stevens and majority owner Wyc Grousbeck to initiate major changes in the coming weeks.

After an even bigger gut punch, the end result won't be any different.

For all the character the Celtics showed to push this series to Game 7, the way this team met its end on Monday night was as strange and confound-

day mgnt was as strange and confound-ing as this postseason itself. At the very moment it seemed like the Celtics were going to be the first in NBA history to erase a 3-0 series deficit, they went back home, reverted to their they with back holds, leverted to their worst characteristics and were blown out 103-84. Questions about their roster construction, chemistry, coaching and collective heart are unlikely to go away. The angest that will flow from failing to close the deal in Boston is appropriate

and fair. This was a terrible, inexcusable series to lose against an inferior Miami team that was missing multiple key players throughout. Even when the Celt-ics pulled things back from down 3-0, they fail like favorites — nowi 3-or, they felt like favorites — noly to once again disappoint when a comeback was within reach. It feels like something that will reverberate for a long time to come. As the celtics head into an offseason of greater unknowns, it's worth keeping this is a windn Thwares cos af the lost

or greater unknowns, it s worth keeping this in mind: They were one of the last four teams standing. They were in the NBA Finals a year ago. And in total, a core built around Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown has reached the conference finals four times in six seasons.

ence innais four times in six seasons. You shouldn't throw that away be-cause of one bitterly disappointing out-come. You can't lose patience because you keep coming up short of a title. You don't start over on everything you've built because a super-hot Miami team made all of your issues look bigger than

they really are. Do the Celtics need to make some



Derrick White and the Celtics bench watches the final seconds of their Game 7 s to the Heat on M day MICHAELDW

changes? Sure. But to rewrite the blueprint that has led to so much success or

print that has led to so much success or even consider breaking up Tatum and Brown? Be careful what you wish for. The easy thing to do would be firing coach Joe Mazzulla, the 34-year-old for-mer West Virginia player who was cast mer west virginia player who was cast into this position because of an investi-gation into Ime Udoka's workplace con-duct that came to light last September and revealed multiple, but unspecified, violations of team policy.

Mazzulla was not ready for this job, but there should never have been any expectation he would be. There are played in the NBA, but generally they have spent years preparing and learning have more the bic should be and the should be the never the should be and the should be and the should be have been the should be and the should be a

have spent years preparing and learning before they got their shot. A mere four years ago, Mazzulla was the head coach at Division II Fairmont State. Why did anyone think he was ready to match wits with Erik Spoelstra?

And yet the Celtics throught enough of him to elevate him to Udoka's posi-tion – bypassing the far more experi-enced Damon Stoudamire, who was also on the Celtics bench – and then give him a long-term contract in February.

None of that is his fault, and yet this series got to the point where Mazzulla making a minor adjustment or calling a timeout to stop a run seemed notable.

Smart, Malcolm Brogdon and Derrick White provide? Will the Celtics figure out the center position between Robert Williams, who is on a great contract for the next three seasons but injury prone the next three seasons but injury prone, and 36-year-old Al Horford, who doesn't move the way he used to? Are they too reliant on 3-point shooting? Monday's loss was a microcosm of why it would be easy to justify more

why it would be easy to justify more than a minor overhaul. When Tatum turned his ankle on the first possession of the game and was clearly hobbled throughout, the Celtics needed Brown to be a max-contract guy. He was decidedly not, committing eight turnovers early not, commuting eight furnovers and scoring 19 points on 23 shots. And when they needed to generate offense against the Heat's junky zone defense, Boston settled for a lot of 3s - which is very much their style of play but not a very effective style when you shoot 9-for-42 in Game 7.

