

## **Straight Talk Texas 2036 Interview: A Conversation with Dallas Mavericks CEO Cynt Marshall**

*The interview has been edited for clarity, brevity and key highlights.*

Join us as Texas 2036 President Margaret Spellings talks with the Dallas Mavericks CEO Cynt Marshall about how the NBA team is handling the disruption of COVID-19, and how the team is working with their employees, and the community during this time.

**Margaret Spellings: Sports are important, and I think people are grieving a loss with many professional teams shutting down. The Mavs were one of the first ones out in front on this issue. Tell me about how your fans reacted, how you're thinking about it in terms of business, and what the future holds.**

**Cynt Marshall:** People obviously miss sports; we all do. We're trying to put things out there, but it doesn't replace what actually happens on the court. I think everybody appreciated that we initially came out with a plan, and that we came out and said we were going to make sure all of our people got paid. That was important to my boss, and important to me. We wanted to provide economic security. People liked how we handled it from the beginning.

Now we're a few weeks into it. People want to know when it's coming back, which of course, we don't know. But the reactions from the fans have been great. They want to know if our players are okay. They want to know how they can help in the community. The sponsors want to know how they can help. It is so Texas, that people are coming together and wanting to know how they can help us.

**Margaret Spellings: You all have been keeping your eye on the bottom line, but you're also showing incredible community leadership, working with the mayor and all of that. Tell me about the five things.**

**Cynt Marshall:** One of our players, Jalen Brunson, joined Mayor Eric Johnson and laid out a plan with our players. They all wanted to help get the message across about what we can do to stop the spread, and they put together a great public service announcement. It's basically five things and it starts with: 1) wash your hands often, 2) if you're going to cough, cough into your elbow, 3) don't touch your face because that's where a lot of contamination happens, 4) stay more than six feet apart, which is basically a basketball player or taller, and 5) if you feel sick, stay home. We started this before everybody was being forced to stay home, but it's still relevant. Those are things we can do, practice social distancing, practice good respiratory hygiene, to look out for each other because it's not just about you. It's also about the people around you.

Jalen Brunson joined the mayor and they sent that message and it went over very well. A lot of the players have been out there doing things with education, helping teachers with virtual learning, showing up on the screen, and teaching the science of basketball. We're trying to show up wherever we can to help. All day, I think, "What else can we do? How can we make a difference?" The players have been phenomenal.

**Margaret Spellings: How are you planning for the way forward in the new normal, and how are you thinking about that?**

**Cynt Marshall:** In terms of playing basketball, we don't know what that new normal is going to be because we don't know how long this is going to be around. No decisions have been made about whether we're coming back to the arena. What we do know, to your point, is there will be a new normal in terms of how we interact. We're getting Mavs masks with the logo on them and we're providing gloves. We're going to have personal protective equipment (PPE) for people. We're thinking through all of that, in terms of both our people coming back to work and fans coming back to the arena. What kind of touchless mechanisms should we have? Will we have thermometers that automatically take your temperature? There's so much stuff out there, but we have time to plan for this and come up with all kinds of scenarios that ensure a good experience for our fans. Rest assured, we will have thought it out and it'll be a good time, whatever it is.

**Margaret Spellings: You're in the people business, so how are you thinking about your primary asset? How are you helping the team stay fit and ready to come back when the time comes?**

**Cynt Marshall:** When the season was suspended, everybody had to go home and stay home. I was on a call this morning with our trainer helping our staff think through fitness and nutrition. He talked about how they're communicating with the players every day. Obviously the players are working out, so we're talking about mental fitness. Talking to them about anything they want to talk about. Being there physically, emotionally, and mentally for them. We have a touch point, not a virtual touch point, every single day with them.

**Margaret Spellings: As you think about the future of your industry, how are you going to adapt? How is the team going to adapt?**

**Cynt Marshall:** You go through that phase where you just can't believe what's going on in the world. Then you get to work doing things that need to get done. We put a business continuity plan in place adapted for the COVID-19 situation and worked through that. I do a weekly letter with my teams and emphasize compassion. People need it. We've got to have compassion for people as they come back to work, as they enter arenas, all of that. I mean, people are in different space. Communication is important. Right now, community service is in high demand, and this situation has allowed us to step up our game in the community. These are needs that will be around in the future. When I think about Texas 2036 and the things we're working on, there are a lot of needs out there that frankly, as a basketball organization, we can step up and be a part of. It's making us think about how we can contribute to the community in even more ways.

