

EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

Men's Swimming 1500 METER FREESTYLE

BY JOHN LOHN

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Defending Champion: Grant Hackett, AUS, 14:43.40

World Record Holder: Grant Hackett, AUS, 14:34.56 (2001)

Most Titles: Australia (8): Andrew Charlton (1924), Murray Rose (1956), John Konrads (1960), Robert Windle (1964), Kieren Perkins (1992-96), Grant Hackett (2000-04)

Notable: When Mike Burton won gold in the 1500 free at the 1968 Games in Mexico City, he turned in a time of 16:38.9. Four years later, he repeated as Olympic champ with a significantly faster mark. Burton, en route to gold in Munich, touched the wall in 15:52.58.

MEDAL CONTENDERS

Grant Hackett, Australia: As the defending two-time Olympic champion, Hackett is on the verge of becoming the first man to win the same event in three straight Olympics. However, he has endured some shoulder difficulties, along with some illness, and also decided on a coaching change from longtime mentor Denis Cotterell. He was off form at Worlds last year (seventh in 14:59.59), but has since bounced back in a big way, evident in his season best of 14:48.65. Expect Hackett to be on the podium in Beijing, and it wouldn't be surprising if he becomes a part of Olympic history.

Larsen Jensen, USA: At the Athens Games, the American record holder gave Hackett all he could handle before taking the silver medal. Jensen adheres to a grueling workload and focuses on the big events. At last year's Worlds, Jensen finished fourth in 14:52.98. At the U.S. Trials, he pushed the pace early, but was eventually overtaken by Peter Vanderkaay. Still, Jensen managed a time of 14:50.80.

Peter Vanderkaay, USA: The American is best known for his exploits in the 200 and 400 freestyles, but he's shown the ability to move up to the metric mile. At the U.S. Trials, Vanderkaay made a move around the midpoint of the race, overtook Jensen with 250 meters to go, and prevailed in 14:45.54. Vanderkaay could be a medalist in three freestyle events.

Mateusz Sawrymowicz, Poland:

Sawrymowicz had a major breakthrough last year, winning gold at Worlds with a time (14:45.94) that held up as the fastest of 2007. By securing that victory, Sawrymowicz immediately established himself as a gold-medal challenger in Beijing.

Yuri Prilukov, Russia: Prilukov has been a consistent factor on the international distance scene and reaffirmed that status by taking the silver medal at Worlds last year. This year, he claimed the European title in 14:50.40. To contend for a medal, he'll have to go in the low 14:40s.

David Davies, Great Britain: The British star was the bronze medalist at the Athens Games and repeated that performance last year at Worlds. This year, he clocked 14:54.28 for the silver medal at Europeans. Davies is an obvious force on the international stage, and he owns results that warrant inclusion on the list of medal favorites.



[PHOTO BY JASON REED, REUTERS]

ABOVE » Grant Hackett, AUS

His career best sits at 14:45.95 from 2004.

Tae Hwan Park, South Korea: The young Korean sensation is primarily regarded as a 200 and 400 freestyler, but he can go the distance, too—Park ranked eighth in the world last year (14:58.43). Certainly, he'll have to take time off that effort to be a contender.

Other Challengers: Italian **Federico Colbertaldo** has been 14:50.59 this year, and Canadian **Ryan Cochrane** (14:54.66) is rapidly improving. Also, watch Aussie **Craig Stevens**—lost in Hackett's shadow—China's **Zhang Lin**, Tunisian **Ous Mellouli**, Poland's **Przemyslaw Stanczyk** and France's **Sebastien Rouault**. ♦