

# EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

## Men's Swimming 100 METER BACKSTROKE

BY JOHN LOHN

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Defending Champion:** Aaron Peirsol, USA, 54.06

**World Record Holder:** Aaron Peirsol, USA, 52.89 (2008)

**Most Titles:** United States (12): Harry Hebner (1912), Warren Kealoha (1920-24), George Kojac (1928), Adolph Kiefer (1936), Allen Stack (1948), Yoshi Oyakawa (1952), John Naber (1976), Rick Carey (1984), Jeff Rouse (1996), Lenny Krayzelburg (2000), Aaron Peirsol (2004)

**Notable:** The gold medal in the 100 backstroke has been won by a North American each year since 1992. While the United States has captured the last three titles, top honors in 1992 went to Canada's Mark Tewksbury, who set a world record of 53.98.

### MEDAL CONTENDERS

**Aaron Peirsol, USA:** He's been the undisputed king of the 100 back for the better part of this decade. Peirsol will be considered the favorite—deservedly so—until someone comes along and beats him. He is the three-time defending world champ, his latest title coming last year with a world record 52.98. He lowered that mark to 52.89 at the U.S. Trials, where he seemingly played with his competition, not shaving until after the semifinals.

**Matt Grevers, USA:** The Northwestern graduate, now training at the University of Arizona, had a breakthrough performance at the U.S. Trials, registering a time of 53.19. That effort allowed Grevers to clip Ryan Lochte and Randall Bal for his first Olympic nod. Also a standout freestyler, Grevers went from a long-shot in this event to an instant medal contender.

**Markus Rogan, Austria:** The silver medalist in the 100 and 200 back-

strokes from the Athens Games, look for Rogan to be a medal contender again in 2008. The Austrian ranked seventh in the world in 2007 (53.78), and captured the European title earlier this year (54.03).

**Liam Tancock, Great Britain:**

Tancock emerged as a player on the international stage last year when he took bronze in the 100 back at the World Champs and later clocked 53.46 at the Japan International, good for a European record at the time. Tancock relies on his speed and a strong first 50. Whether that approach leads to an Olympic medal will be determined in Beijing.

**Arkady Vyatchanin, Russia:** The Russian veteran has been a top performer in the 100 and 200 backstrokes for the past few years, and he finished 2007 ranked sixth in the world (53.69) over the shorter distance. He just missed a medal at the World Champs, where he placed fourth. Vyatchanin has a career best of 53.50 from two years ago, and he won bronze this year at the European Champs (54.45).

**Helge Meeuw, Germany:** Meeuw turned in the fifth-fastest performance ever at the German Trials in April. His 53.10 clocking is a European record, and he comes to Beijing with the second-fastest time this year among

those who will be competing in the 100 back. A year ago, he didn't even make finals at the World Champs, but he ended the season ranked ninth in the world with a 53.85 at the World University Games. Which Meeuw will show up in Beijing?

**Other Challengers:** South African **Gerhard Zandberg**, who won the 50 back at Worlds in 2007, is his nation's best contender in the 100 with a 54.83 in April. Aussie **Ashley Delaney** (53.68) will join him in the chase for a final berth, as will teammate **Hayden Stoeckel** (53.78). Japan's **Tomomi Morita**, the bronze medalist in Athens, has gone 54.03 this year. ♦



ABOVE » Aaron Peirsol, USA