With their collection of depth and players under contract, the Celtics could make a lot of moves or very few. They could blame the coach or the players.

could blame the coach or the players. They could split up their two superstars or double down. Or they could simply look at this se-ries as an anomaly where someone like Caleb Martin, who was a 9.6 point-per-Careb Martin, who was a 9.6 point-per-game wing for Miami in the regular sea-son, got into a zone and shot 60% for the series, including 22 of 45 from the 3-point line. On the other hand, it's em-barrassing to lose a series in which he was Miami's best offensive player.

was Miami's best offensive player. The range of problems and solutions probably makes it tougher, not easier, for Stevens to identify how to reshape the program and optimize what the Celtics are capable of. On one hand, it Centes are capable of. On one hand, it was just a bad series. On the other, they messed around against the Atlanta Hawks and nearly lost to the Philadel-phia 76ers, too. And the Celtics' vulner-ability being tied to stretches of poor shooting is an issue that stretches back

shooting is an issue that stretches back several seasons. So now it's all on the table. Fans will demand big moves. Stevens, a conser-vative and thoughful person by nature, may be inclined to work on the margins.

It adds up to one of the most fascinat ing offseasons in recent memory – and, thanks to the Heat, one that came a lot faster than anyone anticipated.

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were one adjustment or a different rota-tion away from winning. When you lose the way the Celtics lost, it's about more than the guy with a clipboard. The more meaningful questions for Boston are a lot harder to answer. With Brown eligible for an extension this summer and Tatum next summer, the Celtics could legitimately have to tie up more than \$600 million to keep them into their early 30s. That's not inst a lot up more than sooo mininon to keep them into their early 30s. That's not just a lot of money, it's a massive commitment of salary cap that would certainly make the Celtics nervous if they believe that due has already maxed out. There are other issues, too. Was Mar-

cus Smart's defensive regression this season a blip or a warning? Do the Celt-ics need more dynamic play-making from the point guard position than what

That's not ideal when you have a team in

That is hot taken with you have a team in the middle of its championship window. Everything counts in these series, and it's hard to win when you're consis-tently losing on the coaching margins. So it would be easy to imagine Boston thanking Mazzulla for his time and hir-

ing one of the more experienced coach-es on the market like Monty Williams. Perhaps there were some things Bos-could for the table in these playoffs be-cause of a coaching deficit, but this did

not feel like a series where the Celtics were one adjustment or a different rota-

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MOVIES NEWS & VIEWS

# **Realism replaces magic in 'Little Mermaid'**

Kelly Lawler

In the 1989 version of "The Little Mermaid," the sea was a crisp blue, sea creatures could turn into functional musical instruments, ocean waves defied gravity and a flounder was huggable But under the sea in the

2023 remake, the ocean is dank and dark, the fish are slimy, and dark, the fish are simily, scary and bug-eyed and the only thing defying science is Melissa McCarthy's eyesha-dow, which stays immaculate underwater. Much has already been said shout the prov. "Meanedi"

about has aneuty occur said about the new "Mermaid," which stars McCarthy as the villain Ursula and singer Halle Bailey as Ariel, and how it disappoints compared with its an imated original. It's a tale as old imated original. It's a tale as old as time when it comes to Dis-ney's parade of live-action re-makes of its beloved animated films (their box-office take, however, seems just fine). Their biggest problem is sim-ple: They were better off stay-ing cartoons.

Every change – to aesthet-ics, to story, to soundtracks, to length - that is required to make these films "live action" chips away at the magic of the originals. This relentless pur-suit of realism doesn't make a good kids' movie: It may be dark underwater in the real ocean, but we want to see Ariel dance properly lit on the screen. The new films are too long, too monotone, too bland and full of photorealistic talking animals that ra boring to horrifying. that range from



Scuttle (voiced by Awkwafina), Flounder (voiced by Jacob Tremblay), and Ariel (Halle Bailey) star in the live-action "The Little Mermaid." PROVIDED BY DISNEY