We're also talking about health, not compromising your own health. We'll have to relook at our policies and stay focused. We've got to be a little more disciplined about guidelines, what we're telling people, and the requirements we have. We have a responsibility to make sure the feelings and things that we're doing right now carry into the future. Even though we were kind of forced to come inside, we didn't ask for this. I do not want to be in the house, but we didn't have a choice. We have a choice about how we come out of the house. We have a choice

about how we emerge. It's like with Texas 2036, how we're trying to make good decisions and good choices for the future. We get to decide how we emerge from this and how we come out.

Now we're doing a lot of planning. We will come out better and different as a result of all of this. We're going to make sure that people who lost their lives, didn't lose them in vain. We've got to be better. We've got to be different. Innovation will come from this, all of us. I'm just trying to focus on the positive and take that positive into the future.

**Margaret Spellings: One of the things we policy wonks are observing, is the inequities surfacing around technological access. Things like telemedicine or online learning. I read that 30,000 kids in Dallas ISD don't have access to online learning. They have to go to the American Airlines hotspot and sit in the parking lot to try and do their homework. To the extent that communities look to the team and their sports heroes for leadership and resiliency, it does provide an opportunity. What are you seeing in your organization with regards to policy issues like broadband, education, and health differences, and how we can go forward?**

**Cynt Marshall:** A few things occurred to me when this first happened. I immediately thought about the fact that now that people are forced to stay home, there are so many kids who will not be able to eat three meals a day, who won't have shelter because school is closed, who won't be able to learn because they don't have access to computers and technology. The whole affordability, availability, accessibility, the three A's that we talked about 10 years ago, it's all coming back. We're being told that COVID-19 is disproportionately hitting African-Americans because of health disparities that have existed for a long time. I had my whole leadership team read the legislation. I said, "Everybody read it, whether you think it applies to you or not because public policy applies to all of us." We had our chief technology officer working with Dallas Independent School District on virtual learning to make sure all kids have access to technology, which is not something we would normally do. Those are the kinds of examples where things have opened up to us now, so we're making all these contributions and working with organizations that are focused on domestic violence and child abuse, focused on health disparities, focused on making sure that people have access to technology, because some of this actually is ridiculous. It is criminal that in 2020 we have kids who can't eat because school is out. We have kids who can't really learn right now the way they should because they don't have access to technology. That is crazy. We have communities that don't have access to healthy food. So we've got to figure out, how do we keep them healthy in this situation? Not everybody can go to a grocery store. As an organization, we're all about health, fitness, and learning. We've got to step it up a notch. Those are the things that are top of mind for us. My boss is out there advocating for small businesses and people who are losing their jobs. Without this situation, we wouldn't be out there talking about all this stuff.

**Margaret Spellings: That's true. It's the silver lining.**

**Cynt Marshall:** Even though we're not playing basketball, we're playing the game of life with people right now. It's like I used to tell my team at AT&T, we're doing stuff for the community. We don't just work here. We live here too. And it's the same way now. We don't just play here, we live here too. These are our communities. These are the kinds of things that matter. These are the kind of issues that people are facing every single day, pre COVID-19, and will be facing post COVID-19. Let's use this opportunity to step up and make a difference and get rid of

some of these disparities. This is one of the reasons why I love the work Texas 2036 is doing, the reason I'm excited.

**Margaret Spellings: I think if they didn't know it before, people are now learning it matters to them. That homeless person that has COVID-19 is a problem for them, too.**

**Cynt Marshall:** We said we're all in this together, and people realize we truly are all in this together. We should all be concerned about that homeless person, that kid that can't learn, those neighborhoods that can't get healthy food. We all need to all be worried about it.

**Margaret Spellings: Cynt, one final word from you. How do you want to leave it with our viewers today?**

**Cynt Marshall:** We have an opportunity to be different and to be better and to be more of a community. The last part of community is unity, and we're seeing a lot of unity right now. We're seeing a lot of people coming together to volunteer, to write checks, to give either time, talent, treasure. We need to keep that going. This is our community and so I will say it again, we don't just work here, we don't just play here, we live here, too. We're part of the broader community, not just in our little neighborhoods, but we're a part of something bigger and now we get to make it better. It's important we make it better.