#### Photorealistic fish? Not what you'd call cuddly

Looking at the animals, it is easy to see how the new films have gone wrong. Take the seafaring sidekicks of "Mermaid," which are full of color, dyna-mism and emotion in the origi-nal film. Their eyes are exaggerated, their proportions are all

wrong for nature but follow cute character rules (namely, imitating the dimensions of a human baby). They are inviting and, well, animated. They make great stuffed animals to make great stuffed animals to sell at the Disney Store. In the 2023 "Mermaid," Flounder (voiced by Jacob Tremblay) is beige. He looks like a real flounder, which means he's skinny and a little creepy. Sebastian (Daveed Diggs) looks like any other spindly crab, except that his

mouth moves. Scuttle the seagull (Awkwafina) has terrifying eyes. When the three try to sing and dance (and Scuttle very unfortunately raps), they are limited in their movements. They kind of wiggle and flop. It's depressing and unsettling watch

The new "Mermaid" tries and fails to grab some of the flash of the original. It has fish that swim around Ariel in pret-"Under the Sea." But in the car-toon, the fish do a conga line. Animated fish bunny-hopping Animated fish bunny-hopping is a joy to watch – photorealis-tic fish doing it is a horror show. Animals have an uncanny val-ley, and Disney found it. In the production of many

animated movies, voice actors are filmed as they record their dialogue. Then the animators can incorporate their perfor-

mances into the faces of their mances into the faces of their characters. That's why Robin Williams' Genie from "Aladdin" is so magnetic, and why Simba in "The Lion King" can break your heart. But when the goal is a "real" animal, you can't put human emotions behind their

#### Magic is missing in a realistic fantasy world

It's not just the animals. It's the whole futile exercise of realism in live-action remakes that in actuality are primarily CGI.

There is an inherently magical quality to animation as an art form. It's not just the most convenient way to bring a mermaid to life or the dumbed-down version of movies for kids. It's a thing all its own that opens up worlds, exaggerates and emphasizes and literally il-lustrates exactly what the artist wants us to see

LIFE

Ariel's hair is redder than red. Sebastian's eyes are bigger than big. The ballgowns are poofy and perfect. It's no won-der animation is a medium primarily associated with children; these exaggerations are candy to their little curious minds. A great animated movie is bright, brilliant and brimming with possibility. It has dy namism. Every comparable im age from a live-action remake is flat and dull. There is another way to

bring these stories to live action bring these stories to live action that preserves their inherent campiness and charm. "The Li-on King," "Beauty and the Beast," "Aladdin" and others have moved from animation to Broadway with far more cre-Broadway with far more cre-ative success than they have to feature film. Glitter, big hair and big makeup is a part of the fab-ric of the stage, and when you turn an animated lion into a breathtaking puppet, you have something new and exciting to look at. Onstage, the living ob-jects of "Beast" bedazzle with their sheer absurdity, with kick lines full of dancers dressed as forks and knives. The Disney stage adaptations are fun, where the movie remakes are a

slog. With every Disney cartoon with every Disney cartoon seemingly getting a remake (in-cluding 2016's "Moana"), audi-ences are doomed to singing nature documentaries for years to come. But when it comes to cultural legacy, they can't get anywhere close to their prede-cessors. Magic doesn't strike

#### MUSIC

## MUNA shows its Pride and joy in a 'heavy' month

### Joy Ashford

On the first night of Pride month, queer pop band MUNA took the stage at the Stonewall Inn, the site of the riot that started Pride that now is an iconic gay bar. The trio known for opening

for Taylor Swift and its hit "Silk Chiffon" featuring Phoebe Brid-gers were the main event at a Stonewall fundraiser for embattled queer organizations in Tennessee and Texas.

Katie Gavin, Josette Maskin, and Naomi McPherson opened their set with the 2016 ballad about safe spaces "I Know a Place "I didn't want the songs we

wrote in 2014 to still be so rele-vant today," lead singer Gavin told USA TODAY before the show

But in a Pride month that McPherson described as "jar-ring" and "heavy," the band's anthem for those who "think being vourself means being unworthy" is as necessary as ever.

### 'Cultivating joy' is essential to Pride

Members of MUNA agreed that Pride month feels different this year. "It's jarring to think about our journey over the past 10 years and how much more dystopian things have gotten for queer people," said McPher-

son. For the second year in a row, there has been an uptick in the number of states that grew more hostile to the LGBTQ+ community, according to the 2023 Out Leadership State LGBTQ+ Business Climate In-dex report shared exclusively with USA TODAY.

"The political landscape, es-pecially with regards to trans people, is so terrifying," said McPherson, who identifies as nonbinary and uses they/them pronouns

Despite increasing legal at-tacks on trans and queer peo-

ple's health care and expres-sion in public, the band said joy remains essential to their work

remains essential to their work and music. "If we're miserable, they win," McPherson said. "I think it's important to show young people that I'm happier because I came out. I'm happier because I am who I am," Maskin added.

Joy has a "really important role" to play in "any kind of big time collective change – be-cause it's hard work," Gavin said. "There are often times where you can just feel despair. So if you don't engage in this practice of cultivating joy and

making this fun and having a good time, I just don't think that it's sustainable to keep up the fight."

#### Taylor Swift fans and the 'generous' new generation

#### MUNA also finds hope for the future in the younger generation.

The band is known for their The band is known for their avid queer fan base, but they also have been playing to audi-ences outside their own fans as openers for Taylor Swift on her Eras Tour. "We've felt very welcomed by Taylor audiences," Gavin said of their sets with Swift so far. "A lot of the fans that I see in

the audience are much younger the audience are much younger than we are," McPherson add-ed. "They're so open-minded and generous with their time and their ears – and also very open-minded with their per-spective on the world." They think it's likely that 'we will get to a point with their generation" where an artist's queerness "just doesn't matter" in deter-mining their "mainstream" ap-peal. peal.

"Obviously, being a queer artist matters to our communi-ty," McPherson said, citing the value of representation. But they hope that the "ghettoizing" of queer artists to a certain niche – something they still niche – something they stil feel, even at their level of suc-

#### cess - won't be here to stay. Stonewall Gives Back

MUNA's show on the first day of Pride month was part of the annual Pride Kickoff Cele-bration for the Stonewall Inn Gives Back Initiative (SIGBI), a Gives Back Initiative (SIGBI), a charitable organization run by CEO and co-owner of Stone-wall Stacy Lentz. Funds raised from the event are being donated to three

LGBTQ organizations in red states: youth center "Just Us" in Nashville, Tennessee; theatre

company "Friends of Georges" in Memphis, Tennessee; and the El Paso, Texas community the El Paso, Texas community space Borderland Rainbow Center, which, among other things, supports gender-non-conforming people seeking asylum in America.

"We really want to specifi-"We really want to specifi-cally work on grassroots or-ganizations that are being af-fected the most by these horrif-ic drag bans and bans against gender-affirming care," Lentz said. Contributing: Charisse

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Matthew Fitzpatrick plays a shot from a bunker on the 18th hole during the first round of the Wells Fargo Championship last month. JIM DEC

# **Defending champion** Matthew Fitzpatrick doesn't hold back

Tom D'Angelo The Palm Beach (Fla.) Post USA TODAY Network

LOS ANGELES - Matthew Fitzpatrick was given the opportunity to pass on the question, but at first thought about giv-ing it a shot.

'I'll answer it," the defending U.S.

Open champion said when asked: "Do you feel like you should be compensated for not going to LIV?" Fitzpatrick's mind was in overdrive. You could tell by his face. For a second it appeared he was going to jump in, perappeared ne was going to jump in, per-haps join his colleagues who have not been shy about saying they should be re-warded for their loyalty to the PGA Tour. But he could not get out the words. "Yeah, pass," he finally said, followed her several for which lower

by a very uncomfortable laugh

by a very uncomortable laugh. Fitzpatrick was first on the firing line Monday at the Los Angeles Country Club, site of the 2023 U.S. Open, the first major since the golf world was rocked by the announcement the PGA Tour and Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

A year ago, things were so much sim-pler, especially after Fitzpatrick captured his first major championship, finishing one stroke ahead of Scottie Scheffler and

one stroke anead of scottle Schemier and Will Zalatoris at The Country Club in Brookline, Mass. Things then certainly were not "con-fusing," a word, or one similar, Fitzpat-rick uttered five times to describe what he knows about the PGA Tour-LIV Golf union

"I seem to remember just last year just thinking about the tournament, just the U.S. Open," he said. "It was obviously different because I had the tie to the golf terent because I had the tie to the golf course and the history there, so probably was easier for me to mentally focus on that and be in a better place than obvi-ously all this confusion that's going on this week.

"I just don't know what's going on, I on't think anyone knows what's going on. Are we signing with the PIF? I have no idea. Even though I guess it is confusing, it's pretty clear that nobody knows what's going on apart from about four people in the world."

PGA Tour pros are not alone in their confusion on what to make of golf's fu-ture. Aussie Cam Smith, one the more notable players who defected from the

Tour to join LIV last summer, is as much in the dark as Fitzpatrick and ev-eryone else ... apart from those four people

Smith said he received a call from Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the governor of Saudi's PIF, last Tuesday about 10 min-utes before Al-Rumayyan appeared with PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan on CNBC to make the announcement

The call was more out of courtesy

The call was more out of courtesy than informational. "I think he was probably calling a few different players, so the call was kind of short and sweet," Smith said Monday. "Didn't really explain much, but just kind of explained what was go-ing to happen on that day, and there was still a lot of stuff to work out." For Fitznatrick one of those things

Was sum a tot of stuin to work out. For Fitzpatrick, one of those things to be worked out is his game after re-vealing the bulging disk he was diag-nosed with in February had a "slight flare-up" Friday at the RBC Canadian Open. He recovered well enough to fin-ible tid for each ish tied for 20th.

Fitzpatrick's game, though, did suf-fer when the injury first occurred. He missed three cuts in four starts prior to the Masters, where he felt good enough to finish in a tie for 10th. The next week to missi in a the for 10th. The next week he defeated Jordan Spiteh in a playoff at the RBC Heritage for his second ca-reer PGA Tour victory. The results have been inconsistent since with a T-9 at the Memorial a week after missing the

the Memoria a week after missing the cut at the PGA Championship. "I definitely feel like my game is in better shape," said Fitzpatrick, who is ranked No. 8 in the world. "I certainly don't think it's as good as it was last year."

But is that good enough to retain the 18-inch tall sterling silver trophy that goes to the U.S. Open winner and take it on another vacation? We'll know Sundav.

Fitzpatrick was forced to return the trophy – "I was so sad about that. I didn't feel I spent enough time with it," he said – as it now awaits a new owner. Still, it became his best friend while

in his custode, even accompanying him for a week-long vacation to Italy after the British Open. "It went a few places, actually," he said. "We were on a boat, so to Capri, Amalfi, Positano. Had a few nice day time." trips.

## **Cameron Smith says** he is a good fit for a different Open test

### Adam Woodard

USA TODAY Network

LOS ANGELES - Like the rest of us Cameron Smith's initial reaction to the bombshell news of the PGA Tour and Public Investment Fund's plan to partner and form a new global golf entity was disbelief.

"I guess the first reaction was I thought it was kind of a joke that had come out," said Smith on Monday ahead of the 2023 U.S. Open at Los Anernor Yasir Al-Rumayyan) gave me a call and kind of explained what was go-

ing on." Al-Rumayyan – often referred to as Al-Rumayyan – often referred to as His Excellency, or H.E. – made a short-and-sweet phone call to Smith around 10 minutes before his joint interview with PGA Tour commissioner Jay Mo-nahan on CNBC last Tuesday, but the distribution wave merican details were sparse. "He didn't really explain too much. I

think there's still a lot of stuff to he worked out, and as time goes on, we'll get to know more and more," Smith continued. "But there's definitely a lot of curious players, I think, on both sides as to what the future is going to look like."

Talk about an understatement. The bombshell news sent shock-waves through the golf world, and the waves through the goit world, and the topic of discussion will assuredly dom-inate the first few days in L.A. But much like last week at the RBC Canadian Open, when the tees are in the ground and the balls are in the air for Thurs-

and the balls are in the air for Thurs-day's first round, the golf will take the leading role and what a scene it will be. After a "pretty cruisey flight over," Smith played seven holes on the front nine Monday morning but was sur-prised with the setup. This week at LACC may not have as much of that third, sing route 1000 a surple the d plan. thick, signature USGA rough that play-ers and fans have come to expect. "It's a little bit different here. I think the Bermuda rough, I think you can get

kind of lucky or unlucky," explained

## **Bitter rivals McIlroy,** Koepka paired in group

#### Scooby Axson

Whatever issues that are still re-maining between PGA Tour golfers and those who left to join the lucrative Saudi-funded LIV Golf will certainly be one of the main storylines when the 123rd U.S. Open starts Thursday at Los Angeles Country Club. PGA Championship winner Brooks

Koepka and Kory McIroy are set to tee off together at 4:54 p.m. EDT with 2021 Masters champ Hideki Matsuyama also in the group. All three golfers are among the betting favorites to win the U.S. Open, according to DraftKings. Koepka was one of the biggest

names to make the leap to LIV shortly names to make the leap to LIV shortly after it debuted last June. McIlroy was one of LIV's biggest critics, but when the PGA Tour, DP World Tour, and LIV Golf announced an unprecedented partner-ship last week it shook up the golf world. McIlroy, who has not won a major ti-tle since the 2014 PGA Championship, had plenty to say on the issue, express-ing surprise and mixed emotions over the venture, adding he didn't think the golfers who left for LIV Golf should be welcomed back

"I think ultimately when I look at the bigger picture, 10 years down the line, this is going to be good for the game of professional golf," he said. "I still hate LIV. I hope it goes away."

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Smith. "There's patches out there where they're actually quite thin and you can get away with kind of a bad shot and other patches where if you're in there it's no good at all. I think that's a little bit differ ent

"I think the way you go through the hills there a few times, there's lots of shots where you almost have to work the shots where you almost have to work the ball into the hill. It's a really good chal-lenge," he added. "But I think that Ber-muda rough is definitely a little bit differ-ent. Typically we're playing in the north-east and get that really dense kind of wet rough. In other words, this week could play

to Smith's strengths. The former world No. 2 joined the up-start LIV Golf after a 2022 season that start LiV Gon atter a 2022 season that featured marquee wins at both the Play-ers Championship and Open Champion-ship at St Andrews. The 29-year-old Aussie is a big-time player who often rises to the occasion, but that said, his past history in the U.S. Open isn't anypast instory in the U.S. Open isn't any-thing to write home to Brisbane about. After a T-4 in his first U.S. Open appear-ance in 2015, Smith has since finished T-59, cut, T-72, T-38, cut, cut, but does boast six top-10 finishes, including three at the Masters.

"I'd like to think that I play my best golf around kind of tough golf courses. I know kind of my U.S. Open record isn't that great. For me, the driver has always been the one club where it gets me in trouble in the U.S. Open and probably the PGA, the U.S. PGA. You have to drive the ball strong," explained Smith. "I think that's where a golf tournament can get away from me, but the driver is starting to feel really good, and I think there's a few opportunities around here to make birdies, so I think that falls into my hands a little bit."

As the reigning Champion Golfer of the Year at the USGA's flagship champithe rear at the USGA's hagsing championship, Smith was briefly stumped when he was asked to distinguish the differ-ence between the USGA and the R&A be-fore he filled the room with laughter by answering one is in the U.S. and the other the UK